

# Influx of mma into the global sporting consciousness



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Over the last 10 years, the visibility of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) in global sporting culture has notably increased. With reference to appropriate theories related to globalisation, critically examine the influx of MMA into the global sporting consciousness.

The term “ globalization” is multifaceted and open to interpretation.

Globalization as interpreted from Giddens (1990) is a network of worldwide social relations, in which local events are shaped by major factors from all around the world. A faultless agreement about the definition of globalisation is not yet established. Nonetheless, some of the significant prerequisites for globalisation include: increased telecommunication networks and the opening of contexts to market mechanisms owing to the internationalisation of finance systems, and allowing nation states to control economies and societies (Scheuerman, 2008).

Global sporting consciousness is an ability to appropriate the global, international, and cross-cultural sources that are apparent within the world of sport. The interconnections and implications of various institutions and events have resulted in a pathway that has allowed Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) to form into a globally recognised sport (Earley, 2015)

MMA is a combat sport that combines elements of various martial arts disciplines such as: wrestling, jiu-jitsu, and kickboxing. Combatants win by knocking out the opponent, forcing the opponent to submit, or by judges’ decision. This essay will critically assess the rapid penetration of MMA from the perspective of globalization, drawing upon key theories. There are too many theories and historical events to include within the space of the essay,

therefore emphasis on specific and most relevant events throughout MMA history will be referenced. The utilisation of globalisation frameworks derived from the scholars; Maguire and Appadurai will help justify why certain events were crucial for the influx of MMA into our global consciousness today.

Transnational corporations and the transnational capitalist class (those in charge of media conglomerates), will be referred to throughout. These factors are critically discussed, due to their significant and continued influence on MMA. The theories and frameworks of Americanization, cultural homogenization, the advancement of technologies and the recent changes in ideological discourses within certain nations, provide a framework for the most prolific reasons and justifications for the rise of MMA.

### Brief history

Critical assessment of the influx of MMA into the global consciousness cannot be completed comprehensively, without first illustrating the significance of the Ultimate fighting Championship (UFC). It is the number one MMA fight promotion organization globally and it has long since been this way. The UFC is responsible for the MMA rise to legitimacy within the sporting world (Szczerba, 2014). Under new ownership, the sport conformed to a codification process in 2001.

The codification process involves the development of more specific and explicit rules, which are enforced in a strict, efficient manner. Sports rules invariably restrict how individuals can achieve sporting success (e. g. the prohibition of ‘dirty’ tactics for example, eye gauging and biting in MMA contests), therefore the codification process essentially demands the

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development of stricter personal self-control and self-discipline among participants (Elias, 1986).

Realizing the potential financial implications of continuing without state approval, Zuffa LLC, parent company of the UFC, in collaboration with the Nevada State Athletic Commission, endeavoured to change the UFC's rulebook. After adopting some modifications, UFC later became sanctioned in Nevada, U. S. and gradually re-branded itself as a sport rather than a spectacle (Maher, 2010). The decision was paramount to the organisation's longevity and subsequent global recognition as the number one promotional company across the globe for MMA (Graham, 2007).

The rise of the UFC within the mainstream sporting industry set a blue print for the developing MMA world. Bellator, Cage warriors and Bay Area Multicultural Media Academy (BAMMA) adopted similar strategies of codification, corporate sponsorship and various transnational practices including the scouting of talent from all over the world. As of May 2018, there were a total of 41 MMA promotional organizations globally. Some exist only to be feeder leagues to the bigger promotions while others exist to try to be the best in the world (e. g. Bellator MMA or ONE Championship) In the UK, MMA's popularity has seen a great increase. There are several homegrown promotions such as BAMMA and Cage Warriors that are selling out arenas and broadcasting live on TV. to

This section of the essay will critically examine Maguire's theory of the global media sport complex. A system which can be best explained via reference to the Homogenization and Americanization strand of the

globalization debate. The application of this theory, is best suited to offer justification of the prevalent influx of MMA upon our global consciousness.

