

MODELING CUSTOMER RESPONSES TO ALTERNATIVE GOLF EXPERIENCES



Golf is often perceived as outdated, and its popularity has declined in recent years, particularly among younger generations. To stimulate interest in this sport, some recreational venues have introduced alternative golf experiences relying on indoor golf simulators or other innovative set-ups. Dr. Jeeyeon Jeannie Hahm, Dr. David J. Kwun, and Dr. Juhee Kang at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management recently set out to model the satisfaction and behavioral responses of people who engaged in alternative golf experiences, building on a framework known as the Mehrabian-Russell model.

Over the past decades, the golf industry has faced considerable challenges due to the sport's declining popularity and difficulty recruiting newer generations. The strict entry requirements posed by traditional golf facilities, such as expensive golf club fees and fewer options for beginners, often limit people's access to the sport.

Recent efforts within the golf industry have been aimed at retaining existing customers while also attracting new players and encouraging beginners to further improve their skills. The COVID-19 pandemic revived some interest in golf as more people started perceiving it as a safe outdoor activity while social distancing measures were in place.

To strengthen this renewed interest in the sport and encourage younger generations to start playing, some venues introduced alternative golf experiences, such as indoor golf simulators. Research investigating how these

With alternative golf experiences, the industry hopes to strengthen a wider interest in golf.

alternative golfing experiences are received and what draws players to these new options could help to enhance future implementations, ultimately contributing to the golf industry's growth and renovation.

Dr. Jeeyeon Jeannie Hahm, Dr. David J. Kwun, and Dr. Juhee Kang, Associate Professors at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, recently carried out a study aimed at better understanding the environmental stimuli and recreational motivation that drive consumers towards alternative golf options, as well as the satisfaction and behavioral responses of people who tried these emerging golf-inspired experiences. Their paper introduces an extended version of the Mehrabian-Russell (M-R) model, a framework used to study how consumers respond to environmental stimuli, which specifically focuses on alternative golf.

AN EXTENDED MEHRABIAN-RUSSELL MODEL

The M-R model is a psychological framework introduced by Albert Mehrabian and James A. Russell. This framework can be used to better understand and describe how people respond to environmental stimuli, both in terms of their behavior and emotional responses.

The M-R model has been widely used in both psychology and marketing research, where it can help to examine the impact of environmental stimuli on specific consumption behaviors (e.g., how much a consumer purchases a specific product or uses a specific service). In their paper, Hahm, Kwun, and Kang specifically used this framework to examine consumer evaluations of alternative golf facilities.

The traditional version of the M-R model proposes that environmental stimuli impact people's emotions, which in turn influence their behavioral intentions (i.e., their intention to engage in particular behaviors). In recent years, this model has been adapted for marketing research by integrating additional elements that are closely related to consumer behavior and service evaluations.

Hahm, Kwun, and Kang further extended the model by including environmental attributes, behavioral responses, and moderating factors specific to alternative golf experiences. In terms of the environmental stimuli influencing



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consumer behavior, their model considers the physical environments where alternative golf experiences take place, the quality of food and beverages served at these venues, and the overall quality of the service offered.

