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WHAT IS GLOBAL SPORTS LAW? THE VIEW FROM THE TWITTERSPHERE

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ABSTRACT

Sports competitions are some of the oldest global activities and have been extensively organized and regulated on a global level. As a result, it is common to speak of global sports law. However, what is global about sports law and the extent of globalization of sports law's globalization process is unclear. This article sheds new light on these questions by studying conversations about sports law on Twitter. It confirms the parallel existence of local and global sports law and explores what constitutes each. Finally, it uncovers geography-based differences in the level of globality.

Keywords: global law; sports law; social media; Twitter; text mining.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Sports Law Between the Local and the Global

Sports competitions involving competitors from different nations and across the globe have been a key part of sports dating back to at least the ancient Olympic Games. The need to organize and govern global sports activities created a need for rules, principles, processes, and institutions that transcend national borders and when implemented these elements combine to form the backbone of what can be described as global sports law (Foster 2003, pp. 2–3; Nafziger 2011, p. 4). This process, the globalization of sports law, intensified in the late 1800s with the establishment of international sports governing bodies (SGBs),¹ institutions that today play a central role in the organization and regulation of sports. In this regard, the centralization and globalization of sports went hand-in-hand.

For as long as legal scholars have interested themselves in sports law they have disagreed about its nature. These disagreements run so deep that there has been real and extensive differences of opinion on what to properly call the legal sub-discipline (Latty 2011). However, since at least the 1980s the academic literature has recognized that sports law ought to encompass factors besides those that are purely local, which in a legal context primarily centers around the national and the national legal order. This resulted in the academic acknowledgement of international sports law (e.g. Nafziger 1988). More recently, Foster (2003) and Latty (2007) conducted pioneering work in framing sports law in pluralistic terms. Many have since followed in their footsteps and in the last decade it has become increasingly common to speak of and study global or transnational sports law (see e.g. Casini 2010; Casini 2011; Duval 2013; Lindholm 2019; Mitten 2014).

At the same time, it is clear that the process of globalization of sports law has not been completed, in the sense that all sports law is global, and it is not likely to be completed during the foreseeable future. A quick survey of leading sports law textbooks from different nations will reveal that most of them share certain topics that can fairly be described as global in nature, for example matters relating to the fight against doping, sport dispute resolution, and the organization of Olympic sports. However, those textbooks also differ in the topics they address and address a number of sports law topics using nation-specific sources. These textbook authors thus seem to claim, at least implicitly, that practicing sports law attorneys still need to be familiar with the territorial law of the jurisdiction where they practice (see e.g. Beloff et al. 2012 (UK); Buy et al. 2018 (France); Mitten et al. 2016 (US); Lindholm 2014 (Sweden)). The recent publication of an extensive anthology on

¹ The founding of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894 most likely made the greatest contribution towards the global regulation of sports. However, it was predated by the establishment of several international sports federations, including the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) in 1881 and the World Rowing Federation (FISA) and the International Skating Union (ISU) in 1892.

American sports law provides an illustrative example of the present-day relevance of localized sports (McCann 2018). Thus, we currently find ourselves in a situation where local sports law and global sports law exist side-by-side.

It is less clear what in sports law is global and local respectively. Existing research provides no agreed upon answer of what constitutes global sports law or what distinguishes global sports law from local sports law. While there is a strong theoretical and normative discussion, that discussion employs at best a few examples. This article seeks to contribute to existing knowledge about to what extent and in which regards sports law can be characterized as global by taking an empirical approach.

This article seeks to explore the global character of sports law by studying local and global discussions about sports law on social media, more specifically Twitter. It seeks primarily to answer two questions: Who are the actors that drive global and local sports law discussions and which sports law topics are more globally and more locally relevant respectively?

The type of “globality” explored here relates to the global in the sense “of world-wide relevance”. Thus, this contribution does not explore sports’ and sports law’s relative degree of detachment or independence from national law or the transnational character of sports law (compare e.g. Duval 2013; Foster 2019). Much like the aforementioned sports law textbooks, this piece approaches sports law as a body of discrete albeit elusive topics that in some way relate to the relationship between sports and law, such as for example doping, dispute resolution, civil liability, and criminal liability. However, at the same time it is acknowledged that no definitive list of sports law topics can be drawn up and that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to define or quantify all such topics. Finally, this article approaches sports law as a conversation that involves different types of actors (lawyers, non-profit organizations, sports-business people, fans etc.) across the globe and that these actors tend to cluster based on shared interests in particular topics.

The article explores two expectations. First, that the relative relevance of topics varies depending on geography. In other words, certain topics are more relevant in some countries or regions than others. For example, it is reasonable to expect that the legality of salary caps is a more relevant topic in countries where the dominant sports employ salary caps. Second, that topics vary in terms of how geographically extensively they are relevant. In other words, it is essential to give topics a geographical dimension.

As explained in greater detail immediately below, the article explores a unique set of 5,363 tweets about sports law (herein referred to as *Sports Law Tweets*) that were automatically extracted from Twitter over a six-month period. This data is combined with manually collected information about the Twitter users that produce and to some extent consume those tweets (herein referred to as *Sports Law Tweeters*).² After a brief description of tweets and retweets about sports law (Section

² Replication data is available at: <https://github.com/jojolindholm/sports_law_tweetersphere>.

1.3), Section 2 identifies and distinguishes between local and global sports law tweets by studying how far away from their originating point tweets are retweeted.

Using this division between local and global tweets, the rest of the article empirically explores the two questions posed above. Section 3 explores whether there are significant differences between Sports Law Tweeters when it comes to them producing global Sports Law Tweets. In particular, it explores whether there are statistically significant differences in globality of Sports Law Tweeters based on the sector they belong to, their gender (for individuals), and where in the world they are based. Section 4 then seeks to identify global and local sport law topics. To answer this question, the paper explores difference in how often specific words appear both in global and local tweets (Section 4.1) and in tweets originating in different locations (Section 4.2).

This study demonstrates that Twitter contains a quite large, distinctly global sports law discussion but also strong local communities interested in local or even “super local” sports law issues. Neither of these types of sports law communities is inherently superior to the other and one finds active and influential tweeters that focuses on the local level, the global level, and everything in between. While many sports law topics are prominent in both local tweets and global tweets, some topics are more distinctly local or global in character. That a topic lands in either of these categories can often be explained by, first, whether a particular sport -- and the legal issues associated with that sport -- has a more local or global audience and, second, differences in how sports is organized in different countries. For example, this helps explain the study’s finding that sports law tweets originating in North America are, in general, significantly less global than tweets originating in other continents.

1.2 Method and Data

In order to explore the extent and nature of globality in sports law, this article uses data from Twitter, including information about both tweets and Twitter users that engage with those tweets. Twitter is one of the most popular social media platforms and the relatively easy access to Twitter data has made it a favorite for researchers interested in using social media data (Steinert-Threlkeld 2018, pp. 2-4; Zimmer and Proferes 2014). Twitter is used by actors interested in and working with sports law, both individuals and collectives,³ to communicate with each other by producing and consuming content relating to the field of sports law. One can in this sense speak of the existence of a *Sports Law Twittersphere* (cf. Bruns et al. 2014; Bruns and Enli 2018). It should be acknowledged that the choice of studying Twitter over another social media platform may have had an impact on the study's results, particularly as Twitter is not equally popular across the globe. Many of the countries where Twitter is most extensively used are Western and English-speaking

³ Of all Sports Law Tweeters in the data, 34.5% of all accounts were owned by a legal person or collective, 19.9% by female users, and 47.5% by male users.

but there is also a large number of Asian users (see Java et al. 2014; Leetaru et al. 2013; Hawelka et al 2014). However, there is no obvious alternative platform with a more universal sports law user group that might provide a better understanding of global sports law. Also, this article uses approaches that should help mitigate differences in data by region. For example, the significance testing of regional differences takes sample sizes into account.

