

The Influence of Brutal Violence and its Impact on Fan Motivation in Mixed Martial Arts

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Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is a sport rapidly growing in popularity throughout the world. The most popular MMA, combat sport league is the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) (Reams & Havard, 2017). The main way to view UFC fights is through pay-per-view, where a consumer would spend money to order a fight through their internet or cable provider. Determinants of pay-per-view broadcast viewership often depend heavily on motivation factors such as the fighters involved in the event, social connection, and interest in the sport (Scott, Salaga & Santos, 2013). Since 2008, the value of the UFC has grown from \$1 Billion to \$7 Billion in 2018 through a growing fan base and increased amount of media coverage (Watanabe, 2015).

Because of the display of violence within the sport, there was little media coverage of MMA, which proves to be a key determinant of popularity and consumption of a particular niche sport (Martin, Williams, Whisenant, & Dees, 2015). This has made it very difficult for advertisers and sponsors to associate with MMA and UFC as a brand (Macintosh & Crow, 2011). However, as MMA and the UFC made more rules and regulations within the sport, media coverage began to grow, which enhanced the way which the sport was perceived by the public. Due to MMA's increasing popularity and exposure, more research is needed on what fan motivation factors are present in determining why one consumes the sport. By determining what fan motivation factors are present in low identified fans vs. high identified fans, marketers can use this information to reach desired target markets and adjust their marketing campaigns accordingly. Previous studies generally found little correlation between exposure to violence and fan motivation levels, those studies mainly collected data from individuals who had identified as being a highly engaged MMA fan. This study aims to determine if individuals are more motivated by violence in MMA if they do not identify as a high-level MMA fan. To determine if there is a correlation between fan motivation factors and fan identification level, empirical data will be used through explanatory and relational theories. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine if the fan motivation factors of exposure to violence, skill of the fighters involved, and overall interest of the sport change depending on an individual's level of MMA fan identification.

This quantitative research study looks to add onto the previous research within MMA by subjecting survey participants to a series of images and videos with different fan motivation traits, such as violence, excitement, or aesthetics. Based on past research studies examining the relationship between MMA consumption and fan motivation, the researcher was able to create three main hypotheses towards the outcome of the anticipated quantitative data:

- H1: Demographically, the majority of subjects who identify as MMA fans will be younger, Caucasian males.
- H2: The exposure to violence/blood as a motivation factor in MMA consumption will be higher when participants indicate low level fan identification.
- H3: The exposure to violence/blood as a motivation factor in MMA consumption will be lower when participants indicate high level fan identification.

The instrumentation used in this study to determine fan identification and motivation factors of MMA was a three part questionnaire, which was distributed through the purpose of convenience throughout the popular social media site "Reddit." Reddit is a forum where users can view posts and comment on posts to share their personal opinions on various subjects and issues. The target population of this study was participants 18 years and over. Over a three week period, a total of 71 subjects participated in the survey, with a total of 67 completed responses, yielding

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a 94% completion rate. The demographic questions of the surveys illustrated that the majority of the respondents were: male (80%), white/Caucasian (75%), aged 25-34 (48%), a median household income between \$30,000-49,000 (26%), with 49% of the participants being a college graduate.

These demographic features illustrate similar results collected related studies, and confirms H1 that the majority of subjects who identify as MMA fans will be younger Caucasian men. To determine if there was significant difference between men and women for fan identification, an independent t-test yielded a t-score of 3.2 (DF = 65) with $p = .002$. This p score is less than .05, which confirms a significance between fan identification for men and women. For H₂ and H₃, results of the study illustrated only a slight negative correlation between fan involvement and brutal violence as a motivation factor. As MMA fan identification increased, the motivation factor of exposure to brutal violence in the sport slightly decreased. Results found in testing these motivation factors did prove to be similar to the results in Kim et al. (2008), where main fan motivation factors were skill of the fighters and overall interest in the sport.

The finding of this study can be beneficial for MMA because it can help marketers and advertisers tailor specific campaigns to these target markets. When looking to promote an event, MMA marketers can utilize this information to have more violent depictions of the sport in areas where it has been determined that there is not a large amount of highly identified MMA fans. Similarly, advertisers would also place non-violent images and campaigns that showcase other motivation factors (i.e. skills of fighters involved) where there is a large concentration of highly identified MMA fans. As this study and past studies illustrate, many of the target demographics for MMA can be found through social media blogging sites dedicated to MMA discussion, such as Reddit pages. This studies results enforced the findings of other research studies in affirming that demographically, the majority of consumers utilizing social media for MMA purposes are younger, Caucasian males (Frederick et al., 2012).