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The antecedents and consequences of visitors' participation in a private country club community: The moderating role of extraversion

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the antecedents and consequences of visitors' participation in a private country club community. Based on the theoretical relationships between the conceptual constructs, a model was proposed and then tested utilizing data collected from 288 amateur golfers in the United States. The results showed that two dimensions of other customer perceptions influenced member interaction while all three dimensions of other customer perceptions positively affected activity involvement, and thus motivated private country club attachment and private country club loyalty. Lastly, extraversion played a moderating role in the relationship between suitable behavior and activity involvement. Both theoretical and managerial implications of the results are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Consumers sharing similar values and attitudes (e.g. the consumption of a particular brand or product) tend to form into groups that are known as 'communities of consumption' (Boorstin, 1973). A special type of community of consumption is a brand community, which is 'a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand' (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). A brand community is considered to exert greater influence on consumers and be more reliable than commercial communities because consumers spontaneously join a brand community in order to freely share information about and experiences with a brand or product (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Thompson & Sinha, 2008).

Brand community is also important in the private country club industry. There are more than 4400 private country clubs (about 30% of all golf facilities), with membership totaling about 2.1 million in the United States (National Club Association, 2010). Most private country clubs include one or more high-quality golf courses, restaurants, a health club, and other recreational facilities, so the clubs charge a high price for membership, typically around

\$250,000 to \$500,000 (Golf Digest, 2008; York, 2002). In addition, some famous private country clubs are well known as tourist attractions. For example, the annual Masters Tournament is held in the Augusta National Golf Club, where many tourists visit to watch golf and admire beautiful golf courses (World Guides, 2014), suggesting that some private country clubs can also play a significant role as tourist attractions.

Most private country club communities are formed and operated in part by members who are enthusiastic supporters of these clubs. For example, members of the private country club community may actively participate in activities (e.g. golf tournament, social party, and charity event) held at their private country club community, where they can interact with other club members (e.g. Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz & Schau, 2005; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009). Through these activities and social interactions, members may develop a great affection for their private country club (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). For this reason, private country club managers often dedicate considerable effort to understanding the reasons for visitors' participation in a country club community; however, no academic studies have yet focused on this matter.

One of the key factors in visitors' participation in a private country club community is the other customers (Tajfel, 1981; Tsai, Huang, & Chiu, 2012). In the service marketing literature, other customers refer to customers who simultaneously stay in a service facility with a focal customer (Brocato, Voorhess, & Baker, 2012). Other customers exert a major influence on overall customer satisfaction in the service industry (Huang & Hsu, 2010; Hyun & Han,

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2015). For this reason, people spend more money on membership fees in order to use a private country club so that they may socialize with other similar-minded customers during a round of golf. This is one reason that people join a private country club community.

It is furthermore necessary to identify the moderating role of extraversion in the relationship between other customer perceptions (hereafter OCP) and visitors' participation in a private country club community. This is because extraversion can have a significant effect on human behavior and decision-making (Mooradian & Swan, 2006). Indeed, many previous scholars have examined the role of extraversion in consumer behavior research, suggesting that it is critical to show the differences according to the level of extraversion (Kautish, 2010). It is therefore meaningful and significant to investigate extraversion as a moderator in the relationship between OCP and visitors' participation in a private country club community.

The theoretical background thus supports the importance of brand community participation in the private country club industry. However, private country club managers currently do not have a practical model for the formation of visitors' participation in a private country club community, and its influence on brand attachment and brand loyalty. The objective of this research was therefore to examine the antecedents and consequences of visitors' participation in a private country club community. More specifically, this study investigated: (1) the effects of other customer perceptions (i.e. similarity, physical appearance, and suitable behavior) on visitors' participation in a private country club community (i.e. member interaction and activity involvement); (2) how visitors' participation in a private country club community influences private country club attachment and private country club loyalty; and (3) the moderating effect of extraversion in this process. The results are expected to provide private country club managers with useful insights for developing effective and efficient marketing strategies for visitors.

2. Literature review

This section begins by introducing the concept of brand community participation. It then explains its antecedent (i.e. OCP) and consequences (i.e. brand attachment and brand loyalty). Fig. 1 presents a conceptual model.

