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Women that fight: The female participation in mixed martial arts events

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ABSTRACT

Sports marketing is in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) a strategic potential, either through the promotion and implementation of events or the interested in sports. Thus, the management of the sports event planning becomes strategic to measure it considers the participation of female athletes in MMA events. This study aims to analyze the participation of females in MMA events, highlighting the perception of the fighters on the current business scenario in this segment. The method is configured as an exploratory and descriptive research with a qualitative approach, where there is information content analysis obtained through an open questionnaire. The results showed that the MMA product planning females is working strategically towards attracting viewers and brand awareness. In addition, further notes to male dominance in this type of sport, emphasizing gender issues related to compensation of the athletes and their occupation. However, it is clear that athletes even challenged by this scenario, remain convinced of their choices by segment.

Keywords: Sports market; Mixed Martial Arts; Women.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fight is part of the human essence as a prehistoric synonym for survival. It is intrinsically associated to the individual's curiosity. This fact, among others, explains the success of combat events, since the gladiators' time on the arenas. Considering this premise, the sports market utilizes this social phenomenon to its advantage, linking it to the different organizations strategic planning (MELO NETO, 2000; GREEN, 2001; PITTS; STOTLAR, 2002; REIN; KOTLER; SHIELDS, 2008; RATTEN, 2011). Thus, the sports market is revealed as a possible tool, within a planning, to achieve goals that could be sales, brand consolidation, a new positioning, or others by using sports (GREEN, 2001; MORGAN; SUMMERS, 2008).

The sports market is able to reach this planning through the agents' investments, which aim something in return (MASTERALEXIS; BARR; HUMS, 1998; MELO NETO, 2000; MORGAN; SUMMERS, 2008). The agencies that promote sports events and the sports marketing companies act in market niches by means of clubs, sports federations and athletes as intermediaries (ANDERSSON; GETZ, 2008; BROWN et al., 2015).

Sporting events aims to search for economic resources, consolidate the brand, marketing and advertising (GREEN, 2001), as well as acting as public funding strategy. One cannot ignore the competition of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) attract many viewers worldwide. They were responsible for the dissemination and public recognition of oriental martial arts in the West, and from this acceptance of new studies and scientific research emerged, making progress training routines and equipment. Thus the inclusion of females in MMA events is strategic, in order to increase the dissemination of the event itself and therefore the viewer audience. However, the main focus designed as event planning, are still struggles with focus on males. This being the theoretical gap that this study aims to discuss.

Women that seek their space in this segment defy cultural limits and social impositions, break taboos and paradigms, and face prejudice (GREEN, 2001; JAMES; RIDINGER, 2002; POPE, 2011). Thus, the sports market can be an ally through the sports practice (PITTS; STOTLAR, 2002; VLASTUIN; ALMEIDA; MARCHI, 2008; RATTEN, 2011).

In this perspective, the difference between genders in the labor market still serves as a barrier, depending on the segment. So this study reveals its importance as it addresses a subject still little explored in Social Sciences. It offers character and uniqueness can instigate, from the results, new questions. Thus, the study aimed to analyze the participation of females in MMA events, highlighting the perception of the fighters on the current professional scenario that segment. The research aims to contribute to the theoretical discussion on gender in MMA segment, through the planning of sports events, anchored in the theory of sports marketing. In order to investigate the scene of martial sporting events, the study discusses the following issues: (i) What are the reasons

that lead fighters to choose the martial arts as sports practice? (ii) What is the evidence that marked the trajectory of athletes to become professional fighters?

Regarding the method of the study is characterized as exploratory and descriptive, qualitative, conducted with four professional athletes of MMA in Brazil.

So that the objective was achieved, the study was organized into four sections besides this introduction. Following presents the theoretical framework that supports the research, followed by the method and the analysis and presentation of results. Finally, final considerations, limitations and some propositions agenda for future research.

2. SPORTS MARKETING, PLANNING AND SPORTS EVENT

Sports occupies new and important roles from both the industry and the entertainment growth. In this situation, there is the professionalization of marketing directed to the sports field. The sports field is one of traditional marketing's segments that uses sports as means of aggregating, fortifying, building, amplifying and preserving an institution's' image, personality, brand or product (PITTS; STOLLAR, 2002; POIT, 2004).

