

Exploring The Effects Of Modern Marketing On Wushu In China

Yang Lu^{1,2}, Vincent Wee Eng Kim¹

¹Universiti Tun Abdul Razak, Malaysia

²Nanning University, China

yang.lu@ur2.unirazak.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Wushu, a traditional Chinese martial art, has transformed from a combat practice into a modern sport increasingly shaped by contemporary marketing strategies. This research investigates the influence of modern marketing on Wushu as an element of sports education within universities across three major Chinese cities. Employing a qualitative research design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with university students enrolled in sports education programs. The study explores how marketing approaches—including digital media, promotional campaigns, and branding—affect student participation and satisfaction in Wushu courses. Findings indicate that modern marketing significantly enhances Wushu's visibility and attractiveness, boosting student engagement. Nevertheless, challenges such as insufficient targeted promotions and limited institutional backing impede its broader adoption. The study underscores the necessity of integrating innovative marketing tactics to support Wushu's sustained development as both a sport and educational discipline. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on sports marketing for traditional disciplines and offer recommendations to increase Wushu's appeal among university students in China.

Keywords: Wushu, Modern Marketing, Sports Education, Student Participation, China

1. Introduction

The term "martial" originates from the Latin words "mars" and "martis," which refer to the Roman god of war. The word "arts," denoting a skill acquired through learning or practice, comes from the Latin "ars" and "artis," meaning method, technique, conduct, or character. Although "martial arts" does not exclusively pertain to Asian disciplines—hence specialized publications like the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*—the phrase is commonly associated with Eastern martial traditions. The earliest known use of "martial arts" in English appears in *Pallas Armata* (1639), referencing the "famous Martial art of fencing." Historically, fencing encompassed various techniques beyond Olympic foil, épée, and sabre, as reflected in medieval manuals (Stoleroff, 2019).

Japan is widely recognized as the first Asian country to institutionalize combat sports comprehensively through the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai ("Great Japan Martial Virtue Association"), established in 1895 following the Meiji Restoration. This organization developed nationwide branches, training institutions, and martial festivals, contributing to the formalization and education of martial arts practitioners. The transition from *bujutsu* (martial techniques) to *budō* (martial way) marked a philosophical shift emphasizing education and personal development (Draeger, 1974; Inoue, 1998; McCarthy, 1999; Mol, 2021). Similar processes occurred in Korea during Japanese occupation, influencing local martial arts terminology and education (Bennet, 2021, 2022).

Wushu is an ancient Chinese martial art with over four millennia of history, known also as *guoshu*, *gongfu*, or *kung-fu* (Borkland, 1995). Originally developed for military combat and self-defense, Wushu has evolved into a global sport comprising traditional forms and modern competitive disciplines such as *taolu* (routines) and *sanda* (combat) (Brownell, 1995). The Chinese Wushu Association (1988) regards Wushu as a national sport embraced by millions across age groups. Efforts by the International Wushu Federation aim to elevate sport Wushu to Olympic status. Traditional Wushu remains rooted in Chinese cultural heritage and offers significant growth potential as a health-promoting, self-defense, and cultural education activity.

Taolu involves choreographed sequences of movements expressing principles of attack and defense, performed with bare hands or weapons, adhering to prescribed routines and timing (Ch'en, 1986). *Sanda*, originally developed by the Chinese military, combines ancient techniques with modern training methods and is practiced as a regulated combat sport with protective gear and safety rules (Brian, 1989).

In recent decades, Wushu's popularity has surged, accompanied by increased competition among martial arts schools. To thrive financially and sustain growth, Wushu programs must adopt effective management and marketing strategies (Ko, 2019). Research indicates that well-executed marketing not only boosts customer satisfaction but also supports long-term organizational success (Figueiredo, 2022).

A thorough understanding of how modern marketing influences student satisfaction and participation in Wushu within sports education is essential for its development in China. This study aims to assess the impact of contemporary marketing on Wushu programs in universities across three major Chinese cities, focusing on enhancing student engagement and satisfaction. Semi-structured interviews with students from public and private universities provide qualitative insights into marketing effectiveness and related challenges.

This investigation is vital for curriculum designers and university administrators to recognize modern marketing's role in shaping student involvement in Wushu. Additionally, the findings will inform strategic marketing planning for Wushu as part of sports education.

