

Individual combat sport: comparison of motivation and media consumption behaviors between Mixed Martial Arts spectators in amateur and professional events

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**Marketing
Session 27**

**Saturday, May 31, 2008
3:00 PM - 3:25 PM**

**Presentation (25-minute)
Abstract 185**

The popularity of the sport of Mixed Martial Arts has grown dramatically over the last few years. Not only has the major North American promoter, the Ultimate Fighting championship (UFC), grown exponentially, but other professional MMA organizations such as the International Fight League (IFL), King of the Cage (KOTC), and EliteXC have emerged. In addition, many amateur MMA organizations have begun promoting fights at a local level.

Given this dramatic increase in popularity, Kim, Greenwell, Andrew, Lee, and Mahony, (in press) explored motivation and media consumption behaviors of MMA fans. They found MMA spectators were more driven by sport interest and drama than by other possible motivations. In addition, they found gender differences in that males were more motivated by sport interest, economics, and violence. Sport interest, vicarious achievement, and national pride were significant predictors of media consumption for males, while sport interest and drama were significant predictors of media consumption for females.

One of the limitations of Kim's et al.'s study was that the sample was limited to spectators at an amateur event. Considering sports fans may appreciate different aspects of the sport to attend or watch according to its level of competition (James & Ross, 2002; Ross & James, 2006), a comparison between spectators at an amateur event and a professional is warranted. Therefore, the primary purpose of the current study was to explore the differences of the MMA spectators at different levels of competition (amateur vs. professional) by comparing spectators' motivations and the media consumption behaviors.

The relationships were examined by assessing responses from 373 participants who attended an amateur event ($n = 209$) and a professional event ($n = 165$). The spectators at the events were primarily young (88.5% for the amateur event and 61.5% for the professional event were ages 18-39) and primarily male (76.9% for the amateur event and 64.6% for the professional event). To confirm the reliability of the scale used to address the motives, Cronbach Alphas for each motivation were calculated for both groups. Coefficients ranged from $\alpha = 0.713$ (drama) to $\alpha = 0.905$ (violation) for the amateur event and from $\alpha = 0.762$ (aesthetics) to $\alpha = 0.878$ (socializing) for the professional event. In the amateur event, the highest rated motives that the participants indicated were drama ($M = 5.51$) and aesthetics ($M = 5.11$). Socializing ($M = 5.11$) was the third highest rated factor, followed by violence ($M = 4.50$), adoration ($M = 4.32$), vicarious achievement ($M = 4.32$), and escape ($M = 3.91$). In the professional event, the highest rated motives that the participants indicated were drama ($M = 5.62$) and aesthetics ($M = 5.62$). Escape ($M = 5.33$) was the third highest rated factor, followed by vicarious achievement ($M = 5.02$), violence ($M = 4.91$), adoration ($M = 4.52$), and socializing ($M = 4.45$).

There were significant differences between participants at the amateur and professional events in escape, vicarious achievement, aesthetics, and violence ($p < .05$). Fans at the professional event rated significantly higher in these motives than fans at the amateur event. Two backward linear regression analyses indicated that drama ($\beta = .370$), vicarious achievement ($\beta = .179$), and aesthetics ($\beta = .232$) were significant predictors of media consumption for spectators at the amateur event [$F(3, 204) = 27.216, p < .001, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .275$], while aesthetics ($\beta = .663$), adoration ($\beta = .341$), and drama ($\beta = -.290$) were significant predictors of media consumption for spectators at the professional event [$F(3, 146) = 29.681, p < .001, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .366$].

Results suggest some differences in motivation between consumers of amateur and professional events. For example, spectators at the professional event rated escape much higher than socializing, whereas the opposite was true of the amateur event. This suggests consumers at the professional fight see the event as a chance to get away, therefore, marketers of these events should add to the spectacle and entertainment aspects of the event. Further, the influence of drama was very different for the two events. Spectators at the amateur events wanted to see close fights, whereas drama was negatively correlated at the professional level. This finding indicates spectators at an amateur event are not likely to know the individual fighters, therefore, they prefer close, dramatic finishes to fights. On the other hand, spectators at the professional event most likely possessed more knowledge of the individual fighters and had developed allegiances for certain fighters which may lead them to prefer seeing their favorite fighter win convincingly, rather than watch a close fight. Although many of the findings were similar among the two groups of spectators, these findings indicate there are differences between amateur and professional MMA spectators, and marketers

2008 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2008)

should develop appropriate marketing strategies appropriate to the level of competition.