First and foremost, the data include a dataset with information about all 5,363 original tweets containing sports law hashtag (#sportslaw) posted on Twitter over a six-month period between 20 July 2019 and 19 January 2020. That is, all retweets were removed from the dataset. These tweets are herein referred to as the *Sports Law Tweets*. By selecting the data in this manner, the study targets the particular “hashtag public” (Bruns and Enli 2018, p. 130) or “legal sub-field” (Duval 2018a, p. 104) of interest for answering the research questions. The information includes, *inter alia*, the unique tweet identifier, the tweeted text, the posting Twitter user’s username, and how many times the tweet had been retweeted.

The data collection involved some important methodological decisions. First, limiting the data to tweets containing “#sportslaw” exploits and relies on the posting users themselves identifying the topic of their tweets as dealing with a sports law issue, rather than making an independent classification. Obviously, many sports law-related tweets do not contain the hashtag and are therefore not included in the data. However, on the other hand, it is highly unlikely that the data includes false positives, i.e. that a tweet with the particular hashtag addresses a topic unrelated to what could reasonably be characterized as sports law. Also, adding additional hashtags or search terms, such as “CAS” or “doping + law OR legal OR court”, would both bias the study towards a particular, preconceived notion of what constitutes sports law and risk the inclusion of false positives. There is also no obvious reason why #sportslaw-tweets would not constitute a representative sample of all tweets about sports law, such as the hashtag being used more frequently by tweeters of particular backgrounds or tweeters that are based in particular places or used more frequently for particular sports law-related topics.

Second, the obvious exception to this is that it biases the data, and therefore the study, towards English-language tweets and, consequently, English-speaking users. However, English is the de facto universal language and bound to be the dominant language of a global discussion about sports law, which is the object of examination. However, the analysis of the data and the findings is done with this in consideration.

Third, how many times a tweet has been retweeted depends in part on how much time has passed since the tweet was posted. Most obviously, a tweet that was just tweeted cannot have been retweeted. Moreover, the data collection process must accommodate the Twitter API which only allows for the collection of tweets during the most recent ten days. For these reasons, between one and nine days passed between when a Sports Law Tweet was posted and information about it was collected for the dataset. The mean time span between posting and collection was

2.9 days with a standard deviation of 1.7 days. Where in this time span a specific tweet is placed should have no significant impact on the data as retweets tend to decrease over time following a power law distribution: a tweet receives 75 percent of all its retweets in the first six hours after it is posted and retweets after twenty-four hours are rare (van Liere 2010; Mathews et al. 2017; Qingyuan et al. 2015).

The data also contains information about all 787 unique Twitter users that posted a Sports Law Tweet, that is any Twitter user that posted a tweet containing “#sportslaw” during the examined six-month period. These users are herein referred to as the *Sports Law Tweeters*. The Sports Law Tweeters dataset contains *inter alia* information about the Sports Law Tweeter's username; whether the account is a personal accounts or an institutional Twitter account managed by a collective;⁴ in the case of a personal account whether the user is male or female; where the user is based geographically on the level of nearest major city,⁵ country, and continent; where applicable, the professional sector in which the user operates;⁶ and number of followers on Twitter. This data was primarily based on information posted by the users themselves on Twitter. That information was manually confirmed and standardized and occasionally supplemented by information provided by the user on other social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, and employer websites.

In the overwhelming majority of all cases there was no hesitation regarding the correct coding. In case of uncertainty values were left blank. The most difficult assessment concerned what city the user was based in but main country was almost always very obvious. Where country was clear but specific city was unclear, the user was coded as based in the largest city of the country. An exception for this was institutional accounts which, in case of doubt, was coded as based in the city of its headquarter or principle place of business.

Finally, the data includes information about connections and dissemination of information within the Sports Law Twittersphere. This more specifically includes basic identifiers regarding 5,959 retweets of Sports Law Tweets: the identifier of the original tweet, the username of the Sports Law Tweeter that posted the original tweet, and the retweeting user's username.⁷ A large number of these retweets were made by Twitter users that are not themselves Sports Law Tweeter. For these retweets, the collected information provides limited information that can be used to answer the research questions. However, 1,973 of the retweets (33.1%)

⁴ This includes e.g. universities, non-profit organizations, and law firms.

⁵ The study uses data about metropolitan areas from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2014). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*, CD-ROM Edition, included in the package tmap for R.

⁶ I identified and coded for five major sectors: academia, law, news, other business (e.g. SGBs, financial services, and sports agents), and non-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGO). In case of multiple possible alternatives, the one emphasized by the user was assigned.

⁷ Metadata from Twitter indicates that the collected Sports Law Tweets were retweeted a total of 8,174 times. Thus, Twitter queries for specific retweets only returned information about 73% of the retweets. The reason for this is unclear. However, it is unlikely to affect the representatives of the data.

were made by Sports Law Tweeters. Such retweets within the Sports Law Twittersphere are of particularly relevance in this study: by combining data about tweeters and retweeters it was possible to identify for each retweet both the *geographic origin*, i.e. the geographic base of the Sports Law Tweeter posting the original Sports Law Tweet, and the *geographic destination*, i.e. the geographic base of the Sports Law Tweeter retweeting the original Sports Law Tweet. As explained in greater detail below, this information is used to determine with a high degree of specificity to what extent a Sports Law Tweet was retweeted by and therefore relevant to users far away from and outside the territory where the original poster was based, which in turn is used to distinguish between local and global tweets (see Section 2).

Section 3 seeks to describe and differentiate between Sports Law Tweeters that produce local and global Sports Law Tweets respectively. This is explored by studying whether the global character of a Sports Law Tweet (true/false) can be predicted by the Sports Law Tweeter's characteristics, i.e. the factors collected in the dataset described immediately above. To answer this question, we use a logistic regression model where the outcome variable is whether a tweet is global (dummy) and the predictor variables are the tweeter's sector, gender, and continent (categorical variables).

Section 4 seeks to identify global and local sport law topics. To achieve this, we employ automated text analysis and more specifically term frequency analysis. Word frequency comparison is a common, reliable, and straightforward approach for comparing different corpora (Java et al. 2014). A corpus consisting of all tweeted text was created and processed by removing usernames, weblinks, punctuation, line breaks, and numbers. Also, very common words, e.g. prepositions and articles, so-called stop words, were removed in the pre-processing of the corpus. Finally, all words were converted to lower case and stemmed. On the basis of this data, a number of sub-corpora were created distinguishing between, first, the text of local and global tweets and, second, the text of tweets originating on different continents.