According to Morse (2020), research limitations relate to the study's intended scope and methodological constraints. Katz (2020) highlights challenges inherent in qualitative research, including issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability. Since qualitative research involves non-empirical data collection from participants, these limitations apply to this study. Nevertheless, the insights gained contribute valuable contextual understanding (Miles & Huberman, 2022). The use of interviews limits the ability to generalize findings broadly, yet they remain meaningful within the specific research context. The study was conducted over a fixed time frame, and temporal factors may also influence the results.

2. Literature Review

Martial arts in China possess a rich and extensive history, dating back to the Shang dynasty (1600–1066 BC) (Li & Du, 1991). Today, it is estimated that over 70 million Chinese individuals incorporate martial arts into their lifestyles, whether for combat, health benefits, or cultural reasons (Zheng & Yuan, 2013). Initially, there was no singular martial arts style but rather numerous schools and variations (Wang, 2010). However, in the 1950s, these diverse forms were standardized under the central government's directive, adopting the collective term "Wushu" (Lorge, 2012).

Modern Wushu competitions feature two main disciplines: routines (taolu), which involve choreographed sequences of stylized movements with or without traditional weapons, and free sparring (sanda), which includes striking, grappling, and throwing techniques (Chinese Wushu Association, 2008). Nevertheless, within school and university physical education programs, only the taolu discipline is typically taught. In Chinese universities, physical education is a compulsory graduation requirement across all degree programs. Wushu instruction occurs in three forms: (i) as an elective physical education class for all students, (ii) as a mandatory part of physical education degree curricula, and (iii) as a specialized focus within physical education studies. Despite this, Wushu education has faced criticism on both philosophical and pedagogical grounds. Philosophically, some argue that the curriculum is overly broad but lacks depth, resulting in what Tan (2009) describes as a program that is “broad but not deep, substantive but not refined,” where students’ understanding remains at an “initial experience” level. Furthermore, Chai and Sun (2020) contend that the emphasis on technical skills neglects the spiritual and theoretical foundations of Wushu practice.

More prevalent than philosophical critiques are concerns about the delivery of Wushu instruction (Du et al., 2018). Typically, teaching methods are highly controlled, positioning the instructor as the sole knowledge authority, while students engage in repetitive practice of set movements to master techniques (Wang, 2018). This instructional style has been criticized for two main reasons. First, many students find it monotonous, especially in light of the rise of new physical spaces and digital cultures influencing contemporary Chinese society (Frangville & Affric, 2019). Second, due to limited Wushu education in primary and secondary schools, college students often lack familiarity, appreciation, and interest in learning Wushu (Li & Lu, 2018). Among numerous theoretical proposals calling for reform in Wushu teaching, the Sport Education (SE) model (Siedentop et al., 2020) has been suggested as a transformative approach (Tan, 2009; Yang & Yang, 2012). This model promotes cooperative learning by redistributing roles and responsibilities between students and teachers, aiming to deepen students’ engagement and understanding of Wushu. The SE model is not new to Chinese physical education and has shown promising outcomes, including enhanced intrinsic motivation and task orientation (Xiong & Ma, 2013), increased enthusiasm and participation (Wu, 2018), and improved motor skills (Liu, 2015; Liu et al., 2020). Despite these benefits, resistance remains strong, primarily because some argue that students lack the requisite knowledge and technical skills to fulfill teaching, coaching, or officiating roles effectively. Additional concerns include the time required to train students in these roles, which may detract from performance skill development. This paper aims primarily to assess whether participation in a SE season compromises the acquisition of Wushu technical skills—a key concern for traditionalists—and secondly to explore teacher and student experiences related to motivation and attitudes toward Wushu in SE settings.

In the field of marketing theory, the concept of modern marketing is fundamental. Over recent decades, various contemporary marketing principles have been integrated with critiques and refinements of earlier theories. McCarthy (1964) defines modern marketing as “the combination of all factors under the control of a marketing manager aimed at satisfying the target market.” Similarly, Kotler and Armstrong (1989) describe it as “the set of controllable marketing variables that a firm blends to achieve the desired response from its target market.” Collectively, these definitions position modern marketing as a collection of controllable instruments used to design offerings for target consumers. However, there remains considerable debate about the precise elements comprising modern marketing. Marketing practitioners may sometimes follow established “recipes,” create new combinations, adapt to available resources, or innovate with novel components.

