



Why do Korean golf travelers cross national borders to play golf?

Dr. Jeongsun Kimmm
UA Consulting, Bundang
Republic of Korea
Email: jskimmm@live.co.kr

Abstract

Golfing is a lively and increasing activity for tourists internationally and is a rapidly growing niche tourism sport. Partaking in golf while on a holiday is a budding idea and there are a number of tactics in tourism market segmentation based on trip motivations and special interest sports. Motivations for golfing and international golf traveling have not been studied as extensively as motivations for other types of travel and leisure activities. In this research, motivations for travelling and golfing were examined not only from academic but also non-academic viewpoints. This research was designed to examine Korean golfers' motivations for international golf travel. The questionnaire survey was completed by 461 Korean golfers in 2007 in Seoul, Korea. The results suggest that Korean golfers, mainly social and enthusiastic golfers, have five motivations for international golf travel. These motives can be summarized by the push-pull-influence factor model, which is recommended for further testing in future research.

Keywords: Leisure, activity, international, golf, travel, sport, tourism, motivation, model.

Introduction

The records of ancient Korea, especially the Annals of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1863), indicate that Koreans played a version of golf called Gyg Gu (National Institute of Korean History 2005). However, this game was not enjoyed popularly by the general public, and neither was modern golf until Korean professional golfers gained a series of victories in international golf championships from 1998 onwards. The sport of golf, highly affected by these consecutive tournament wins, started to gain both attention and popularity (CNN 1998). As a result, there has been an increase in golf participation in Korea and also an increase in the number of international golf travelers seeking cheaper and more convenient opportunities to play on foreign golf courses.

According to Seo (2003), the number of golfers increased by 11.5%, and the number of golf centers by 21.4%, between 2001 and 2002. However, Bonk stated in 2004, "[Korea has] only 50 public courses. The other 120 or so courses are at private clubs with six-figure [membership] fees" (para.10). The number of international golf tourists was expected to increase from between 100,000 and 150,000 in 2003 to between 300,000 and 400,000 in 2004 (Sim 2004). About 500,000 golfers were estimated to have taken part in international golf travel in 2004 (Hankyoreh 2005), 575,000 golfers in 2005 and 635,000 in 2006 (Kolec, 2006). It was also estimated



that these golfers spent about US \$858,570,000 in 2004, \$1,006,819,000 in 2005, and \$1,182,710,000 in 2006 (Kolec, 2006). According to this research survey, the majority (75%) of the surveyed golfers had started playing golf since 1998 from which time Korean professional golfers continued to achieve victories on international golf tours. These findings indicate that championship wins by Korean professional golfers have played a role in the increase in the number of Korean golfers and golf tourists who will fly for several hours to a foreign golf destination. However, little has been discovered about Korean golfers' motivations for international golf travel, even though this new phenomenon has received attention from the mass media (e.g. Hankyoreh, 2005). Therefore, it was considered important to cover this deficiency, and the research aim was to find the reasons why Korean golfers choose to cross national borders for golfing.

Literature Review

Golf in History and in Korea

Golf could have originated anywhere in the world. Brasch (1971) stated that “a shepherd, to pass the time, was idly sending pebbles flying through the air with his crook until one fell by chance into a rabbit hole” (p115). However, it is known that “early forms of golf were played in the Netherlands first and then in Scotland” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010 para1). This popularly known record, combined with the past comparative unpopularity of golf in the Republic of Korea (Korea), has possibly made many Koreans think of golf as a purely western sport. Korean traditional golf, Gyg Gu, once enjoyed by the ruling class, seems to have fallen into a period of redundancy due to political conflicts such as Gimyo Sahwa in 1519, and Eulsa Sahwa in 1545 (The Academy of Korean Studies, n.d.), when turmoil rather than pleasure dominated.

The first modern golf course with 18 holes on the Korean peninsula was established in 1924 (Doosan, n.d.). However, playing golf appears to have been enjoyed only by a few who could afford the time and high cost, and the game remained extremely exclusive, beyond the majority of the Korean population even in 1988 when Ok-Hee Ku became the first Korean player to win an international LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) tournament (Blauvelt, 2003). It seems to have been only in 1998 when Koreans started paying greater attention to golf, thanks to the LPGA championship win by Korean professional golfer Seri Pak. According to CNN (1998), “When Pak sank an 18-foot (5.5-meter) put to win the title, most of her homeland [Korea] was sleeping. But television stations played her winning shot over and over again. . . A game Koreans once considered a luxury sport is gaining popularity, thanks to the U.S. Women’s Open win by 20-year-old Pak Se Ri” (para.1 & 3). Korean golf fans’ passion was subsequently fed by Pak’s multiple victories from 1998 to 2007 (Wikimedia, 2010).

