The Martial Arts Participants Profiles: A case of Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Taekwondo

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Lifestyles in American society have changed over the past few decades such that people now tend to spend more time and money maintaining wellness. Participation in physically active recreation and sports has increased tremendously in recent years due to this increased fitness and health consciousness (Columbus & Rice, 1991; Ko, 2003, Richman & Rehberg, 1986). Along with various other activities, martial arts have become an increasingly popular recreational pursuit in Western countries. Martial arts have become an increasingly popular recreational activity in U.S. Most martial arts participants believe that martial arts are capable of producing both physical and mental benefits for participants (Columbus & Rice, 1991; Mathes & Battista, 1985; Richman & Rehberg, 1986). Membership is the primary income source of martial arts programs (Kim, Zhang, & Ko, 2009); yet, retention and expansion of the existing membership are the most challenging for programs. It would be important to better understanding of member in various sociodemographic segments, so as to formulate effective marketing strategies for consumers of different backgrounds and needs. No research attention has been devoted to examining the relationships between perceived values and a martial arts participant’s background. The purposes of this study are twofold: a) to help fill some of the informational voids by providing insights into the characteristics and behavior of AAU TKD participants and b) to examine the relationships between sociodemographic variables and perceived value factors.

Perceived value has received increasing attention as one of the most significant factors in predicting consumer satisfaction, behavioral intention, and loyalty in several different contexts such as general business, tourism, and sports perspective (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000b; Jayanti & Ghosh, 1996; Lee, Yoon, & Lee, 2007; Mizik & Jacobson, 2004). Woodruff (1997) defined perceived value as “a customer’s perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer’s goal and purposes in use situations” (p. 142). Zeithaml (1988) proposed a conceptual model that illustrates the relationship among price, quality, perceived value, and purchase intentions based on an exploratory investigation. Four types of value were defined: (a) low price, (b) whatever I want in a product, (c) the quality I get for the price I pay, and (d) what I get for what I give. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) developed the Perceived Value (PERVAL), which measures consumer perceived value through a multiple-item scale. Originally, the PERVAL scale was derived from the dimensions of Sheth et al.’s (1991) value construct. While a number of perceived value studies focused on quality and price, these two factors could not completely explain the decision-making process. The PERVAL scale added the emotion and social dimensions. Thus, Sweeney and Soutar’s PERVAL scale (2001) was developed to include all four dimensions of consumers’ perceived value, including: (a) emotional value, (b) social value, (c) functional value (price/value for money), and (d) functional value (performance/quality). They defined emotional value as “the utility derived from the feelings or affective states that a product generates” (p. 211). Social value was defined as “the utility derived from the product’s ability to enhance social self-concept” (p. 211). Function value (price/value for money) was defined as “the utility derived from the product due to the reduction of its perceived short term and longer term costs” (p. 211). Finally, they defined functional value (performance/quality) as “the utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of the product” (p. 211).

A total of 234 participants were recruited from Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Taekwondo National Championship in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. The AAU TKD National Championship is a major TKD annual event organized by one of the largest non-profit volunteer organizations in the U.S. Perceived value was measured with four subscales (Emotion, Quality, Price, and Social) with a total of 11 items that were adapted from Sweeney and Soutar’s PERVAL scale (2001). The PERVAL’s scale items were slightly modified in order to be relevant to the setting of TKD schools and a sociodemographic section was included in the questionnaire that contained nine variables (i.e., gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, household income, education, belt rank, information source, and TKD annual expenditure). These items were phrased in a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) and regression analyses were conducted by applying the procedures in...
SPSS 19 to examine the relationship between the sociodemographic variables and the perceived constraints factors.

The sample consisted of 56.8% (N = 134) males and 42.4% (N = 100) females. Approximately, 50% of the participants were between 35 and 55 years old and close to 27% were 18 and 25 years old. Regarding household income level, 61% of the participants earned more than $50,000 annually. Caucasian (78.3%) was the primary ethnic composition. In addition, Asian (8.1%), African American (5.5%), and Hispanic (3.4%) respondents represented the remaining ethnic groups. The respondents were of various educational backgrounds, with a majority having at least some college experience and college graduate (70%). 33% of respondents had more than one year contract. 60% of the respondents have participated TKD more than 5 years old. Of the respondents, 41% of them had a family membership contract and 50% had individual contracts. Close to 66% of the participants were of Black Belt rank; whereas, 10% were of White or Yellow Belt rank which represents beginner levels of TKD.

Participants first learned of the TKD school with which they were affiliated from various sources, mainly including referrals, advertisements, and the internet. For example, more than 50% of the respondents obtained information about their TKD school(s) via word of mouth and friend referrals. With respect to TKD expenditures per year, more than one half of the participants spent more than $2,000 on TKD services and products. The results of the MANOVA revealed that group differences were detected in emotional value (p = .008) and quality value (p = .025) based on ethnicity as a fixed factor. Descriptive statistics indicated that among the significant differences that were revealed, Asian/pacific islanders had higher mean score of emotion value and social value. The multivariate test results indicated that a significant portion (27.1% and 25.2%, respectively) of the variation in the fixed factors was explained by the participants' ethnicity [Wilks' Lambda = .774; F = 2.07; and \( \eta^2 = .226 \)]. The results of the MANOVA revealed that group differences were also detected in all four value measures (emotional value, \( p = .023 \); price value, \( p = .035 \); social value, \( p = .001 \); and quality value, \( p = .009 \)) based on membership type as a fixed factor. The multivariate test results indicated that a significant portion (27.1% and 25.2%, respectively for both tests) of the variation in the fixed factors was explained by the participants' membership type [Wilks' Lambda = .872; F = 2.742; and \( \eta^2 = .128 \)].

Both consumers' sociodemographics and psychographics are important aspects of sports marketing segmentation (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). These aspects need to be examined independently and also collectively. Recruitment and retention of martial arts school participants are key to the thriving of martial arts school business. In order for the schools to survive and thrive financially, it is very important that martial arts school administrators and marketers recognize the relationships between sociodemographics and perceived value factors, and how they interactively affect current members' decisions on continuing or dropping out of martial arts schools. The findings of this study revealed that martial arts consumers of various ethnic backgrounds had different perceived value of martial arts schools. When formulating promotional strategies, differential marketing procedures may be formulated to specifically address the uniqueness of cultural and ethnic needs. Membership length and history of participation in martial arts school should also be considered as new participants and people of less martial arts participation history tended to perceive more constraints; instead of constraints, positive reinforcement may be more effective to retain those with a long history of membership and participation. This finding contributes on the field of martial arts industry by providing additional and knowledge of martial arts participants, in case, AAU TKD.