As opportunities increased to participate in various sports, people began to enjoy skiing, golf, water sports, and other activities that often demand moderate-to-heavy financial commitments. Of these sporting activities, golf’s popularity has increased substantially since the early 1990’s in Korea. Although the sport of golf has witnessed increases in popularity and participation, those individuals in Korea who want to participate in the sport have to spend a lot of money just for an opportunity to get onto a golf course (Kim, 2003). In recent years, the average green fee in Korea has been around $140 (Kim, 2006) – about three times higher than the average green fee in the United States (U.S.) – that accompany the limited number of golf courses in the country. With the plethora of golf courses in the U.S., however, golf enthusiasts are able to participate in their sport on courses throughout the country at a fraction of what it costs to play at Korean golf courses. Many Korean students participate in golf during their studies in the U.S. because of the easy access to golf courses and the relatively inexpensive green fees. Considering the increase of incoming Korean students to the U.S. institutions, it is expected that the number of Korean students participating golf would also increase.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine golf participation motivations between Korean and American college students in the U.S. This study – which is unique because of its status as the only known such examination of golf participation motivation between Korean and American college students – was based on self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory is an effective framework to consider different levels of motivation for sports and exercise participation. A primary focal point of self-determination theory has been to conceptualize human consumption behavior and motivation along a continuum, such as satisfaction, personal experience, and learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to Bryan and Solomon (2007), when individuals are self-determined to participate in sports, rather than being forced to participate it, individuals will be more willing to participate in sports, and will shift from lower degrees to higher degrees of self-determination. Previous research in physical activity and other contexts has demonstrated that satisfied motivational results are positively associated with self-governing regulations, and/or are negatively linked to more self-restraint regulation (Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004). In addition, individuals tend to adopt a new sport for competition and exert themselves to learn new techniques, skills, and approaches in order to pursue high levels of competition (Asken, 1991).

The participants in this study were 226 males (133 Korean and 93 American) and 120 females (68 Korean and 52 American) Korean and American college students (N=346) who at the time were attending two large, Midwestern universities in the U.S. Korean and American students were selected to participate in this research based on the selected class room, golf course which is owned by the university and selected tee times stratified by weekday and weekend or practice time. The Sport Motivation Scale (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, Tuson, Briere, & Blais, 1995) was administered to all participants. In addition, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed in order to measure the influence of the years of golf experience, country of origin and gender on motivation levels.

The results of the MANOVA revealed statistically significant main effects for gender, \(Wilk's \Lambda = .20, F(7, 328) = 2.416, p < .05\), year of experience, \(Wilk's \Lambda = .00, F(14, 656) = 5.752, p < .05\), country*year of experience, \(Wilk's \Lambda = .001, F(14,656) = 2.759, p < .05\), and gender*country*year of experience \(Wilk's \Lambda = .013, F(14,656) = 2.049, p < .05\). There were no significant effects for gender*country, \(Wilk's \Lambda = .150, F(7,328) = 1.550, p > .05\), and gender*years of experience \(Wilk's \Lambda = .286, F(14,656) = 1.180, p > .05\). Follow-up analyses involving ANOVA indicated that the effect of gender was significant for intrinsic motivation to stimulation, \(F(1,344)=6.11, p = .013\), and the effect of country of origin was significant for all three intrinsic motivation subscales (intrinsic motivation to know \(F(1,344)=21.87, p = .000\), intrinsic motivation stimulation \(F(1,344)=18.98, p = .000\), intrinsic accomplishment \(F(1,344)=17.21, p = .000\)), all three extrinsic motivation subscales (external regulation
Among the numerous findings revealed in this study, it was found that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation were strongly associated with golfers’ participation levels because they could discover new skills, experience greater satisfaction, feel excitement, experience rewards, secure aesthetic benefits, and reach personal goals. One of the interesting findings was that all Korean student golfers had higher scores in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation subscales than American student golfers.

The findings of this study can assist sport management and marketing professionals in their development and implementation of golf marketing strategies that focus on maximizing usage and revenues from Korean and American college student golfers. The study’s results provide sport marketers with a frame of reference for better understanding the relationship between an individual’s golf participation behavior and their motives associated with golf between Korean and American college students. By understanding golfers’ participation motivations, sport marketers can make improved decisions regarding the intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. For example, sports marketers focus on their marketing strategies on providing one-point, free lessons at a golf course for Korean golfers who have a high years of experience level. Therefore, in reference to this study, it would be useful for sport marketers to have an understanding of the levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in Korean and American college student golfers, because these motivations seem to be clearly associated with gender, country of origin, and year of experience in golf. Finally, this study supported that the SDT is a useful theoretical framework for studying and understanding the relationship between motivation and participation in golf.