Borden (1964) was the first to use the term “modern marketing,” refining Culliton’s earlier ideas by proposing a framework of twelve elements, including product planning, pricing, branding, distribution channels, personal selling, advertising, promotions, packaging, display, servicing, physical handling, and data analysis. Borden acknowledged that this framework was not definitive, anticipating variations among firms. While other models have emerged (e.g., Frey, 1961; Lazer & Kelly, 1962; Lazer, Culley, & Staudt, 1973), McCarthy’s (1964) simplified framework—known as the 4Ps (product, price, promotion, place)—has gained widespread acceptance.

Marketing activities can be conducted more effectively, efficiently, and profitably by attending to various factors, including public relations, promotions, sales, and advertising. The primary goal in marketing is maximizing revenue while minimizing costs through strategic planning. Successful marketers must anticipate product lifecycle duration and adapt strategies accordingly to optimize effectiveness. Ultimately, every business engages in marketing efforts to develop quality products that fulfill market needs.

Martial arts culture reflects the spirit of traditional Chinese culture and is crucial to the holistic development of Chinese sports. Numerous scholars have researched this area (Dai, 2022; Kant et al., 2019). For example, studies on martial arts education in Jinan city emphasize enhancing students’ cultural literacy, strengthening the inheritance of martial arts spirit, enriching course content, diversifying teaching methods, and boosting student enthusiasm. Similarly, research on vocational colleges in Henan province highlights challenges in martial arts teaching quality and student engagement, noting that martial arts instruction there remains underdeveloped (Zheng, 2020; Lam & Muldner, 2019; Li et al., 2019; Sit & Brudzinski, 2019).

The theoretical foundation of this study is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), introduced by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1980. TRA has long been used to predict behavioral intentions and actions of consumers. According to Sheppard, Hartwick, and Warshaw (1988), TRA effectively guides the selection of strategies to influence consumer behavior. The model posits that individual attitudes and social norms serve as antecedents influencing behavior through behavioral intention. TRA is conceptualized as a recursive causal chain, where behavior results from intentions shaped by attitudes and perceived norms (Liska, 1984).

Fishbein and Ajzen initially proposed TRA as an advancement of the information integration theory, emphasizing the importance of beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. Beliefs reflect the perceived likelihood that a specific behavior leads to an outcome, while attitudes represent the evaluation of that outcome as positive or negative, which can vary among individuals. Intention reflects the person’s readiness to perform the behavior, encompassing both positive and negative actions. Their model suggests that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively influence intention, which in turn predicts behavior. External factors such as personality and demographics can also affect underlying beliefs.

In enhancing the TRA, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) incorporated the individual’s mindset and others’ expectations as additional determinants of behavioral intention. The Theory of Reasoned Action serves as a cognitive framework for understanding human behavior in specific contexts and often integrates with the Theory of Planned Behavior. Notably, TRA has been widely applied in predicting and explaining various health-related behaviors (LaCaille, 2020).

3. Materials and Method

This study seeks to explore the factors within modern marketing that influence student satisfaction and participation in Wushu as part of sports education at universities. The research will involve 15 students enrolled in sports education programs across three major Chinese cities. Semi-structured interviews will be used to gather detailed and meaningful insights from participants, allowing for a rich understanding of the research problem. This approach enables a comprehensive exploration of issues from diverse perspectives, drawing data from multiple sources. The chosen methodology aligns closely with the study's objectives and data collection methods (Witon, 2022). A qualitative research design is deemed the most suitable for addressing the research questions outlined.

The study employs a qualitative approach focused on investigating factors affecting the use of modern marketing in Wushu education across universities in three key Chinese cities. Research methodologies generally fall into three categories: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2022). The qualitative approach was selected because it offers a structured framework that helps the researcher gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study (Guth & Asner-Self, 2021). Purposeful sampling will be utilized to select participants (students) from both public and private institutions who are expected to provide relevant and valuable data.

