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## A comparison of spectators' motives at wushu and amateur mixed martial arts events in Poland

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## PSYCHOLOGY

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### A comparison of spectators' motives at wushu and amateur mixed martial arts events in Poland

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**Key words:** motivations, sport fans, MMA, sanda, behaviours

#### Abstract

**Aim.** This paper examines differences between the motives of spectators attending wushu and amateur mixed martial arts (MMA) events.

**Material and Method.** The data was gathered at the Wushu Cup in Poland and two MMA events. ANOVA showed significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) regarding seven out of nine motives, with only vicarious achievement and adoration being equal.

**Results and Conclusion.** The rankings of motives indicated a similar structure, as spectators were foremost motivated by aesthetics, knowledge, and vicarious achievement. However, spectators of MMA were relatively more interested in sport-related qualities of the event, while those attending the wushu event were more strongly driven by emotions associated with the competing athletes.

#### Introduction

The popularity of particular combat sports in terms of their viewership and number of attendees at events has been recently changing in many countries [Kim, Andrew, Greenwell 2009]. One spectator sport that has experienced unparalleled growth in several regions is mixed martial arts (MMA). In Poland, the success of MMA might be described by over 16,000 people attending an event that took place on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2014, which was organised by a domestic MMA company named Konfrontacja Sztuk Walki. Furthermore, television rankings of their events regularly reach three million viewers [Reisner 2012]. At the same time, some of the traditional martial arts and combat sports try to adapt to the competitive market to attract new adepts.

According to Shuai [2011], the popular martial art of *wushu* is currently undergoing changes to become more 'spectator friendly' in order to attract higher global interest. The idea behind this action is that the attractiveness of the events might transfer to the number of practitioners of particular sports. Therefore, it seems important for representatives of

different combat sports to understand what appeals to their attendees. This interest could be identified by analysing spectators' motives.

In the paper, we continually use the phrases of combat sports and martial arts. As stated by Birrier and Halbrook [1988], 'martial arts' is a general term that describes the art of combat and self-defence. Combat sports refer to sports in which two competitors fight each other using a set of prearranged rules [Cynarski, Skowron 2014]. Examples of combat sports are boxing, wrestling, and fencing.

#### Spectators' motives

Motives are considered a crucial predictor of spectators' direct and indirect sport consumption, and for that reason numerous studies have been conducted in the field [Sloan 1989; Trail *et al.* 2000]. Most of them are rooted in the compiled theories describing the attractiveness of sport, which Sloan [1989] divided into five groups: salubrious effects, stress and stimulation, achievement seeking, catharsis and aggression, and entertainment. Comparisons

between sports have proved that motives vary depending on whether a sport is individual or team, aggressive or non-aggressive, and stylistic or non-stylistic [Wann, Wilson 1999; Wann *et al.* 2008]. Furthermore, some specific motives have been observed among attendees at less popular or extraordinary events [Fink, Trail, Anderson 2002; Kim *et al.* 2008].

According to Kim *et al.* [2008], combat sports received limited interest from researchers. This under-representation is surprising given that boxing and MMA are currently among the most demanded spectator sports in many countries [Jewell, Moti, Coates 2012; MacIntosh, Crow 2011].

One combat sport that has received probably the most concern regarding its spectatorship is MMA. Studies aimed at revealing what drives spectators of MMA have been conducted in the United States, South Korea, Canada, and Poland [Andrew *et al.* 2009a; Kim *et al.* 2008, 2009; MacIntosh, Crow 2011]. Kim *et al.* [2008] found sport interest, drama, aesthetics, and socialising to have the highest means among the dimensions of motives. His consecutive studies showed significant differences regarding South Korean and American fans. While Koreans rated the motive of drama, vicarious achievement, and interest in fighters the highest, sport interest, drama, and aesthetics were of the highest importance in the US [Kim, Andrew, Greenwell 2009]. In his research, Andrew *et al.* [2009a] acknowledged aesthetics, drama, escape, and vicarious achievement as the dominant factors. MacIntosh and Crow [2011] conducted their examination at MMA event in Canada and found entertainment, drama, and skill to be rated the highest. Most of the studies were carried out at commercial events.

