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# Innovative Sport Consumption Experience

*An Empirical Test in Spectator and Participant Sports*

**Masayuki Yoshida**
**Makoto Nakazawa**

## Abstract

Understanding what aspects of sport consumption experiences are necessary to be innovative to gain and sustain long-term competitive advantage is a key issue in sport marketing. Presented herein is a multi-dimensional conceptualization of innovative sport consumption experiences, including six dimensions: sport performance, aesthetic environment, facility convenience, online services, brand community, and loyalty programs. Data were collected from spectators at a professional baseball game and users of a running station in Japan. Through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM), we assessed the construct and nomological validity of the proposed scale to measure the innovative sport consumption experience. In both settings, aesthetic environment innovativeness was the dominant factor in enhancing consumer satisfaction and brand attitude. Furthermore, the effects of brand community innovativeness on consumer satisfaction, brand attitude, and behavioral intentions were positive and significant for the baseball sample, while online services innovativeness positively influenced consumer satisfaction and brand attitude in the running station setting. The proposed framework was a useful model for understanding consumers' assessments of innovative sport consumption experiences based on specific innovation points.

**Keywords:** *innovative sport consumption; product innovativeness; service innovation; experience innovation; consumer loyalty*

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In his seminal work on consumer loyalty, Oliver (1999) suggests, "for a consumer to become and remain loyal, he or she must believe that an object firm's products continue to offer the best choice alternative" (p. 35). Sport organizations are not an exception to this statement because the development of innovative sport products is a key source of competitive advantage for sport organizations (Higgins & Martin, 1996). According to Shank (2005), there are two primary reasons why production innovations are critical in the sport industry: "[f]irst, new products are necessary to keep up with changing consumer trends, lifestyles, and tastes. Second, as unsuccessful sport products are dropped from the product mix, new products must be introduced continually to maintain business and long-term growth" (p. 248). In today's dynamic sport business environment characterized by heterogeneous consumer demands and technological revolution, the key to new product innovations lays in large deviations from existing products based on multiple value dimensions including functional, emotional, and relational elements (Berry, Shankar, Parish, Cadwallader, & Dotzel, 2006; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). To be truly innovative, sport organizations should engage in creatively changing multiple business systems not only in the tangible domain but also in the intangible and relational domains.

Despite the advances that have been made regarding product innovativeness in the marketing literature (Ali, Krapfel, & LaBahn, 1995; Moreau, Lehmann, & Markman, 2001), there is much to learn about the innovativeness of a sport product. A sport product is defined as "a good, a service, or any combination of the two that is designed to provide benefits to a sport spectator, participant, or sponsor" (Shank, 2005, p. 216). This definition indicates sport products include both physical goods and intangible services, and the combination of the two types of products forms a sport consumption experience that can be either the direct experience of participant sport or the vicarious experience of spectator sport. Because the consumption of a sport product is highly experiential and complex, it is desirable for researchers to focus on multiple innovation points when studying the innovativeness of sport products.

In the minds of consumers, product innovation depends on the newness of a product to the consumer and usage pattern changes (Holak & Lehmann, 1990). In order to understand the psychological processes underlying consumers' perceptions of intangible service and experience innovations, service delivery process (Avlonitis, Papastathopoulou, & Gounaris, 2001), service modification (Avlonitis et al., 2001), respectful access (Berry et al., 2006), flexible solutions (Berry et al., 2006), comfortable gains (Berry et al., 2006), and experience environments (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003) have been examined in the innovation literature. While marketing researchers to date have examined the innovativeness of intangible services (Berry et al., 2006; Avlonitis et al., 2001) and experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003), only a few studies have empirically tested the innovativeness of sport consumption experiences. A notable exception

is the recent work of Yoshida, James, and Cronin (2013) where the innovativeness of spectator sport consumption experiences was conceptualized and tested as a multidimensional construct. They found that sport event innovativeness in the spectator sport context was composed of six dimensions: player performance, aesthetic environment, self-service technology, respectful access, fan loyalty program, and fan community. Their study contributed to our understanding of what aspects (i.e., offerings, services, and relational programs) of sporting events should be innovative in order to provide superior value and increase consumer satisfaction in the context of college football in the United States (US). However, the findings are context-specific and cannot necessarily be generalized beyond this particular setting. It is still unclear whether or not the same factor structure would be found if a sample of spectators outside the US were surveyed. The innovativeness of participant sport consumption experiences has also been ignored to a great extent in the literature. It is paramount to further conceptualize and investigate the concept of the innovative sport consumption experience across spectator and participant sports in a different cultural context. Given the limitations of previous research, the purposes of the current study were to (1) conceptualize the construct of innovative sport consumption experience, (2) assess the factor structure of the proposed construct in the contexts of spectator and participant sports, and (3) examine the impact of the innovative sport consumption experience on consumer retention variables for the nomological validation of the developed measures.

## Research Setting

This study was conducted in both spectator sport and participant sport settings. For the spectator sport setting, we chose a professional baseball team based in the eastern Tokyo metropolitan area in Japan. In the last decade, the team has completed various facility upgrades. In 2004, more club-level seating options were added to the team's home stadium. In 2008, the team installed nearly 300 meters of a new light emitting diode (LED) ribbon board at the stadium. The improvements of a big screen presentation and lighting added radical attributes to the fan experience at the stadium (e.g., displaying game information, presenting sponsor advertisements with in-game promotions, and creating a new entertaining atmosphere). Spectators at a 2011 regular-season baseball game were the subjects of this study.

