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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 independent fan behavior.

(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.

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.”

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.

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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.

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

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