Other Korean professional golfers’ championship wins have also contributed to Koreans’ growing enthusiasm for the game. According to USA Today statistics, South Korean-born professional golfers won four championships in 1998, six in 1999, three in 2000, seven in 2001, nine in 2002, and three in 2003 (Blauvelt, 2003). LPGA championship wins have meant not only international prestige and stardom,



but also wealth. “In 1998 Pak reportedly signed a multimillion-dollar contract . . . That likely caught the eyes of Korean parents” (Blauvelt, 2003 para.27). “Pak has won nearly \$8 million on the tour . . . at [the age of] 26, she has already qualified for entry into the LPGA Hall of Fame” (Bonk, 2004 para.14). LPGA championship wins by Korean golfers meant overcoming various difficulties. Pak stated, “First of all, the language, the culture, the food, it’s all different . . . The only thing that’s the same is driving on the right side and golf” (Bonk, 2004 para.27). Thus, continuing and multiple championship wins by role models like Pak seem to have supplied Korean golf enthusiasts with the ambition of overcoming hardships and achieving fortune and celebrity on the international stage. LPGA Commissioner Votaw, in an interview with the Los Angeles Times, stated, “[Pak] gave the entire country of Korea the motivation and inspiration for fathers and their daughters to say, ‘Hey, if she can do it, we can do it’ ” (Bonk, 2004 para.4).

The consequences of the popularity of golf in Korea are increases in 1) the number of professional and amateur golfers, and also 2) golf facilities for learning and practicing. During 2001-2002 the number of golfers increased by 11.5%, and the number of golf centers increased by 21.4% (Seo, 2003). Another outcome of this growing enthusiasm for golf has been an increased demand for overseas golf travel to pursue cheaper and more convenient opportunities to play. “The number [of] traveling golfers [in 2004 was] expected to reach 300,000 to 400,000, many more than the 100,000 to 150,000 estimated for 2003” (Sim, 2004 para.9). Koreans’ golf ardor has generated remarkable profits for the golf industry. Blauvelt (2003) reports, “Five years ago, the vast majority of LPGA TV rights fees came from the USA. Now the majority comes from outside the USA, and the largest percentage is from South Korea. The highest LPGA merchandise revenues now come from Korea” (para.5).

Travel and Golf Motivations

In the ancient and medieval eras, populations appear to have been fairly immobile. Robinson (1976) observes that, “It has been customary to believe that in late medieval and early modern times the population was largely immobile, that people were born, lived and died in tightly circumscribed surroundings, seldom, if ever, moving far from their native heath” (p.6). However, pleasure travel has taken-off in modern times. Elliott (1997) states that, “in 1995, there was a total of 567 million international tourist arrivals compared to 25 million in 1950” (p.4). The international arrivals recorded by the World Tourism Organization (n.d.) show a steady increase in the number of international travelers.

Research on travel motivations has been conducted steadily from various angles since the 1990s in response to the increase of tourists. Some examples are: tourist motivations (Lundberg, 1971); pleasure vacation motivations (Crompton, 1979); sightseeing tourist motivation (Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991); Canadian ecotourist motivations (Eagles, 1992); Japanese overseas tourist motivations (Cha et al 1995); mainland Chinese visitor motivations to visit Hong Kong (Qiu & Lam, 1999); skiers’ motivation (Holden, 1999); commercial whitewater rafting motivations (Fluker & Turner, 2000); drag racing spectator motivations (Patterson & Aitken-Turner, 2002); tourist motivations by nationality and destinations (Kozak, 2002); German tourist



motivations (Prebensen et al., 2003); Colonial Cup race spectator motivations (Daniels & Norman, 2005); international trophy hunter motivations (Radder, 2005); Taiwanese seniors' travel motivations (Jang & Wu, 2006); Kenyan national reserve visitor motivations (Beh & Bruyere, 2007); backpacker motivations (Maoz, 2007); and convention attendee motivations (Severt et al., 2007).