Limited information is available about spectatorship at non-commercial combat sports or martial arts events. Cooper tested spectators' preferences at the non-revenue, 'All-Stars' wrestling event in the US [Cooper 2009]. He found that spectators were primarily interested in individual matchups, achievement, and being a wrestling loyalist. The same preferences were acknowledged in a more general study, comparing factors that drive people to attend multiple wrestling events [Cooper 2011].

Aforementioned empirical researches cover a narrow part of what might be described as combat sports. Information about a spectator's motives at traditional martial arts events is even more limited, although various examinations have been carried out in order to acknowledge motives of participation [Jones, Mackay, Peters 2006; Ko, Kim, Valacich 2010; Zeng, Cynarski, Xie 2013]. This lack of interest may suggest that martial arts are not frequently considered a spectator sport.

## Information about MMA and *wushu*

While researchers have always been interested in the presence of boxing as a phenomenon in contemporary culture, MMA has raised awareness associated with the moral aspect of such spectacle even further [Bottenburg, Heilbron 2006; Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2006]. Despite the initial rejection of the sport among many authorities, the policy and main narrations in the media regarding MMA changed rapidly, and today the sport might be considered mainstream in several developed countries [Sánchez García, Malcolm 2010]. MMA adapted effective techniques from different combat sports and martial arts, offering a dynamic and unpredictable spectacle where two fighters compete in a ring or cage. While the origins of MMA are sought in the Ancient Greek's Pankration, it is the modern-day, commercial form, which is highly successful in terms of viewership, event attendance, and amateur participation [Sánchez García, Malcolm 2010].

Conversely, *wushu* is a martial art strongly rooted in the cultural background of its country of origin. As stated by Shuai [2011], the current commercialisation competes with tradition in the international development of this martial art. Under the umbrella of contemporary, modern *wushu*, various forms of activity can be found [Shuai 2011]. The sporting aspect of *wushu* is divided into two, vastly different from a spectator's standpoint, types, which are *taolu* and *sanda*. In *taolu*, also called 'forms', an athlete demonstrates a range of techniques and movements in front of judges, who assess the aesthetic qualities of the performance [IWUF 2014]. In *sanda/sashou*, also called 'free-fighting', two athletes compete on a raised platform. They are allowed to kick, punch, take down, and push their opponents off the platform, to show their superiority [IWUF 2014]. The open formula brings a range of competitors from other combat sports to *sanda*.

In the study, we aimed to compare the motives of spectators attending two combat sports: the *Wushu Cup* and amateur MMA events in Poland. Acknowledging why people attend MMA events might provide information about the qualities of the sport that make it so attractive from a spectator's perspective. In order to distinguish these attributes, spectators of MMA were compared to the attendees at the *wushu* event. The decision to choose *wushu* arose from the idea to make the compared sports closely related in terms of a spectator's experience. *Sanda*, a form of *wushu*, fulfils this condition. Additionally, as it has been recognised on the organisational level, *wushu* is making a shift to become more attractive for the spectator. *Sanda* is at the forefront of this evolution. Finally, the rea-

son for choosing this sport was practical, as we knew that the chosen *wushu* event would attract some spectators.

In order to distinguish motives related to the entertainment value of the sport itself, other decisions about the sample were made. Several studies have shown that people attend sporting events not only for reasons related to sporting performance, but also because they are willing to be a part of an event, as well as being motivated by socialising, crowd experience, and escape from their daily routine [Trail *et al.* 2003]. As our goal was to address fans of the two sports, it was decided to choose amateur events where opportunities to fulfil the aforementioned needs are limited [James, Ross 2004]. By doing so, it was possible to address questions about the allure of non-commercial events, especially in the context of martial arts and combat sports.

## Methods

The survey was conducted at the two amateur MMA events and one Wushu Cup in Poland. All events were non-revenue and were located in some of the largest cities in Poland. The sample consisted of 78 spectators at the *wushu* event (out of 87 distributed questionnaires) and 76 at the MMA events (of 92 questionnaires). Descriptive statistics of the samples are presented in Table 2.