Sports marketing definition does not differ from marketing itself; it is only related to the sports discipline. Thus, sports marketing must be linked to some of marketing basic premises, such as product, demand, desire, value, satisfaction, quality and market (MASTERALEXIS; BARR; HUMS, 1998; MORGAN; SUMMERS, 2008; CARDIA, 2014). Such as with a product or service, it is essential to examine the market size in relation to the sports entities and to the fans of a modality both. The latter are potential consumers, because it is possible to supply their needs. It is important to highlight that in several economic sectors the increased interest and participation in sports generates the growth in the sports market's use, and is the result of a general and constant growing interest in sports practice by society. A specific sport's attributes and characteristics make it a greatly efficient action, indispensable for the companies that seek a competitive differential in any marketing strategy (REIN; KOTLER; SHIELDS, 2008; CARDIA, 2014).

Sport marketing is the set of actions geared to the practice and dissemination of sports, clubs and associations, either by promoting events and tournaments or through sponsorship of teams and sports clubs (GREE, 2001; MORGAN; SUMMERS, 2008). The objectives of the sports marketing aimed at increasing public recognition, enhance corporate image, establish identification with specific market segments, to fight or to anticipate competitors' actions, involving the company with the community, giving credibility to the product with the combination of quality and event emotion.

The sports market offers the possibility to segment the organizations' performance before the public (MORGAN; SUMMERS, 2008). It is understood to be another route, escaping mainstream

media, and carrying marketing actions to a moment of pleasure for the consumer. It allows the use of emotions with increased facility and property (MASTERALEXIS; BARR; HUMS, 1998).

In this context, the sports event planning is strategic from a properly prepared proposal goals, objectives and specific actions, aiming the positive results, seeking a financial return and desired image (ANDERSSON; GETZ, 2008). The sporting event can be considered a marketing tool, an action tactics (MELO NETO, 2000; ANDERSSON; GETZ, 2008; BROWN et al., 2015.). Whereas since antiquity the psychological effect of large conurbations and movement of people is recognized for its energy and motivation production capacity and change (GETZ; ANDERSSON; LARSON, 2007; SARMENTO et al., 2011). It is worth noting that the events are related to culture and social context, and influenced by prevailing standards of the historical moment (Green, 2001; ANDERSSON; GETZ, 2008; BROWN et al., 2015).

The sports event can be considered a marketing tool, an action tactics (MELO NETO, 2000; ANDERSSON; GETZ, 2008; BROWN et al., 2015). Since ancient times, the psychological effect of big crowds and people moving around is recognized for their energy and capacity to produce motivation and change (GETZ; ANDERSSON; LARSON, 2007; SARMENTO et al. 2011). The events' relation to the culture and the social context is a fact worth of consideration, which prevailing patterns of the current historical moment influence (ANDERSSON; GETZ, 2008; BROWN et al., 2015).

One of the most appealing elements is unpredictability in sports. The spontaneity contained in every action and the attempts to predict results not only keep fans interested, they provide an escape route from the monotony of daily life. By experiencing uncertainties, the enthusiasts discover the dramas and surprises there are in sports from an overwhelming attraction, hence getting motivated to invest money, time, and energy as spectators (REIN; KOTLER; SHIELDS 2008; HOEBE; KERWIN, 2013). In line with that, the events derive from man's ability to create. They originate, sometimes, from a simple idea and may reach international proportions. (MELO NETO, 2000). It are strongly appealing when treated as a communication vehicle, capable of reaching all social classes (POIT, 2004; GETZ; ANDERSSON; LARSON, 2007; BROWN et al., 2015).

The professional combat sport cannot be dissociated from the show, because without it the interest of the media and the public does not exist without media has no sponsor and no sponsor there is any money to continue to invest in sports (PAIVA, 2010). The entertainment has to be designed to show, not to create illusions, but to allow the sensations are more realistic and heavy (SAVASTANO, 2008).

