

Current Status and the Determinants of Golfers' Satisfaction: An Exploratory Study

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Purpose—The purpose of this study is to examine the current state of golfers' satisfaction and to explore the determinants of golfers' satisfaction. **Design/methodology/approach**—Survey instruments were used in this study for data collection. Ten golf facilities participated in the research. Golfer satisfaction data were collected through a series of surveys conducted at each property, where 237 golfers participated in the golfer satisfaction survey. **Findings**—Five attributes (Appearance, Inside Service, Outside Service, Tee Time, and Conditions) were generated from 21 items and identified as the major contributors to golfers' satisfaction. In addition, the study shows that female golfers are more satisfied than male golfers; golf communities did the best job managing their golfers' satisfaction than private golf courses and resort golf courses. **Practical implications**—It is vital that golf facility managers understand the elements of customer satisfaction. This study not only identifies these items but also provides practitioners with insight as to the significant components of golfer satisfaction to plan, organize, and control better customer service outcomes to grow their business and the industry. **Originality/value**—The golf industry is in decline, yet only few researchers have studied this industry. By examining the determinants of golfers' satisfaction, this paper provides significant information to golf management.

Keywords: golf, satisfaction, determinants, exploratory

The golf industry is a significant part of the hospitality industry. According to the 2014 National Golf Foundation (NGF) Report, there are 16,000 golf courses, 24.7 million golfers in the U.S., and \$76 billion revenues (including real estate) was generated from this industry (NFG, 2014). However, the golf industry is in decline. The number of golfers has been reduced from 30 million in 2005 to 24.7 million in 2013 (NFG, 2014). This poses a serious threat to the future of golf. The purpose of this study is to examine the current state of golfers' satisfaction and to explore the determinants of golfers' satisfaction. Specifically, this study is designed to help golf facility managers identify key variables to both the factors that influence a golfer's

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satisfaction and the elements that drive that satisfaction. Without this knowledge, managers can only speculate as to where to place vital and dwindling resources to reverse these serious and unfavorable trends.

Literature Review

Studies on Golfers' Satisfaction

Many studies have examined the relationship between tourists' satisfaction levels and their intentions to repurchase the experience (Barsky, 1992). The underlying assumption of these studies is that if an experience has a positive effect on an individual, he or she is more likely to repeat the activity enjoyed. While there is no guarantee that a satisfied consumer will be a repeat visitor, quite often a dissatisfied customer will not return (Dube, Renaghan, and Miller, 1994). If management knows how the components of a product or service affect consumers' satisfaction today, the challenge of planning for future consumers may be limited almost exclusively to adapting current products and services to match the current "customer satisfaction forecast" (Barsky and Labagh, 1992).

It is not surprising that only a few studies address the satisfaction of golfers, a particular category of active sport tourism. While one of the earliest studies (Petrick & Backman, 2002) examined whether experience use history affected overall satisfaction and intention to return, a number of more recent studies have attempted to provide a more in-depth understanding of golf tourists' satisfaction. For example, Correia, Barros, and Silvestre (2007) used a mixed logit approach, while two other studies (Hennessey, Yun, MacDonald, and MacEachern, 2007; Hutchinson, Lai, and Wang, 2009) used structural equation modeling to examine the return intention of golf tourists. While these studies have provided some insight into the golf tourists' satisfaction, clearly more research is needed. In addition, there was no study that examined the determinants of golfers' satisfaction. Therefore, this paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge in this field by examining golfers' satisfaction.

Determinants of Golfers' Satisfaction

There are numerous variables that affect a golfer's satisfaction in particular (Groch, 2013). For example, the tee times a golfer receives, knowledge of staff, cleanliness of carts, etc. However, there is limited research focused on golf management (Fjellstul and Tesone, 2008) and only few studies research the determinants of golfers' satisfaction. Based upon the information gained from interviewing twenty-seven managers at golf facilities in southwest Florida, it was concluded that a list of 21 items be considered as determinants of golfers' satisfaction (see Table 1).

Why Golfer Satisfaction is Important?

