Scale development of attitudes towards mixed martial arts

Author: Thomas Gaarenstroom, PhD Candidate

Institution: Deakin University, Australia

E-mail: tgaarens@deakin.edu.au

Keywords: mixed martial arts, ultimate fighting championship, media framing, scale development, attitudes

Research objective and aim of the paper

The aim of this paper is to present a scale measuring consumer attitudes towards Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and to determine links between attitudes and consumption of the sport.

Theoretical background

Combat sports generate much discussion within the broader community including the acceptance of these types of sports in society. The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) is the foremost provider of MMA globally, generating significant revenue and drawing record breaking crowds (Tainsky, Salaga & Santos, 2012). Within new markets such as Australia however, the introduction of MMA and UFC contests has polarized debate in the media, reflecting political, social and moral arguments about the value or social acceptance of this sporting activity. The debate introduces a framework whereby there is strong active negativity across segments of society (Orlando, 2012, pg.58), offset by strong positive commitment towards the sport by others (Kim, Andrew & Greenwell, 2009), thus demonstrated conflict. Active negativity has implications for the image and brand of the sport and in particular the developing cognitive stage of those who are unfamiliar with the sport. This research presents the development of a scale for measuring consumer attitudes towards MMA in Australia. This process seeks to inform strategy for fan development by increasing the understanding of attitudes towards the sport, as well as informing a potential process for reducing negative sentiment and behaviours towards MMA.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

A comprehensive scale development process (DeVellis, 2012) was used to develop a range of measureable attitudes. The process began with the generation of over 200 items drawn from past literature as well as a media framing study in which a conflict frame was developed (Gaarenstroom, Turner & Karg, 2015). The 200 items were reduced to 28 items through a process of three researchers reaching consensus on item replication and the stated importance of each item. The remaining items contributed towards measuring consumer's attitudes towards MMA with respect to legitimacy, violence, social impact, political/government and economic benefit issues. In addition, a range of items demographic and behavioural items as well as a range of items measuring involvement with the sport and the individuals overall disposition towards MMA were collected. Initially, an online pilot survey of Australian consumers (n=148) was administered. Analysis reviewed descriptive and frequencies, to understand the nature of consumption of the sport. From here, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), correlation and regression tests were undertaken to develop and test the scale. Next stages underway are described below.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The EFA process using maximum likelihood estimation and Direct Oblimin rotation produced an 18-item, -factor structure with between three and five items loading on factors reflecting legitimacy of the sport (whether MMA is a legitimate sport), violence (consumer perception of the sports violent nature), social impact (testing consumer's link between the sport its societal impact) and economic benefit (whether hosting MMA events will cause significant economic benefit for a region). Each of the factors exceeded the suggested cut offs for AVE (between 0.54 and 0.64) and Cronbach's Alpha (between 0.81 and 0.90). Composite factor scores were developed and regression analysis demonstrated that each of the developed factors was a significant predictor of both attitudinal and behavioural aspects of involvement with MMA.

Following the pilot, a larger scale survey is currently being administered to a representative sample of the Australian population. This stage will use confirmatory factor analysis to validate the constructs and then structural equation modelling to test relationships between consumer attitudes and overall positive and negative attitudes and behaviours towards the sport. This stage will also seek to identify segments of consumers that exist and characterise them with respect to their attitudes, opinions and behaviours towards MMA.

Overall, the development of a scale and understanding attitudes seeks to inform strategy with respect to barriers and facilitators to adoption of MMA. It is the intent of the research to use the findings to develop a model of segments, to more comprehensively capture and describe the polarising nature of this sport, and the drivers of consumer response.

References

- DeVellis. R., F. (2012). Scale Development, Theory and Applications (3rd ed.). California, Sage Publications.

- Gaarenstroom, T., Turner, P. & Karg, A. (2015). Framing the Ultimate Fighting Championship: An Australian media analysis. Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics. 1-19. DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2015.1096243

- Kim, S., Andrew, D. P. S., & Greenwell. (2009). An analysis of spectator motives and media consumption behaviour in an individual combat sport: cross-national differences between America and South Korean Mixed Martial Arts fans. International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-10-02-2009-B006.

- Orlando, M. (2012). The ultimate fighting advocacy for sport safety and recognition. International Journal of Social Health Information Management 5(10): 58-66.

- Tainsky, S., S. Salaga, & C. A. Santos. 2012. "Determinants of pay-per-view broadcast viewership in sports: The case of the Ultimate Fighting Championship". Journal of Sport Management 27(1): 43 – 58.