As a result of these travel motivation studies, diverse motivations have been discovered. Some examples from recent research are: cultural experience (Kozak 2002; Guzman et al 2006; Beh & Bruyere 2007; Rittichaiinuwat 2008); escape (Pearce & Lee 2005; Swanson & Horridge 2006; Guzman et al 2006; Severt et al 2007; Beh & Bruyere 2007); relaxation (Kozak 2002; Pearce & Lee 2005; Rittichaiinuwat 2008); nature appreciation (Pearce & Lee 2005; Swanson & Horridge 2006; Beh & Bruyere 2007; Rittichaiinuwat 2008); personal development/growth (Pearce & Lee 2005; Beh & Bruyere 2007); education/learning (Swanson & Horridge 2006; Poria et al 2006; Severt et al 2007; Beh & Bruyere 2007); novelty (Pearce & Lee 2005; Guzman et al 2006); and networking/socialising (Guzman et al 2006; Severt et al 2007).

Some other examples are: pleasure-seeking/fantasy (Kozak 2002); fitness (Swanson & Horridge 2006); adventure (Beh & Bruyere 2007); good climate (Rittichaiinuwat 2008); emotional involvement, feeling connected with heritage (Poria et al 2006); business activities, and job opportunities (Severt et al 2007).

Regarding motivations to play golf, Russell (2006) lists five reasons: getting outdoors, exercise, building character, having fun, and making new friends (para.2-7). According to Maxlifestyle (2007), "[people] play golf for health reasons . . . for fun . . . to be a professional golfer and earn money. . . to unwind from the stress of their weekday job. . . for finding business partners and making business deals. . . [to] socialize with fellow golfers or spectators" (para.1-4).

Theoretical Framework

Travel motives can be summarized by the two-factor classification (Crompton 1979): the push/intrinsic factor from individuals (e.g. escape), and the pull/external factor from tourist attractions/destinations (e.g. good weather). Golfing motives, explained by Russell (2006) and Maxlifestyle (2007), can also be summarized by the two-factor framework (Crompton 1979), which can also be utilized for Korean golfers' motivations. However, a three-factor (push, pull, and influence) model (see Figure 1) seems to be more adequate in explaining Korean golfers' international travelling motives, since Koreans turn out to be greatly affected by the social trend of golfing influenced by Korean professional golfers' championship wins.

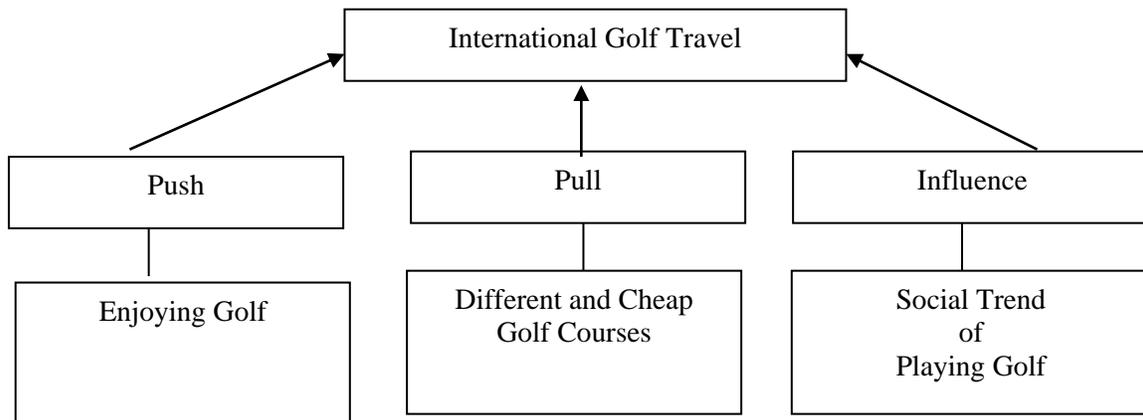


Figure 1. Three-Factor Motivation Model of Korean Golfers' International Golf Travel

Methodology

A questionnaire survey was conducted in Seoul, which is the area most crowded with golfers and golf centers. Of the Korean population, 43% resided in Seoul and another suburban province in 2005 (Statistics Korea, n.d.). In 2007 there were 504 reported golf practice centers in Seoul, and 521 in other provincial areas of Korea (Leisure Bank 2007). One district from Seoul was selected as the main venue because it had the largest number of golf centers (100). The golf centers were contacted either by phone or direct visits seeking cooperation. Finally, the survey was conducted at 12 golf centers. Judgment sampling was used in selecting golfers, who were asked to participate before or after practicing golf, or during a break. The few golfers who were in a hurry to practice or did not take a rest while practicing were excluded. The research period extended over three months from March to May 2007. The total of completed questionnaires was 461, from 270 male and 191 female golfers. The questionnaire used a 7-point Likert-type scale (7, very strongly agree to 1, very strongly disagree).