For the participant sport setting, we selected a running station in Japan. There is a 5 km-loop around the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. Approximately 30 running stations provide locker rooms in this area. The running station we worked with was established in 2010. This running station is organized by a large sporting goods manufacturer and is renowned for its branded service experiences that include special running clinics by professional instructors and rentals of shoes, apparel, and towels of the brand with reasonable prices. Data were collected from the users of this running station in 2012. More details on the respondents are addressed in the Method section.

## Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

### Conceptual Framework

Product innovativeness is defined as the novelty and uniqueness of a new product to the consumer (Ali et al., 1995; Moreau et al., 2001). In order to capture the radical attributes of sport consumption, we defined the construct of innovative sport consumption experience as sport consumers' perceptions of the newness and uniqueness of a sport consumption experience (Ali et al., 1995; Moreau et al., 2001) that is either the direct consumption of participant sport or the vicarious consumption of spectator sport (Shank, 2005). Because many sport organization-consumer transactions involve not only the transfer of physical goods but also the performance of athletes and the experience of services, the innovative sport consumption experience is a multi-dimensional construct (Yoshida et al., 2013). Drawing from previous research, it is suggested that researchers should conceptualize innovative sport consumption experiences based on (1) sport-related, (2) service-related, and (3) relationship-related elements (Berry et al., 2006; Sawhney, Wolcott, & Arroniz, 2006; Yoshida et al., 2013).

**Sport-related innovativeness.** In the sport context, the core product refers to the entertainment of sport performance based on the uncertainty of game outcome (Schaaf, 1995). Players' athletic skills, style of play, and team tactics and strategies are all part of sport performance in the core product domain. More specifically, according to Deighton's (1992) typology of staged event performance, sport performance can be classified into observation- and participation-based sport performance. Observation-based sport performance is a type of sport performance that allows sport consumers to witness skillful player performance on the field and enjoy watching games in an unpredictable manner. On the other hand, participation-based sport performance refers to a type of sport performance that allows sport consumers to actively participate in a sport competition and enjoy a sense of adventure and excitement. Based on the observation/participation dichotomy, sport performance innovativeness in spectator sport depends on the new and unique characteristics of observation-based sport performance. In contrast, sport performance innovativeness in participant sport depends on the new and unique characteristics of participation-based sport performance. In this study, adding radical attributes to the dimension of sport performance innovativeness is of particular importance to understanding innovative sport consumption experiences. In the product innovation literature, product innovativeness refers to the novelty and uniqueness of a new product to the consumer (Ali et al., 1995; Moreau et al., 2001). We adapted this definition to the sport context and described sport performance innovativeness as sport consumers' perceptions of the novelty and uniqueness of directly experienced or vicariously observed sport competitions. Operational definitions of novelty and uniqueness when describing sport performance innovativeness can be obtained from Holt (1995) who indicates that

consumers evaluate sport performance by making comparisons with a variety of baseline expectations and that an unconventional unique style of play is one of the prime targets for consumers' evaluations. Therefore, there is support in the literature to incorporate the innovation characteristics of novelty and uniqueness into the conceptualization of sport performance innovativeness.

**Service-related innovativeness.** Because of the complexity of various ancillary services provided by sport organizations, service-related innovation may include multiple sub-dimensions. First, we distinguished between separable and inseparable services. One perspective on separable and inseparable services is provided by Berry and colleagues (2006). Their service innovation model indicates that separable services can create a new delivery benefit that is derived from allowing consumers to break free of the constraints of time and place. For example, online experiences through the use of internet sites and social media prior to, during, or after a sporting event can provide a rich, engaging, and interactive online environment for consumers. While online service experiences arise in numerous settings when consumers participate in company-initiated or user-initiated online environments, the focus of the current investigation is on company-initiated online service innovativeness. Nontransactional consumer-company relationships in less formally organized social media environments were not included in the conceptual framework because this study demonstrates a model of innovative sport consumption experiences in transactional buyer-seller exchanges (i.e., the exchanges of money, time, and effort for sport products). In this study, online service innovativeness was included as a separable service dimension and is defined as sport consumers' perceptions of the novelty and uniqueness of a technological interface that allows them to use online services for themselves without assistance from frontline employees (Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom, & Brown, 2005).

In contrast, inseparable services are consumer oriented in support of his or her presence and time in order to create both hedonic and utilitarian benefits (Berry et al., 2006). A new hedonic benefit can accrue from a feeling of emotional comfort based on the aesthetically pleasing design and atmosphere of a service environment. Also, a new utilitarian benefit can be generated by reducing the time and effort costs required for consumers in a service environment. By fundamentally managing design, atmosphere, spatial layout, and facility functionality, sport organizations are able to provide new hedonic and utilitarian benefits. Given this consideration, the hedonic aspect of a new inseparable service benefit is considered to be a component of aesthetic environment innovativeness (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997), whereas the utilitarian aspect is viewed as facility convenience innovativeness. The former is defined as sport consumers' perceptions of the novelty and uniqueness of a new feeling of emotional comfort in a service environment that is designed to portray a particular image of what is experienced (Berry et al., 2006). The latter dimension of facility convenience innovativeness is sport consumers' perceptions of the novelty and uniqueness of a new convenience benefit,

which stems from consumer-oriented facility services in support of their presence and time.

