
Commentary: Child of the 1990s, adult of the 21st century – the origins and relevance of a 25-years old journal

International
Journal of Sports
Marketing and
Sponsorship

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When the *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship*'s first edition was published in 1998, I was a young(ish) academic trying to make his way in the profession. At that time, sport marketing as a field of research was somewhat established in the USA, though elsewhere in the world it was variously underdeveloped, ignored or sometimes even ridiculed.

At the first sport conference in Europe that I ever attended (in the 1990s), where I gave a presentation on branding in football, one audience member asked me during the Q&A session, "how is this relevant?" A little later, during the data collection phase of my doctorate (which focussed on sport sponsorship), I contacted an English Premier League football club to ask for an interview with someone from its marketing department. The response was, "we don't have a marketing department, but there's someone in human resources who might be able to help".

How things have changed, since then marketing and sponsorship have become the cornerstones of how clubs, franchises, governing bodies, events and even athletes manage their activities and operations. Marketing is no longer a poor relation or an irrelevance, and this is partly thanks to this journal and everyone who has read, published in or edited it. A 25th anniversary is always a momentous occasion, but for the *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship*, it is especially the case – it was a foundation for the development of a new discipline, and it remains one of the most important publications in its field.

The journal is testament to the hard work of hundreds, possibly thousands of people, though its appearance during the 1990s was not accidental. In his book "Accelerate!: A History of the 1990s", James Brooke-Smith (2022) reminds us that what happened then helped to fundamentally shape what we think and do now. In this same spirit, everyone who published an article as part of the journal's first volume should consider themselves to be pioneers and the founders of work that has a legacy which now extends across decades.

Brooke-Smith's insights provide a helpful basis for understanding three decades of change, which I also recently tried to analyse by labelling them "giga changes" (Chadwick, 2022). Specifically, these were globalisation and liberalisation, digitalisation, environmentalism and socio-culturalism.

The 1990s witnessed an end to the Cold War, indeed the former Soviet Union was formally dissolved in the early part of the decade. Francis Fukuyama (1992) wrote about the end of history, as democracy, liberal free trade and capitalism prevailed and became a dominant ideology. This provided fertile ground in which sport marketing could grow, later helping to drive a common acceptance that business, profit and serving consumers are legitimate motives underpinning the governance of sport. If the Iron Curtain still existed today, then perhaps the journal would not have flourished in the way that it has.

The decade started with satellite television making its mark on sport but finished with the Internet and websites causing a stir. The 1990s was marked by the launch of the world's first, free public search engine, which later gave rise to sports clubs and franchises pondering how they could best utilise their digital presence. Many got caught up in the dotcom boom, though



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they struggled to understand how they could monetise their websites. Today, such notions might seem unfathomable to younger generations of researchers and writers, yet every paper they now published by the journal on social media, crypto currency or the metaverse carries these 1990 developments in its DNA.

Tackling climate change has come to dominate every aspect of human existence, sport is no exception. Indeed, moving forward we should expect that an increasing number of submissions to the journal will bring environmental concerns to the fore. Once more, it was during the 1990s that we witnessed both the first organised and globally coordinated climate change protests, and the COP summits that have become so vital in our race to address the emergency we face. Some observers will see environment as being just one part of a growing sense of purpose in sport marketing that have witnessed over the last decade. Though here too the 1990s were instrumental in our development of understanding.

If one takes the Jordan brand (which was launched in 1997) as just one example, it is clear that marketing phenomena such as athlete activism, and the emergence of lifestyle marketing, are an outcome of socio-cultural changes that were emerging in 1990s and have now become so important to our task as sport marketers. As the first wave of what would later become GenZ consumers was being born, so the *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship* started publishing. Seeking to understand such profound socio-cultural changes and enlighten readers is the essence of what this publication has always been about.

Many readers will already know Danish physicist Nils Bohr's view that prediction is very difficult, especially if it is about the future. Most of us probably did not understand how what was happening in the 1990s would become so instrumental in shaping what is happening now. This inevitably begs the question for researchers publishing in the journal to consider what is happening now, how that will shape the future, and where their work will need to follow developments and trends. The resonance of this statement should not be underestimated, especially when one looks at our first edition back in 1998.

The contributors to that first issue must be thanked for their daring and diligence, every one of us owes them a debt of gratitude. Personally, I might not even have been positioned to write this commemorative statement if it was not for this group, particularly as one of them became my doctoral supervisor. However, two things stand out: first most of the articles were written by men, all from North America and Europe, and every paper examined issues of sponsorship. Fast forward to Volume 5, Issue 4 and it is clear to see how far we have come. Browsing the content of this specific issue, one sees a publication that has been nearly three decades in the making, displaying diversity, quality, depth and relevance.

Such has been the success of our co-creation that in a list of more than 100 sport management journals appearing on the NASSM website, this journal is currently ranked fifth, with an Impact Score of 3.0. Congratulations to everyone who has been part of the journey, you have done a great job. One hopes ambitions are to lift the journal to even greater heights, in which case those who consider submitting should turn their minds to understanding what happens next. After all, what is happening right before our eyes now is what will shape the content of the *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship* in the years leading up to 2050.

Based upon current industry trends, it seems likely that issues of digital marketing, experiential marketing, purpose-led marketing and consumer engagement will be major research themes for the journal. Of course, as its title suggests this publication will also surely continue to have sponsorship as an important body of work. In the years since the journal's inception, sponsorship has changed dramatically from a transactional, "sticker on the car" relationship to a more strategic, collaborative and value creating partnership. It is important that current researchers continue helping us to understand, develop and improve the intellectual and practical foundations of both sport marketing and sponsorship.

However, our world (as well as our academic discipline) faces some significant challenges as we live in dynamic, complex times characterised by sensitivity and uncertainty – Nils Boehr's words now seem more pertinent than ever. Navigating through such terrain is already problematic, but we as marketing and sponsorship experts cannot shy away from what confronts us. Inevitably, this means that the journal and its contributors must continue to stay in tune with latest developments in sport and across the world in general. How we envision, predict and assess the future nevertheless poses some interesting questions.

As I completed my 1990s doctorate, little did I know that my work in later years would be spent examining state owned Gulf airline sponsorships or the significance of China in the marketing of European football. So how can we know what comes next, for instance in 2049 when the journal will be 50 years old? Our discipline needs visionaries, people who can read the future, though one wonders what role artificial intelligence will play in shaping academic research and publication, and in understanding marketing, during the coming decades. Whatever the future holds, the sophistication and rigour of approaches now being seen in submissions being made to the journal strongly suggests that it will continue to play an important role for some time to come.

The *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* is not the product of a small group of people, it belongs to all of us. Special thanks go to the publishers, former editors, editorial board members (past and present) and countless reviewers, all of whom have made the publication what it is today. Further gratitude is extended to everyone who has submitted a paper, whether it was accepted or not. Perhaps a special mention should be reserved too for our colleagues, families, friends and others who have had to endure worries and stresses whilst we have waited for submission reviews to be completed. Suffice to say, the journal is more than an academic publication, it is at the heart of a community, an ecosystem and a sphere of influence across the world of sport. Long may this continue.

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