The wushu event was one of the biggest martial arts competitions in Poland throughout the whole year. Starting from the early hours, the event involved a plethora of different forms of competition: technical demonstrations, international match-ups between adolescent contestants, and professional fights between well-established athletes. We distributed the questionnaires at the end of the event, when the forms were limited to the *sanda* competition (amateur and professional, with or without protective gear). In the case of MMA, the events were amateur. Some of the techniques allowed in professional MMA were prohibited, and participation was limited to non-professional fighters who fought in protective gear. The events were organised by private entities, which also organise professional MMA events. In both sports, every attendee in the audience was asked to participate in the survey.

## Instrument

A specific scale to measure the importance of motives was used in the study. It was refined by Andrew *et al.* [2009a] specifically to fit the context

of combat sports. The scale consisted of nine dimensions: adoration, aesthetics, crowd experience, drama, escape, knowledge, socialising, vicarious achievement, and violence. Every dimension of motives was described by three items assessed on a 7-point Likert scale. The scale was previously translated into Polish and was tested at professional MMA events.

As this study was conducted in different settings, it was decided to make some changes in the questionnaire. These modifications referred to the motive of violence, a controversial factor, which is supposed to attract some sport spectators or raise their enjoyment [Andrew *et al.* 2009b; Bryant, Zillmann, Raney 1998; Jewell, Moti, Coates 2012; Raney 2006]. However, amateur MMA competitions are different from professional events. Athletes have to use headgear and are usually equipped with shin guards and softer gloves, which are less impactful. As a result, less damage is inflicted, and the outcome of a fight is not as dramatic. While some matches during the Wushu Cup in *sanda* were organised without much protective gear, the form is generally less violent than professional MMA fights. For this reason, it was decided to exclude terms such as 'bloody' or 'I enjoy violence' and replace them with less controversial expressions that would better fit the context.

## Statistical analysis

First, the psychometric qualities of the instrument were tested. Due to the small sample size, we were not able to use refined methods to check reliability and validity. Instead, we tested reliability of the scale using Cronbach's alpha. Discriminant validity was examined by analysing correlations, with a value over 0.8 between the motives considered unacceptable [Brown 2006]. ANOVA was used to test differences between the motives. Prior to this, we tested the assumptions of ANOVA. Normality of distribution was assessed by checking skewness and kurtosis, and Lavené's test was used to examine the homogeneity of variance. Finally, a ranking of motives was used to assess the importance of particular drivers in relation to other factors in the sports.

## Results

Cronbach's alpha indices for the motives were between 0.68 for socialising and 0.89 for violence. While Cronbach's alpha for socialising (0.68) was slightly below the common cut-off value of 0.7, it was decided to accept this issue, as the value was very

**Table 1.** Correlations between the motives

	adoration	aesthetics	ce	drama	escape	kno	soc	vic	violence
adoration	1								
aesthetics	.322	1							
ce	.522	.262	1						
drama	.083	.271	.074	1					
escape	.292	.257	.303	.224	1				
kno	.480	.565	.278	.111	.384	1			
soc	.320	.186	.510	.081	.245	.170	1		
vic	.622	.400	.478	.125	.250	.333	.319	1	
violence	.182	.006	.297	.205	.319	.203	.232	-.006	1

abbreviations: ce – crowd experience, kno – knowledge, soc – socialising, vic – vicarious achievement

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of the samples

	MMA	wushu
Gender		
male	76%	51%
female	24%	49%
Age		
18-24	64%	26%
25-29	26%	0%
30-39	8%	36%
40-49	1%	26%
50-59	0%	8%
60 or more	0%	5%
Education		
university	39%	54%
secondary	46%	36%
vocational	9%	5%
elementary	4%	1%
no education	1%	4%
Place of residence (number of citizens, in thousands)		
town over 500	38%	51%
between 200-500	13%	18%
between 100-200	21%	3%
between 20-100	12%	0%
town 20 or less	5%	15%
countryside	11%	13%
Do you live in the voivodeship of the event?		
yes	78%	49%
no	22%	51%
Median income per household member in zł (in quintiles)		
1651zł and more	45%	63%
1201-1650	17%	21%
1200-901	20%	13%
900-641	5%	3%
640 or less	12%	0%
How did you learn about MMA/wushu events?		
from TV	24%	3%
from the Internet	24%	8%
from friends	50%	77%
from advertisement	3%	13%

close to the borderline and the factor was discriminant from the other motives. Correlations between the factors did not exceed 0.65 (see Table 1), thus

no issues with discriminant validity were met. The highest correlation was observed between vicarious achievement and adoration, which reached 0.62.

