

Consumer Demographics and Behaviors of Fans Attending a PGA Event

G. Clayton Stoldt & Mark Vermillion
Wichita State University

With special assistance from Jeffrey Boone, April Brown,
Josh Howell, & Angela Leivian

Understanding consumer behavior is at the heart of the marketing process. Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2007) observed that one of the characteristics of marketing myopia in sport is a failure of sport marketers to focus on consumers in their markets. Rein, Kotlar and Shields (2006) stated, “The first critical step in reaching, attracting, and retaining fans is understanding not only who the fan is but *how the fan connects to a sport*” (p. 54).

The purpose of this paper is to describe, summarize, and—using basic exploratory analytics—examine the consumer characteristics and behavior of fans attending a Professional Golf Association (PGA) tournament on the Web.com Tour . Utilizing fan survey results secured at the event, we offer findings pertaining to fan demographics, connections to the event, opinions regarding the tournament, and related consumer intentions. We also discuss a number of implications regarding the findings. It is our hope that the paper serves as a case study of how a medium-sized sport property can secure and utilize research to increase its understanding of its fans and their behaviors.

Event Background

The Preferred Health Systems (PHS) Wichita Open was a Professional Golfers Association (PGA) event now known as the Air Capital Classic (ACC). The event dates back to 1990 when Tom Lehman won the inaugural Wichita Open (ACC, n.d.). Throughout its history, the event has been a part of the PGA’s developmental tour. The Web.com tour, as it is currently titled, brands itself as “The Path to the PGA Tour” (Web.com Tour, n.d.). Each year, the tour awards 50 cards entitling its top players to compete on the flagship PGA tour the next season.

The Wichita tournament has a prestigious history with past champions including David Duval, David Toms, Brad Elder (twice), and Jason Dufner (ACC, n.d.). The event has also generated more than \$850,000 in donations for local charities since 2006. Three different clubs have served as the tournament’s home at different times throughout its history. Since 2001, the event has been held at Crestview Country Club.

Uniqueness of the event

One of the most popular aspects of the Wichita tournament is its par-3 17th hole, which has become a hub for business networking and social activity (Riedl, 2013). The corporate grandstand area holds more than 3,000 people and features open bars and a food tent. Spectators receive coupons for free cheeseburgers from a local restaurant each time a golfer birdies the hole, and caddy races to reach the green are yet another part of the hole's appeal. Yet another corporate hospitality area sits on the 18th hole, but it is the 17th that most stands out in the minds of spectators and participants. One corporate sponsor has likened the event as the "Kentucky Derby of the Web.com Tour" (Riedl, 2013).

Overview of Methods

In order to understand a demographic and descriptive analysis of the PHS Wichita Open's fan base, a brief review of data collection methods is in order. This section will describe the survey instrument used, data collection procedures, and sample descriptors.

The survey instrument was developed by the research team in consultation with the tournament staff. While the survey addressed a range of questions, most items related to spectator demographics, linkages to the tournament, opinions about the event, and future purchase intentions as they pertained to sponsors/potential sponsors.

The research team attended each day of the 2010 tournament to collect survey responses on site. Team members fanned out across the course, so they could solicit spectators whether they were watching from a single hole or walking with golfers as they advanced through the course. However, given higher capacity for spectator seating and their proximity to the front gate, holes 17 and 18 housed a disproportionate amount of fans throughout the tournament.

Total attendance at the 2010 tournament was 30,000. Our survey team secured 565 completed surveys.

Results

Demographics

In regard to gender, 73.9% of the respondents ($n=556$), were male, 26.1% were female. The following tables summarize survey results in regard to age, education, and income level.

Table 1

Age

Age Category	% of Respondents
18-23	3.4
24-29	11.9
30-39	17.8
40-49	22.7
50-59	22.7
60 or older	21.6

$n=556$

Note: Fans under 18 were not included in the survey

Table 2

Education Level

Education Level	% of Respondents
High School	7.7
Some College	22.1
College Degree	51.6
Graduate Degree	18.5

$n=566$

Table 3

Income Level

Income Level	% of Respondents
Less than \$40,000	6.7
\$40,000-\$69,999	19.2
\$70,000-\$99,999	22.2
\$100,000-\$199,000	37.9
\$200,000 or more	14.0

$n=522$

We also collected the respondents' zip codes. Results indicated that fans were most commonly from northeast Wichita (the sector of the city in which the tournament was held) northwest Wichita, and nearby suburbs Derby and Andover.