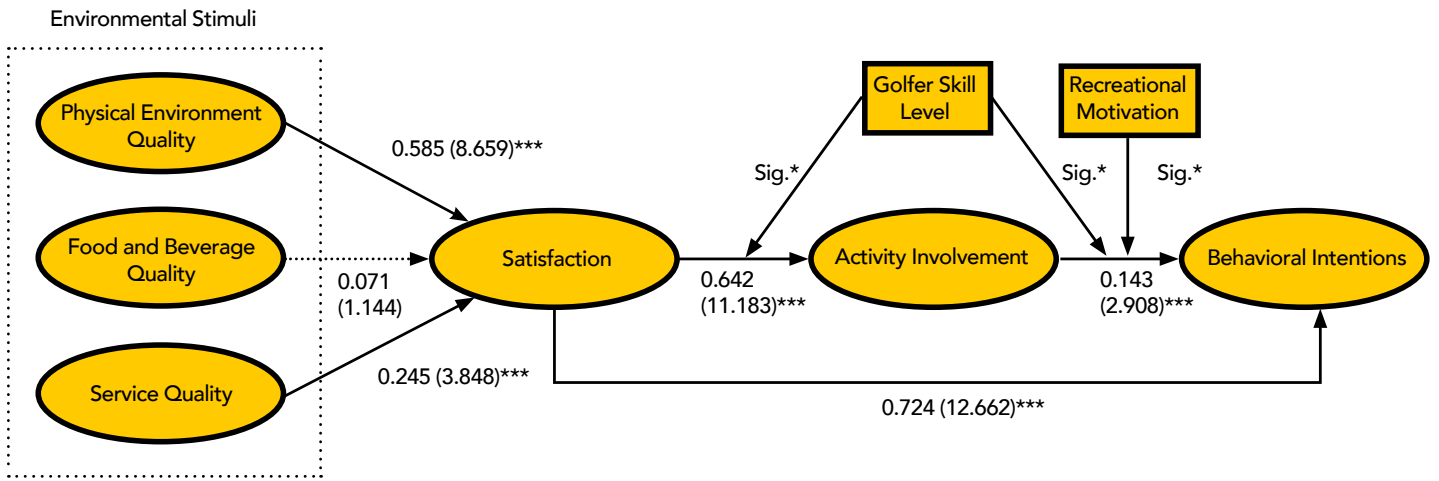
These environmental stimuli are proposed to affect the satisfaction of consumers and, consequently, their behavioral responses. The behavioral responses examined in this study include both people's activity involvement (i.e., how relevant it is for them to play alternative golf and visit sites where they can do this) and their behavioral intentions (i.e., to what extent they intend to play alternative golf).

Finally, the team's model considers factors that could moderate the effects of environmental stimuli on people's behavioral responses. These effects include the recreational motivation that can drive people towards alternative golf experiences and the golfer's skill level.

TESTING DIFFERENT HYPOTHESES

Building on previous hospitality and marketing research, the researchers set out to test various hypotheses. Firstly, they hypothesized that an alternative golf venue's physical environment, the quality of food and drinks it offered, and the overall quality of its services would positively affect customers' satisfaction.

They then postulated that the consumers' satisfaction would positively affect both their activity involvement and behavioral intentions, suggesting that activity involvement would also positively affect behavioral intentions. Finally, the team hypothesized that recreational motivation would moderate the relationship between activity involvement and behavioral intentions. In contrast, a golfer's skill level would moderate the relationship between a customer's satisfaction with the service and activity involvement.



Results of structural equation modeling (Significance *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$).

Hahm, Kwun, and Kang created a questionnaire designed to test these hypotheses and distributed it online to people over 18 years of age who had visited an alternative golf venue in the United States within the past 12 months. The researchers analyzed the answers of 493 survey respondents who had visited an alternative golf facility: 63.7% had visited Topgolf; Drive Shack (19.3%), ReaLiTEE Golf (8.1%), Nextlinks (6.3%), and 2.6% had visited 4ore.

significantly impact the customers' satisfaction was the quality of food and beverages served at venues. All the other factors analyzed (i.e., the physical environment and service quality) positively impacted the visitors' satisfaction.

Secondly, as the team had hypothesized, the satisfaction of customers was found to significantly influence their activity involvement and behavioral intentions, with activity involvement also influencing behavioral intentions. Notably, they also found that the interaction between recreational motivation and activity involvement predicted the behavioral

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ALTERNATIVE GOLF

Overall, the study offers valuable insight into the factors that influence customers' satisfaction with alternative golf services and their behavioral responses to these experiences. The M-R extended model they devised has proved to be a valuable framework to unpack the feedback from those who tried alternative golf.

This model could be used in other golf-specific hospitality studies or help examine reviews by customers of a particular alternative golf venue. The results could also inform the design and implementation of new alternative golf experiences.

Specifically, their findings could inspire business owners to invest more in their venue's physical environment and the services offered. Even if food and drinks were found to have no positive effect on the satisfaction of customers, the researchers think that venues should not entirely disregard them, as they can add value to the overall service provided.

While this study suggests that alternative golf venues attract both experienced and new golfers, the satisfaction of expert golfers appears to be higher than that of beginners. This observation could encourage owners and managers to introduce additional activities that meet the needs of beginners and novices, as well as competitions and advanced simulations for seasoned golf players.