**Relationship-related innovativeness.** Extending the contemporary view of relationship marketing in the marketing literature, we focused on particular relational benefits and identified two sub-dimensions in the sport context: brand community innovativeness and loyalty program innovativeness. The conceptual foundation of these two dimensions is attributed to Zeithaml and Bitner's (2003) classification of social bonds, including the two dimensions of consumer-consumer bonds and consumer-firm bonds. In this study, the innovativeness of consumer-consumer bonds was conceptualized as brand community innovativeness. A brand community is defined as a specialized, nongeographically bound community based on the relationships among consumers of a brand (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Sport consumers participate in face-to-face, virtual, consumer-initiated, or company-initiated brand communities. In order to assess consumers' unique feelings of camaraderie and their actual behavior in transactional consumer-company relationships, the proposed conceptual framework is based on subjective consumer responses evoked by live experiences in company-initiated brand communities. Conceptual support is provided by research in the brand community literature (Keller, 2003; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), indicating that consumers derive a positive psychological benefit from membership in groups, such as fan communities in spectator sport and running communities in participant sport. In this article, brand community innovativeness was defined as sport consumers' perceptions of the novelty and uniqueness of a visible, specialized, and non-geographically bound consumption community based on the relationships among the consumers of a sport brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

In contrast, the innovativeness of consumer-firm bonds is related to the novel characteristics of loyalty programs. A loyalty program refers to a type of marketing program that seeks to bond more profitable customers to a firm or its products by offering an additional incentive (Dowling & Uncles, 1997). From the consumer's perspective, loyalty programs can offer relational and special treatment benefits when individuals have a long-term relationship with companies (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998). For instance, professional sport teams might create a credit card and let their fans build up points that are redeemable for multiple reward options, such as team products, tickets, and special access to prestigious experiences (e.g., player-fan interactions). In the running station context, consumers participate in reward programs to obtain discounts, free access to locker rooms, and an exclusive footwear customization program. Loyalty programs are perceived as innovative in the eyes of consumers because they provide new and unique membership rewards. We defined loyalty programs innovativeness as sport consumers' perceptions of the novelty and uniqueness of a membership program, which helps loyal customers connect with a sport organization by offering an additional incentive (Kumar & Shah, 2004).

## Hypotheses

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework and hypotheses underlying this study. Similar to Brakus, Schmit, and Zarantonello's (2009) scale development study of brand experience, consumer satisfaction, brand attitude, and behavioral intentions were included in the framework. These factors can be used as criterion variables to assess nomological validity. Nomological validity is established by testing the relationships between innovative sport consumption experiences and other factors in a network of hypotheses, usually with regression or path analysis (Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991). If we accurately conceptualize and measure the construct of innovative sport consumption experiences, it should predict theoretically related constructs. Theoretically, the literature on the quality-value-loyalty chain (Zeithaml, 1998) suggests that superior value is a significant antecedent of consumer satisfaction (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000), brand attitude (Johnson, Herrmann, & Huber, 2006), and behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 2006; Zeithaml, 1998). According to the emerging experience marketing logic (Brakus et al., 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003), innovative consumption experiences create superior value for consumers. Because innovations in the sport context are also a source of customer value (Higgins & Martin 1996), we expected that an innovative sport consumption experience would have a positive effect on consumer satisfaction, brand attitude, and behavioral intentions. Since the proposed innovative sport consumption experience construct includes six sub-dimensions, the following hypotheses were tested:

$H_1$: Consumers' evaluations of the innovativeness of (a) sport performance, (b) aesthetic environment, (c) facility convenience, (d) online services, (e) brand community, and (f) loyalty programs have positive effects on their satisfaction with the service they experience.

$H_2$: Consumers' evaluations of the innovativeness of (a) sport performance, (b) aesthetic environment, (c) facility convenience, (d) online services, (e) brand community, and (f) loyalty programs have positive effects on their brand attitudes.

$H_3$: Consumers' evaluations of the innovativeness of (a) sport performance, (b) aesthetic environment, (c) facility convenience, (d) online services, (e) brand community, and (f) loyalty programs have positive effects on their behavioral intentions.