Results

Sample characteristics

The golfers' ages ranged from 19 to 65, but 88% were between 26 and 55 years old. Of four income categories (little, average, above average, and significantly above average), 92% golfers self-identified as average or above-average earners. The lowest self-proclaimed income in the average and above average category was 1,000,000 Korean won (about 1 million US dollars) while the highest income was 400,000,000 Korean won (about 400 million US dollars). Thirty-eight percent of the male golfers were engaged in golf, construction, or service industries, or were self-employed businessmen, while 53% of the female golfers were full-time housewives. Regarding the start year of playing golf, 66% had started golfing between 2000 and 2007, and 25% in the 1990s, against only 7% in the 1980s and 1970s. This result demonstrates the effects of the Korean professional golfers' championship wins



since 1998 (CNN 1998, Wikipedia 2010). It turned out that the majority of golfers were enthusiastic as they played golf on a regular basis: 73% played 1 ~ 4 times monthly, and 43% had taken an international golf trip up to five occasions and 15% six times or more. Monthly spending on golfing and related side activities ranged from 1,00,000 to 5,000,000 Korean won. This result indicates that golfers were composed of various spenders, e.g. economic spenders (spending 100,000 won per month), conspicuous spenders (spending 5,000,000 won: about 5 million US dollars).

Principal Component Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was used to simplify sixteen golf and golf travel motive items into similar categories, based on the logic of using factor analysis explained by Child (2006) who states that, “the central aim of factor analysis is the ‘orderly simplification’ (Burt 1940) of several inter-related measures using mathematical procedures. . . All sciences . . . are concerned to discover if variables form regular patterns and vary together” (p.1). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measurement of sampling adequacy and Cronbach’s Alpha reliability test were used to examine whether the factor analysis was adequate for the sixteen variables.

The KMO measurement of sampling adequacy was 0.65 (see Figure 2). Regarding KMO scores, Friel (n.d.) argues that factor analysis is not proper if the score is less than 0.5. Therefore, the KMO score of 0.65 was not considered entirely satisfactory, but acceptable. Cronbach’s Alpha was 0.64, which did not seem satisfactory since only alpha scores between 0.80 and 0.90 are usually considered satisfactory (Fluker & Turner 2000). However, Swanson and Horridge (2006 para.32) cite Nunally (1967) stating that, “Alpha levels in the 0.60 are considered acceptable for new instruments, particularly when the measure consists of only a few items”. Therefore, the alpha score of 0.64 was considered fine in this research, based on the argument by Nunally. The alpha is 0.74 for the first factor, 0.66 for the second factor, 0.70 for the third factor, -0.53 for the fourth factor, and 0.17 for the fifth factor (see Figure 2). The alpha scores for the first, second, and third factors present acceptable consistency. However, the alpha for the fourth factor turns out to be negative, and the alpha for the fifth factor is very low, indicating very weak consistency among the variables. Regarding negative alphas, Atkins (2007) states that, “alpha *can* go negative, which means that items are reliably different as opposed to reliably similar.”

As the KMO 0.65 and the alpha 0.64 were considered acceptable, principal component factor analysis using a varimax rotation was employed as an extraction method. Five factors were extracted: enthusiasm, socializing, challenge, economic, and dual motives. Figure 2 shows the eigenvalues: 2.78 (factor 1), 1.99 (factor 2), 1.98 (factor 3), 1.93 (factor 4), 1.37 (factor 5), all greater than 1.0. Factor 1 accounts for 17.35% of the variance, factor 2 for 12.43%, factor 3 for 12.38%, factor 4 for 12.08%, and factor 5 for 8.56%. These five factors explain 62.80% of the total variance. Through principal component factor analysis, it was confirmed that Korean golfers took international golf travel from enthusiasm, socializing, challenge, economic, and dual motives.