Actions and overall objectives of transnational corporations is to regulate cultural flows across the global complex. The global sports system is closely connected to the emergence of global media communications. Subsequently, the world of sport we know today, is a consequence of global media actions (Maguire, 2011). Mass media corporations continue to surpass expectations in regards to their global scale, wealth and influence. The transnational way these companies operate, demonstrates increasing levels of consolidation, with many media industries already highly concentrated and dominated by a very small number of firms. Corporations such as: 21st Century FOX, BT sport group and The Walt Disney company are all influential players in the sports industry (Forbes, 2018). Mass media conglomerates influence sports by controlling the production and consumption, through means of sponsorship and broadcasting rights fees (Carroll, 2010). The capitalist nature of these enterprises enables further growth of sporting brands across all disciplines on a national and international level. In relation to broadcasting and the consumption of media content, MMA is available via three different markets, irrespective of promotional organization or territory: subscription-based pay-tv, Pay-Per-View (PPV)-TV, and free-to-air TV (Rompuy and Dondurs, 2013).

Those responsible for the actions of these corporations are known as the transnational capitalist class. Sklair (2002) states there are four components contained within the class: Corporate, State, Technical (those responsible for endorsing the class publicly (e. g. athletes, who can become powerful

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celebrities such as Conor McGregor) and the Consumerist element (those who enable consumption of product). Consumption and consumerism is the social and economic order, promoted by the transnational capitalist class and is reflective of individual ideological viewpoints (Sklair, 2002). Their influence demonstrates how the ideas of the elite few transmit to the masses.

Consumption of sport can be categorised into direct consumption, which includes spectators attending sporting events, and indirect consumption, relating to following the sport through mass media (Wann et al., 2001).

Originating and operating, predominantly from America, the transnational capitalist class have significantly influenced the world of MMA through the medium's media networks and communication systems, increasing the direct and indirect consumption of the sport. Individuals belonging to the transnational capitalist class implement a controlled order in which they maintain consistent jurisdiction (Mehus, 2005). In this respect, MMA has become a valued commodity, that is based on the size and composition of the audience and potential advertisers and sponsors of media broadcasters (Mehus, 2005). This creates a trend towards establishing global media sports, for example, American football, basketball, baseball and ice hockey. Global media sports are a form of Americanization, a model concerned with promoting and producing advertising, leading to the sale to the mass public audience (Collins, 2011). This concept has affected the world of sport numerous times, including the influx of MMA.

The hegemonial position experienced by specific sports within this global media sport complex requires less-powerful sports to conform to the style and form in which the dominant sports are presented in. For example, the <https://assignbuster.com/influx-of-mma-into-the-global-sporting-consciousness/>

showiness and spectacle of the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) have become the benchmark that other sports compare themselves to. Analytically, the UFC are arguably following in similar footsteps to the NFL and NBA when they attempted to become institutionalized in the mainstream. Moreover, UFC events in the present day, draw better ratings in key demographics than NBA, and MLB games, and pay-per-view revenues have grown to levels comparable to major boxing and pro wrestling events (Hamilton, 2006).

Carroll (2010) have stated in a global referenced context that 'the media are American'. This questions the cultural homogenisation of globalisation and its relevance when discussing MMA. Cultural homogenisation refers to the reduction in cultural diversity through the popularization and diffusion of a wide array of cultural symbols — not only physical objects but customs, ideas and values (Giulianotti, 2012). This results in power imbalances between local and global stakeholders. Local stakeholders seek domestic benefits and international prestige whereas global stakeholders seek to develop supranational markets. International sporting bodies, that are transforming into semi-corporate structures, seek to consolidate their decision-making role to increase output and content.

Initially, a global demand for combative sports consisting of an array of martial arts did not exist. Consequently, the popularity of locally popular sports or pastimes such as Jujitsu in Brazil or Karate in Japan is overwhelmed by the popularity of MMA events. MMA and the UFC, alongside the investment of transnational media conglomerates is increasing the financial worth to compete. If the incentive is greater to compete in one sport over <https://assignbuster.com/influx-of-mma-into-the-global-sporting-consciousness/>

another the popularity of the lesser invested sports platform will decrease or be forced to conform and act in a similar manner. There is a concern that the decline in participation rates of traditional martial art forms, is a direct result of the global expansion of MMA. However, the argument that MMA and the respective organisations involved, are acting in a culturally homogenised manner, is not without legitimate opposition. Instead, Maguire (2011) states it is a case of capitalisation upon a broad range cultural process and flow.