Unlike other industries, the golf industry has relied more on the discretionary customer (i.e., Golfers), therefore golfer satisfaction is very likely to play a significant role in a golf facility's financial success. In fact, many researchers have studied the relationship between customer satisfaction and financial performance, yet mixed results have been found (Bernhardt, Donthu, and Kennett, 2000). However,

Table 1 Items Affecting Golfer's Satisfaction

Tee times I get
The process by which I make tee times
Speed of check in
Knowledge of staff
Courtesy of staff (inside)
Tournament operation
Shop appearance
Quality of products
Product selection
Product pricing
Handling of telephone calls
Courtesy of staff (outside)
Cleanliness of carts
Cleanliness of clubs
Clubs ready on time
Convenience of bag drop
Pace of play
Condition of restrooms
Golf Instruction
Condition of greens
Course condition

Nelson, Rust, Zahorik, Rose, Batalden, and Siemanski (1992) found that a positive relationship does exist and demonstrated that this relationship holds true for all profitability measures—earnings, net revenues, and return on assets. In addition, Bernhardt et al. (2000) suggested that a positive and significant relationship exists between changes in customer satisfaction and changes in the financial performance of a firm. Bernhardt et al. (2000) also stated that, in the short run, this positive and significant relationship may be obscured by many factors, but may be significantly positive in the long run.

However, opposite conclusions have also been drawn from many other studies including Schneider (1991, p. 154). In his review article on service quality and profits, he stated “customer service-quality perceptions and satisfaction are sometimes, but not always, reflected in profits.” In addition, Tornow and Wiley (1991) found a negative correlation between customer satisfaction and gross profits. In addition, Wiley (1991) concluded that all dimensions of customer satisfaction related negatively to financial performance. Although these findings might

seem counterintuitive, on closer examination, they may not be that surprising. For example, a business might decide that increasing its customer satisfaction is important, but in doing so, has to spend a large sum of money to implement this strategy. This could result in high customer satisfaction, but lower profits. On the other hand, internal cost-cutting measures such as lowering training expenses or postponing facility upgrades may make a firm seem more profitable in any given time period, even if customers are not satisfied.

Therefore, it could be true that a multitude of factors could mask the true relationship between customer satisfaction and financial performance if the examination was based on the data received from one business (Chi and Gursoy, 2009).

The purpose of this study is not only to examine overall golfer satisfaction but also to examine more thoroughly the factors or determinants of satisfaction. Data collection, variables, and data analysis method will be discussed in the following session.

Methodology

Data Collection

Survey instruments were used in this study for data collection. A stratified random sample of twelve country clubs in Charlotte, Lee, and Collier counties in Southwest Florida (SWFL) was selected among a population of approximately 120 clubs. Ten of twelve golf facilities agreed to participate in the research. The sample was stratified to include public, private, resort and golf communities. Golfer satisfaction data were collected through a series of surveys conducted at each property, where 237 golfers participated in the golfer satisfaction survey.

Variables

To establish golfer satisfaction associated with major operational components of their golfing experience, twenty-seven golf club managers were interviewed in the southwest Florida area. Based upon these interviews, 21 items were included as possible determinants of golfer's satisfaction. Overall satisfaction was added to develop a comprehensive view on golfer's satisfaction. These 22 items/questions were scored on a 5 point scale: 1= Completely Dissatisfied, 2= Somewhat Dissatisfied, 3= Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied, 4 = Somewhat Satisfied, 5= Completely Satisfied.

Data Analysis

In the study, data were analyzed in three stages. First, the descriptive statistics showed an overview of the golfers' satisfaction on the services they received. Second, factor analysis was conducted to reduce the numbers of items that predict golfers' satisfaction. Finally, a multiple regression was employed to identify which factors were related to overall golfers' satisfaction (factors generated from the previous step were used as independent variables).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Two hundred thirty-seven golfers completed the Golfer Satisfaction Survey (see Table 2). Of the 237 golfers from 10 country clubs that participated in the golfer’s survey, 72% were men, 27% were women and 1% did not respond to the gender question. The breakdown of participants by type of facility was: 56% Golf Community, 20% Public, 19% Private and 5% Resort. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviation of the attributes to golfers’ satisfaction. Skewness and kurtosis on each variable ranged from -.86 to .71. Table 3 shows the breakdown of overall satisfaction by gender and by type of facility.