**Table 3.** Means and standard deviations (SD) of the motives

	wushu sample			MMA sample
	mean	SD		mean
aesthetics	5.85	1.04	aesthetics	6.17
vicarious achievement	5.47	1.28	knowledge	5.62
knowledge	5.18	1.06	drama	5.47
adoration	5.00	1.15	vicarious achievement	5.39
socialising	4.89	0.95	escape	5.25
drama	4.82	0.98	socialising	5.22
escape	4.77	1.36	crowd experience	5.07
crowd experience	4.54	1.29	adoration	5.05
violence	2.97	1.53	violence	4.64

**Table 4.** The results of ANOVA

	wushu sample		MMA sample		F value
	n=78	SD	n=76	SD	
	mean	SD	mean	SD	
adoration	5.00	1.15	5.05	1.24	0.06
aesthetics	5.85	1.04	6.17	0.70	5.03
crowd experience	4.54	1.29	5.07	1.29	6.66
drama	4.82	0.98	5.47	1.02	16.55
escape	4.77	1.36	5.25	1.18	5.59
knowledge	5.18	1.06	5.62	1.00	7.01
socialising	4.89	0.95	5.22	1.00	4.40
vicarious achievement	5.47	1.28	5.39	1.11	0.15
violence	2.97	1.53	4.64	1.49	47.27

p - \*<.05; \*\*<.01; \*\*\*<.001; n.s. – non-significant

There were several descriptive differences regarding the samples at the events (see Table 2). People attending the *wushu* competition were generally older, better educated, and had a higher income. Interestingly, nearly half of the sample gathered at the Wushu Cup was female, in comparison to a higher proportion of males to females at amateur MMA events.

Nearly half of the attendees at the wushu event lived in a different voivodeship to the one in which the event took place in, which was greater than in the case of MMA events. Finally, while spectators at MMA events learned about their first ever event from various outlets, those attending the wushu competition heard about the events, for the most part, from their relatives.

For both sports, the most important factor of attending events was an aesthetic motive. In case of *wushu*, this motive was followed by vicarious achievement, knowledge, and adoration respectively. The motive of violence was the least important and its mean was below the midpoint of the scale. Regarding MMA, aesthetics was followed by knowledge, drama, and vicarious achievement. Similarly to *wushu*, violence was given little importance among MMA spectators.

Prior to testing differences between the motives, assumptions of ANOVA were assessed. Skewness

and kurtosis of the items did not indicate a substantial departure from normality, as neither value exceeded 1.6 [West, Finch, Curran 1995]. Lavené's test for homogeneity of variances showed violations of the assumption, and thus it was decided to use Welch's ANOVA.

Significant differences were found in the case of seven out of nine motives (see Table 4). The samples varied the most while assessing the motive of violence ( $F=48.27$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), drama ( $F=16.55$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and knowledge ( $F=7.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These factors were rated higher among MMA spectators. Non-significant differences were observed for adoration and vicarious achievement only.

## Discussion

The goal of the study was to compare motives of spectators attending amateur MMA events and more traditional combat sports. To obtain the data, we conducted a survey at two MMA events and a single *wushu* event.

First, the socioeconomic differences between spectators attending the two sports should be discussed, as they might be associated with moti-

vations. The characteristics of spectators at MMA events is consistent with the group described in previous studies [Andrew *et al.* 2009a; Brown, Devlin, Billings 2013; Kim *et al.* 2008; MacIntosh, Crow 2011]. This refers especially to their young age, as only 9% of attendees were aged 30 or more years, and that they were predominantly male. In contrast, 75% of spectators at the *wushu* event were aged at least 30, they were also better educated and had a higher income. As many competitions at the *wushu* event involved adolescents, some of the attendees could have been their parents.