Sports events became to be perceived as a way to put crowds together and make use of the emotion generated by sport through their publicity capacity (ANDERSSON; GETZ, 2008; BROWN et al., 2015). Thus, Sarmento et al. (2011) highlights those sports have an excellent

publicity capacity out of the several types of messages that could be used. The growing notion of this fact increases its use as a social diffuser, which, in the market's constant progress context, ends up compelling strong investments in new technologies and in the complementarity of the sports events.

Still, successful sports events can be promoted on a smaller scale to meet the demands of a certain modality's fans. Sometimes, some sports have a segmented interest, but their market parcel must be considered even so (BROWN et al., 2015). This parcel emerges from consumer's needs being met (CARLSEN; GETZ; SOUTAR, 2000; SARMENTO et al., 2011). Among the several sports modalities, with martial arts it is not different.

3. SEGMENTATION AND GENDER

From market segmentation, the marketing professionals may split the market into similar groups that are different before the others (HOOLEY; PIERCY; NICOLAUD, 2011). Each market segment represents a different opportunity of contact with the public (HOOLEY; PIERCY, NICOLAUD, 2011). There are variables used to segment groups, compiled in three main classes: basic characteristics, attitudes and behavior. There are socioeconomic, behavioral, and lifestyle-related characteristics, as well as the demographic ones (e.g. sex, age, geographic location) within them (MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014).

The lifestyle-related characteristic is the most considered for this study, because it concerns three main elements: activities (i.e. leisure, sports, hobbies, entertainment, domestic activities, work-related or professional, buying behavior, chores and domestic repairs, trips and various activities, vacation, education and volunteer work); interaction with others (self-perception, personality and ideal 'self', perception of roles such as mother, wife, husband, father, son, daughter, social interaction, communication with other people and thought leadership); opinions (about such topics as politics, society and morals, economic issues, business, technologies and environment) (HOOLEY; PIERCY; NICOLAUD, 2011).

Marketing specialists get increasingly closer to the segmentation by lifestyle, thus getting their products to have a concept corresponding to the target public's personality (REIN; KOTLER; SHIELDS, 2008). This research has the female segment as its main theme.

The identities are molded through different markings and the focus will lie on the discrepancies among men and women in this study. These markings occur through symbolic systems and social exclusion forms. In social relations, they are established by classification systems, in which the principle of difference is applied, making the population to be split in at least two groups that do not receive equal weights/treatments. These divisions are normally related to gender (CONNELL; MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005).

The gender term does not cover the phenomenon-classifying form, thus being a consensual system of distinctions and not an objective description of inherent traits. Still, such classification suggests a relation between categories, which makes distinctions or separated grouping possible (SCOTT, 1995).

West and Zimmerman (1987) highlight whom gender is not a set of characteristics or traits, or a defined role, but rather the result of social interaction and practice. Consequently, “there are certain situations that perpetuate the view or the execution of behaviors that are conventionally linked to ways of being male or female” (HOEBER; KERWIN, 2013, p 327).

In another definition, even more specific. The term means the dimension of cultural attributes allocated to each gender (WEST; ZIMMERMAN, 1987; HEILBORN, 2004; DAVIS; DUNCAN, 2006; MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014). The existence of a gender hierarchy, which molds the power structures and the participation in politics and economics should also be highlighted (WEST; ZIMMERMAN, 1987).

Social changes, combined with alterations in the productive system, have caused the construction of new spaces, so men and women started to occupy work sectors that formerly belonged exclusively to men (COLWELL, 1999; CONELL; MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005; POPE, 2011). Women’s subordination to men is a fixed point in a society’s mindset. Regardless of profession, women will be usually depreciated, which indicates men and women do not have the same identity, even though they are operate in the same profession (COLWELL 1999; JAMES; RIDINGER, 2002; CONNELL; MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005; CHIES, 2010). “A global approach recognizes the development of male hegemony within corporations and transnational media and global politics” (HOEBER; KERWIN, 2013, p 328.)

By the time women start to occupy a space that was understood to be male, their workforce starts to be conceived as inferior, because not only did that space possess a historical construction, there was also the demarcation of requisites comprehended as male (e.g. strength, resistance or leadership). These differences imposed between genders, which predominantly expresses inferiority about women, are built by an ideological reinforcement that tries to mask the reality. (CONNELL; MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005; CHIES, 2010, MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014).