UFC as the largest organization in the MMA community, saw fit to capitalise on the global influences that MMA encompasses. The UFC often act upon regional and national interests. For instance, events in Europe generally feature more European-based fighters, a clear acknowledgement of fan familiarity and allegiance to national fighters. Utilising their strength as a global brand, alongside creating bespoke fights for the local market, has been beneficial for the rise of the UFC. This transnational practice of focusing on global perspectives and local responsiveness is a characteristic of globalisation (Giulianotti, 2012). In summary, the application of Maguire's media-sport complex illustrates why the increased transmission and consumption of MMA has occurred; it is the direct consequence of transnational practices of multinational companies.

In addition to this, an investigation into the motivations of fight fans found the primary reasons to digest MMA content were: excitement, unpredictability and the appreciation of the beauty of fighting techniques, personable to individual fighters (Greenwell, et al. 2009). Therefore, a professional fighter's technique style is highly influential in the competitive bouts he or she may be involved in. The match making aspect of MMA

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constitutes an essential feature of MMA's popularity. Competitive and exciting matchups engage fans, increasing consumer interaction.

The new global cultural economy is a more complex dynamic than anything previous. This complexity is a result of fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics. To complement Maguire's theory, Appadurai's elementary framework of global flows illustrates the complicated and interconnected dynamic the world of global sport and consequently MMA falls into. The elementary framework for exploring such disjunctures, is used to look at the relationship between five dimensions: Ethnoscapes, Finanscapes, Technoscapes, Mediascapes and Ideoscapes.

The analysis of global cultural flows is particularly useful in approaching the root of the influx of MMA; it provides a framework for the most influential events in MMA to be identified and analysed, taking into account the differentiating factors. The conjectures of ethnicity, finance, technology, media and ideology are central to any examination of a shift in global cultural phenomena. The influx of MMA into our global consciousness directly relate to these factors.

Ethnoscapes is a dimension of Appadurai's global flows framework and relates to individuals that characterise shifting forces (e. g . tourists, immigrants, refugees and guest workers). Migratory flows are central forces in the modern world. The movement of persons away from their home nation is known as deterritorialisation (Raffaele, 2007). In relation to MMA, the increased movement of individuals who behold traditional and unorthodox

martial art forms, results in a surplus of talent. This amalgamation of global fighting styles causes the continuous evolution of MMA.

Migratory flows within sports result in an intertwined complex of social, political and cultural displacements. Appadurai's interconnected evaluations of Finascapes and Technocapses gives explanation to this. Finascapes, is the globalization of the economy, resulting from national economies being involved in interdependence at a global level. The distribution of capital is a multifaceted, rapid and difficult landscape to follow. Primary driving forces of growing interdependence are: international capital and transnational corporations (Harvey and Thibault, 1996).

The UFC recently sold for \$4 billion, the most expensive transaction in global sports history. This illustrates the rise of MMA to a global sport and proves that MMA is in the global sporting consciousness, as financial transfers embody the distribution of international capital (Appadurai, 1995).

Technoscapes refer to the global configuration and fluidity of technology on a regional, national and international scale. The development of global sports is closely connected to the emergence of global media communications and one of the most relevant aspects to this growth are social media platforms. This involves an interconnected mechanism of athletes, promoters, owners and fans.

The growing consensus amongst consumers is, a growing demand for 'all access' featured media content. The way MMA organisations approach and encourage the use of social media channels shows the promotional

organisation's willingness to adapt to the changing of consumer demand  
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(Radmanovich, 2012). All access media content is present due to the rise of the internet, complimented by smart phone access (Raento, 2009). Regular posts on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube allow informal networking and facilitate the *all access* media demands of consumers. Social media is the most common way in which sport content is digested globally (Iriyama, 2009). The information created and distributed by media outlets involves a varying degree of complexity. Mediascapes involve the distribution and electronic capabilities globally, that produce and distribute this information (Appadurai, 1995). All of which have powerful public and private stakeholders across all territories at all levels of influence.

Traditional sources of revenue, for example ticket sales and footfall at events have declined in importance. Sport organisations should ensure sufficient exposure in the sponsorship and endorsement marketplace. Media coverage secures this. Hence sport in general has become a lot more compliant with media demands (Boyle and Haynes, 2000). Without this, MMA would not have achieved and continue to accomplish the scope of content it has attained. This provides further reasons for MMA's presence in our global consciousness.

As a foundation block upon which the previous disjunctures were built upon, Mediascapes and Ideoscapes are closely related landscapes in which to represent the present disjunctures and differences present in the global cultural economy. This offers further explanation for the influx of MMA. Without disjunctures in global cultural flows, pathways for the global rise of new sports may not occur.