These corpora were then summarized using term frequency, that is in terms of how frequently the different unique terms found in all Sports Law Tweets appear in each corpus. Term frequency is a simple way to describe a corpus, but it can also be used to distinguish corpora from each other. When a term appears more frequently in one corpus than another, this describes how the two corpora differ from each other. As expected, word frequency in the general corpus and the sub-corpora follow a power law distribution (Zipf 1936; Zipf 1949). In this article this information is used to identify terms that are distinct for, first, local and global tweets and, second, tweets from different regions. The terms that characterizes and distinguish those corpora are analyzed from a sports and sports law perspective to identify more general global and local topics.

1.3 Exploring the Sports Law Twittersphere

In order to analyze users, tweets, and retweets about sports law we must understand the structure and characteristics of the Sports Law Twittersphere. The first thing to be noted is that tweeters, tweets, and retweets within the Sports Law Twittersphere are not equitably distributed across the globe. As presented in Table 1 below, most Sports Law Tweeters are based in Europe (42.9%) and North America (36.4%). However, there is great variance between Sports Law Tweeters with regard to how many Sports Law Tweets they post and how frequently those tweets are retweeted. Even though there are few costs associated with and other barriers to producing social media content, and in contrast with its egalitarian ethos, much of the attention on social media is concentrated to a few users (Huffaker 2010; Åkerlund 2020).

Table 1. Sports Law Twittersphere by Continent

<i>Continent</i>	<i>Tweeters</i>	<i>Tweets</i>	<i>Retweets</i>
Africa	38	116	356
Asia	65	262	780
Europe	338	2,020	3,927
North America	287	1,214	939
Oceania	31	1,671	2,068
South America	25	76	99

The Sports Law Twittersphere is no exception. We can use a user’s number of retweets⁸ and number of unique retweeters⁹ as a proxy for the user’s influence. A Twitter user that retweets a tweet indicates an interest in the original author’s opinion. Retweets are also an indication of the original poster’s power to communicate opinions beyond the immediate network (followers). Combining retweets and unique retweeters ensures catching for example users with a small but very active following (Åkerlund 2020, p. 4).

However, as we can see in Figure 1 below, the two measurements largely follow each other in the data and follow a power law distribution. In other words, as is evident from Figure 1, the Sports Law Twittersphere is dominated by a small group of users that wield an out-sized influence in the Sports Law Twittersphere and this group includes Sports Law Tweeters from all continents. The figure also shows that a Sports Law Tweeter’s total number of retweets and number of unique retweeters are not particularly strongly correlated with his or her total number of

⁸ I.e. the total number of times a Sports Law Tweeter’s Sports Law Tweets have been retweeted.

⁹ I.e. the total number of unique Twitter users that have retweeted a Sports Law Tweeter’s Sports Law Tweets.

Sports Law Tweets in the data. Thus, while many of the members of the Sports Law Twittersphere are based in Europe and North America, the inequitable distribution of influence between users provides a more equitable geographic distribution of influence.

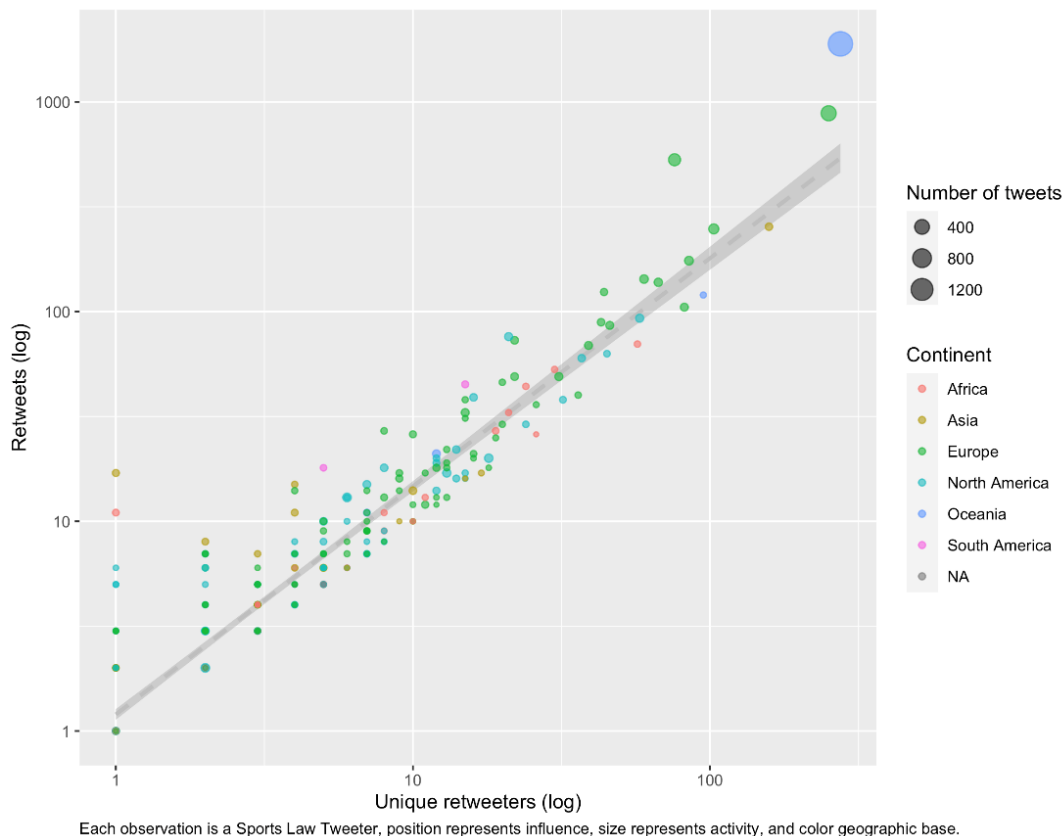


Figure 1. Activity and influence by Sports Law Tweeter

Secondly, as we can see in Figure 2, retweets are dramatically inequitably distributed among tweets: 44.4% of all Sports Law Tweets (2,382 tweets) are never retweeted and 27.8% (1,492 tweets) are only retweeted once. At the other end of the distribution, a small group of 97 tweets are retweeted more than ten times and together collect a quarter of all retweets within the Sports Law Twittersphere.