As shown in Table 3, female golfers have a higher overall satisfaction score at 4.67, while male golfers have a lower score at 4.53; there was no significant difference between the two groups ($p > .1$). It is interesting that most of the golfers are satisfied: 96% of female golfers and 93% of male golfers answered 4 “somewhat

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation
T Times I Get	4.35	.770
T Time Process	4.37	.714
Speed of Check in	4.59	.628
Knowledge of Staff	4.69	.569
Courtesy of Staff	4.80	.481
Tournament Operation	4.40	.744
Shop Appearance	4.55	.654
Quality of Products	4.18	.870
Product Selection	3.70	1.003
Product Pricing	3.84	.890
Phone Calls	4.58	.626
Courtesy of Staff	4.76	.513
Cleanliness of Clubs	4.59	.766
Cleanliness of Carts	4.66	.593
Clubs on Time	4.76	.533
Bag Drop	4.54	.728
Pace of Play	3.99	.880
Condition of Restrooms	4.56	.619
Golf Instruction	4.55	.769
Condition of Greens	4.23	.869
Course Condition	4.35	.777
Overall Satisfaction	4.57	.596

Table 3 Satisfaction Scores by Gender and Type of Facility

		Overall Satisfaction
By Gender	Female	4.67
	Male	4.53
By Type of Facility	Golf Community	4.61
	Private Golf Course	4.588
	Resort Golf Course	4.17

satisfied” or 5 “completely satisfied” when being asked about their overall satisfaction. When breaking down by type of facility, golf communities earned the highest satisfaction score (4.61), while resort golf courses got the lowest (4.17).

Principal Component Analysis and Reliabilities

Using SPSS 22, a principal component analysis was conducted on 21 attribute items to reduce the data. The procedure used a loading cutoff value of 0.45 for item inclusion (Tabachnik & Fidell, 1996), and varimax (orthogonal) rotation with both eigenvalue criterion and Scree Test to identify the number of dimensions. The reliability was assessed by Cronbach's Alpha.

The results of principal component analysis and reliabilities were reported in Table 4. The principal component analysis with varimax rotation of 21 attributes produced five component dimensions based on both latent root and Scree Test criteria. Both Bartlett test of Sphericity ($p < .000$) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.829) indicated that using factor analysis on these attributes was highly appropriate (Norusis, 1992). The five components explained 63.9% of the variance. Because of a cut-off loading value of 0.5 for item inclusion, all 21 items were retained in the analysis and each item was loaded on one component only. The high loadings indicated a good correlation between the items and component grouping to which they belonged. The components were averaged for composite scores and labeled as “Appearance”, “Outside Service”, “Inside Service”, “Tee Time”, and “Conditions”. The reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha) ranged from 0.76 to 0.807, which indicated acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally, 1994).

Multiple Regression

To identify which factors were related to overall golfers' satisfaction, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed on the independent variables of these five factors (Appearance, Outside Service, Inside Service, Tee Time, and Conditions) versus the dependent variable of overall satisfaction.

Standardized difference of fit value (SDF), standardized difference in beta value (SDB), Cook's distances, and case wise analysis were conducted to detect outliers in the data. The cases that identified outliers on two or more indices were removed from the database.

After deleting outliers, skewness and kurtosis on each variable ranging from 0.06 to 0.76, the normality assumptions were achieved. In addition, besides linearity

Table 4 Principal Component Analysis of Golf Club Attributes

Attributes	Factors				
	Appearance ($\alpha=.807$)	Outside Service ($\alpha=.760$)	Inside Service ($\alpha=.787$)	Tee Time ($\alpha=.772$)	Conditions ($\alpha=.802$)
Product Selection	.877				
Quality of Products	.848				
Product Pricing	.832				
Shop Appearance	.531				
Clubs on Time		.870			
Bag Drop		.766			
Cleanliness of Clubs		.732			
Cleanliness of Carts		.697			
Pace of Play		.543			
Courtesy of Staff(outside)		.513			
Golf Instruction		.502			
Tournament Operation		.501			
Knowledge of Staff			.809		
Speed of Check in			.615		
Courtesy of Staff (inside)			.607		
Phone Calls			.584		
T Times I Get				.808	
T Time Process				.681	
Course Condition					.822
Condition of Greens					.750
Condition of Restrooms					.552

KMO measure of sampling adequacy = 0.829. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 1446.8 (210 d.f., $p < 0.0001$).

and multicollinearity, (tolerance value and variance inflation factor) all assumptions were met. The variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance are two closely related statistics for diagnosing collinearity in multiple regression.