Collectively, the suggestions put forward by the Rosen researchers could contribute to the future growth and innovation of the golf industry, potentially helping to revitalize a sport that is sometimes perceived as elitist and old-fashioned.

THIS MODEL COULD BE USED IN OTHER GOLF-SPECIFIC HOSPITALITY STUDIES OR COULD HELP TO EXAMINE REVIEWS BY CUSTOMERS OF A PARTICULAR ALTERNATIVE GOLF VENUE.

More than half of the respondents were female, and the vast majority were White, followed by Black or African American. 20.7% of the study participants identified as new golfers, 16.6% as beginners, 15.6% as intermediate, 15.6% as novices, and 9.9% as 'beginner plus'. Out of the 493 respondents, 69 (14%) had never played traditional golf before, and only 36 (7.3%) identified as advanced players.

MAIN FINDINGS AND INTERACTION EFFECTS

Upon analysis of the collected survey responses, the Rosen researchers found that they had confirmed most of their hypotheses. The only environmental factor that did not

intentions of respondents. Specifically, people with a high motivation to have fun and who were more engaged in the alternative golf experience had stronger behavioral intentions to play the sport than those with a low recreational motivation.

The researchers also found that the skill level of golfers moderated the relationship between satisfaction and activity involvement. Advanced golfers who were satisfied with the experience tended to be more involved in the sport than beginners. Moreover, advanced golfers who were engaged in the alternative golf experience appeared more likely to revisit the venue than engaged beginners.

RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Jeeyeon Jeannie Hahm, Dr. David J. Kwun, and Dr. Juhee Kang aimed to better understand the environmental stimuli and recreational motivation that drive consumers towards alternative golf options, as well as the satisfaction and behavioral responses of people who tried these emerging golf-inspired experiences.

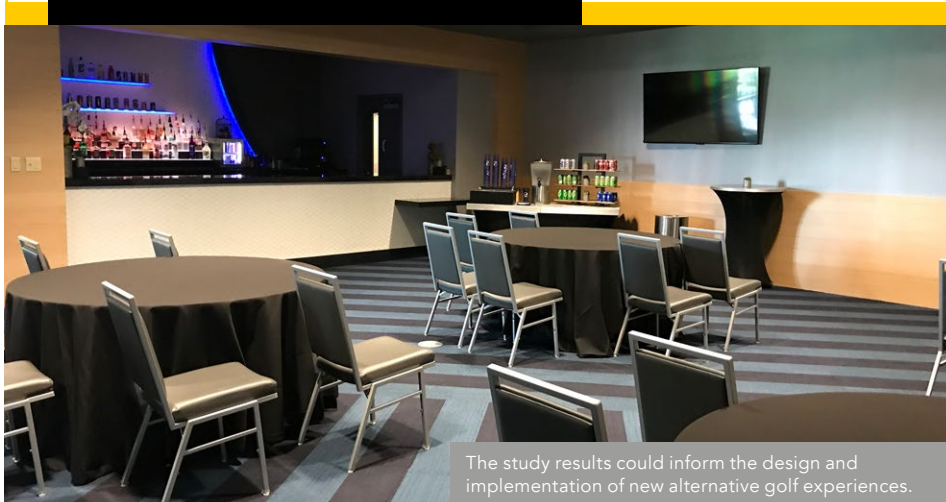
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PERSONAL RESPONSE

How could your extended Mehrabian-Russell model inform the future development of alternative golf experiences?

Our study underscores the pivotal role of activity involvement within the extended model. This activity involvement was gauged not only through golf participation but also by engaging in social gatherings and philanthropic endeavors at alternative golf venues. The findings of our research indicate that it is imperative for alternative golf facilities to prioritize visitor satisfaction with the environmental stimuli to enhance engagement in the array of activities available, consequently fostering repeat visits and positive recommendations for the facility. Notably, this effect was more pronounced among experienced golfers compared to novices. Hence, alternative golf facilities ought to curate appealing products and services tailored to the varying skill levels of golf consumers. Specifically, offering events and services customized for advanced golfers, such as competitions for low handicappers, club fitting sessions, demonstrations of new golf clubs, swing analyses, and golf tutorials, can prove highly effective.



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