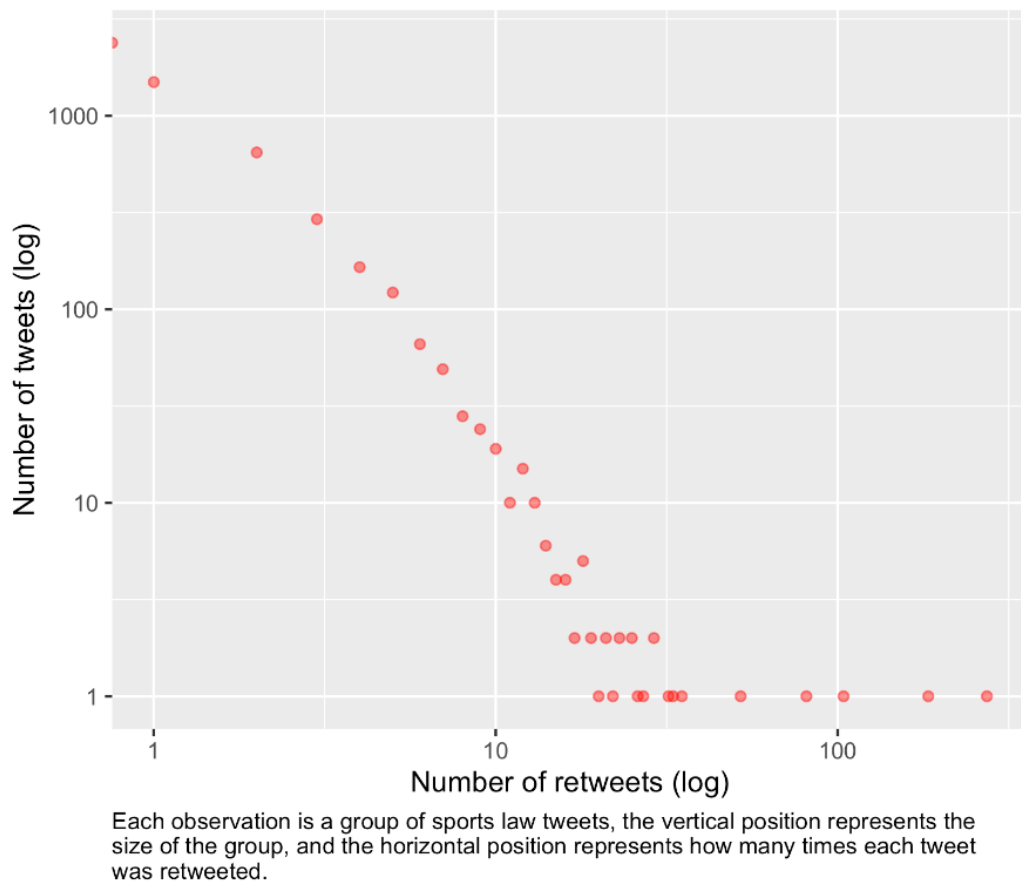


Figure 2. Retweet distribution

2 IDENTIFYING GLOBAL TWEETS

In order to study the global sports law discourse we must first identify the global discussion or, differently phrased, distinguish the global from the local. As discussed in Section 1, this study approaches this as a question of how geographically extensive tweets are relevant. Thus, we are looking to measure and compare the extent of the geographic relevance of individual tweets or, more simply put, how far a tweet travel (van Liere 2010).

We here use and combine two measurements of geographic reach, both based on retweets. The first is the *geographic distance* in kilometers between the geographic origin of the original tweet and the geographic destination of the retweet (van Liere 2010) (see also above Section 1.2). The second measurement is *territorial reach* that as a numeric variable captures whether the retweet is (1) *domestic*, i.e. the retweet is in the same country as the tweet, (2) *regional*, i.e. the retweet is in the same continent but a different country than the tweet, or (3) *international*, i.e. the retweet is in a different continent than the tweet.

The two measurements supplement each other to capture the global dimension that this article seeks to explore. Geographic distance is an accurate

measurement of global in a very concrete way and is less likely than territorial reach to exaggerate the global nature of retweets across borders within a homogenous region. For example, using territorial reach, a Belgian retweet of a Dutch tweet is regional and a Guatemalan retweet of a Mexican tweet is international. However, at the same time, geographic distance is liable to exaggerate the global nature of domestic retweets within geographically large nations, such as the United States, Canada, and Russia, a problem that territorial reach does not suffer from.

The iniquitable distribution of retweets in the data (see Section 1.3) has some methodological consequences. Since we rely on retweets to measure global relevance, Sports Law Tweets that have not been retweeted provide no relevant information; whether a tweet is more relevant locally or globally is a pointless question if the tweet had no measurable relevance to anyone. However, for the 1,305 Sports Law Tweets that were retweeted at least once by a Sports Law Tweeter the data provides a quite exact measurement of how far geographically it was spread. This, in turn, can and will be used to explore to what extent Twitter conversations about sports law is global and whether there are significant differences in the relative degree of globality based on geography, the characteristics of the original tweeter, and the subject of the tweet. We can explore the existence of distinct groups of Sports Law Tweets by studying how the geographic distance of retweets are distributed, meaning the longest distance between the geographic origin of the tweet and the geographic destination of any retweet.

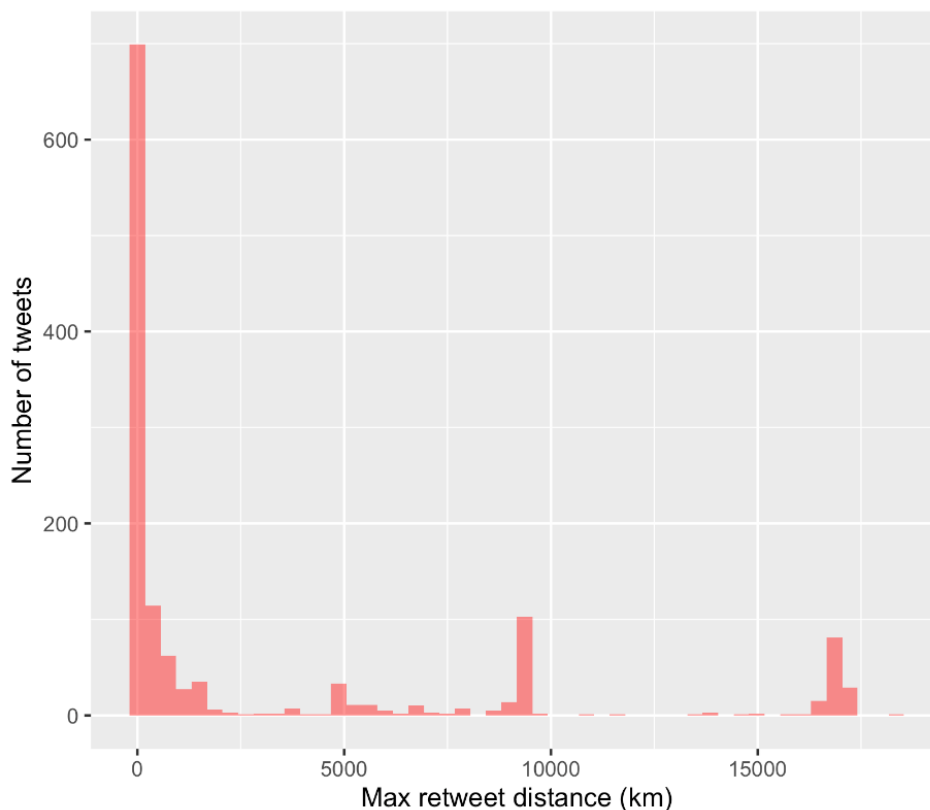


Figure 3. Geographic distance distribution

Figure 3 reveals quite clearly the existence of three main groups. The first group, *short-distance tweets*, consists of Sports Law Tweets that are exclusively retweeted within a distance that is less than 2,500 kilometers. The vast majority of all short distance tweets are only retweeted in the same city as the original tweet (geographic distance equals 0), and the frequency of retweets decreasing quickly with distance. After this there is a gap in the geographic distribution before the appearance of a second group of tweets, *medium-distance tweets*, with a maximum geographic distance of between 5,000 and 7,500 km. From around 10,000 km there is another long break in the distribution before the appearance of a third, final, and quite distinct group of *long-distance tweets* with a maximum geographic distance of around 16,500 km.