The study Hoeber and Kerwin (2013) shows that there is a male hegemony in sports and exclusive predominance of men. In this context women are still considered subordinate. However, it emphasizes that women’s participation in sport practice is growing, as spectator and participant (JAMES; RIDINGER, 2002; CONNELL; MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005; HOEBER; KERWIN, 2013).

This inferiority is constructed from engrained stereotypes to females, as fragility, emotionality and irrationality, regarded as outside the political and economic power. Pope (2011) and Pope and Williamns (2011), state that despite evidence of women consume and participate in sporting events,

some female spectator are marginalized as sports fans and considered as “inauthentic” because sex fans the men see with features and non-traditional behaviors. Hence, the women that are identified with and opt for a profession taken as belonging to the male universe, represented by MMA fighters in this study, should “[...] possess the attributes that are valued in this career’s work context and adapt to them, since these aspects are normally stimulated or even directed to men only” (CHIES, 2010, p. 525).

From these findings, obviously MMA scenario adopts an event planning strategy with different approach to women’s struggles. This selectivity takes professionals from areas of communication, management and sports marketing to modify their strategies and guidelines (GREEN, 2001).

In this context, then it is up to organizations of sporting events adopt a strategy towards your target audience. Dietz-Uhler, Hariick and Jacquemontte (2000), Robinson and Trail (2005) and Hoeber and Kerwin (2013) analyzed the behavior of women and sports fans men, for the purpose of adequadar the product gender, and power in this way, to understand what motivates these consumers to opt for a particular product. Thus, they were able to determine that for each chosen target market, the organization develops a market offering, which is positioned in the minds of target consumers as something that provides one or more central benefits.

The strategy indicates a way for brands to establish a strong place in the minds of consumers, despite calls from competitors. This involves consistency of message and the association of a brand to the ideas that are already deeply consolidated in the consumer’s mind (MASTERALEXIS; BARR, HUMS, 1998; MORGAN; SUMMERS, 2008). This is the initiative to create an image in the consumer’s mind according to products, services and benefits offered by the institution. This marketing definition there is a statement of where and with whom the company compete.

Therefore, the situation that reinforces the male hegemony, takes from the women’s choices appropriating some male behavioral elements to shape their careers (GREEN, 2001; MESSERCHMIDT, 2012). In this context, this study discusses the strategy adopted by the MMA event organization in which women’s struggles are strategically planned before the male fights. Understanding so that this constitutes the theoretical GAP this study.

4. METHOD

The study aimed to analyze the participation of females in MMA events, highlighting the perception of the fighters on the current business scenario in this segment. Therefore, the design adopted is characterized as qualitative research (RICHARDSON, 2000; STAKE, 2000), exploratory (ONWUWGBUZI; LEECH, 2006), under the exploratory (ONWUWGBUZI; LEECH, 2006) and descriptive types, was respected in this study. The theoretical-empirical design, with a primary and a secondary data source was adopted.

The scope of the study is centered in the Mixed Martial Arts segment (MMA), which won space in the sports market and entertainment. It is a form of struggle where practitioners do not follow a specific style of martial art, but select the most effective parts of each style to compose your combat game (PAIVA, 2010). In Brazil, MMA fights became popular from 2011, with the event broadcast on network television and the production of reports and programs with athletes seeking contracts with Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) (VASQUES; BELTRÃO, 2013).

In Brazil there is no official ranking to identify and classify the female MMA professional fighters making it impossible to sample definition. Athletes rely on corporate sponsorships to sustain their training and participation in events. By maintaining a high technical and physical level and win good results, they begin to participate in major competitions, high visibility, reaching international levels. Considering this scenario, the searched sample was composed by four female professional MMA athletes, who were the key information holders. For identification purposes, the participants were named Athlete 1, Athlete 2, Athlete 3 and Athlete 4 in this study.

