An Analysis of Motivational and Constraint Factors Affecting Golfers with Different Frequency of Play and Membership Status

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According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF, 2003), there was a decreasing trend in number of rounds played over three years from 2001 to 2003. The number of rounds has not recovered since then (NGF, 2007). Golf industry expert (e.g., Newport, 2007) indicated that while trying hard to draw new players, the golf industry has missed more opportunities to get more rounds out of its most avid golfers. As called by the CEO of the PGA, Steranka (2007), gathering statistics and compiling research on the 'best practice' are important for marketers of golf industry to retain existing players. For doing so, the frequency of play and membership status of golfers could be used as reliable variables not only for identifying loyalty of the golfers to the game and facility, but also for determining their motivation and constraint to the sport (Petrick, et al., 1999, Zhang, et al., 2005).

However, what are the important motivational and constraint factors to influence the various golfer players? Are the golfers with membership motivated and constrained by the same factors as the non-members? What are the factors that constrain and motivate the golfers at different usage levels? These research questions need to be answered. Therefore, the purposes of this study were to (a) explore important motivational and constraint factors that affect various golf players; (b) determine how these factors affecting the golfers with and without membership; and (c) examine differences of motivational and constraint factors affecting the golfers with divergent frequencies of play.

A survey was conducted among the golfers at three medium level golf courses in southern Mississippi and the Gulf Coast region during summer of 2007. Approximately 500 survey questionnaires were distributed to potential participants and 407 valid questionnaires were received with a return rate of 81.4%. The instrument was adopted from two validated measures of Petrick et al. (1999) and NGF (2003), which contains 20 proposed motivational and 18 constraints items. The instrument was examined by using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of SPSS (13.0). The items with factor loading higher than .40 were kept, otherwise were dropped. The EFA revealed four factors (Leisure Opportunity, Social Purpose, Skill Development, and Family/Health Benefits) with 12 acceptable motivation items and three constraints factors (Intrapersonal, Lack of Time, and Cost/t-time Availability) with 11 items. The internal consistency of the motivation and constrain factors were acceptable with the alpha values of .77 to .79, respectively.

While MANOVA revealed a significant (p < .05) difference on the independent variables of membership status and frequency of pay, analytic efforts were given by using one way ANOVAs to identify significant differences of motivational and constraint factors among the participants. The result of ANOVA indicated a significant (p < .05) difference between the golf course members and non-members. The members were more likely to be motivated by the factor of 'Leisure Opportunity' than the non-members. However, the non-members demonstrated a higher level of constraint than the members (p < .01). One way ANOVA also explored a significant difference of important motivational (p < .01) and constraint factors (p < .05) perceived by the players who had various frequency of play. The most frequent players considered that 'Social Purpose' and 'Skill Development' were more important factors to motivate them than the less frequent players. 'Intrapersonal' factor posed a bigger constraint to less frequent players than other players (p < .05).

The findings of this study provided quantitative support to the theory of motivation and constraint in sport participation, and explored important motivational and constraint factors affecting different golfers. The marketing practitioners of golf businesses could use the results as a valuable reference to better design their promotions for retaining customers and the recruitment for membership. The decision makers of golf industry might consider the motivational and constraint factors reported in this study to advance their marketing strategy and to promote special programs for retaining and upgrading their current and active golf customers.