In this way, geographic distance distribution indicates that tweets can be usefully divided into three groups based on their relative global character. However, adding territorial reach suggests that a distinction between two major groups is more appropriate. The mean territorial reach of the tweets belonging to each of these three categories (Table 2) and the distribution of local, regional, and international tweets across the three categories (Figure 4) provide the same clear message: Sports Law Tweets can clearly and easily be divided into two groups.

Table 2. Tweets Grouped by Geographic Distance

<i>Category</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Range (km)</i>	<i>Mean territorial reach*</i>	<i>Mean geographic distance (km)*</i>	<i>Mean number of retweets*</i>
Retweeted tweets	1,305		1.6 (0.9)	3,184 (5,463)	3.1 (3.3)
Local tweets/short distance	946	0– 2,499	1.1 (0.3)	201 (409)	2.6 (2.6)
<i>Super local tweets</i>	666	0	1 (1)	0 (0)	2.0 (2.0)
Global tweets	359	2,500–	2.96 (0.2)	11,046 (4,771)	4.5 (4.3)
<i>Medium distance</i>	222	2,500– 9,999	2.9 (0.3)	7,549 (2,034)	4.5 (4.8)
<i>Long distance</i>	137	10,000–	3 (0)	16,712 (954)	4.5 (3.5)

* Standard deviation in parenthesis

Short-distance tweets hardly ever reach outside the borders of the country where they were made and can therefore be characterized as *local tweets*. In fact, the overwhelming majority of the local tweets are “super local” in the sense that they

are not retweeted outside of the city where the original posters are based. This clearly suggests that the contribution of these tweets to the global sports law discussion is limited. On the other side of the spectrum, no meaningful distinction can be drawn between medium- and long-distance tweets and together they form what can fairly be characterized as *global tweets*: both categories consist almost exclusively of internationally retweeted tweets and, conversely, all international tweets belong to these categories. With the stark difference in global spread between tweets that reach below and above 2,500 km respectively, there is very little need or room for an intermediate category of tweets to describe the data.

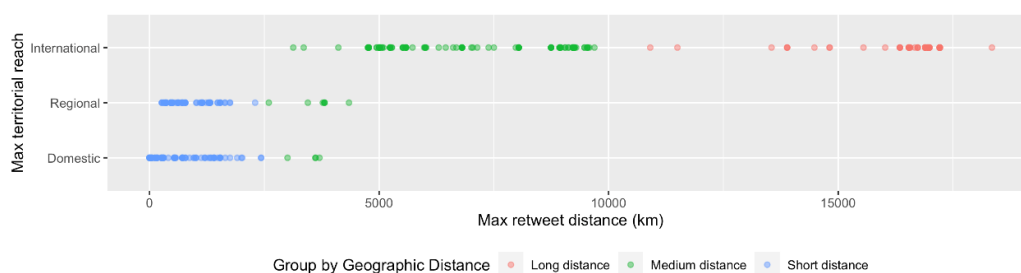


Figure 4. Geographic distance and territorial reach by distance group

The most interesting aspect of these findings is the relative size of the respective groups and, in particular, the significant number of local tweets: three-fourths of all Sports Law Tweets are local and more than half are super local. It is hazardous to make a normative assessment whether the Sports Law Twittersphere ought to be more global. However, I find the strong presence of local sports law tweets somewhat surprising. As addressed in Section 1.1, sports and sports law are generally thought of as particularly globalized, and have been for quite some time. Moreover, these findings are based on an approach and data that would seem to provide optimal conditions for identifying globally-relevant tweets: English-language conversations on a global social media platform in 2019 (see Section 1.2). In this regard, one might expect that a study based on other data is more likely to reveal an even lower rather than greater degree of globality in sports law discourse.

It should in this context be emphasized that the limited geographic spread of local tweets does not mean that local tweets are irrelevant in the sense that few are interested in the topics that they address. While local tweets are on average retweeted less frequently than global tweets, the difference is not as great as one might have expected (Table 2). Considering that global tweets have a global audience that is obviously much larger than any local audience, one might have expected a much greater difference in the retweet rate between local and global tweets. The fact that there are plenty of opportunities for local tweets to be retweeted strongly suggests the existence of significant local communities interested

in sports law issues of local relevance. Thus, we should think of the Sports Law Twittersphere as consisting simultaneously of a significant global community *and* strong local communities.

3 WHO IS GLOBAL, WHO IS LOCAL?

On a general scale, the Sports Law Twittersphere thus has a clear and somewhat surprisingly strong local character. However, one should not assume that the relative degree of globality is distributed equally across all tweets and all tweeters. This section explores the existence of significant differences between the characteristics of local and global Sports Law Tweets. The question we are trying to answer is essentially to what extent we can predict whether a Sports Law Tweet is of global relevance on the basis of information about the tweet and the user who tweeted it.

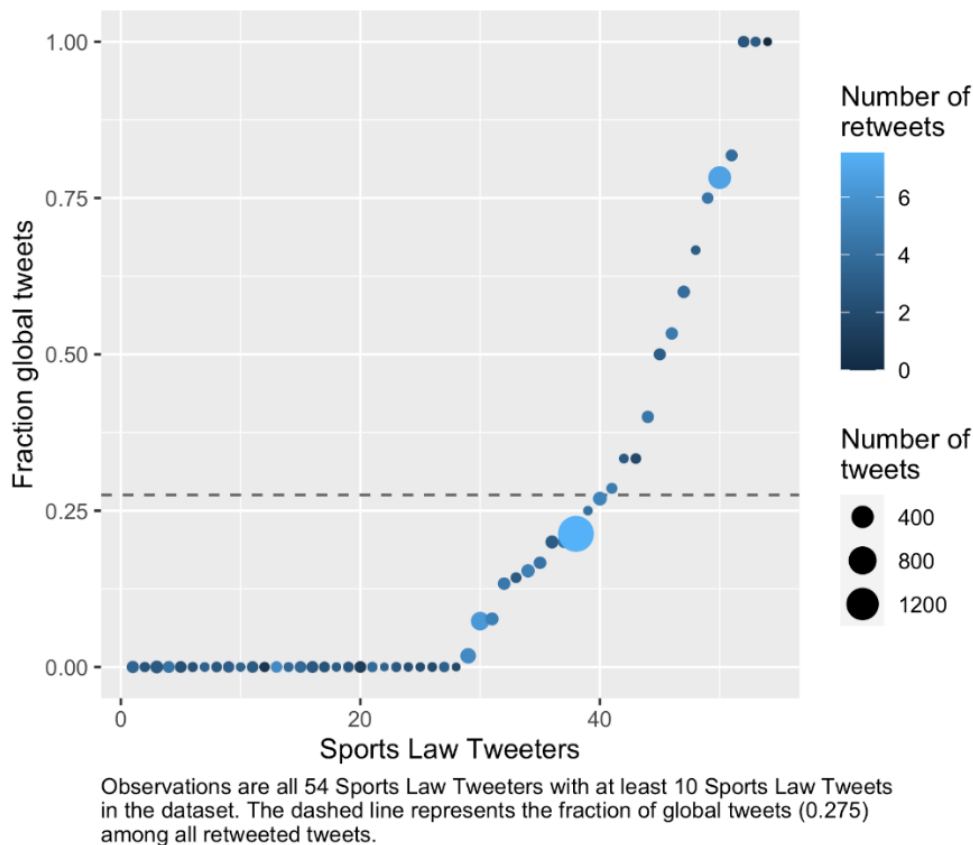


Figure 5. Degree of globality by Sports Law Tweeter

To start we can note that there are significant differences between individual Sports Law Tweeters with regard to the global relevance of their tweets and that at least some users have a clear tendency towards either the local or the global (Figure 5).