The leading motives of attendance were shared in both sports. Aesthetics and knowledge were the primary drivers of spectatorship. With the addition of drama, these motives were named as spectators' motives by Trail *et al.* [2003], which refers to being dominant among observers, who are primarily interested in a high level of sporting performance. While this result is not surprising in the case of *wushu* where competition in some styles may be classified primarily as aesthetic, it is not as obvious for MMA. High appreciation of aesthetics in combat sports is contradictory to studies conducted by Wann and Wilson [1999] and Wann *et al.* [2008], who acknowledged that fans of aggressive sports are less interested in aesthetic qualities. Nevertheless, the high ranking of spectators' motives was observed in nearly every study aimed at unveiling factors driving spectators to MMA [Kim *et al.* 2008, 2009; Andrew *et al.* 2009a]. Our finding also suggests that even at a low level of competition and skills in comparison to professional events, people are foremost willing to watch high quality performances [Kim *et al.* 2008]. Finally, the importance of aesthetic values might apply to attendees who are strongly attached to the sport, which was previously found to be the case in MMA [MacIntosh, Crow 2011].

The least important factor in both sports was the motive of violence. Spectators at the Wushu Cup rated it below the midpoint of the scale, which implies its inadequacy to the context. The Wushu Cup involved different forms of the sport before the fight-related competition, which probably attracted an audience seeking very different emotions, not necessarily associated with aggression. Since being introduced to the scales by Kim *et al.* [2008], the motive of violence was rated as of medium or little importance for spectators at several events involving physical contact between athletes. Nevertheless, in the context of MMA the motive has not been previously rated as the least important [Andrew *et al.* 2009a; Kim *et al.* 2008, 2009]. On the other hand, this finding is understandable, as during amateur bouts the amount of violence is limited due to

the use of protective equipment, shorter rounds, and a stricter set of rules. According to their other motivations, spectators attending the two MMA amateur events might be considered sport enthusiasts, and this group was found to perceive violence in the sport otherwise than less involved individuals [MacIntosh, Crow 2011]. Finally, when analysing the motive of violence, it has to be remembered that answers might be biased due to an issue with social desirability.

Other motives that had rather little importance for spectators were escape, crowd experience, and socialising. As described by Trail *et al.* [2003], this group consists of factors that are not exclusive to sporting events, and may be shared by individuals no matter of their other motivations. As the events did not involve additional attractions such as concerts, non-sporting performances, or light effects, which are sometimes a part of professional sports events, the result is not surprising. Similarly, many elements, which are believed to increase the perceived enjoyment of sports events were excluded, thus the role of drama was lower than in some professional MMA fights [Andrew *et al.* 2009a].

Comparing the ranking of motives between the sports, the primary difference applies to adoration and vicarious achievement. These motives are believed to be essential to those who are strongly emotionally attached to an athlete [Trail *et al.* 2003]. The two motives were the only with no significant difference between the groups, as all the other motives were rated higher by MMA spectators. Thus, a non-significant difference may be interpreted as the relatively higher importance of the two motives in the *wushu* sample. Furthermore, people attending the *wushu* competition rated vicarious achievement and adoration as high as second and fourth highest in the ranking of the most important motives.

This result indicates that while spectators at MMA events were foremost driven by motives related to the sport, the audience at the *wushu* event consisted of a large part of the fans of the competing athletes who were vicariously achieving their success and adoring them. Once more, a theoretical distinction provided by Trail *et al.* [2003] should be mentioned, as he divided sport spectators' motives to those typical of people interested primarily in the sport (aesthetics, drama, knowledge) or athletes (vicarious achievement). One way to explain the result is to take into consideration the aforementioned structure of the sample. In the case of *wushu*, spectators' age, place of living, and the way in which they learned about the event, suggest that they could be closely related to the athletes. The presence of relatives in the arena is more likely to

occur at a wushu event in comparison to MMA, as the latter sport is still considered unacceptable in some circles [Sánchez García, Malcolm 2010]. Conversely, the *wushu* event involved a major national competition and some of the athletes were already well-established. Thus, they could have already received enough attention to build a following outside their family and friends.

