Past, Present, Future: An Exploration of Domestic LPGA Fan Motivation and Identification

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By standard metrics, the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) is a successful women’s sport league (Mell, 2017). However, much of the interest and demand has shifted overseas, resulting in more international events, which can create difficulties for domestic viewers to engage with the Tour (Davies, 2018). This is problematic since domestic engagement remains vital to the LPGA, particularly with securing sponsors and attracting continued coverage of events.

Furthermore, the LPGA still possesses niche sport status. Research has demonstrated that it is particularly important for niche sports (i.e., mixed martial arts, lacrosse) to segment to specific consumers as a means of tangible (e.g., revenue) and intangible (e.g., fan identification) growth (Greenhalgh, Simmons, Hambrick, & Greenwell, 2011). Therefore, an examination of interest factors is practically beneficial for LPGA sustenance and advancement.

Robinson, Trail, and Kwon (2004) conducted similar research on consumption motives and points of attachment related to golf, via differences amongst participant gender and type of events. However, little evidence exists to explain the motives for attendance and engagement with the LPGA amongst American fans, in addition to the corresponding effects on variables such as identification and behavioral intentions. This study thus seeks to build upon prior work, but with a segmented focus on the LPGA in the United States.

Extending the body of research on the LPGA also addresses a general, ongoing need for a more in-depth understanding of women’s sports fans so as to generate a robust fan base (Ridinger & Funk, 2006). Examining the relationship of consumption motives to identification and behavioral intentions would also allow for better explanation of how fans of female and niche sports develop greater loyalty (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the following research questions:

1) What is the relationship between fan motivations and the development of identification with the LPGA?
2) What is the relationship between identification with the LPGA and consumption behaviors?

Through a collaboration with the LPGA, surveys will be emailed to an existing database comprised of past ticket purchasers and newsletter subscribers. The survey contains several scales, including the Sport Interest Inventory (Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2003), which is comprised of 18 motivational factors (e.g., bonding with friends, wholesome environment) displayed by sport fans. The survey also encompasses behavioral intentions (Fink, Trail, and Anderson, 2002) and identification to the LPGA, which will be measured with three items modified from Trail and James’ (2011) team identification index. Structural equation modeling will be used for data analysis. Each variable will be tested based on its path coefficient and significance of its relationship (e.g., motivation factor and identification, identification and consumption behaviors) with the corresponding endogenous variable.

The results will provide a detailed picture of the domestic fan base of the LPGA. Knowledge about factors related to identification and behavioral intentions will provide important implications for the Tour, potentially stimulate ideas for other women’s professional sport leagues, and expand the academic body of knowledge related to fan behavior of female sport.