With an average age of 21 years, athletes 1, 2 and 3, belonging to the Astra Fight Team, currently live and practice in Balneário Camboriú whereas Athlete 4 does in Curitiba. Both of these cities are configured as large urban centers. Athlete 3 is the only one who did not need to move, since she is born in Balneário Camboriú. The others, instead, are native of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina states (Athlete 1 is born in Erechim, RS; Athlete 4 is born in Bagé, RS; and Athlete 2 is born in Navegantes, SC). They left their academies for not having access to complete MMA training and searched for better-structured teams, capable of providing professional opportunities.

Once they live in different locations, geographically distant from the researcher, the contact was made via internet and the open questionnaire was answered by them, which was sent via email. The researchers got through to the fighters by the technicians and well-known fighters indication, who live close to and know them.

The research instrument was an open questionnaire, whose questions were designed aiming to explore in depth the perception of female fighters in the matters related to professional MMA scene.

The open individual questionnaires were sent so that the individual's life could be explored in depth. This technique is indicated when the subject matter refers to detailed individual experiences, choices or to biographies. These are particularly sensitive subjects that could cause anxiety (BAUER; GASKELL, 2014).

The collected material treatment confronted the previous theoretical approach with field investigation. This analysis is aimed to organize the data in such a way that the answers provided to the problem posed in research are made possible (GIL 1999).

The *corpus* generated from the responses of athletes was analyzed by analysis of technical content. This form of analysis aims to overcome uncertainties through careful reading, hence clarifying signification elements that were formerly uncomprehend (BARDIN 2000). The broad objective that led to the adoption of this form of analysis was to seek comprehension and meaning. The data were built from what was said and the analysis occurred through the search of themes with common content and through these themes' function (BAUER; GASKELL 2014).

5. ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The initial questions were prepared in order to, from the answers, can trace their life trajectory in the sport and with the planning of sports events.

When questioned about their early martial practice, the athletes revealed different motives. Athlete 1 sought refuge on the mat due to the problems she faced with her father, who was an alcoholic and an aggressive person. Her older brother, who was already practicing it, also inspired her. Athlete 3 was encouraged by her father since young age, who was a martial arts teacher. In regards of that, she started practicing it as a child. In both cases, a strong familiar reference can be evidenced. Athletes 2 and 4, in turn, felt they were overweight and thus sought fight as a physical activity.

Athletes 1, 3 and 4 revealed the first sports activity they engaged in were martial arts' modalities: Taekwondo and Muay Thai. Athlete 2, however, practiced different sports (i.e. athletics, soccer, volleyball, basketball and handball) before coming to Chinese boxing and, next, MMA.

The athletes were also inquired about the moment they decided to be MMA fighters. In response, Athletes 1, 2 and 4 revealed that happened right after their first combat. They also affirmed that was the moment when they found out their passion for this modality. Athlete 3 was prepared by her father since her childhood as previously mentioned and acquired a considerable fight experience until being assessed as apt to compete in MMA.

The specific amount of time of MMA training varies among the professionals. Athletes 1 and 2 have practiced for three years; Athlete 3 for five years, and Athlete 4 for one year.

Their first contact with MMA began by distinct means. Athlete 1 fought Muay Thai in an event where MMA fights were being held. She got impressed by it and felt willing to start practicing. Athlete 2 used to practice Chinese boxing and fought in an MMA event insecure of how she would do. Her close friends practiced MMA, but had never seen it personally before participating in the event. Athlete 3 had friends and acquaintances who practiced MMA and she sought willingly for a team with qualified training. Athlete 4, in turn, came to know MMA through her husband, who was also a fighter and started in this modality without having practiced all its principles.

The athletes' families generally do not like their professional choice, but support them. Athlete 1 highlights, *"From some time now my father has told everyone he has a fighter daughter and is proud of it. My mother is almost my press officer and fan no. 1. My parents' being proud of me has always been my goal."* Athlete 2 states several of her friends kept apart from her. They would not understand her training routine and all she would have to let go. That accounts for the fact that "in the complete escape of the cultural model, the individual is comprehended as a foreigner who does not want to share common values" (BOSI, 2003, p. 135).