One interesting insight, which refers to the high importance of vicarious achievement in both sports, is that even at amateur, free-of-charge events, fans are able to vicariously fulfil the need for success. However, this is not clear when considering the results of Cooper's [2011] study, who found that, in comparison to those attending more prestigious tournaments, people coming to local wrestling matches are not less motivated by achievement. However, the situation changes when analysing the strength of affiliation with an individual wrestler. The evidence from MMA spectators is sparse, although in general vicarious achievement played a more important role at professional events than at those happening on an amateur stage [Andrew *et al.* 2009a; Kim *et al.* 2008, 2009].

Finally, the high ranking of fans' motives in the case of wushu might be related to the low importance of drama and violence in this group. Vicarious achievement and adoration are lowly correlated with the motives of drama and violence, which suggests that people emotionally attached to particular athletes are not necessarily interested in competitive, dramatic outcomes, but are rather willing to see their favourite athlete winning.

## Conclusions

The study aimed to compare the motivational profiles of spectators at *wushu* and amateur MMA events. It was found that people attending MMA generally declare a higher level of motivation for every motive except vicarious achievement and adoration. The motivational profiles of the spectators were rather similar, although fans' motives were more important for *wushu* spectators, while MMA spectators were rather seeking sport-related motives, such as drama. The results indicate that the importance of particular motives is relatively similar in the two very different combat sports involving aspects of martial arts.

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## Porównanie motywów kibiców przychodzących na amatorskie zawody mieszanych sztuk walki i wushu w Polsce

**Słowa kluczowe:** motywacje, fani sportu, MMA, sanda, zachowania

### Abstrakt

Celem pracy było porównanie motywów kibiców, którzy przyszedli na amatorskie zawody mieszanych sztuk walki (MMA) oraz wushu. Powodem podjęcia badania było zidentyfikowanie dynamicznej zmiany popularności poszczególnych dyscyplin sportów walki w Polsce. Coraz większy sukces, zarówno pod względem liczby ćwiczących, jak i różnych form konsumpcji w mediach i oglądalności na żywo, odnoszą formy będące połączeniem innych sportów walki. Wyniki badania miały umożliwić wyodrębnienie cech wyróżniających owe formy z perspektywy kibica, które mogą decydować o ich wysokiej popularności.

Dane zebrano w trakcie dwóch zawodów MMA (n=76) i Pucharu Polski w Wushu (n=78). Badania odbywały się w miastach wojewódzkich w Polsce. Obecność na zawodach była nieodpłatna, a zawodnicy nie otrzymywali z tytułu uczestnictwa wynagrodzenia.

Narzędziem wykorzystanym do pomiaru motywów była wcześniej przetłumaczona i zmodyfikowana wersja kwestionariusza Andrewa [2009a]. Skala spełniła warunki rzetelności, a zmienne nie były ze sobą bardzo silnie skorelowane (Tabela 1). Osoby uczestniczące w zawodach MMA były młodsze niż kibice obecni na zawodach wushu (Tabela 2). Charakteryzowały się również niższym wykształceniem i dochodem na jednego członka gospodarstwa domowego.

Do porównania oceny motywów kibicowania wykorzystano test ANOVA. W przypadku siedmiu z dziewięciu motywów zaobserwowano istotne różnice ze względu na sport, na poziomie  $p < 0.05$  (Tabela 4). Motywy, z wyjątkiem podnoszenia własnej wartości oraz adoracji, zostały ocenione wyżej przez kibiców MMA. Najistotniejszym czynnikiem w obu grupach okazał się motyw estetyczny, za którym w przypadku wushu znajdowało się podniesienie własnej wartości i motyw podnoszenia wiedzy o sporcie, podczas gdy wśród kibiców MMA był to motyw podnoszenia wiedzy oraz dramatyzm (Tabela 3). Najmniej istotnym czynnikiem w obu grupach był motyw przemocy. Hierarchia motywów, opracowana na podstawie średnich, w grupach była podobna, choć kibice wushu wyżej oceniali motywy odnoszące się do relacji emocjonalnej z występującymi zawodnikami, podczas gdy kibice MMA deklarowali ważność dramatyzmu i motywów związanych z ucieczką od codzienności, a także przebywaniem wśród innych ludzi.

Kibice sportów walki obecni na zawodach amatorskich charakteryzowali się podobnymi motywami, a wyniki tej pracy są spójne z wcześniejszymi badaniami dotyczącymi kibiców MMA.