2.1. Brand community participation

Brand community participation is defined as 'the extent to which a member actively engages in community activities and interacts with other brand community members' (Tsai et al., 2012, p. 676). Member participation in the brand community is known to be an important factor in ensuring the brand's survival in the long term (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Koh & Kim, 2004). For instance, customers with a high level of brand community participation evidence significant interest in the brand (e.g. pre-investigation before a purchase, developing a relationship with a brand, sharing information with other brand users, and offering feedback about the brand after the purchase) (Kellogg, Youngdahl, & Bowen, 1997). Many companies have tried to make their customers become active participants in a brand community (Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007). Academic research also has shown the important role of brand community participation in consumer behavior. For example, McAlexander et al. (2002) suggested that brand community participation resulted in multifaceted relationships (e.g. between brand owners and brand community, as well as between customers and the brand), which help to create brand loyalty. In addition, Thompson and Sinha (2008) found that customers with a high level of brand community participation were more likely to adopt a new product from the preferred brand and are less likely to adopt new products from rival brands.

Given the definition of brand community participation (Tsai et al., 2012), brand community can be said to consist of two sub-dimensions; interaction and activity involvement. In addition,

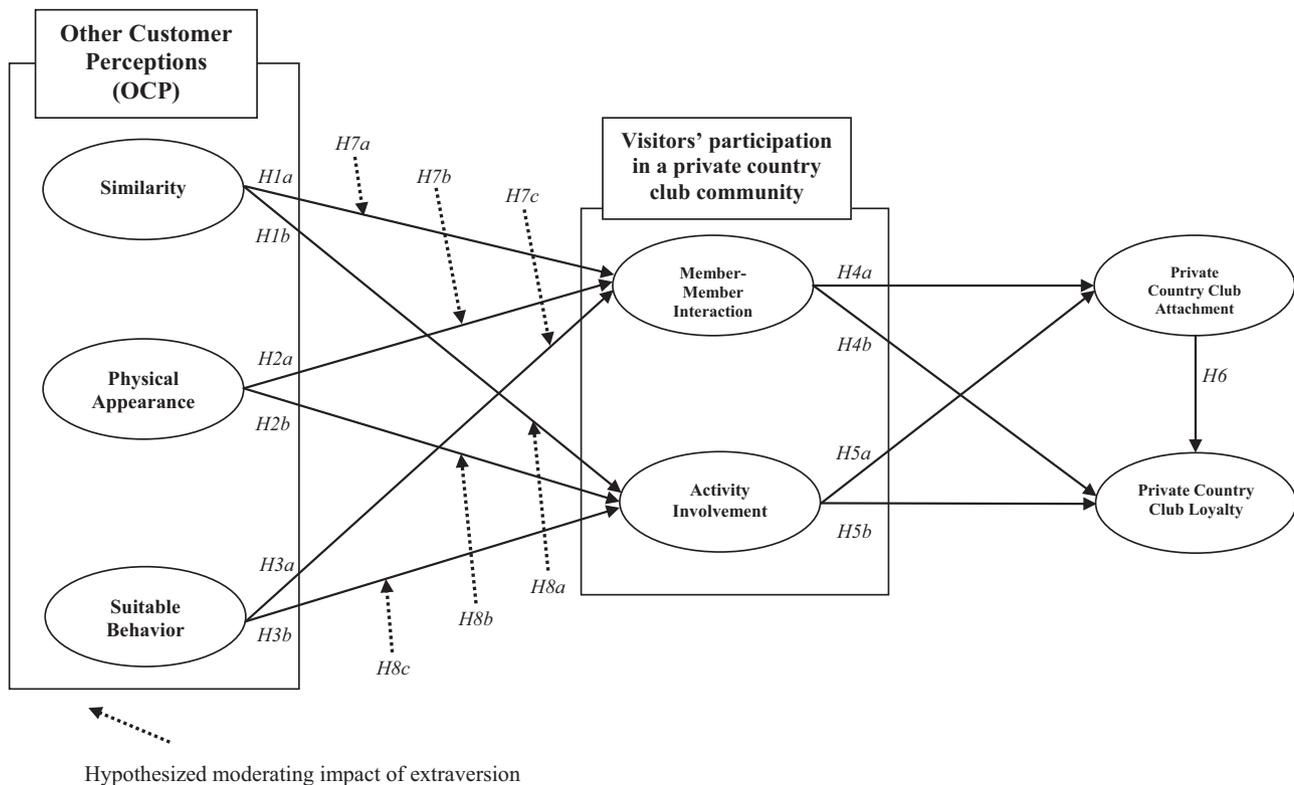


Fig. 1. Proposed conceptual model.

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