All of the professionals emphasize fight is their life. They state that the modality transformed them and that they cannot see themselves doing something else. In this context, the fact of "[...] being able to choose, change course" becomes noticeable. After all, "The cultural representations are always related to freedom" (BOSI, 2003, p. 157). Athlete 3 reveals that this is the fulfilment of her and her father's dream. From this story, it is possible to notice that "the development of a professional career allows women to have an identity expression that is frequently incompatible with the rigidly-imposed identity of female behavior and work market actuation." (CHIES, 2010, p. 523).

In regards of training colleagues and coaches, the athletes reported a companionship within the team, with no gender discrimination on both the colleagues and coaches' part. Everyone is seen as athletes and professionals. However, when questioned whether they had already suffered discrimination at the fights place or not, Athlete 1 highlights she goes through it when teaching MMA for men. *"I was once going to train a friend of mine's class and the student said he refused to be taught by a little girl."* As a result, she decided she would only teach women. Athlete 2 states commentaries always arise jokingly. They say a woman does not belong on the mat, but rather in the kitchen or doing something more sensitive.

When questioned whether they had already been a victim of society's prejudice, athletes 1 and 2 stress that the majority of people are surprised and "find it amazing" when they find out the girls are fighters. However, there are even those who question them about why they enjoy being beaten up or why they are not in the kitchen. This fact reveals that "women in general have their identity rigidly imposed as housewives by the Brazilian society. However, the reality's misinterpretation is based on thinking this identity is intrinsic, that is, that women belong naturally to the domestic space" (CHIES, 2010, p. 511).

Discriminatory comments, especially by men, were also mentioned in relation to random news published on the Internet. This fact makes it clear that prejudice against women is instilled into people's minds for the fear that the social structure be disassembled, like a 'sand castle', once this social structure has been for a long time present in our society as the domination cornerstone between genders. The female social roles' transformation leads to the social relationships reformulation (CHIES, 2010). In order to conclude this issue, Athlete 4 points out there is even

another side in this profession: people do not consider the training to be a job, thus ask her if she only trains or works as well.

The participants were inquired about the current female MMA scenery. There was unanimity in the answers, in which they stated women's space is growing, as well as acknowledgment. Female fights are appealing to the public according to them, and that is the reason why the events' organizers usually call them (GETZ; ANDERSSON; LARSON, 2007; BROWN et al., 2015). Athlete 1 points out that the number of female fighters, as well as rivalry, is rising. On the other hand, Athlete 4 emphasizes there are still differences in remuneration between genders.

This finding indicates that the planning of MMA events appears to be receptive and positive with respect to female athletes. Sports marketing perceive an identification, or even curiosity, for this athlete profile from the public, and utilizes this demand as a key element to act and promote strategies. The communication agent in this context plays a role in mediating between investors and sports actors. Its function is: to make investors consciously aware of the potential of this type of business; to define the goals clearly that the sports actors will work on; and to elaborate the project correctly (LIMA; SALIBA; BORGES, 2010, p. 9).

The athletes take advantage of this good professional moment to improve in their trainings in order to gain notoriety in this segment. They are aware that they play a distinct role in MMA events, taken as a differential to the positioning strategy of the events in which they participate. Athlete 2 highlights that both men and women train equally, it corroborates the study made by West and Zimmerman (1987), Pope (2011) and Pope and Williams (2011). Athlete 3 draws attention to the fact that opportunities are increasing, which is due to this segment's expansion. So, the athletes that train professionally are ahead. Athlete 4 emphasizes women's lower pays in comparison to men's and that they hardly perform the main fights, which diminishes them professionally speaking (JAMES; RIDINGER, 2002; MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014).

When asked if they were able to make money only by fighting, they all denied. Athlete 1 draws attention to the spending on food supplementation and to the housing costs and to the intense training routine. So, she works as a Muay Thai and MMA instructor and as a receptionist at the gym she works out. Athletes 2, 3 and 4, on the other hand, are partly supported by their families. Athletes 2 and 4 have occasional jobs as security guards.

Although they face the difficulties mentioned above, all of them are certain they will proceed with this career. Athlete 1 has just signed the contract for the greatest world female event. She wants to make progress, evolve, and contend for the belt of her weight category. Athletes 2 and 3 want to keep focus as well, dispute in international events and next they intend to specialize as trainers. Athlete 4, in turn, trains to have an opportunity to wrestle at international events.

