

ARE WOMEN WALKING THE FAIRWAY?

Helena Reis

Mestre, Universidade do Algarve, Escola Superior de Gestão, Hotelaria e Turismo, Campus da Penha, Faro

hreis@ualg.pt

Antónia Correia

PhD com Agregação, CASEE, Universidade do Algarve, Faculdade de Economia, Campus de Gambelas, Faro

acorreia@ualg.pt

ABSTRACT

Golf is a leisure activity that has always had constraints for women, mainly due to cultural barriers existing worldwide. In 1890, the British introduced golf in Portugal; the gendered policies of the game prevailed. This reality seems difficult to overcome: 85% of golfers in Portugal are men.

The study aims to understand whether Portuguese women perceive the intra-, inter- and structural factors advanced by literature; to identify the life contexts of female-golfers and to explain what moderates sports behaviour.

Having built a model based on the literature, we applied it to Portuguese women-golfers: 21 in-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed. The sample ranges from Portuguese national champions, to women who are initiating golf.

The research results in a theoretical contribution for consumer and gender behaviour studies. Based on a market-led approach, the main conclusions permit the identification of strategic guidelines to attract potential female markets.

The results indicate that structural and interpersonal factors are stronger than the intrapersonal. Cultural values persist, while women's lifestyle has not changed much; these values are difficult to overcome even when women are motivated to participate in leisure. More than explicit discrimination, the exclusion of women is a cultural factor engrained in their lives, meaning that women exclude themselves, tacitly accepting discrimination.

KEYWORDS

Gender, Golf, Constraints/Facilitators Factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Golf is a leisure activity which remains restricted for women mainly due to cultural barriers that continue to exist worldwide. Despite notable efforts made by professional women golfers since the last decades of the 19th century, advances towards equity with men have been slow and difficult, denouncing a masculine pattern or apparent discrimination behaviour, based on a traditional tendency to acknowledge this game as a “men's game”.

In the past decades, the golf has attracted an increasing interest and the number of participants has risen worldwide. From an upper-class sport (Flannery and Leech 2004; Tinkler 2004), golf evolved into niches of leisure tourism and many countries are developing strategies to captivate these tourists to golf destinations, as stakeholders realize the multiplier economic effect of golf. Despite this, women are neglected by these marketing strategies, which may indicate that they have been forgotten or that the cultural resistance to women's participation in this activity is intrinsically assumed: female golfers had and still have to overcome prejudice in order to be accepted (Crane 1991; Kahn 1996; Tinkler 2004).

This study shows that participation in golf generates from the situational and social contexts that are prone to women's participation, whereas the same factors also have the reverse effect. The human narratives of this study may be outdated as they refer to episodes occurring between 1864 and 1997, but more recently, McGinnis and Gentry's (2006) research on women's participation in golf lead to similar conclusions. According to these authors, women's absence from golf participation is based on social constraints, rather than on personal ones.

In 1890, the British introduced golf in Portugal and the gendered policies of the game prevailed. This reality seems very difficult to overcome, since 85% of golf players in Portugal are men; the growth rate of this market segment is similar to the female growth rate, evidence that has placed women on the lower 15% of the market share for ages. Nevertheless, the fact that women enjoy shopping more than men (D'Astous, 1990; Dholakia, 1999) and that on average, women spend more, and are more prone to purchasing (Dholakia, 1999) may establish women as a promising market segment.

This research assumes a humanistic perspective, grounded on Ecological Systems Theory (henceforth EST) by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Woodside, Caldwell and Spurr's (2006) concept of Causal Historical Wave. The EST states that "one can only understand the individual by understanding his or her environment". An ecological perspective of human development is concerned with understanding the contexts in which an individual exists (intrapersonal), and incorporates the interactions between the individuals (interpersonal), other individuals and the social structures of society (structural) to explain human development. Woodside et al. (2006) propose that the causal history could be one's childhood, personality traits, or particular life experiences which shaped one's wants and desires. Crawford and Godbey (1987) identified three dimensions of constraints: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. The intrapersonal refers to the inner self of the individuals and comprises their characteristics, fears and beliefs. Some of the intrapersonal factors identified by the literature are: personality, past experiences and personal performance (Raymore, 2002). The interpersonal constraints are related to social interactions established among individuals and comprise family, groups of reference, strangers and opinion leaderships/market mavens (Raymore, 2002). The structural constraints are external factors that inhibit the participation, like institutions, infra-structures, socio-economic status, social background, money, gender and race (Raymore, 2002). These factors are assumed to be the main drivers of consumer behaviour, therefore they could be assumed as the starting point to understand why women do not participate in golf activities.

2. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to understand whether Portuguese women perceive the intra-, inter- and structural factors advanced by literature. Moreover, it aims to identify and describe the contexts in which the golfer respondents live and with which they interacted in the past, in order to explain what moderates sports behaviour, according to different lifestyles, life stages and facts, as facilitators or constraints.

3. METHODOLOGY

Having built up a model based on the literature, the authors applied it to a set of Portuguese women golfers. Twenty-one in-depth interviews that lasted from 1h45 to 4h30 minutes were recorded and transcribed. The sample ranges from the Portuguese national golf champions, to women who are now initiating golf practices. Our objective is to clarify how and to what extent women perceive gender norms and procedures in golf. Further, the reflection upon these issues will motivate the introduction of changes towards the opportunity for attracting more women to golf.

4. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

The research will result on a theoretical contribution, on the field of consumer behaviour, particularly on gender behaviour. Taking a market-led approach, the main results and conclusions will permit the identification of strategic guiding lines for the Algarve to look at potential female markets, which deserve more attention from the golf-marketers.

The findings report will enhance gender behaviour analysis and elucidate on how, why, and to what extent gender heterogeneity relies on intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural factors.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate that the structural and interpersonal factors are stronger than the intrapersonal and persist across the centuries. In fact, some cultural values persist, while women's lifestyle did not change much; these values are difficult to overcome even when women are motivated to participate in leisure activities such as golf. Our research finds that the exclusion of women, more than explicit discrimination, is a cultural factor engrained in their daily lives, meaning that women exclude themselves and tacitly accept this discrimination. Furthermore, results confirm previous research found in the literature and show that some women are "unaware (i.e., focusing on golf as a sport and ignoring or denying masculine dimensions of golf rituals)" (McGinnis, Gentry & McQuillan, 2009:20) of gender asymmetries, while others fit what McGinnis et al., term as "unapologetic (i.e., challenging masculine rituals that threaten entitlement to golf and attempting to create women inclusive alternatives)" (2009:20).

REFERENCES

- BRONFENBRENNER, U. (1979), *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- CRANE, M. (1991), *The Story of Ladies' Golf*, Stanley Paul & Co. Ltd, London.
- CRAWFORD, D., & GODBEY, C. (1987), "Reconceptualizing barriers to family leisure", *Leisure Sciences*, 9, 119-127.
- D'ASTOUS, A. (1990), "An inquiry into the compulsive side of normal consumers", *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 13 (1), 15-31.
- DHOLAKÍA, R. R. (1999), "Going shopping: key determinants of shopping behaviors and motivations", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 27, (4), 154 – 165.

FLANNERY, M., & LEECH, R. (2004), *Golf Through the Ages, Six Hundred Years of Golfing Art*, Limited Edition.

KAHN, L. (1996), *The PLGA: The Unauthorized Version*, Group Fore Productions, Inc., California, USA.

McGINNIS, L. P., & GENTRY, J. W. (2006), “Getting Past the Red Tees: Constraints Women Face in Golf and Strategies to Help Them Stay”, *Journal of Sport Management*, 20, 218-247.

McGINNIS, L. P., GENTRY, J. W., & McQUILLAN, J. (2009), “Ritual-based Behavior that Reinforces Hegemonic Masculinity in Golf: Variations in Women Golfers Responses”, *Leisure Sciences*, 31, 19–36, 2009.

RAYMORE, L. (2002), “Facilitators to Leisure”, *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34.

TINKLER, B. A. (2004), *Joyce Wethered - The Great Lady of Golf*, Tempus Publishing Limited, UK.

WOODSIDE, A., CALDWELL M., & SPURR, R. (2006), “Advancing Ecological Systems Theory in Lifestyle, Leisure and Travel Research”, *Journal of Travel Research*, 44 (3), 259-272.