

# Chapter 11

## Promoting an Asian Sport to the World: The Case of Taekwondo

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### ABSTRACT

*Taekwondo (TKD) has seen rapid growth as a universal martial art sport due, in part, to it being an Olympic Games event. TKD has played a very important role in the construction of the image of Korea as a nation brand. This chapter provides an extensive discussion on factors affecting consumer decisions to participate in TKD schools. The suggested factors in this chapter provide specific implications to the marketing of TKD based on the unique characteristics of the TKD market environment. This chapter also illustrates how TKD organizations have maintained a close working relationship with the Korean government to seek financial and human resources support.*

### INTRODUCTION

With economic development, lifestyles in the world society have changed over the past few decades. Today, people are more prepared to spend more time and resources in maintaining their wellness. Participation in physically active recreation and sport activities has increased tremendously in recent years due to increased fitness and health consciousness. Along with various other activities, martial arts such as Tai Chi, Karate, Kung fu, and Taekwondo (TKD) have become an increasingly

popular recreational pursuit in Asian countries. The introduction and prevalence of martial arts have created various sporting opportunities at the recreational, amateur, and professional levels. Martial arts are widely considered valuable participatory activities for a variety of purposes, such as prevention of criminal victimization, personal growth and discovery, life transition, and task performance (Columbus & Rice, 1991). Specifically, previous studies of martial arts have supported the notion that martial arts have come to be recognized as a combat sport, a self-defense system, a physi-

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cal fitness option (e.g., Mathes & Battista, 1985), and a means of mental discipline training (e.g., Columbus & Rice, 1991; Finkenberg, 1990; Law, 2004; Richman & Rehberg, 1986; Trulson, 1986). Martial arts participants are usually trained in private martial arts schools, public health and fitness programs, martial arts curriculums in educational institutions, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)/Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), or military organizations (Ko, 2002, 2003). Ko and Yang (2008) identified a number of specific reasons for the growth of martial arts: (a) transformation of values of martial arts training, (b) modernization of instructional curriculum, (c) promotional efforts made by governments of martial arts countries-of-origin, (d) increased marketing commercialization, (e) globalization of martial arts through the sportification and formalization of its organizational structure, (f) diversification of martial arts products in movies and fitness programs, and (g) emergence of mixed martial arts.

Among the various martial arts, this chapter focuses on analyzing the reasons that led to the growth and popularity of TKD in the world. TKD, Korean traditional martial arts, is one of the major symbols of Korea. TKD is referred to as "the world's most popular martial art." The benefits of participating in TKD are widely publicized in terms of culture, spirit, mind, and body (WTF, 2014). Currently, the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) has 205 member nations with more than 80 million participants learning TKD all over the world (WTF). To a great extent, achievements in TKD's popularity are attributable to the concerted efforts that the Korean government has made over the years to promote this sport internationally (MCST, 2014). In this chapter, we will also discuss how to manage and market TKD schools in order to recruit and retain new members. The current growth in the number of private TKD schools is generating new opportunities for TKD enthusiasts. However, the rapid growth of TKD schools has resulted in a highly

competitive business environment in the Asian market environment and beyond. The operation of private TKD schools primarily relies on the revenue generated from membership fees. In order for private TKD schools to survive and thrive, it is necessary to identify marketing variables that affect current and potential members' decisions to attend TKD schools. The contents in the chapter will be divided into the following four subsections:

1. Growth and popularity of TKD,
2. Diffusion of Taekwondo in Asia and the world,
3. Korean government marketing strategies for TKD,
4. Mechanism, issues, and challenges in marketing TKD.

## **1. GROWTH AND POPULARITY OF TAEKWONDO**

### **TKD History**

TKD has been known as the most systematic and scientific Korean traditional martial art, which is an essential form of combat that requires little or no use of weapons other than the warrior's own hands and feet. TKD was independently developed over 20 centuries ago in Korea (Kim, 1997). The name, TKD, is literally translated as "the way of kicking and punching." It was derived from the ancestral martial art of Taekkyon. It was founded on a traditional folk sport linked to the Korean original 'Truth' spirit as the Sunbi spirit of Kokuryo (B.C. 37 - A.D. 321) and the Wharang spirit of Silla (B.C. 57- A.D. 935), which have been passed on for more than two thousand years (Kim, 1997). In particular, TKD became popular in Korea and has become a part of its culture and heritage.

TKD is also referred to as "the world's most popular martial art." TKD as a military art is still practiced today among the Korean military and is

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