

Social responsibility and sport management practices: Examining the impact of viewing televised sporting events of a violent nature

Contact details

Name author(s): Choong Hoon Lim (1), YoungIk Suh (2), Joonho Kang (3) & Paul M. Pedersen (4)

Institution(s) or organisation(s): Indiana University (1, 2, 4); Seoul National University (3)

City and country: Bloomington, USA (1, 2, 4); Seoul, Korea (3)

Email address for correspondence: limc@indiana.edu

Aim of paper and research questions

Sport and media organisations generally want to be viewed as good corporate citizens and entities that engage in socially responsible activities. While sport violence is often viewed as socially tolerable violence, organisations that profit off of sports violence – through either the management (i.e., ticket sales) or promotion (i.e., broadcasting) of a violent sport – could be viewed as socially irresponsible if a connection exists between viewing violent sports and aggressive behaviours. Further, sport organisations' use of sport violence as a promotional tool for even nonviolent sporting events (e.g., dangerous tackling in soccer) has been a controversial issue in our society. Therefore, based on research on mass communication and consumer psychology, the primary purpose of the current study is to cross-culturally investigate the influence of viewing violent sporting events on aggression. The study also attempts to develop a user-friendly web based aggression measurement program (WAMP) in order to facilitate cross-cultural study on sports violence.

Literature review

Sport event managers have used the most violent acts for promotion (auto-crash in car racing; fighting between ice hockey players) through advertisement. It has been also suggested that there is a need for more attention to be paid to violent sporting events because of the proliferation of new violent sports such as Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) and the K-1 league, while such violence in sports has been traditionally treated as socially tolerated violence (Walker, 2000). According to Sargent et al. (1998), violent individual sporting events such as mixed martial arts provide spectators and media audiences with unique emotional experiences. Further, violent sporting events are important to the public, to policy makers, and to parents, because young people learn about real violence (not imaginary) through the modelling process (Smith, 1978). The notion of a positive relationship between viewing violence and aggression has been well supported by previous studies (e.g., Josephson, 1987; Bushman, 1998). It has also been suggested that the influence of viewing violence on aggression and behaviours can vary based on how the violence is constructed (Cantor & Wilson, 2003). However, despite the uniqueness of sports violence, little is known about the influence of viewing violent sporting events.

Research design and proposed data analysis

The target sample contains 50 males and 50 females whose ages range between 10 and 16 years old. The current research project consists of three phases. First, the WAMP program is developed in which subjects play a reaction time game and have a chance to punish a imaginary

character with noise after they win the game. In the second phase, subjects complete an on-line survey containing scaled measures taken from the personality traits (i.e., sensation seeking and trait hostility) and demographic information. The main experiment utilises a randomised repeated experimental design, where study subjects are randomly assigned to one of four media content conditions (i.e., violence/violence, nonviolence/violence, violence/nonviolence, and nonviolence/nonviolence). A week later, subjects will participate in another session with the same condition to examine test-retest reliability.

During and after the exposure to each stimulus material, participants' aggression level will be tested twice (once with the WAMP and the other with the traditional Competitive Reaction Test) in order to investigate the internal validity of the WAMP. In addition, subjects' heart rate and blood pressure will be measured in order to assess the internal validity of the stimulus materials. Further, some variables (i.e., exercise, caffeine consumption) will be controlled. Correlation analysis between the WAMP score and the CRT score will be used to investigate internal validity. Further, repeated-measures-ANCOVA will be utilised to examine the influence of violent sporting events.

Discussion of progress

The current study is one of the first known attempts to experimentally examine the influence of the violent sporting events on viewers. The development of WAMP will be beneficial both to scholars who study the influence of sports violence, as well as to parents who would like to monitor their children's aggression. More important, however, is that given the growing concerns surrounding youth violence around the world, there is a need for study in this area to pinpoint how certain factors may interact with each other to influence youth violence. Determining if there is a connection between viewing sport violence and aggressive behaviour will help sport organisations and sport media entities better understand their engagement in socially responsible and good corporate citizen endeavours and behaviours. Additionally, the moral and ethical issues on the use of sport violence as a promotional tool will be discussed.

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