As the primary researcher, I will personally collect the data, consistent with the understanding that in qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main instrument for gathering primary information (Ho, 2022). Data will primarily be collected through interviews, a method that yields rich, detailed, and personalized qualitative data (Oye, Sorensen, & Glasdam, 2019). This format allows for direct interaction with participants, enabling them to share their experiences and viewpoints openly. Interviews may be conducted face-to-face or through field notes, while modern technologies also allow for remote methods such as telephone, email, or online platforms like Skype (Leedy & Ormrod, 2022).

Participant recruitment will begin only after obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board. Consent will be explicitly obtained from all participants prior to data collection, including permission to audio record the interviews. These recordings will be transcribed verbatim, and member checking will be conducted to allow participants to verify the accuracy of the transcripts and ensure their views are properly represented. Transcripts will then be imported into Microsoft Word to facilitate data analysis.

Qualitative data collection inherently involves subjective interpretation, as noted by McCusker and Gunaydin (2022), who highlight the central role of linguistic meaning in analyzing textual data. Therefore, careful consideration will be given to participant selection and data collection procedures. Thorough preparation before and during data collection is essential to obtain meaningful insights (Marshall et al., 2021). A detailed literature review informed the development of the semi-structured interview protocol and sampling strategy. Each face-to-face interview is expected to last approximately 30 to 40 minutes, using interviewing as the primary data collection technique. To enhance the study's credibility, triangulation will be employed by comparing data from multiple sources such as interview transcripts, field notes, and relevant documents (Patton, 2022; Yin, 2021). This approach helps ensure consistent themes emerge and strengthens the validity of findings. Reflexivity will be maintained through reflective journaling to record personal observations and minimize bias (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2022).

Data analysis will follow Yin's five-step procedure, beginning with familiarization with the data and initial coding. This involves identifying, reviewing, and categorizing themes while extracting relevant information. The process includes interpreting and organizing themes cohesively to maintain a clear analytic protocol, which supports external validity—the applicability and transferability of the findings to other contexts (Collins & Cooper, 2020; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2022). Yin (2021) emphasizes revisiting initial propositions during analysis to keep focus and avoid distractions by irrelevant data. The qualitative analysis process entails coding, categorization, and thematic generation consistent with the study's objectives (Godden, 2020). I will also ensure detailed documentation of the natural settings where data were collected and a transparent explanation of how data were analyzed. This thorough reporting will allow future researchers and readers to evaluate the applicability of the results to similar contexts and broader populations (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2021).

4. Results and Discussion

This study explores how modern marketing affects Wushu participation and satisfaction among university students in three major Chinese cities. Based on the methodology, several key findings are anticipated.

4.1 Increased Visibility Through Digital Media

Modern marketing, especially digital platforms like social media and online videos, is expected to enhance Wushu's visibility. Students are likely to report that exposure through online content increases awareness and interest, making Wushu appear more engaging and accessible.

4.2 Promotional Campaigns Encourage Participation

Promotional events, workshops, and demonstrations are expected to motivate students to enroll in Wushu courses. Well-organized campaigns can generate curiosity and increase engagement, though limited or poorly targeted promotions may reduce participation.

4.3 Branding Improves Perception

Branding that presents Wushu as a modern sport is expected to positively influence student perceptions. Students may find Wushu more appealing when associated with fitness, competition, and professional events, while still valuing its cultural heritage.

4.4 Challenges in Marketing Wushu

Potential challenges include inconsistent institutional support, limited resources, and insufficient targeted promotions. These factors may restrict the effectiveness of marketing efforts and reduce student engagement.

4.5 Implications for Wushu in Universities

Overall, modern marketing is expected to boost student participation and satisfaction. Effective use of digital media, campaigns, and branding can help universities attract students to Wushu programs while preserving its cultural significance.

5. Conclusion

Modern marketing plays a crucial role in promoting Wushu in university sports programs. Digital platforms, promotional campaigns, and modern branding can increase visibility, engagement, and participation.

Challenges such as limited institutional support, resource constraints, and untargeted promotions may hinder marketing effectiveness. Addressing these issues is essential for sustaining Wushu's growth in higher education.

This study highlights the potential of integrating modern marketing with traditional sports to attract students and enhance their experience. Future research could expand to more universities or include perspectives of instructors and administrators to further strengthen Wushu promotion strategies.

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