In relation to their expectations, the athletes believe that MMA should be recognized more and seen as a profession, regardless of gender. Athlete 2 underlines the several talented female athletes, who are left out for not having opportunities. Athlete 3, in turn, emphasizes that this environment has already been better, that the differences between genders remain. *“There is generally only one female fight in events. There should be more, several, because female fights are generally those which draw the public and are the most expected, the most impressive.”*

From the reports of athletes the gender issue is very present, confirming the male hegemony in this segment, according to research cited in the work developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Messerschmidt (2012). Be the compensation issues, subculture (Green, 2001), as the choice of secondary professional activity, as quoted security work for one of the athletes. This evidence can be inferred that the MMA event planning female fights are strategically allocated attraction for the male audience. From this perspective, there is the sport marketing focuses on the planning and development of a product centered on the search for increased spectators, the brand dissemination, sale of a particular product, in this case the MMA.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The routine of MMA athletes is permeated struggles against barriers in the economic, social and cultural spheres which come to corroborate the studies of Colwell (1999), Green (2001); Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Messerschmidt (2012). From this study, one can understand the motivations of athletes in choosing the MMA practice, in a scenario where the male hegemony prevails. And yet, personal evidence and professionals who have marked the course of the athletes in the segment.

In order to pursue their dreams and professional goals, these women are aware that they have to partially leave their family's and friend's company aside. The move into large urban centers in search of recognition and opportunities. This detachment, and even courage, come from the social transformations. These, “[...] combined with changes in the productive system, led to the construction of new spaces, so now men and women both occupy work sectors that formerly belonged exclusively to the male world” (CHIES 2010: 507). (ROBINSON; TRAIL, 2005; DAVIS; DUNCAN, 2006; CHIES, 2010). Although still perceive the male hegemony in MMA segment.

Moreover, it was possible to see how the sports marketing and management of MMA events, uses the feminine gender as a strategic advantage in holding events. In response to their enquiries, the study participants stated that they recognized their individuality and identity on the mat. As time goes by, the athletes have a greater confidence in their potential and doubt their inabilities. Teammates are rather good companions than male and female persons and the trainers require equal diligence from both, without gender distinction. This is an advance for the sports marketing,

because makes room for professionals (both athletes and trainers), who were socially discriminated, to thoroughly perform their activities, being recognized and, most important, properly paid.

Thus, the event managers include female fights in MMA events attraction way, aiming to increase viewers. Thus, recognizing that maintaining the attention of fans on the emerging technologies of family structures changing, the large number of competitive activities and high expectations work to make the fan more than a mere spectator (MIERZWINSKI; VELIJA; MALCOLM, 2014; BROWN et al., 2015).

It recognizes that the strategic marketing needs to understand and analyze the buying behavior of your target consumer, to understand how they connect to the sport. In this sense, the sports marketing and its strategies and actions can find market niches able to move the economic system (CARLSEN; GETZ; SOUTAR, 2000; ANDERSSON; GETZ, 2008; GETZ; ANDERSSON; LARSON, 2007; SARMENTO et al, 2011; BROWN et al., 2015).

As academic contribution this study discussed the strategies adopted by the MMA event organization in which women's struggles are strategically planned before the male fights. This reinforces the idea of male hegemony in sporting events. This being a relatively unexplored niche and researched in Brazil.

Regarding the limitations encountered in the implementation of this article have been lack of previous studies on the subject MMA, and especially on women participating in this type of event. It is also worth considering that in Brazil there is no ranking of athletes practicing MMA, making it impossible to have a sense of this universe, preventing the results of this study can be generalized.

As well as future research agenda suggests new studies that qualify the motivations that drive female athletes to pursue this sports segment, which is the MMA. And yet, it would also be investigating how the female perceives the role of these professionals in this type of sporting event, as well as investigating the perception of males as women's participation, either with professional segment athletes and public spectator deepening the discussion on gender, considering cultural issues characteristics of Brazil.

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