This is not as such particularly surprising: we would expect the level of globality portion of global tweets, similar to for example the distribution of retweets (see Section 2). It is however somewhat surprising that there is no apparent correlation between, on one hand, how active Sports Law Tweeters are in the Sports Law Twittersphere in terms of how many Sports Law Tweets they have posted and, on the other hand, neither their level of globality nor how frequently their tweets are retweeted. Active and influential Tweeters can be found on both the upper and lower scale of the globality distribution.¹⁰ This strengthens the conclusion made above that there are strong local communities within the Sports Law Twittersphere. These communities' existence indicates by extension that there are distinct local sports law issues that are relevant to these communities. This is explored in greater detail in Section 4.2 below.

There are a number of factors relating to the tweeter that could possibly help predict whether the tweet will be local or global. However, the data reveals that differences between Sports Law Tweets that are local and global are not generally tied to the tweeters' gender, in what section they work, or where in the world they are based. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions to this and where a characteristic of the tweeter significantly helps predict the globality of his/her/their tweets (Figure 6).

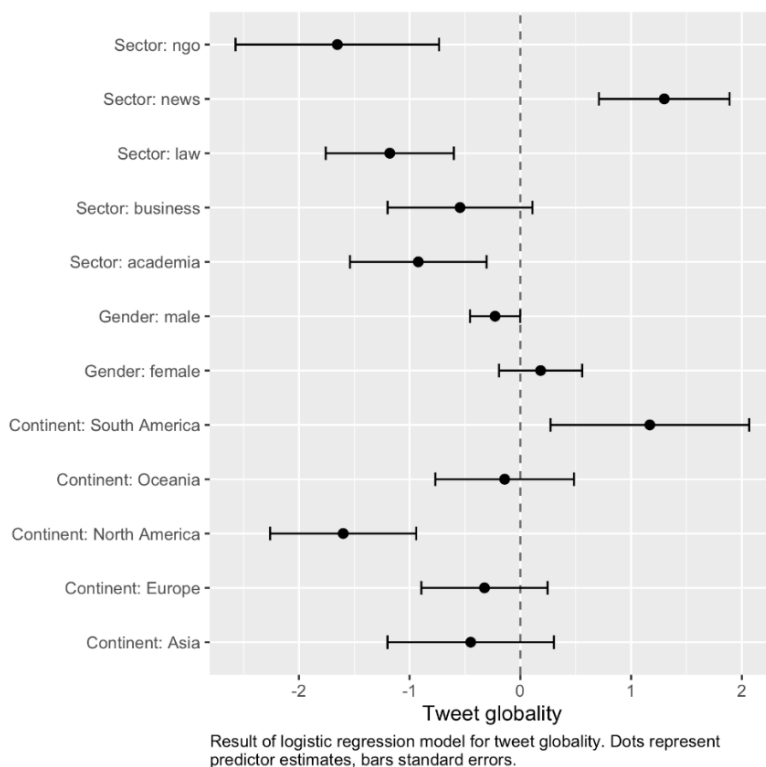


Figure 6. Globality by sector, gender, and continent

¹⁰ Although not plotted in Figure 5 it can be noted that the same is true for number of followers.

First, the tweeter working in the news sector is positively correlated with the tweet going global. A number of factors may contribute to this result. While all actors involved in the Sports Law Twittersphere are presumably interested in getting their message out and maximizing their audience, this is arguably especially true for those who are professionally involved in news dissemination. Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that professional reporters and news organizations are particularly skilled at identifying stories that are of interest to a global audience and framing these stories in a way that are attractive to a global audience. This result may also say something about Sports Law Tweeters as consumers of information. Perhaps they trust tweets from reporters and news organizations more than from, for example, lawyers and academics. Perhaps they are more interested in sports law news than sports law opinions. Or maybe journalists simply produce a higher portion of high-quality, retweet-worthy tweets. By comparison, the tweeter being a practicing attorney or a law firm is negatively correlated with the tweet being global rather than local. In other words, relative to other Sports Law Tweeters, practicing lawyers tweet more about local sports law matters and less about global matters. One interpretation of this is that the practice of sports law is, as discussed above in Section 1.1, still in many regards local in character and more so than, for example, the academic debate or the news coverage.

Finally, the tweeter being based in North America is negatively correlated with the tweet going global. It is unlikely that this difference can be explained by the data sample as it includes a large amount of Sports Law Tweets from a large number of North America-based Sports Law Tweeters, many of whom are also frequently retweeted (see Section 1.3). One plausible explanation for North American tweets being more local lies in the differences between North America and most of the rest of the world when it comes to which specific sports consumers are interest in. Football (soccer) is the most popular sport in 226 countries and two of the rare exceptions are Canada (ice hockey) and the United States (American football) (Beauchamp 2014; Kidwell 2008). While fans in other regions also have more locally-relevant sports, they share a strong interest in the “global game” that bind them together and distinguish them from the average North American sports fan.

Another possible explanation for the observation may be differences between the so-called American and European sport models. For example, the existence of division promotion-relegation and intra-league restrictions such as drafts and salary caps affect what legal issues become most pressing in the jurisdictions respectively. These explanations are explored further in Section 4.2 by studying textual differences between Sports Law Tweets of North American origin and Sports Law Tweets from the rest of the world.

