Asian Culture as a Moderating Concept Affecting the Motivation of Consuming LPGA Events Filled with Leading Asian Golfers: Development of a Conceptual Framework

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Over the last two decades, the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) has witnessed the dominance of Asian players. According to the LPGA players’ world ranking by prize money, the number of Asian players ranked within the top 30 has increased from 1 in 1995 to 17 in 2015 (LPGA, 2016b). During the same period, 13 Asian players received the ‘Rookie of the Year Award’; meanwhile, only 4 U.S. players were on the list during the same time period (LPGA, 2016a). Although an increasing number of Asian players have competed in professional sport leagues in the developed economies, such as the Major League Baseball (MLB) and the Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA), the number of players who are viewed as the best players in respective leagues is still minimal. Rather, the dominance of Asian golfers in LPGA tours is a very unique phenomenon that is rarely found in other professional sports. This has become apparent in the broadcasted LPGA programming since the camera usually follows golfers at the top of leaderboard; typically, audiences would not be able to watch their favorite golfers unless the golfers are among the leading scorers (Chung, Derdenger, & Srinivasan, 2013).

In spite of the rapid emergence of Asian golfer, a majority of the American consumers of LPGA events are not Asian. Those who consume, watch, and attend LPGA tournaments have not been changed much. According to a survey conducted by the Sports Business Daily (2011), fans of LPGA are typically male (63.4%), boomers between 45 to 64 years old (41%), White/Caucasian (83.9%), and of high socioeconomic status (43.5%). The discrepancy between tour leading golfers and main spectator group in the LPGA is surely a unique situation. In contrast, the viewer demographic profile of a NHL regular season was that of 92% White, 3% Black, and 2% Hispanic (Thompson, 2014); in the meantime, the dominant number of NHL players are White with only 5% being black (Judd, 2015). With the notable discrepancies in LPGA, it is still unknown about the extent to which the cultural aspect would affect the motivation of LPGA consumers. Previous studies on sport consumer motivations have primarily based on the traditional demographic profiles of players and consumers that are of high congruence, namely the underlying assumption is that star players and general consumers are all from Western countries.

To what extent the traditional research findings on consumer motivation are still applicable to LPGA tours is questionable. Today, golfers in the LPGA tours are becoming more internationalized, with many coming from Asian countries. Although some international players do interviews in English and some do need interpreters, today commentators are so used to international golfers that they seldom mention their intentional background even when a LPGA event is held in America. It is also true that the Asian population in North America has been increased drastically; from 2000 to 2010, the Asian and Asian American populations had been increased by 46%, which was faster than any other ethnic groups, and 5.6% of the American population (i.e., over 17 million people) identify them as Asian or Asian American (East-West Center, 2016). The increased presence of Asian communities has provided convenient opportunities for American consumers to access and understand Asian culture. Without a doubt, the impact of these societal changes needs to be considered when studying sport consumers. Through conducting a comprehensive review of literature as the primary methodology of inquiry, the purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual framework for studying Asian Culture as a moderating concept in the relationships of LPGA consumer motivation to their consumption behavior.

Trail, Anderson, and Fink (2000) proposed nine motives that explains the reasons for sport spectatorship, including vicarious achievement, social interaction, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetic, escape (relation), physical attractiveness, quality of physical skill, drama/excitement, and family. McDonald, Milne, and Hong (2002) found that motivations of golf spectators are different from of team sports spectators on the motives of achievement, skill mastery, physical risk, aesthetics, aggression, value development, and self-actualization. Gauthier (1994) found major
reasons of attending LPGA to be excitement, drama, and shot-making finesse. Across these studies, there are common factors that can be drawn for the motives of LPGA spectators such as aesthetics, physical skill, drama and excitement, and acquisition of knowledge. Nonetheless, these previous studies were conducted under the traditional premise that the cultural and demographic backgrounds of spectators were similar to those of the players.

Previous studies revealed that culture affects consumers’ motivation. For instance, Frías, Rodríguez, Alberto Castañeda, Sabiote, and Buhalis (2012) observed that there was an interaction effect between culture and information source agencies. Moreover, some researchers found the role of culture in the motivation of international travel to participate in sport events. Kim and Chalip (2004), in their study on American sport consumers’ potential intention to visit 2002 FIFA World Cup Tournament, found that when sport consumers highly desire to learn about the culture, they would have increased interest in attending sport events. Funk and Bruun (2007) found that attitude toward a country, cultural experience, and knowledge learning on new culture had a significant impact on the motivation of international sport participation. Peñaloza (1994) contented that cultural experience would lead to an individual’s behavior change in accordance with the new culture he/she experienced.

By following the planned behavior theory (Ajzen, 1991), this study proposes that experience and learning of Asian culture alters the relationship between consumer motivation and LPGA event consumption. Essentially, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and behavior toward Asian culture would moderate the influence of common motivation factors of aesthetics, physical skill, drama and excitement, and acquisition of knowledge on LPGA consumption. Given that the cultural concept has previously not been considered as a moderator when studying spectators motivation for LPGA event consumption, the developed conceptual model can be utilized to study contemporary LPGA consumers. The research findings will surely help the LPGA to promote its tours to audiences with diverse backgrounds.