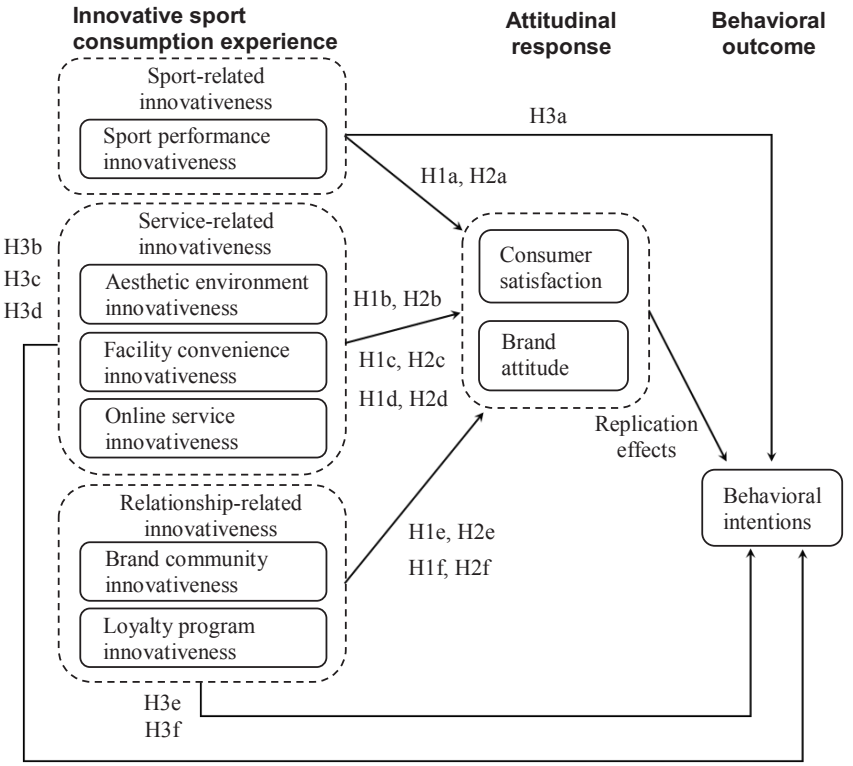


***Figure 1.*** Theoretical Framework and Research Hypothesis

In addition to the hypothesized impact of innovative sport consumption experience, the effects of consumer satisfaction and brand attitude on behavioral intentions should be positive and significant. In the sport marketing literature, consumer satisfaction (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005) and brand attitude (Yoshida & Gordon, 2012) have been found to be influential for behavioral intentions. In order to replicate the relationships reported in previous research, we proposed both consumer satisfaction and brand attitude have a positive effect on behavioral intentions.

## Method

### Data Collection

This study was conducted in both spectator sport and participant sport settings. First, data were collected from spectators attending a professional baseball game in the eastern Tokyo metropolitan area. At a regular-season game in the second half of the 2011 season, questionnaires were distributed to individuals out-

side the stadium prior to the start of the baseball game. In order to collect data as systematically as possible, the researchers estimated when, where, and how people would be present at various locations around the stadium based on observations of previous games. Twelve trained surveyors approached potential respondents in the assigned locations. In order to collect data on participant sport, the setting we chose was a running station organized by a large sporting goods manufacturer. Data were collected from users of this running station during weekends in the peak season between September and November in 2012. Five trained surveyors distributed questionnaires at the station after the participants finished running. The surveyors ensured that no subject participated in more than one survey.

### Measurement

In order to measure the innovativeness dimensions, an 18-item scale was adopted from Yoshida and colleagues' (2013) sport event innovativeness scale. Consumer satisfaction was measured with a scale adopted from Yoshida and James' (2010) customer satisfaction with service experiences scale. Brand attitude was measured on a three-item scale adopted from Brady, Cronin, Fox, and Roehm (2008). Behavioral intentions were measured with a three-item scale adapted from Yoshida et al. (2013). These items assessed consumers' favorable intentions to (1) buy services of the sport brand consistently in the future, (2) recommend the sport brand to other consumers, and (3) allocate more than 50% of their sport consumption budget for the sport brand. All survey items were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale (see Table 1).

### Back Translation

As a check of meaning equivalence between the original English instrument and the translated Japanese instrument, the survey questionnaire was first translated into Japanese by a bilingual Japanese-English speaker. Then, the back-translation into English was conducted by another native of Japan who is also fluent in English. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, a US-born American citizen was asked to assess differences in meaning between the original and the back-translated instruments. A comparison of the two forms indicated that both instruments reflected the construct domain.

**Table 1**

*CFA Results*

| Construct | Item | Factor loading | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Baseball[a] | Running station[b] |
| Sport performance innovativeness ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .94, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .85, $CR_{Running}$ = .91, $AVE_{Running}$ = .77) | | | |
| 1. | The (unique performance of the players on your favourite team/running performance through this running station) has led to a change in (the team's style of play/your running style).[c] | .95 | .80 |
| 2. | The (performance of the players on your favourite team/running performance through this running station) is unique compared to other (teams' players/running stations).[c] | .92 | .92 |
| 3. | The (performance of the players on your favourite team/running performance through this running station) is novel compared to other (running stations/teams' players).[c] | .90 | .92 |
| Aesthetic environment innovativeness ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .87, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .70, $CR_{Running}$ = .90, $AVE_{Running}$ = .74) | | | |
| 1. | The store design of this (stadium/running station) is novel. | .87 | .88 |
| 2. | The unique store concept of this (stadium/running station) creates a distinctive atmosphere. | .90 | .93 |
| 3. | This (stadium/running station) has an atmosphere that is radically different from the atmosphere of other (stadiums/running stations). | .73 | .76 |
| Facility convenience innovativeness ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .91, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .76, $CR_{Running}$ = .89, $AVE_{Running}$ = .74) | | | |
| 1. | The facilities of this (stadium/running station) are easy to use compared to other (stadiums/running stations). | .81 | .73 |
| 2. | This (stadium/running station) provides user-friendly facilities that are radically new. | .89 | .94 |
| 3. | This (stadium/running station) provides facilities that are unconventionally easy to use. | .91 | .89 |
| Online service innovativeness ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .94, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .84, $CR_{Running}$ = .86, $AVE_{Running}$ = .68) | | | |
| 1. | The online services (i.e., homepage, Twitter, Facebook) offered by (your favourite team/this running station) are unique compared to other (teams/this running station). | .96 | .75 |
| 2. | The online services offered by (your favourite team/this running station) have led to a change in your (game/running) experiences. | .95 | .81 |
| 3. | The online services of (your favourite team/this running station) provide a new way of following (the team/running information). | .85 | .90 |
| Brand community innovativeness ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .91, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .77, $CR_{Running}$ = .94, $AVE_{Running}$ = .83) | | | |
| 1. | The (fans/users) of (your favourite team/this running station) are motivated to (support the team/run) in an unconventional manner. | .88 | .85 |
| 2. | The camaraderie of the (fans/users) of (your favourite team/this running station) is novel compared to the relationships among other (sport fans/runners). | .91 | .92 |
| 3. | Unlike other (fan/user) communities, the (fan/user) community of (your favourite team/this running station) has novel characteristics. | .85 | .95 |
| Loyalty program innovativeness ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .94, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .84, $CR_{Running}$ = .92, $AVE_{Running}$ = .80) | | | |
| 1. | The membership rewards of (your favourite team/this running station) are extraordinarily new. | .92 | .92 |
| 2. | The membership benefits of (your favourite team/this running station) have led to a change in (the way fans follow the team/your running style). | .88 | .80 |
| 3. | The membership programs of (your favourite team/this running station) provide unconventional rewards. | .95 | .94 |