Connections to the event

We also asked fans how they were informed of the event and how they obtained tickets for the event. In regard to the information question, fans had the option of selecting multiple information sources. Results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4
Sources of Information about the Event

Source	% of Respondents Citing
Advertisements	33.4
Media Coverage	33.0
Sponsor	32.3
Word of Mouth	29.9
Other	20.8
Employer	17.3
Host Country Club	13.3

n=566

As indicated, the three most commonly cited sources of information were, in order, advertisements, media coverage, and event sponsors.

Fans were asked to identify a single source from which they secured tickets for the event. Results are listed in Table 5.

Table 5
Sources of Tickets for the Event

Source	% of Respondents Citing
Invited by Event Sponsor	25.4
Guest in Hospitality Box	23.7
Other	19.8
Given by Employer	11.9
Purchased from the Event	11.2
Given by Host Country Club Member	7.1
Purchased from Not-For-Profit Partner	0.9

n=566

As indicated, the most commonly cited sources were event sponsors and ticket purchasers in hospitality areas. The most commonly mentioned source in the “Other” category was friends.

Opinions regarding the tournament

Since fans attending the same event may view it from different perspectives, we asked spectators what type of event they perceive the Wichita Open to be. Responses (*n=547*) were a sporting event (62.5% of respondents), a community event (22.5%), and a social event (14.6%).

We also queried fans with two questions regarding their enjoyment of the event. The first simply asked them to rate their enjoyment of the event on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest). The mean response level was 6.1 ($n=559$). Nearly half of the respondents (44.7%) rated the event at 7, and 93.2% rated the event at a 5 or better.

The second question asked fans to name the best thing about the tournament. This was an open-ended item, so our research team categorized and then tallied responses based on those categories. Results regarding the most common categories are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6
Best Thing about the Wichita Open

Education Level	% of Respondents
Hospitality	26.8
Sport Aspect	17.5
Social Aspect	11.4
Players	10.2
Networking Opportunities	3.2
Golf Course	2.3

$n=428$

The research team also reported that while they encouraged to fans to respond to the specific question (i.e., “the best thing), many respondents indicated their preferred answer was “everything.”

Related consumer intentions

The fans’ positive dispositions toward event sponsors have marginal value outside data describing their future purchase intentions. We provided fans with a list of items and asked whether they planned to make purchases in these categories within the next year. Findings are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7
Fan Intentions to Purchase Items by Category Within the Next Year

Category	Yes (%)	No (%)
Automobile	25.8	74.2
Financial Services	13.3	86.7
Fitness Services	15.6	84.4
Furniture	23.5	76.5
Home Improvement	40.0	60.0
Major Appliance	17.7	82.3

$n=565$

Discussion

The demographic profile of the tournament's fan base is that it is predominately male (73.9%), middle aged (63.2% with ages 30-60), well educated (70.1% with a college or graduate degree), and reasonably affluent (51.9% with annual incomes of \$100,000 or more). Many tend to come from nearby areas of town or suburbs.

The responses to questions regarding how fans heard about the event and where they purchased tickets underscore the importance of event sponsors the tournament. Sponsors ranked third, behind advertisements and media coverage, as the most commonly cited source of information about the event. Fans also cited sponsors as the most commonly cited source of tickets for the event.

Fans clearly enjoyed the event with nearly half giving it the highest rating possible. Such sentiment was also evident when a number of respondents stated that the best thing about the event was "everything." A review of the responses to both the question of what type of event fans perceive the tournament to be and what was the best thing about the event point toward the conclusion that fans view the Wichita Open as much more than just a sporting event. More than twice as many fans (41.2% combine) cited benefits such as hospitality, the social dimension, and networking opportunities as the best part of the event, as compared with those who identified the sporting aspect of the event.

The survey results pertaining to purchase intentions are relevant to current and potential corporate partners. While the stated purchase intention rates were all below 50%, they still provide support for the position that the tournament's fan base boasts substantial purchasing power. For example, 25.8% of respondents indicated the planned to purchase an automobile within the next year. Based on total attendance of 30,000 that translates to 7,740 car purchases by tournament fans in the next year. That figure, combined with the demographic attractiveness of the fan base, should contribute to the value of partnership agreements with automobile retailers.

References

Air Capital Classic (n.d.). *Our tournament history*. Retrieved from

<http://www.aircapclassic.com/event-info/history>

Mullin, B.J., Hardy, S., & Sutton, W.A. (2007). *Sport marketing* (3rd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Rein, I., Kotler, P., & Shields, B. (2006). *The elusive fan*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Riedl, M. (2013, June 14). Air Capital Classic's 17th hole "the place to see and be seen" in Wichita. *The Wichita Eagle*. Retrieved from

<http://www.kansas.com/2013/06/14/2848915/air-capital-classics-17th-hole.html>

Web.com Tour (n.d.) @WebDotComTour. Retrieved from

<https://twitter.com/WebDotComTour>