Ideoscapes are a concentration of ideas, terms and images, including freedom, rights, sovereignty', and democracy. The 'rights' aspect of this description is particularly relevant in exploring how the ideological disjuncture between various territories and nation states can explain the prominence of MMA in global culture. Amongst westernized nations, the shifting paradigm of women rights movements and feminism has resulted equal social standing for men and women, (Imbornoni, 2009). Although women's rights activists have been successfully active for some time now, sport is often regarded as being behind in terms of popularity, media coverage and financial rewards for women.

The MMA world decision to accept and promote female MMA fighters served as a major milestone in the world of sport. Former fight promotions; Strikeforce and King of the Cage were the first organisations to actively promote female fighters. In accepting the role of women to compete in MMA the UFC opened the opportunity for a vast new market. This opens the question as to whether this decision from the largest MMA promotional company to promote female fighters was a financial motive rather than a social justice action (Sailors, 2017).

The UFC had their first world champion in the form of Ronda Rousey in 2011. Rousey is regarded as a symbol of female empowerment and has been praised for her involvement in the polarizing female MMA industry, in which she became one of the highest-pay-per-view draws in the world. Rousey is often held responsible for the shift and step forward that the MMA community took towards gender equality (Sailors, 2017). In addition to the ideological discourse of female rights movements embodied in MMA, the <https://assignbuster.com/influx-of-mma-into-the-global-sporting-consciousness/>

technological advancements in media communications and marketing research can be linked to further illuminate the complexity of Appadurai's disjunctures.

Quantifying audience participation and engagement rates is a market technique employed by fight promotions such as the UFC, Bellator and Cage warriors. (Seungmo 2009). The addition of female fighters into the UFC, in particular the rise of Ronda Rousey, was coupled with targeted advertisement campaigns into territories the UFC were present throughout. Furthermore, this decision would have directly and indirectly influenced the perceptions of female fighters. Whether negative or positive connotations were derived from this, the decision to promote a female global 'superstar' from the MMA community sent shockwaves around the world(Weaving, 2017) This capitalizes upon changing political discourses such as this has undoubtedly influenced the arrival of the sport on a global level.

Juxtaposed to professional boxing, MMA's closest sporting comparative, boxing has not transcended social barriers and captured the imagination of the sports fans in the same way. This is due to a combination of issues mainly relating to traditional attitudes the boxing world beholds older style and views of masculinity. Without MMA being a relatively new and established sport, the current trajectory of women's MMA may not have occurred. Despite the popularity of WMMA, women only make up a fraction of the UFC's roster, therefore there remains substantial room for growth.

The relationship of Appadurai's five dimensions of global flows has illustrated the complex nature a developing sport, in a growing globalized world. This

framework is central to justify how the paradox of MMA's global popularity is now present in our global consciousness.

The most influential events have been outlined throughout the course of this essay. Firstly, the agreement of the UFC to conform to the codification process, allowed MMA to be officially recognised as a sport rather than a spectacle. Furthermore, the interdependencies between the media and the sport of MMA is highlighted throughout. Maguire's global media sports complex provides a framework to justify why transnational corporations and their growing consolidation of power is one of the primary reasons for the growth of MMA.

MMA organisations have undergone a process of Americanisation in terms of their production, promotion and advertisement. In doing so, MMA has consequently become a valued commodity, in which media corporations have significant control.

The global influence of the sport is not without criticism of acting in a culturally homogenised manner. The amalgamation of fighting styles allows for the continuous growth and evolution of the sport but it also results in the popularity of singular discipline martial arts to reduce significantly.

Nevertheless, the capitalist nature of the transnational organizations is unquestionably a major factor in the shift of influence the world of MMA has had onto our global consciousness

The application of Appadurai's five dimensional scapes illustrate factors deemed most relevant when examining the recent manifestation of MMA.

This highlights the importance of migratory flows, the process of  
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detritorialisation, the technological advancements and the power sport beholds when embracing changes in political or ideological discourses.

Traditional martial arts disciplines have a rich global history. MMA and the UFC have capitalised on these global influences of fighting styles in terms of capturing an audience where the popularity of combative sports is already present. The technological advance experienced globally, permitted progressive marketing strategies from media corporations, coupled with the financial power has allowed the sport to transcend barriers on demographic, territorial, ideological and levels.

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