**Table 1 (cont.)**

| Construct | Item | Factor loading | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Baseball[a] | Running station[b] |
| Consumer satisfaction ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .95, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .87, $CR_{Running}$ = .94, $AVE_{Running}$ = .84) | | | |
| 1. | You are happy about the service you experience at this (stadium/running station). | .96 | .94 |
| 2. | You are delighted by the service you experience at this (stadium/running station. | .94 | .98 |
| 3. | You are satisfied with the service you experience at this (stadium/running station). | .90 | .81 |
| Brand attitude ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .83, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .62, $CR_{Running}$ = .90, $AVE_{Running}$ = .75) | | | |
| 1. | What kind of attitude do you have about (team name/company name)? (Negative Attitude [1] to Positive Attitude [7]) | .81 | .90 |
| 2. | What kind of image do you have about (team name/company name)? (Negative Image [1] to Positive Image [7]) | .77 | .91 |
| 3. | How would you rate the (product/event) quality delivered by (team name/company name)? (Low Quality [1] to High Quality [7]) | .79 | .79 |
| Behavioral intentions ($CR_{Baseball}$ = .86, $AVE_{Baseball}$ = .67, $CR_{Running}$ = .84, $AVE_{Running}$ = .64) | | | |
| 1. | The probability that you will (attend another sporting event of the team/use this running station) is: (Very Low [1] to Very High [7]). | .71 | .86 |
| 2. | The likelihood that you would recommend (attending the team's game/this running station) to a friend is: (Very Low [1] to Very High [7]). | .84 | .92 |
| 3. | The probability that you will spend more than 50% of your (sport consumption budget on the team/running training budget on this running station) is: (Very Low [1] to Very High [7]). | .90 | .59 |

[a] $\chi^2$ (df) = 580.37 (288), p < .01; $\chi^2$/df = 2.02; CFI = .98; NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .061
[b] $\chi^2$ (df) = 665.17 (288), p < .01; $\chi^2$/df = 2.31; CFI = .98; NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .063
[c] The items were originally developed in the spectator context (Yoshida et al., 2013) and were revised to reflect both the baseball and running station settings.

## Results

### Samples

First, we collected data from spectators at a professional baseball game. Of the 360 questionnaires that were distributed, 342 were returned for a response rate of 95.0%. Among the 342 forms returned, 36 were rejected because many items were left blank. We further eliminated 28 respondents who had never attended the team's home game prior to the data collection because these participants were not able to respond to the survey items of consumer satisfaction that required consumers' cumulative experiences at previous games. This left a total of 278 usable cases ($n$ = 278). Of the baseball sample, 68.4% of the subjects were male. One-third of the respondents were in the 30-39 age range (32.8%), 28.2% were between 40 and 49 years old, and 24.5% were between 20 and 29 years old.

The second data collection was conducted at a running station. All of the 339 questionnaires distributed were returned. Among the 339 forms returned, 10 were incomplete, yielding a usable response rate of 97.1% ($n$ = 329). Of the total sample, 62.6% of the respondents were male. Approximately one-third of the subjects were in the 30-39 age range (36.3%), 27.4% were between 20 and 29 years old, 25.8% were between 40 and 49 years old, and 10.5% were 50 years old and above.

## Assessment of the Measures

The psychometric properties of the items were assessed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.8. The fit of the measurement model was acceptable for both samples. The ratios of chi-square to degrees of freedom ($\chi^2/df$) were within the acceptable range of 2 to 3 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The comparative fit index (CFI) and non-normed fit index (NNFI) were greater than the cutoff point of .90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The values of the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were .061 for the baseball sample and .063 for the running station sample; both were smaller than Hu and Bentler's (1999) criterion of .08.

Scale statistics, including factor loadings ($\lambda$), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values, are presented in Table 1. Factor loadings ranged from .71 to .96 for the baseball sample and from .59 to .95 for the running station sample. In both settings, the CR values for all factors were greater than the recommended cutoff point of .60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), indicating the proposed constructs were internally consistent. A further assessment of convergent and discriminant validity was conducted by an examination of AVE values. The computed AVE values for the proposed constructs ranged from .62 to .87 in the baseball setting and from .64 to .84 in the running station setting, providing evidence of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the AVE estimate for each construct with the squared correlations between the respective constructs (see Table 2). In both settings, in a total of 36 correlations between the nine latent constructs, the AVE values were considerably greater than any squared correlations between all pairs of the constructs. Therefore, discriminant validity was indicated.

