

ENHANCING CONSUMER BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS THROUGH INNOVATIVE SPORT EXPERIENCES: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM A RUNNING STATION CONTEXT

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Keywords

innovative sport experience, product innovation, service innovation, participant sport, consumer loyalty

Aim

Our research has two purposes. First, we attempt to define the concept of innovative sport experience in the context of participant sport and to develop a scale for measuring the construct. The second purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between innovative sport experience and consumer retention variables such as behavioral intentions.

Theoretical background

In today's dynamic sport business environments characterized by heterogeneous consumer demands and technological revolution, it is desirable for sport organizations to creatively manage various innovation points in both tangible (i.e., technical and functional) and intangible (i.e., social and experiential) domains (Berry, Shankar, Parish, Cadwallader, & Dotzel, 2006). However, despite the acknowledged importance of studying innovative sport experiences, there is a lack of empirical research on this topic. A notable exception is the recent work of Yoshida, James, and Cronin (2013) where the term "sport event innovativeness" was derived as a multidimensional construct in the context of spectator sport. Yet, the innovativeness of participant sport experiences has been ignored to a great extent in the sport management literature, but has become increasingly important in the contemporary sport industry where sport consumers engage in an active leisure life. Given the limitation of previous work, this study aims to conceptualize the innovativeness of participant sport experiences and to examine its impact on consumer behavior.

Methodology

The setting we chose was a running station organized by a large sporting good manufacture. Data were collected from users of this running station. Questionnaires were distributed in the station after the participants finished running. From the 339 questionnaires distributed, 329 usable questionnaires were returned. Of the total sample, 62.6% of the respondents were male. Approximately one-third of the subjects were in the 30-39 age range (36.3%), 27.4% were between 20 and 29 years old, 25.8% were between 40 and 49 years old, and 10.5% were 50 years old and above.

The construct of innovative sport experience is defined as sport participants' perceptions of the newness and uniqueness of sport consumption experiences in buyer-seller exchanges. In order to address more specific innovation points, we identify three major elements: (1) sport-focused, (2) service-focused, and (3) relationship-focused components (Sawhney, Wolcott, & Arroniz, 2006). Following the study of Berry et al. (2006), the service-focused component consists of three subdimensions: aesthetic environment, facility convenience, and self-service technology. The relationship-focused component also includes two subdimensions: user community and loyalty programs (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). In order to measure the innovativeness dimensions, consumer satisfaction, brand equity, and behavioral intentions, we adapted items from previous research (Yoshida et al., 2013).

Results and discussion

Using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with LISREL 8.8, convergent and discriminant validity were assessed by an examination of the average variance extracted (AVE) values. The AVE values for the proposed constructs ranged from .64 to .84, providing evidence of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Next, discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the AVE estimate for each construct with the squared correlations between the respective constructs. In all cases, the AVE values were considerably greater than any squared correlations between all pairs of the constructs. Thus, discriminant validity was indicated.

Through structural equation modeling (SEM) using LISREL 8.8, the results indicate the dimensions of sport performance ($\gamma = .40$, $p < .01$), aesthetic environment ($\gamma = .18$, $p < .01$), and self-service technology ($\gamma = .29$, $p < .01$) have positive effects on consumer satisfaction, which in turn influences brand equity ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$) and behavioral intentions ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, the dimensions of aesthetic environment ($\gamma = .33$, $p < .01$) and self-service technology ($\gamma = .21$, $p < .05$) had positive direct effects on brand equity. The impact of brand equity on behavioral intentions was positive and significant ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$). The variances explained for consumer satisfaction, brand equity, and behavioral intentions were .43, .25, and .21, respectively.

The proposed framework is useful for understanding sport participants' evaluations of innovative sport experiences. Our framework assumes a performance innovator by differentiating users' running style and experience from other running stations. Moreover, the results indicate, as a service innovator, the service-focused dimensions can encourage new service delivery benefits by providing radically new facility design and extremely helpful self-services. Through the creative management of the innovation points, sport marketers may be able to contribute to the achievement of satisfying consumers, establishing radical brand image, and enhancing consumer loyalty.

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