The stepwise solution indicated that outside service ($p < .0001$), condition ($p < .0001$), and inside service ($p < .0001$) contributed to the prediction of overall golfers' satisfaction. The variance in overall quality explained by these three predictors was 47.2% (R^2). In addition, all of these three predictors were positively correlated to the overall satisfaction. However, appearance and tee times were excluded in the regression model, which indicated that they were not significant predictors of overall golfers' satisfaction. The results of regression are reported in Table 5.

Table 5 Regression Results

	B	SE B	β	T	p	99% CI
(Constant)	-.177	.356		-.498	.619	[-1.103, 0.748]
Outside Service	.443	.067	.377	6.608	.000	[0.269, 0.618]
Condition	.316	.055	.301	5.737	.000	[0.173, 0.459]
Inside Service	.286	.081	.196	3.536	.000	[0.076, 0.496]

The regression equation based on these factors was:

$$y = -.177 + .443 \text{ inside service} + .316 \text{ condition} + .286 \text{ outside service}$$

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the current status of golfers' satisfaction and explored the determinants of golfers' satisfaction. Two hundred thirty-seven golfers from ten different golf courses participated in this study.

According to the descriptive statistics, there was no significant difference between female golfers and male golfers in terms of overall satisfaction, even though female golfers have achieved higher overall satisfaction score (4.67 vs. 4.53). In addition, female golfers have a higher percentage of satisfied golfers (96% of female golfers vs. 93% of male golfers). Perhaps, golf managers need to do a better job serving their male customers.

When compared by type of facility, the results showed that golf communities did the best job managing their golfers' satisfaction (4.61), private golf courses also did well at (4.58), but resort golf courses received only 4.17. This may be true for many reasons. One possible reason is the difference in service expectations. Resort courses traditionally charge a significant premium to play golf at their facilities. For example, according to the National Golf Foundation, the median cost for 18 holes of golf at a public course on the weekend is \$36 (including a cart), for a privately owned facility open to the public the median cost was \$40 for a weekend round, while resort courses averaged \$86 per round (NGF 2012). These price differences can give rise to higher expectations in the areas of inside services, outside services, and conditions thus reducing the overall satisfaction.

One of the purposes of this study was to explore the determinants of golfers' satisfaction. Satisfaction information on twenty-one items was collected from golfers. All of these items were approved by golf managers from the industry. Out of these 21 items, "Product Selection", "Product Pricing", and "Pace of Play" received the lowest scores. Golf managers should be aware of this information to improve the golfers' experience. In addition, using factor analysis, five attributes were generated from 21 items and identified as the major contributors to golfers' satisfaction. They were: Appearance, Inside Service, Outside Service, Tee Time, and Conditions. The results of multiple regression analysis show that inside service, outside service, and condition are significant indicator of golfers' overall satisfaction because they are positively correlated to satisfaction. Tee time and appearance were not significant indicators of golfers' satisfaction. That is to say, golf management

should focus more on the services they offer to golfers, who care more about the experience they receive, but not so much about the appearance of the golf shop.

The results of this study not only provides a guidepost for future research but also provides practical data for practitioners. In addition, this study can be used as a benchmark upon which other facilities can measure their own relative strengths and weaknesses. Specifically, the research indicates that golf operations need to invest in training and communications to have a well informed and knowledgeable Pro Shop staff (.809). They may also need to employ queuing studies to minimize customer wait times (.615). Golf courses also need to provide superior course conditions (.822) and, in particular, excellent greens (.750). This may require golf course operators to engage in such practices as fertigation and over-seeding to achieve these results. Finally, country clubs need to ensure members experience an efficient bag room (.870) and bag drop (.766) operation with a courteous staff (.513). This small factor cannot be overlooked because the first and last service experience a golfer has is with outside services.

In conclusion, this exploratory study is one of the few studies that focus on golf management, and the first study to examine the determinants of golfers' satisfaction, which fills the gap in the literature. As the golf industry grows, this area should receive more attention from academia. However, the major limitation of this study is sample size. All 237 participants came from 10 golf courses in the southwest Florida area. For further research, researchers should recruit more participants, and cover more national golf courses other than just within southwest Florida.

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