## Hypothesis Testing

An examination of the hypothesized relationships was achieved through structural equation modeling (SEM) using LISREL 8.8 (see Table 3). The fit of the hypothesized model was acceptable in both baseball ($\chi^2/df = 2.05$, $p < .01$; CFI = .98; NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .062) and running station settings ($\chi^2/df = 2.32$, $p < .01$; CFI = .98; NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .063). Table 3 also shows the results of hypothesis testing. In the baseball setting, the innovativeness of aesthetic environment ($\gamma = .32$, $p < .01$), facility convenience ($\gamma = .25$, $p < .01$), brand community ($\gamma = .14$, $p < .05$), and loyalty programs ($\gamma = .19$, $p < .05$) had a positive effect on consumer satisfaction. Also, aesthetic environment innovativeness ($\gamma = .23$, $p < .05$) and brand community innovativeness ($\gamma = .17$, $p < .05$) were significant positive predictors of brand attitude. Furthermore, behavioral intentions were positively influenced by brand community innovativeness ($\beta = .36$, $p < .01$) and consumer satisfaction ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$). Collectively, $H_{1b}$, $H_{1c}$, $H_{1e}$, $H_{1f}$, $H_{2b}$, $H_{2e}$, and $H_{3e}$ were supported.

## Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics, ϕ Matrix, and AVE Values*[a]

| | Construct | Φ matrix[b] (Baseball, n = 278) | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1. | Sport performance innovativeness | ***.85*** | .37 | .39 | .43 | .23 | .44 | .34 | .23 | .10 |
| 2. | Aesthetic environment innovativeness | .61** | ***.70*** | .36 | .33 | .26 | .33 | .42 | .26 | .21 |
| 3. | Facility convenience innovativeness | .62** | .60** | ***.76*** | .51 | .17 | .31 | .36 | .18 | .10 |
| 4. | Online service innovativeness | .66** | .58** | .71** | ***.84*** | .19 | .55 | .28 | .20 | .13 |
| 5. | Brand community innovativeness | .48** | .51** | .41** | .43** | ***.77*** | .21 | .25 | .19 | .29 |
| 6. | Loyalty program innovativeness | .66** | .58** | .56** | .74** | .45** | ***.84*** | .33 | .24 | .13 |
| 7. | Consumer satisfaction | .58** | .65** | .60** | .53** | .50** | .57** | ***.87*** | .32 | .22 |
| 8. | Brand attitude | .48** | .51** | .43** | .44** | .44** | .49** | .57** | ***.62*** | .17 |
| 9. | Behavioral intentions | .31** | .46** | .32** | .36** | .54** | .36** | .47** | .41** | ***.67*** |
| | $Mean_{Baseball}$[c] | 4.48 | 5.18 | 4.30 | 4.44 | 5.90 | 4.57 | 5.18 | 5.74 | 5.83 |
| | $Standard\ deviation_{Baseball}$[c] | 1.30 | 1.18 | 1.37 | 1.25 | 1.17 | 1.34 | 1.29 | 1.08 | 1.26 |
| | Construct | Φ matrix[b] (Running station, n = 329) | | | | | | | | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 1. | Sport performance innovativeness | ***.77*** | .22 | .37 | .45 | .47 | .56 | .35 | .10 | .07 |
| 2. | Aesthetic environment innovativeness | .47** | ***.74*** | .44 | .08 | .17 | .16 | .20 | .13 | .06 |
| 3. | Facility convenience innovativeness | .61** | .66** | ***.74*** | .24 | .41 | .33 | .25 | .05 | .09 |
| 4. | Online service innovativeness | .67** | .29** | .49** | ***.68*** | .52 | .48 | .30 | .09 | .02 |
| 5. | Brand community innovativeness | .69** | .42** | .64** | .72** | ***.83*** | .59 | .20 | .03 | .01 |
| 6. | Loyalty program innovativeness | .75** | .40** | .58** | .69** | .77** | ***.80*** | .20 | .05 | .03 |
| 7. | Consumer satisfaction | .59** | .45** | .50** | .55** | .45** | .44** | ***.84*** | .14 | .15 |
| 8. | Brand attitude | .32** | .37** | .23** | .30** | .18** | .22** | .37** | ***.75*** | .15 |
| 9. | Behavioral intentions | .26** | .25** | .30** | .13* | .11 | .17** | .39** | .39** | ***.64*** |
| | $Mean_{Running}$[c] | 4.43 | 5.13 | 4.89 | 4.18 | 4.17 | 4.15 | 5.07 | 5.61 | 5.98 |
| | $Standard\ deviation_{Running}$[c] | 1.09 | 1.00 | 1.07 | 1.01 | 1.08 | 1.07 | 1.13 | .93 | .94 |

[a] The AVE value for each construct is shown in boldface italic on the diagonal.
[b] Correlations are reported in the lower triangle of the ϕ matrix; squared correlations are depicted in the upper triangle of the ϕ matrix.
[c] The mean scores and standard deviations for the nine constructs were calculated using IBM SPSS statistics 20.0.
* p < .05; ** p < .01

In the running station setting, consumer satisfaction and brand attitude were each positively impacted by the innovativeness of sport performance ($\gamma_{satisfaction}$ = .37, $p < .01$; $\gamma_{brand\ attitude}$ = .20, $p < .05$), aesthetic environment ($\gamma_{satisfaction}$ = .20, $p < .01$; $\gamma_{brand\ attitude}$ = .39, $p < .01$), and online services ($\gamma_{satisfaction}$ = .39, $p < .01$; $\gamma_{brand\ attitude}$ = .35, $p < .01$). In contrast, brand attitude was negatively influenced by brand community innovativeness ($\gamma$ = -.23, $p < .05$). Furthermore, behavioral intentions were positively influenced by facility convenience innovativeness ($\beta$ = .29, $p < .01$), consumer satisfaction ($\beta$ = .32, $p < .01$), and brand attitude ($\beta$ = .32, $p < .01$), whereas the impact of online service innovativeness on behavioral intentions was negative ($\beta$ = -.22, $p < .05$). Given these results, $H_{1a}$, $H_{1b}$, $H_{1d}$, $H_{2a}$, $H_{2b}$, $H_{2d}$, and $H_{3c}$ were supported.