Figure 2. PCA - Motivations for playing golf & international golf travel

	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
Golfing is an important part of my life	.83	-.00	.07	.02	-.10
I enjoy playing golf at different golf courses	.81	-.06	.06	.12	.07
I enjoy playing golf	.76	-.15	-.01	.22	.01
I combine business with golf on my overseas business travel	.46	.31	-.11	.08	.04
I enjoy making contact with members of the opposite gender on my overseas golf travel	.01	.88	-.00	-.18	-.02
Overseas golf travel creates chances to contact the opposite gender	.03	.84	-.01	-.15	-.00
I always take my family with me on my overseas golf travel	-.19	.45	.24	.15	.27
Foreign golf courses are better developed than the ones at home	.02	.08	.84	.06	.07
Services including friendliness are better at foreign golf courses	-.16	.07	.77	.18	-.19
International golf travel presents me with golf challenges I cannot get at home	.33	-.11	.69	-.14	.18
Playing golf overseas is cheaper than playing at home	.13	-.00	.17	.84	.04
I spend a lot more money on my golf activities overseas than I do at home	-.01	.28	.16	-.76	-.11
Playing golf overseas represents better value for money than at home	.38	-.00	.14	.62	-.01
I combine sightseeing with golfing on my overseas golf travel	.01	.12	.04	.19	.78
I enjoy different foods when I go on overseas golf travel	.45	.09	.13	.00	.56
When I take international travel the main reason is to play golf	.34	.27	.20	.21	-.53
Eigenvalue	2.78	1.99	1.98	1.93	1.37
Percentage of variance	17.35	12.43	12.38	12.08	8.56
Cronbach's alpha	.74	.66	.70	-.53	.17

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
 A rotation converged in 6 iterations.

K-mean Cluster Analysis

The K-Mean cluster analysis was used to examine further the characteristics of Korean golfers. As Figure 3 shows, two clusters based on the factor scores are found for the golfers on their motivations for golfing and international golf traveling. These two groups are named social golfers (cluster 1), and enthusiastic golfers (cluster 2). In taking international golf travel, enthusiastic golfers compared with social golfers are more motivated by enthusiasm, challenge, benefit, economic, dual,



and relationship building motives. Social golfers are more affected by socializing and consumption motives. Thus, it turns out that there are two different groups of Korean golfers: one smaller group called enthusiastic golfers, and the other larger group named social golfers.

Enthusiastic golfers have more passion for golfing than social golfers who are more interested in socializing with others. The result of the K-Mean cluster analysis suggests that in Korea the sport of golf and golf travel are undertaken for socializing more often than for simply enjoying golfing.

Table 1. KMCA - Motivations for playing golf & international golf travel

	Cluster	
	Golfers	
	1	2
I enjoy playing golf	5.27	6.21
Golfing is an important part of my life	4.54	5.58
I enjoy playing golf at different golf courses	4.90	5.95
International golf travel presents me with golf challenges I cannot get at home	4.45	5.09
Foreign golf courses are better developed than ones at home	4.15	4.78
Services including friendliness are better at foreign golf courses	4.07	4.55
When I take an international travel the main reason is to play golf	4.02	4.82
Playing golf overseas represents better value for money than at home	4.70	6.20
Playing golf overseas is cheaper than playing at home	4.48	6.26
I combine business with golfing on my overseas business travel	4.37	5.07
I combine sightseeing with golfing on my overseas trips	4.75	5.13
I always take my family with me on my overseas golf holidays	3.96	3.99
I enjoy different foods when I go on overseas golfing holidays	4.56	5.32
Overseas golf travel gives chances to contact with the opposite gender	3.58	3.07
I enjoy making contact with members of the opposite gender on my overseas trips	3.14	2.64
I spend a lot more money on my golf activities overseas than I do at home	4.08	2.58
Sample size	122	76

Independent Samples T-test

The independent samples t-test was used to compare differences between male and female golfers on their motives for golfing and international golf travel. Significant differences ($p < .05$) between male and female golfers were found on nine items (see Figure 4). More male than female golfers were affected by enthusiasm, benefit, dual and socialization motives. More female than male golfers were motivated by family relationship building and consumption motives.