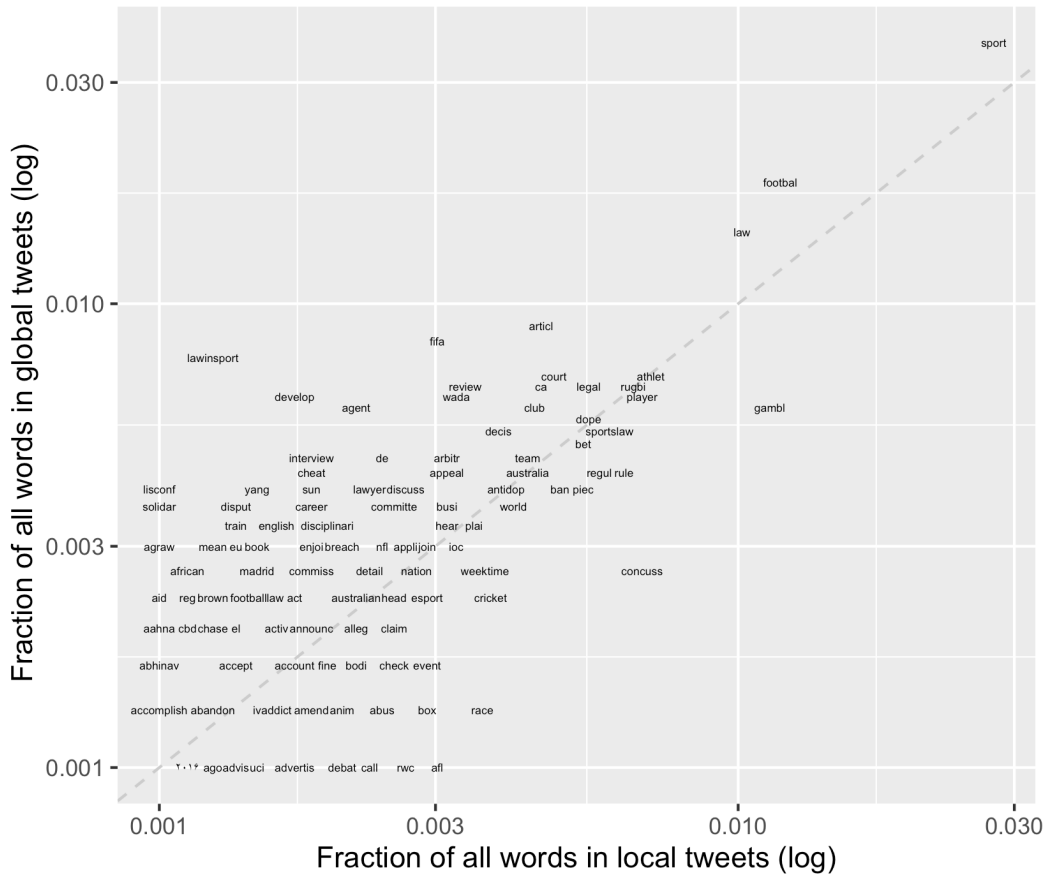
4 GLOBAL AND LOCAL SPORTS LAW TOPICS

4.1 What Is Global Sports Law?

The question of whether there is a global sports law that consists of topics of distinctly global relevance, such that one can distinguish it from local sports law, remains to be answered. In order to provide an answer based on the data the question can be reformulated as follows: do Sports Law Tweets that are of global relevance address different topics than those that are of local relevance? That question can and will be addressed by comparing all global tweets against all local tweets. Doing so can help identify what, if anything, are globally shared topics. However, it is less well suited for identifying what is distinctly local; it lies in the very nature of the local that it differs between different localities. This examination shall therefore also involve an examination and comparison of sports law topics discussed in some example countries. To achieve this, we need to analyze the text of the Sports Law Tweets and, as described in greater detail in Section 1.2 above, a corpus containing the tweeted text of the Sports Law Tweets was created for this purpose. We can then compare the text used in local and global tweets as well as tweets originating in different places, we can capture what topics they address and if they differ.

We begin by comparing and analyzing the text of local and global Sports Law Tweets respectively. To do so requires describing the tweeted text in a quantifiable and comparable manner and a straight-forward solution for this is word frequency. This essentially consists of identifying all unique words in all tweets and calculating how common each word is in local and global tweets respectively (see also Section 1.2). Many words will appear more or less equally frequently in both local and global tweets and are of limited use for distinguishing global tweets from local tweets. However, some words are used more frequently in either local or global tweets and help to describe what distinguishes the one from the other (Figure 7).¹¹

¹¹ It should be noted that the corpus dictionary contains 3,616 unique words, many more than can legibly fit in the figure.



A selection of words in Sports Law Tweets. Position represents a word's relative frequency in local and global tweets respectively.

Figure 7. Word frequency in local and global tweets

Some of these words obviously relate to specific events. However, many of them can be associated with the organization and regulation of sport and correspond with well-known sports law topics. As discussed in Section 1.1 above, there are some arguably global sports law topics that sports law textbooks all over the world addresses and it is interesting to examine to what extent words associated with these topics appear in local and global tweets respectively. This includes, in particular, words that relate to major sports governing bodies (SGBs); the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, and other mega sporting events; sport dispute resolution, particularly the Court of Arbitration for Sport and its jurisprudence; doping, in particular the interpretation and enforcement of the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) Code; and the application, violation, and protection of fundamental or human rights.

As we can see in Figure 7, many of the words that appear in Sports Law Tweets can be associated with these topics. Many such words appear roughly equally frequently in local and global Sports Law Tweets, such as words that are

related to doping¹² and dispute resolution in sport¹³. This suggests that legal issues relating to doping and dispute resolution are not of only local or global relevance but both. Thus, one would not be wrong to claim that doping and dispute resolution are core topics of global sports law, but it would also not be wrong to claim that they are key issues of local sports law. One possible exception from this might be specific cases: tweets containing the words “sun” and “yang”, associated with the Court of Arbitration for Sports’s hearing in *WADA v. Sun Yang*, i.e. dispute resolution of a specific doping matter, attracted a distinct global following.

These findings indicate that local sports law is closely connected to and overlaps with global sports law and that achieving a more complete understanding of many sports law topics requires taking into consideration development on both the local level and the global level. I believe this should encourage lawyers that engage with sports law to develop broad competences; the existence of the entirely local sports lawyer appears untenable but so does also the existence of the purely global sports lawyer.

Some words appear more frequently in either local or global tweets and both help describe them and distinguish them from each other. Many of those words are associated with specific sports. As one would have expected, words associated with sports that are particularly strong only in some countries and regions, such as Australian football, rugby, and cricket, appear more frequently in local Sports Law Tweets. By comparison, the word “football” and many words related to football appear more equally frequently in both local and global tweets. As concluded in Section 2 above, the Twittersphere contains both a strong global community and strong local communities. Legal issues relating to football would seem to be an example of a topic that is strong in both camps.

The data provides some less expected findings. Considering its central place in the private sports law regime (Duval 2018b, S246, S248-S253; Nafziger 1992, pp. 491-493), I would have expected terms associated with the Olympic system to appear particularly frequently in global tweets but picture that emerges from the data suggests that reality is a little more complicated and nuanced. Some SGB’s, like FIFA, appear particularly frequently in global tweets while others, like the International Olympic Committee (IOC), is used more or less equally frequently in local and global Sports Law Tweets. This could be read as Olympic sports being less globally relevant than football.

However, a manual examination of local and global tweets about the IOC and FIFA indicates that the difference between the two is not the actors as such but rather which parts of their activities the Sports Law Twittersphere is interested in. Many local tweets about the IOC concern either IOC decisions directed at specific countries, e.g. Russia, Germany, United Kingdom, Australia, and France, or decisions in disputes between the IOC and national Olympic committees. By

¹² E.g. “wada”, “dope”, and “antidop”.

¹³ E.g. “review”, “arbitr”, “appeal”, and “ca” (erroneously stemmed version of “CAS”).

comparison, many global tweets about the IOC concerned the actions or role of the IOC on issues of sport policy and governance. Local and global tweets about FIFA largely follow a similar division. The major difference between the IOC and FIFA appears to be that the Sports Law Twittersphere is more interested in FIFA's role in the regulation of football, such as the regulation of agents which is also a distinctly global word, than its decisions in or involvement in particular disputes. Also, when FIFA takes actions against major football clubs it appears to be of significant global interest and more so than when the IOC makes comparable decisions in individual cases.

4.2 What Is Local Sports Law?

There are a number of words that are distinctly local, such as concussions and gambling, and that indicate which sports law topics are local in character. However, the global/local word frequencies comparison is not the best tool for identifying which sports law topics that are distinctly local. One issue with only distinguishing between global and local tweets is that it masks geographical differences. It assumes that the nature of the local is homogeneous around the world even though, almost by definition, it is most likely not. Just like what characterizes global discussions must be measured globally, what characterizes local discussions must be measured locally.