In terms of the robustness of the hypothesized effects, it is worth noting that behavioral intentions were more impacted by brand community innovativeness than by consumer satisfaction and brand attitude in the baseball setting (see Table 3). In the running station setting, the direct impact of facility convenience innovativeness on behavioral intentions was as large as those of consumer satisfaction and brand attitude. The results were robust to the inclusion of the simultaneous effects of consumer satisfaction and brand attitude.

**Table 3**

*Standardized Parameter Estimates (t-value) and Hypothesis Testing*

| Exogenous variables | Endogenous variables (Baseball[a], n = 278) | | | Hypothesis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Consumer satisfaction | Brand attitude | Behavioral intentions | |
| Sport performance innovativeness | .10(1.45) | .12(1.25) | -.18(-1.75) | $H_{1a}$, $H_{2a}$, $H_{3a}$ |
| Aesthetic environment innovativeness | .32**(4.53) | .23*(2.57) | .17(1.81) | $H_{1b}$, $H_{2b}$, $H_{3b}$ |
| Facility convenience innovativeness | .25**(3.30) | .07(.77) | -.06(-.65) | $H_{1c}$, $H_{2c}$, $H_{3c}$ |
| Online service innovativeness | -.10(-1.19) | -.03(-.28) | .10(.95) | $H_{1d}$, $H_{2d}$, $H_{3d}$ |
| Brand community innovativeness | .14*(2.52) | .17*(2.31) | .36**(4.83) | $H_{1e}$, $H_{2e}$, $H_{3e}$ |
| Loyalty program innovativeness | .19*(2.43) | .18(1.84) | -.01(-.07) | $H_{1f}$, $H_{2f}$, $H_{3f}$ |
| Consumer satisfaction | | | .19*(2.22) | Replication |
| Brand attitude | | | .12(1.51) | Replication |
| $R^2$ | .55 | .36 | .38 | |
| Exogenous variables | Endogenous variables (Running station[b], n = 329) | | | Hypothesis |
| | Consumer satisfaction | Brand attitude | Behavioral intentions | |
| Sport performance innovativeness | .37**(4.48) | .20*(2.00) | .06(.58) | $H_{1a}$, $H_{2a}$, $H_{3a}$ |
| Aesthetic environment innovativeness | .20**(3.09) | .39**(4.77) | -.13(-1.50) | $H_{1b}$, $H_{2b}$, $H_{3b}$ |
| Facility convenience innovativeness | .13(1.64) | -.13(-1.33) | .29**(2.99) | $H_{1c}$, $H_{2c}$, $H_{3c}$ |
| Online service innovativeness | .39**(4.77) | .35**(3.54) | -.22*(-2.04) | $H_{1d}$, $H_{2d}$, $H_{3d}$ |
| Brand community innovativeness | -.13(-1.50) | -.23*(-2.09) | -.16(-1.46) | $H_{1e}$, $H_{2e}$, $H_{3e}$ |
| Loyalty program innovativeness | -.16(-1.82) | -.08(-.78) | .07(.70) | $H_{1f}$, $H_{2f}$, $H_{3f}$ |
| Consumer satisfaction | | | .32**(4.13) | Replication |
| Brand attitude | | | .32**(4.84) | Replication |
| $R^2$ | .46 | .23 | .27 | |

[a] $\chi^2$ (df) = 592.80 (289), $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 2.05$; CFI = .98; NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .062
[b] $\chi^2$ (df) = 669.56 (289), $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 2.32$; CFI = .98; NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .063; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The ability of the exogenous variables to explain variations in the endogenous variables was assessed by $R^2$ values (see Table 3). The $R^2$ values for consumer satisfaction, brand attitude, and behavioral intentions in the baseball setting were .55, .36, and .38, respectively, and those in the running station setting were .46, .23, and .27, respectively.

## Discussion

When sport organizations attempt to create superior value, retain loyal consumers, and achieve growth, the development of an innovative sport product is a vital practice (Higgins & Martin, 1996). Because of the impact of innovative sport products on sport consumer behavior, it is desirable to understand the innovative sport consumption experience and its determinants and consequences from the consumer's perspective. Toward this end, we presented a multidimensional conceptualization of an innovative sport consumption experience and assessed its impact on satisfaction, brand attitude, and behavioral intentions in the contexts of spectator and participant sports. Since little effort has been made to examine the innovative aspect of sport consumption and its influence on consumer behavior, this study offers a significant contribution to the sport marketing literature in five different ways.

