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Influence of experience and trip characteristics on satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Feelings of satisfaction have been shown to be an important concept when understanding the experience of the tourist as a gauge of the quality of the experience as well as a measure of potential for future behavior. Further research is needed to better understand what influences feelings of satisfaction. This paper examines the impact of levels of experience/ability and trip characteristics. Results indicate that players with higher levels of ability were more likely to be satisfied with the experience.

Keywords: *satisfaction, experiential consumption, sport tourism*

Feelings of satisfaction have been shown to be an important concept when understanding the experience of the tourist. Consumer behavior research has looked at satisfaction as a gauge of the quality of the experience as well as a measure of potential for future behavior (Holbrook, 2006; Yi, 1990). Research within tourism has identified satisfaction as a significant predictor of intentions for future behavior, such as likelihood to return or recommend (Hutchinson, Youcheng, & Fujun, 2010; Metin Kozak & Beaman, 2006; Petrick & Backman, 2001, 2002). Therefore, it is no surprise that researchers have investigated factors that influence satisfaction such as quality (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Beier, Woratschek, & Zieschang, 2004), value (Bowen & Clarke, 2002; Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009) and involvement (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005). Factors used previously include nationality (M. Kozak, 2001) demographics (Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1985), loyalty (Petrick, 2004; Petrick & Backman, 2001; Petrick & Sirakaya, 2004) and experience use history (Hammitt, Hammitt, Backlund, & Bixler, 2004; Petrick, 2002). Understanding these factors that can lead to variations in individuals' level of satisfaction is an important link to understanding the tourist experience.

Understandings of satisfaction are equally important to active sport tourism experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine if differences in traveler characteristics are related to variations in satisfaction with active sport tourism experiences. Following previous

research, two types of variations will be examined in this study; experience with the sport and trip characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

Data used in this study was collected as part of a larger project investigating experience of sport tourists in a well know golf destination. Potential respondents were recruited at one of three golf courses immediately following their round of golf which resulted in 543 collected surveys. Measuring feelings of satisfaction immediately after the experience was determined to be an important variation from previous studies of satisfaction which often ask for reflections of satisfaction weeks or months later. Satisfaction was measured using four similar concepts using a 7-point Likert-type scale (scale anchors are in parentheses), impressions of the event (very good/very bad), the experience (terrible/delightful), pleasure of the experience (very pleased/very displeased) and satisfaction (very satisfied/very dissatisfied). Information concerning sport experience was gathered along with trip characteristics. Each experience and trip variable was categorized as high, medium, low for analysis using ANOVA.

RESULTS

All ANOVA results for individual variables were non-significant except for self-rated ability. The higher a respondent rate their own ability, the more likely they were to be satisfied with the golf experience. However, other experience and trip characteristics do not explain a significant amount of traveler satisfaction with the experience.

Variable	Golf experience			Vacation experience			Trip characteristics				
	Low	Med	High	Variable	Low	Med	High	Variable	Low	Med	High
Self-rated ability	20.5* (4.91)	21.1* (4.16)	22.4* (4.39)	Golf vacations in past 5 years	21.67 (4.32)	21.25 (4.49)	20.96 (4.19)	Days at destination	21.63 (4.44)	21.37 (4.49)	21.16 (3.88)
Rounds in previous year	21.27 (4.43)	21.55 (3.94)	21.19 (4.52)	Golf destinations in past 5 yrs	21.48 (4.34)	21.28 (4.01)	20.90 (4.70)	Rounds per trip	21.34 (4.15)	21.29 (4.66)	21.59 (3.57)
Years of golf experience	21.30 (4.27)	21.55 (3.81)	20.90 (4.91)								

* significant at $p < .05$

RECOMMENDATIONS

While some previous research has shown the benefit for using experience and trip characteristics to better understand the resulting tourism experience, only self-rated ability explained any further variance in the satisfaction scores. This perhaps due to the difficulty of the courses that were involved with the study; the courses were difficult enough that a higher level of skill was needed to enjoy the golfing experience. Marketers of golf tourism should be conscious that the difficulty of the course could potentially have an inverse effect on satisfaction if the participant does not possess the necessary skill to enjoy the experience. Research has shown the importance of satisfaction to repeat behavior (Hutchinson, Youcheng, & Fujun, 2010), therefore

future studies should include additional variables that might explain more variance in ratings of satisfaction. Additional research in golf tourism should also focus on variations with experiences at different destinations, or even different courses within one larger destination.

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