Analysis of Golfers’ Satisfaction among Status of Membership and Frequency of Participation

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Promoting consumer loyalty has been studied by researchers (e.g., Lin, 2004; Spreng & McKoy, 1996) not only for business in general but also in sports such as the golf industry. While behavior consistency and psychological commitment are important determinates of consumer loyalty, satisfaction of customers becomes an essential foundation for customer retention. Previous research literature reported that satisfaction of sport consumers could be affected by various factors such as service quality related to personnel, facility, and overall service (e.g., Caruana, 2002; Chang & Lee, 2004; Spreng & Chiou, 2002). The perception of satisfaction could vary from individual to individual due to differences in social status (e.g., income, education) and demographic characters (e.g., age, gender) (Mahoney et al., 2000; Petrick, 1999). However, what are meaningful variables that could be used to determine the level of satisfaction? How does membership status affect the customer satisfaction in sport industry (e.g., Golf)? What are the different perceptions of service satisfaction among the divergent groups with different frequencies of golf participants? Limited research reports could be found in these domains. Therefore, the study was designed to examine (a) whether the membership status could make the difference about service satisfaction in the golf industry; and (b) if frequency of participation could reflect the degree of service satisfaction among golf participants.

A regional survey was administered in the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. A total of 500 participants were targeted for this survey. Among the selected convenient pool the voluntary participants (N = 308) effectively completed the survey package that included a demographic information sheet and survey instrument with the return rate of 61.60%. The instrument was the Scale of Satisfaction for Golfer (SSG) modified form Petrick et al. (1990) and NGF (2003) with the valid 13 items categorized into factors of ‘Course Services’, ‘Course Quality’, and ‘Face Management’. The content and structure validities and internal consistency (reliability) of the instrument have been tested with satisfactory results (Zhang et al., 2009). The factors of satisfaction served as the dependent variables. The independent variables were the ‘Membership Status’ including ‘Enrolled Members’ (n = 92) and ‘Non-members’ (n = 216) of golf the courses, and the ‘Level of Participations’ in golf consisting of ‘Infrequent’ (n = 46), ‘Casual’ (n = 83), ‘Frequent’ (n = 76), and ‘Loyal’ (n = 103) groups.

The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and Independent Sample t-test were applied to examine the significant differences among the groups of ‘Enrolled Member’ and ‘Non-Member’ on satisfaction. While MANOVA revealed significant difference (p < .05) on the membership status across the factors, Independent Sample t-test was used to detect the detailed differences. The results indicated that the group of Enrolled Member (M = 4.12, SD = .64) scored significantly higher (p < .01) than the group of Non-Member (M = 3.84, SD = .71) on the factor of ‘Course Service’. The golfers with the membership were more satisfied on ‘Course Service’ than their counterparts. Similarly, ‘Enrolled Members’ (M = 4.29, SD = .70) rated significantly (p < .05) higher than ‘Non-Members’ on the factor of ‘Course Quality’. The golfers with membership had a higher satisfaction level on ‘Course Quality’ than Non-Members. A significant (p < .05) difference was also found in the result of MANOVA for the independent variable of ‘Level of Participation’. One way ANOVA and post hoc Scheffe were utilized to determine the significant differences among the groups. The ‘Frequent’ group (M = 4.38, SD = .71) scored significantly (p < .05) higher than the ‘Infrequent’ group (M = 3.96, SD = .86) on overall satisfaction. The golfers who frequently played golf had a higher level of overall satisfaction than less frequent players. In addition, the ‘Frequent’ group (M = 4.10, SD = .61) scored significantly (p < .05) higher that the ‘Casual’ group (M = 3.72, SD = .74) on ‘Course Service’ factor. The ‘Frequent’ group reported a higher level of satisfaction compared to the ‘Casual’ group on perceived ‘Course Service’ factor.

The findings of this study provided additional evidences to support the theory of consumer loyalty affected by the consumer satisfaction of service in the golf industry. The golfers with enrolled membership demonstrated higher satisfaction that served as a strong indicator reflecting their consumer loyalty to the sport and service. The survey also presented quantitative data for managers in the golf industry to decide what improvements could be made for the less satisfied golf participants in a particular customer segment. The service quality, therefore, could be
reinforced in the golf industry to promote consumer loyalty as a means to retaining current golfers and recruiting new members.