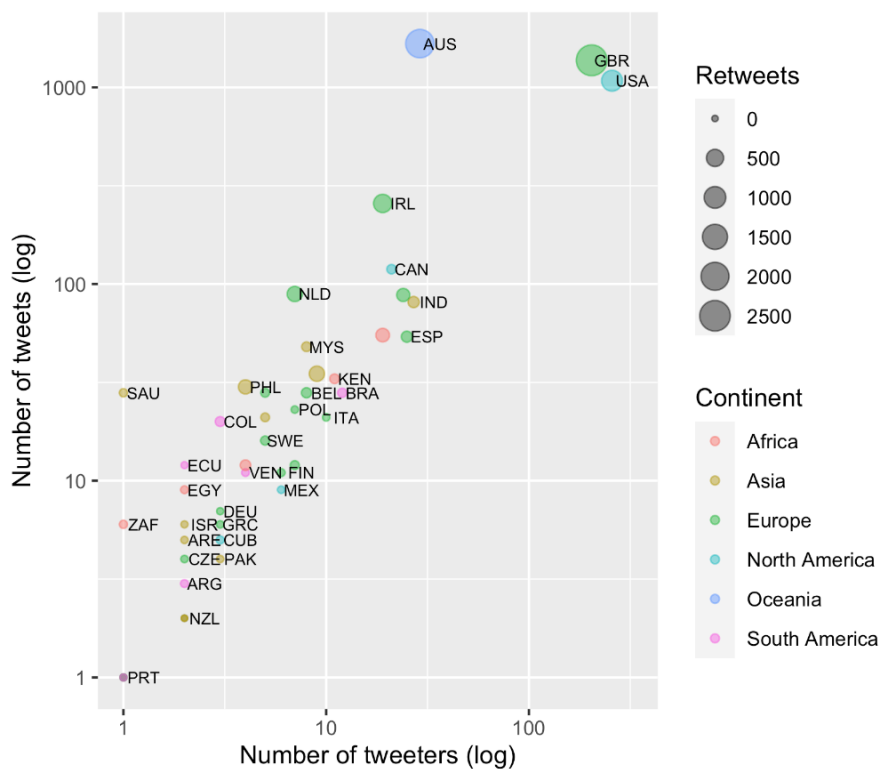


Figure 8: Geographic distribution by country

One approach for achieving this is to study the text of tweets originating in individual geographic regions. The three countries set themselves apart in the Sports Law Twittersphere: The United States, Great Britain, and Australia.¹⁴ These three countries have the three largest numbers of tweeters, tweets, and retweets and thus the largest data to work with (Figure 8).

We can explore what topics of sports law that are particularly locally relevant in those countries by identifying what characterizes and sets apart tweets that come from each of them (Salton Buckley 1988).

A simple and efficient standard tool for this is Term Frequency Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF). In short, for each word that appears in a document, TF-IDF provides a value that represents how important that word is in that document compared to the entire corpus. For the purposes of this study we can approach the text of all Sports Law Tweets as a corpus and the text of tweets originating in a particular country as single, distinct documents. Using TF-IDF we can then identify the words that distinguish and describe tweets from each country from the entire corpus. Table 3 below presents the top words for tweets originating in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia.

Table 3. Top Words by TF-IDF

<i>Rank</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Great Britain</i>	<i>Australia</i>
1	ncaa	sport	piec
2	colleg	antidop	afl
3	oakland	lawinsport	concuss
4	bill	club	australia
5	lawsuit	rugbi	rugbi
6	nfl	footbal	race
7	imag	violat	dope
8	athlet	athlet	gambl
9	like	govern	australian
10	california	team	cricket

The words associated with tweets from the USA is most immediately interesting since it was established in Section 3 that Sports Law Tweets originating in North America have a significantly lower degree of globality than tweets originating in other continents. Many of the tweeted words that are distinctly American are associated with the ways by which sports is organized differently in North America

¹⁴ Their dominance is likely at least in part due to how the data was collected. See above Section 1.2. However, for the purpose of comparison it is practical, almost essential, to use a corpus that is in a single language, here English.

than much of the rest of the world, such as the central role of collegiate sports organized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).¹⁵ As described above the data includes all tweets during a six-month period. It is nevertheless evident from the table that the American tweets focused heavily on the issue of college athletes' rights to profit from their likeness, also referred to as image rights. This has been a major topic in American sports law literature for some time (see e.g. Landry and Baker 2019), but a California bill introduced during the studied period, the “Fair Pay to Play” act, constituted an open revolt against the NCAA principle of amateurism (Bayard 2020). While the presence of the words in Table 3 reflect the importance of this topic and its development in the United States, that they appear much more frequently in local tweets (see Figure 7) indicates that this topic is less central to global sports law.

However, this is not true for all words that one might distinctly associate with American sports. Unsurprisingly, the word “NFL”, referring to the professional American football league in the United States, is one of the words that characterizes Sports Law Tweets originating in the US (Table 3). It is more unexpected that “NFL” appears essentially equally frequently in global and local tweets (Figure 7). Thus, while both the NCAA and the NFL are American institutions, and arguably distinctly so, the former is predominantly locally relevant while the latter is also relevant both locally and globally. It is precarious to draw broad inferences about the development of sports more generally from data about Sports Law Tweets, but if the interest of Sports Law Tweeters are representative for the interest of the general public this may suggest that the NFL is becoming an increasingly globally relevant sport.

The words that best describe British and Australian tweets are dominated by words relating to sports that are particularly popular in those countries.¹⁶ As we can see in Figure 7, many of these words tend to be more locally relevant. However, some of those words, such as those relating to doping and football, have high global relevance. This helps to explain why tweets from Sports Law Tweeters from these regions in general are more globally relevant, even though they also address locally relevant topics.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has provided empirically-based knowledge about global sports law. It largely confirms the intuitions of sports lawyers and sports law academics that sports law is an extensively globalized field. The study has been able to confirm the existence of a strong community of Twitter users across the globe that are interested in and together discuss certain sports law-related topics.

¹⁵ E.g. “academ”, “colleg”, “ncaa”, and “student”.

¹⁶ E.g. “rugbi”, “afl”, and “cricket”.

But that is not the end of the story. Sports law is not thoroughly globalized. Judging from the activity on Twitter, local sports law is very much alive and kicking with its own communities, influential users, and topics. There are even significant super local communities discussing sports law matters only of interest within a single metropolitan area. Their existence can be explained by some sports being very locally relevant and regional differences in how sports are organized. However, the study also shows that it is in many instances inaccurate to describe local and global sports law as separate and more appropriate to approach them as distinguishable but co-dependable spheres.

It would be interesting to know how other legal areas or sub-fields compare to sports law when it comes to the relative degree of globality. It would also be valuable to study if the sports law discussion is becoming more global over time. As discussed at the top of this article one can over several decades detect an increased emphasis of global sports law issues in the academic literature. This study's findings caution against assuming that we are already in a wholly post-national legal world. Whether we are moving in that direction and, if so, how fast, would require studying the topic over a longer period of time. In that regard this study has hopefully illustrates the possibility and value of data-based approaches, pointed towards a workable methodology, and provided some values that can be used for comparisons.

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