

**Understanding Male and Female Differences in the Consumption of Mixed Martial Arts**

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**Socio-cultural**

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**20-minute oral presentation  
(including questions)**

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The sport of mixed martial arts (MMA) from the viewpoint of some researchers, has been identified as one of the rapidly growing participatory and spectator activities in Canada and around the world (Kim, Andrew, & Greenwell, 2009; Kim, Greenwell, Andrew, Lee & Mahony, 2008). With a rich and storied history whose origins date back to Ancient Greek society (Buse, 2006; Rainey, 2009; Young, 2004), MMA in its modern form has paralleled the developmental trajectory of other sports and has packaged itself for mass consumption. The purpose of this study was to examine differences and similarities in the consumption behaviours of male and female students in order contribute to a better understanding of gender as a factor in the rapid growth and popularity of MMA.

The intent of this study was to extend the study of sport consumption of MMA beyond spectatorship to newer forms of media such as social media and video games while also highlighting the similarities and differences between male and female consumption. Students were chosen as the population of study as they fall within the primary target demographic for MMA promoters and marketers (Kim et al., 2008) and have significant purchasing power (Kumar and Lim, 2008)

Given the purpose and intent of this study and the existing literature on MMA, sport consumption and gender, the following research questions emerged:

RQ1a – How do males and females engage in the consumption of MMA?

RQ1b – What are the differences and similarities between male and female consumption of MMA?

RQ2 – How do males and females account for their consumption of MMA?

A sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2009) was utilized that featured an online survey and focus groups. An instrument consisting for 43-items on a seven point Likert scale (n = 151) was utilized and was modified version of the instrument developed by Fink, Trail and Anderson (2002). An EFA produced six components: passive consumption ( $\alpha = .95$ ), apparel consumption ( $\alpha = .94$ ), social media consumption ( $\alpha = .94$ ), live attendance consumption ( $\alpha = .95$ ), video gaming ( $\alpha = .89$ ), perceptions of gender ( $\alpha = .78$ ). A MANOVA test determined there was a significant difference in consumption between males and females ( $\lambda = .628, p < .05$ ). A follow-up ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences in passive consumption (e.g., television and newspaper spectatorship), video gaming, and social media consumption, where males consume more than females.

Once the quantitative data analysis was completed, five focus group sessions were. Participants were stratified based upon their sex and their level of MMA fandom. Fans were split into three categories: no fandom, vested and social fans (Jackowski & Gray, 2004). Respondents with high (average item) scores for watching MMA but low scores for the other topics were identified as a social fan. Conversely, respondents with high scores for watching MMA as well as the other topics would be identified as a vested fan. In these instances, high scores referred to anything above "neutral" (or a 4 on the Likert scale). For the stratification, anything below a score of 4 was considered low as it suggested a low frequency of consumption; the term neutral draws an indifferent connotation and vested fans should be those who acknowledge their consumption. If scores are too low, a respondent may not be classified as a social fan either and, based on the initial strategy, would not be accepted for the focus groups. The researcher determined how many additional topics sufficed for a participant to be categorized as a vested fan on a case by case basis, however it was anticipated that the commonalities among vested fans would be attendance and apparel consumption. The five groups consisted of no MMA fandom (n = 4), vested fans (n = 5), all-male social (n = 6), all-female social (n = 6), and a sex-integrated social (n = 6).

Based on the responses from participants in the focus groups, there were clear distinctions in how males accounted for their consumption of MMA. The consumption of MMA for males was predicated on the belief that men are just naturally drawn to violence and the action. This is consistent with the literature that suggests men do what they believe to be manly (Hanke, 1990; Wenner, 1998) and because those values have been accepted by both men and

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women as the idealized form of masculinity (Connell, 1990b). Moreover, according to the respondents, men are choosing to consume MMA because they feel expected to do so (Stibbe, 2004) and because they do not want to be outcasts (Kimmel, 2008). Male respondents also accounted for their MMA consumption by noting the sport's social benefits, identifying that the sport brings men and their friends together. This sentiment is consistent with the Connell's (1995) notion of ascribing to the idealized form of masculinity through "male bonding" (p. 46).

Female respondents accounted for their MMA consumption (or lack thereof) by stating that they used MMA as a social activity that enabled them to watch or be with friends, family and/or a significant other. This notion is consistent with the research conducted by Oates (1987) that demonstrates that females will reside to their supportive roles (e.g., girlfriend, sister, mother) and be there for the men in their lives (Halbert, 1997). Females also explained their less exuberant behaviour while consuming MMA in the bar setting because women are expected to behave in a particular way, a social role that vastly differs from the one specified for men (Rich, 1980; Wenner, 1998). Female respondents also claimed that many other females do not consume the sport because they do not wish to enter a male domain (Kidd, 1990) and risk being gazed at by men (Skelton, 2002).

This session will discuss the implications that gender has on MMA consumption with a particular emphasis on attempting to grow the sport and reviewing how the sport is marketing to members of these two sex demographics.