Taekwondo (TKD) has become a popular global participant sport with 189 member nations of the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) and an estimated 70 million participants (WTF, 2009). Recently, however, the Taekwondo industry has been faced with a number of challenges including: 1) decreasing participation over the past decade especially with adults (National Sporting Good Manufacturers Association, 2009), 2) retention of participants after they achieve Black-Belt status (Kang, 2004), and 3) competition with alternative martial art forms (e.g., mixed martial arts); (Kim, Zhang, & Ko, 2009). Furthermore, Taekwondo research has mainly focused on exercise physiology/motor mechanics of Taekwondo athletes (e.g., Jeon, Lee, & Kwak, 2004) or the on intrapersonal changes based on participation (Kwaik, & Lim, 2008; Scott, Kozub, & Goto, 2005; Yoo, Yang, Lee, Rhee, Kim, & Cho, 2003). In an effort to better understand what motivates TKD participants, sport marketers have at their disposal a potential measure of retention that examines the level of psychological commitment to the sport that is reported by the participant.

A major advancement in the integration of commitment into the sporting context was achieved with the introduction of the sport commitment model (SCM: Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993). In sport management, this framework has been used to examine commitment in adult tennis players (Casper, Gray, Babkes-Stellino, 2007) and windsurfers (Jeon & Ridinger, 2009). The purpose of the current study was to build on sport commitment model literature by testing factors that relate to sport commitment in adult and youth TKD participants. Specifically our aim was to determine factors associated with adult participants compared to youth.

A total of 24 items based on the Sport Commitment Model were included. SCM variables included enjoyment, social constraints, social support, personal investments, and involvement opportunities that are posited to increase commitment to Tae Kwon Do. Favorable perception about alternate activities was posited to lower commitment. In addition to SCM items, three items related to Athletic Competence (Harter, 1988) were included in the study. Our model then included three items related to intention to continue TKD and five items related to current purchasing that served as outcome variables of commitment. Responses were based on a 5-point Likert-type ranging from “not at all/none” to “very much/a lot”.

A total 434 surveys were collected from selected five studios in the southeastern United States. Missing values analysis identified two surveys that had over 10% of the data missing and were omitted, leaving 432 for further analysis. The sample includes 63.3% males. The average age of the participants was 20 years old (SD = 15 years) with a range of 8-58 years. A majority (60.3%) of the respondents were Caucasian. The youth sample (i.e., under 18 years old) was comprised of 227 respondents while the adult sample over 18 years old had 205 respondents.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was the primary statistical procedure related to the sport commitment and direct/indirect influence of commitment models. Prior to conducting the SEM, frequencies, means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between items for examination of normality were conducted to assess the tenability of assumptions, reliability, and validity of scores. Internal consistency reliability analysis (Cronbach’s α) was used to estimate the reliability of each latent variable. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to determine if the number of factors and the loadings of measured (indicator) variables conformed to what is expected based on previous theory. Path analysis was then run for each of the groups (i.e., youth versus adult and infrequent versus frequent participants) so comparison could be made based on seemingly unrelated regression weights.

Based on reliability estimates and the CFA, five items (one from personal investments, two from involvement opportunities, and two from alternative activities) were removed from the analysis. Overall, the reliabilities of each construct were acceptable (α-values = .68 - .90). Comparison of youth and adults participants uncovered more similarities than differences. Enjoyment (β = .69 youth; .67 adult), personal investment (β = .48 youth; .58 adult), involvement opportunities (β = .26 youth; .24 adult) were significant predictors of commitment to TKD, while...
alternate activities ($\beta = -0.15$ youth; $-0.28$ adult) were found to significantly lower commitment levels. Athletic ability, social constraints, and social support were non-significant predictors in both samples. Commitment significantly predicted intention to continue TKD ($\beta = 0.98$ youth; 0.90 adult), while it was not a significant predictor of purchasing.

Taekwondo-related practitioners and researchers have reached consensus that the most challenging issue facing TKD businesses today is retention, especially with adults (Kang, 2004). Our comparison of youth and adult participants using the SCM revealed little differences between the groups suggesting that marketing need not be segmented based on age. Our study indicated that TKD practitioners should think of converting their traditional skill-based disciplines/teaching to a more fun and enjoyment based discipline. Promotion, such as packaged family lesson, may also increase commitment through personal investment in the sport. Lastly, recognizing and addressing the perception of TKD versus other activities may hold a key to retention with adults. Additional findings as well as limitations and future directions related to this line of research will be further discussed in the presentation.