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Poster

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To Stay or Not to Stay? Japanese Spectators’ Event-Related Perspectives on a Professional Golf Tournament

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Japan is one of the world’s leading golf countries. Coming with the growth of the Japanese economy, golf first gained a reputation as a high social class sport but has increasingly garnered attention from people of all socio-economic backgrounds, appealing to a wide range of ages and spectators. Especially in the business world, negotiations are often held and deals are often made during golf outings, with the term “business golf” gaining widespread popularity. As a result, golf plays an important role in Japanese culture, society, and personal life, and the golf industry in Japan has become the most prolific segment of the sport industry. In the same way, the Japanese golf tour tournaments have increasingly become a mainstream spectator sport. With Japanese golf progressively attracting attentions and professional golfers being put in the spotlight, spectatorship as a new sector of the golf industry in Japan has emerged and is currently transforming, which appears promising for the revitalization and even growth of the golf industry. However, while concepts and findings derived from previous studies on sport spectatorship may shed light on understanding golf consumers, they lack the specificity to gain an in-depth understanding of those factors affecting one’s attendance of and retention at a golf tournament. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of market demand and peripheral service at professional golf tournaments in Japan on spectators' desire to stay at and re-patronize these events.

Indications for sport event quality come together and act as foundations for event attendees to form impressions the event, both functionally and affectively. Perceived event characteristics serve as clues to attitude and behavioral intentions. Willkie (1990) and Lutz (1991) define “attitude” as the psychological responses to subjects, phenomena, and behavior, showing it as the attitude formation process of Cognitions → Affect (Attitude) → Conations (behavioral intentions). This model suggests that the cognitive aspect precedes the affective aspect of spectators’ evaluation, which is along the line of cognitive-impact-consultative paradigm (Oliver, 2015). The conative response occurs when a customer formulates a behavioral intention that is influenced by the positive cognitive and positive affective evaluation of the service encounter (Oliver 1999). Noticeably, a spectator’s behavioral intentions have been found to affect matters through consumer demand variables for core product features and peripheral services (Byon, Zhang, & Baker, 2013). It appears apparent that the enrichment of service quality can increase behavioral intentions and promote customer repurchase desire. Also, positive stay experience at the event may play a role of mediation effect in future event attendance. The proposed conceptual model is composed of three aspects, cognitive (i.e., core product and peripheral service), affective (i.e., desire to stay) and conative (i.e., re-patronage intentions) factors.

An on-site survey was conducted at a recent Chukyo TV Bridgestone Ladies Open of the LPGA regular tour tournament in Japan. Spectators (N = 602) completed a survey on consumer demand for core product features and consumer assessment of event operation quality during a tournament. SEM analyses were conducted to examine the proposed conceptual model specifying the inter-conceptual relationships among core product, peripheral service, desire to stay, and re-patronage intention factors, which indicated an acceptable fit of the model to the data, where NC = 2.12, CFI = .910, SRMR= .063, and RMSEA = .061. The core product factors had significant influences on the desire to stay (affection for the player: β = .18, p < .05; game of golf: β = .29, p < .001; course setting: β = .13, p < .05). Among the peripheral service activities, only the dimension of ‘event management’ significantly influenced the spectator’s desire to stay (event service: β = .16, p < .05; hospitality and amenity: β = .14, p > .05; accessibility: β = .00, p > .05). Comparatively speaking, core product factors had the strongest influences on the spectator’s desire to stay while ‘event management’ was also an important factor affecting one’s desire to stay. Similarly, as a result of the influence of the core product factors on re-patronage intentions, and it was partially supported, with the ‘affection for player’ and ‘game of golf’ factors significantly influencing a spectator’s re-patronage intention (affection for player: β = .17, p < .01; game of golf: β = .32, p < .001). For peripheral services, only the ‘hospitality and amenity’...
factor influenced re-patronage intention (hospitality and amenity: $\beta = .21$, $p < .05$. In addition, a significant relationship between the desire to stay and re-patronage intention ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$) was found. The structural model explained approximately 42% of the variance in the desire to stay and approximately 67% of the variance in the spectator’s re-patronage intention.

A notable contribution of the current study was its focus on the desire of stay, a unique aspect of sport consumer behavior, which is more pertinent to the sport of golf than other sport forms. While the findings related to this unique focus have direct implications to the Japanese golf marketplace, they may be of potential usefulness for other market environments although replication and cross-validation studies are highly encouraged. As evidenced in the strong relationship found between spectators’ desires to stay at tournaments and re-patronage intentions, it is logical to state that golf consumption behavior is on a continuum. In other words, improving event quality and services of professional golf helps elevate the spectators’ desire to stay and encourages their re-attendance.