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**Balancing promotion and social responsibility by sport management professionals:
Investigating the potentially negative influence of viewing mediated sport violence**

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Background

Sport and sport media organizations often use violence as promotional tool to sell their sporting event (Lim et al., 2009). For instance, violent content such as rough physical play in soccer and fighting in ice hockey is often used in advertisements in order to promote certain upcoming events or programming. Further, some sporting events with high levels of violence have witnessed phenomenal growth internationally (Lim et al., 2010). The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) in the U.S. and K-1 in Asia have increasingly become more popular and are part of the multi-billion dollar mixed martial arts segment of the sport industry. However, despite the popular use of sport violence as a marketing tool in media content and the growing popularity of violent sporting events, potential negative impacts of viewing such violence have not been fully examined to date. In particular the phenomenon of sport violence is important to examine because with the plethora of media outlets and new media platforms today's youth have easy access to viewing such violent images associated with sport. While there exists a body of literature providing evidence of the contributing effects of media violence on aggression (i.e., Anderson et al., 2003), most studies in this area have been conducted with certain media content (i.e., movies) so it is unclear if – and if so, how – exposure to sport media violence influences aggressive behaviors.

Objectives

The primary purpose of the current study was to examine if exposure to sport media violence has an impact on youth's aggressive behaviors. The study was based on excitation transfer theory which suggests that the elevated arousal levels brought on by viewing media violence may a) be transferred to following experiences and b) intensify emotional responses to later experiences (Zillmann, 1996). Thus, subjects were tested to determine if they showed a higher arousal level (i.e., heart rate) after exposure to violent sport media content than after exposure to nonviolent sport media content. In addition, the present study examined if subjects showed higher levels of aggression after exposure to the sport media violence. This study also examined the relationship between arousal levels and aggression levels. Further, the influence of trait aggression level was examined.

Methods

The data for this study came from 182 usable surveys collected from children between the ages of 10 and 16. All subjects were recruited by advertisements which were placed in several newspapers. The Web-based Aggression Measurement Program (WAMP) was utilized, which is a modified version of the previous competitive reaction time tasks (Taylor, 1967). The WAMP program uses Flash-based software that is loaded onto a personal computer. In addition, subjects' heart rates were monitored during the experimental session. First, subjects completed a survey containing scaled measures regarding personality traits (i.e., trait aggressiveness, impulsivity) and demographic information. The main experiment in this study utilized a randomized repeated experimental design, where study subjects were randomly assigned to one of four media content conditions (i.e., violence/violence, nonviolence/violence, violence/nonviolence, and nonviolence/nonviolence) and aggression levels were measured after each media stimulus. A video clip from K-1 was utilized as the violent sport media stimulus, while a video clip from figure-skating was used as the non-violent sport media stimulus.

Results

Repeated measures of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showed that subjects showed significantly higher levels of arousal when they were exposed to the violent sport content than when they were exposed to the nonviolent contents. Such findings support Zillmann's excitation transfer theory. The level of aggression measured by WAMP also showed similar patterns in that subjects had higher levels of state aggression after being exposed to the violent sport content ($M = 53.44$, $SD = 3.13$) than after being exposed to the nonviolent media stimulus ($M = 50.74$, $SD = 2.89$). Further, independent sample *t* tests revealed that those who had a higher trait aggression level ($M = 111.81$, $SD = 53.22$) showed a higher WAMP score than those with a lower trait aggression level ($M = 95.67$, $SD = 53.03$), even if the mean difference was not statistically significant.

Conclusion

There has been growing global concern regarding mediated violence and its impact on young people. The present study is the first known attempt to examine the influence of exposure to sport media violence in particular. The data analyses revealed that levels of both arousal (i.e., heart rate) and aggression (i.e., WAMP) were elevated with the exposure to the sport media violence. Socially responsible sport marketers and sport media programmers should be aware of the impact of mediated sport violence and should consider developing strategies to minimize its negative influence on consumers. Specially, the ethical issues related to sport media violence should be well considered especially when sport violent media content is increasingly and easily accessed by youths.