Table 2. IS T-test - motivations for golf & international golf travel

	Golfers	N	M	%	SD	T test
I enjoy playing golf	males	170	5.66	58.2	1.09	3.29 **
	females	93	5.16	51.3	1.31	
I enjoy playing golf at different golf courses	males	171	5.38	52.6	1.16	3.46 **
	females	91	4.87	52.4	1.10	
Golfing is an important part of my life	males	171	5.02	43.0	1.37	3.10 **
	females	93	4.49	25.7	1.19	
Foreign golf courses are better developed than ones at home	males	167	4.44	29.6	1.35	1.99 *
	females	91	4.10	19.4	1.21	
I combine sightseeing with golfing on my overseas trips	males	166	4.98	48.2	1.27	2.01 *
	females	87	4.61	29.3	1.47	
Overseas golf travel gives chances to contact the opposite gender	males	158	3.54	13.7	1.50	3.51 **
	females	81	2.81	5.2	1.53	
I enjoy making contact with members of the opposite gender on my overseas golf trips	males	155	3.03	5.2	1.46	2.73 **
	females	83	2.49	2.1	1.44	
I always take my family with me on my overseas golf travel	males	158	3.78	15.2	1.43	-2.76 **
	females	90	4.31	23.6	1.46	
I spend a lot more money on my golf activities overseas than I do at home	males	168	3.18	10.4	1.53	-3.65 ***
	females	90	3.90	14.7	1.44	
Playing golf overseas is cheaper than playing at home	males	169	5.30	49.6	1.46	1.83
	females	92	4.97	32.5	1.31	
Playing golf overseas represents better value for money than at home	males	167	5.37	48.5	1.27	.55
	females	93	5.28	36.7	1.34	
When I take an overseas trip the main reason is to play golf	males	166	4.36	29.6	1.46	.62
	females	92	4.24	22.5	1.39	
Services including friendliness are better on foreign golf courses	males	165	4.35	27.4	1.39	1.35
	females	90	4.11	17.8	1.29	
I enjoy different foods when I go on overseas golf holidays	males	165	4.78	39.6	1.36	.07
	females	91	4.77	31.4	1.45	
I combine business with golfing on my overseas trips	males	158	4.78	36.7	1.29	1.40
	females	71	4.52	19.4	1.36	
International golf travel presents me with golf challenges I cannot get at home	males	169	4.67	38.2	1.30	-.23
	females	92	4.71	29.8	1.24	

Note 1: * => p < .05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Note 2: The percentage (%) is the responses of agree, strongly agree, and very strongly agree with the statement.



Conclusions

The three-factor (push-pull-influence) model was initially based on the two-factor (push-pull) framework offered by Crompton (1979) and was used as a theoretical framework in this research. According to the three-factor model, Korean golfers are motivated by push and pull (identified by Crompton 1979), and influence (by social trend) factors. Enthusiasm and socializing motives represent the push factor; while challenge, economic and dual motives represent the pull factor. And the social trend in playing golf arises mainly from the continuing championship wins by Korean golfers since 1998.

Implications for Management

This research results include useful information such as Korean golfers' socio-economic profile. Their principal characteristics and golfing patterns can be summarized as follows: 88% are between 26 and 55 years old and 82% self-claim either average or above average income. They are either enthusiastic or social golfers who are very regular players practicing 3 ~ 5 times per week at a golf center.

As the characteristics of golfers differ, it is important for golf travel planners to design diverse golf travel products to enhance the level of satisfaction for product buyers, and thus to increase the number of loyal customers. It must be critical also for golf travel product sellers to know how much customers are willing to spend on golfing and golf travel in order to suggest the most adequately priced products for potential buyers.

Contributions to Academic Knowledge

Motivations have previously been examined for diverse types of traveling, e.g. tourist attraction visits or attending events. However, motivations for golfing and international golf traveling have not been studied as extensively as motivations for other types of travel and leisure activities. In this research, motivations for traveling and golfing were examined not only from academic but also non-academic viewpoints, e.g. five reasons for playing golf by Russell (2006), and the nine reasons proposed by Maxlifestyle (2007). Through the literature review on traveling and golfing motivations, the three-factor motivation model was developed as a theoretical framework to explain why Korean golfers fly long distances, crossing national borders, to play golf. Whether this new model is perfect or not, an attempt to create a new model can be considered as important as testing an existing model, especially if there has not been any real competition since the two-factor model was proposed 30 years ago.

Limitations

The golfers in this research were from just one part of Seoul, in Korea. It might have been more ideal if golf centers in all parts of Seoul and other provinces could have been included because the responses of golfers from other places could be different from those in this research. However, it is assumed that the characteristics and



perceptions of respondent golfers would be similar or identical to those of other Korean golfers, since “Korea’s population is one of the most ethnically and linguistically homogenous in the world” (US Department of State 2007). Even though the limitations existed, the research results are most likely to reflect the general views of Korean golfers as the participants were from different age groups, income levels, and occupations.

Future research

This research used closed questions. Open-ended questions and in-depth interviews are recommended to discover additional, hidden motivations. It has been the push and pull factors (Crompton 1979), which have often been tested in motivation studies of various leisure activity participants including pleasure travelers. However, it turns out that the push and pull two-factor framework is not sufficient to explain the new trend in international golf travel among Koreans. The replacement push-pull-influence model now needs to be applied and tested against motivations for other types of leisure travel.

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