The first contribution of this research is the establishment of the construct validity of the proposed scale. Past studies have predominantly viewed product innovativeness as a uni-dimensional, global construct and have measured the radical attributes of technologically new products (Ali et al., 1995; Moreau et al., 2001). Aesthetically, relationally, and socially innovative sport consumption experiences cannot be adequately examined by the traditional measures of product innovativeness. Although a more recent study (Yoshida et al., 2013) conceptualized and tested the innovativeness of spectator sport consumption experiences, the findings were still contextual and cannot necessarily be extrapolated beyond the context of college football in the US. To address the limitations in previous research, we adopted Yoshida et al.'s (2013) scale items to measure the innovative sport consumption experience and tested the adopted scale across spectator and participant sports in Japan. An examination of the CFA results revealed clear evidence of convergent and discriminant validity in both settings, providing strong support for the multi-dimensional conceptualization of innovative sport consumption experience.

The second major finding is that aesthetic environment innovativeness and facility convenience innovativeness were the dominant factors in enhancing consumer retention variables. Aesthetic environment innovativeness was found to be a significant predictor of consumer satisfaction and brand attitude for both the baseball and running station samples. The underlying rationale for this result is provided by Schmitt and Simonson (1997), who suggest firms can use visual aesthetic design and sensory atmosphere not only to increase consumer satisfaction but also to create long-term competitive advantages (e.g., charging a premium price, building brand equity, and enhancing consumer loyalty). The findings of this study strengthened this contention by showing the impact of innovative aesthetic environments. In addition, facility convenience innovativeness was a significant antecedent of consumer satisfaction in the baseball setting and of behavioral intentions in the running station setting. Both baseball stadiums and running stations are thought to be a self-service environment where consumers are allowed to control when, where, and how they use facilities, and the availability of employee assistance is relatively limited (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). In the current baseball and running station settings, the service environments were new, user-friendly, easy to get to, easy to get through, and easy to get out of the facilities. Wide concourses, clear information signs, and numerous concession stands are all part of superior access. The results indicated that providing an extraordinarily convenient facility increased both consumer satisfaction and the likelihood of returning for future consumption.

As a third contribution, the current study advanced our understanding of innovative brand communities and loyalty programs in spectator sport. The results indicated the effects of brand community innovativeness on consumer satisfaction, brand attitude, and behavioral intentions were all positive and significant in the baseball setting. Also, it is noteworthy to mention that the impact of brand

community innovativeness on behavioral intentions was much stronger than those of consumer satisfaction and brand attitude. Identifying a variable that predicts behavioral intentions above and beyond traditional sport marketing constructs is an important step in advancing our understanding of sport consumer behavior.

The baseball team we studied has developed one of the most unique fan communities in Japan. The fans have well-established traditions, customs, and fan activities, including unique fight songs, body gestures, and group movements. Because of these distinctive characteristics of communal fan behaviors, consumers might perceive their fan community as innovative, and such perceptions would satisfy the fans' expectations and increase the brand image of the team. Moreover, the current study provided evidence that the impact of brand community innovativeness was much more powerful in spectator sport than in participant sport because sport fans become more involved in communal fan experiences at live events when watching games in a group situation at spectator sport events (Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003). From a practical standpoint, the results and the relevant literature (Decrop & Derbaix, 2010; Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw, 1999) suggest fans' pre- and in-game activities such as anthems, fight songs, group movements, and displays of team colors can be used to foster their unique feelings of friendship and pride in fan communities and eventually to increase consumer satisfaction, brand attitude, and behavioral intentions.

Additionally, loyalty program innovativeness was also found to be a significant precursor of consumer satisfaction for the baseball sample. The baseball team we worked with is known as the first team that has successfully developed a customer relationship management (CRM) program among the major professional sport teams in Japan. During the season this research was conducted, the team provided a variety of incentives with six different categories of fan loyalty programs. These incentives included earning points with a loyalty card, priority seating, and various free gifts (e.g., stadium jacket, baseball jersey, backpack, t-shirt, towel, neck strap, and tickets) depending on the category of the loyalty programs. Also, some player-fan interactions and sponsor events were available only for the loyalty program members. Furthermore, the team offered an online membership account so the members could check their records on attendance, purchases, and other transactions. Considering that these unique and useful benefits were novel for the fans who followed the team, it seems reasonable to believe that consumer satisfaction is a function of innovative loyalty programs.

The fourth major finding was that online service innovativeness was the major variable that enhanced consumer satisfaction and brand attitude in the running station setting. The offering of social media and direct e-mail services led to a change in the consumption experience at the running station. In particular, the selected running station has official Facebook and Twitter accounts. The users of the running station actively engaged in real-time social media communications because employees of the running station immediately sent helpful information (e.g., current weather conditions and the number of participants available for run-

ning clinics) to the members using social media. According to Kietzmann and colleagues (2011), companies' social media efforts to increase the connectivity of consumers in the virtual world and in the real world will enhance the effectiveness of real-time marketing. By providing real-time information through social media, practitioners can expect that their online services will bridge the gap between virtual environments and real-world environments, become very helpful solutions, and eventually lead to enhanced consumer satisfaction and positive brand image.

The fifth contribution was to explain the impact of innovative sport performance on consumer retention variables. The findings indicated sport performance innovativeness played a particularly important role in increasing consumer satisfaction and brand attitude in the running station setting. Because there were approximately 30 competitors around the Tokyo Imperial Palace in the year studied, the running station must sustain a continuously high rate of sport performance innovations. Under conditions of high competitive intensity, an innovative sport performance is argued to be a valuable product that provides consumers with superior benefits over competitors and eventually increases consumer satisfaction and brand attitude. The rationale for this assertion follows the literature that suggests that intangible product innovations improve long-term, non-financial performance (i.e., satisfaction, brand image, and loyalty), which are not related with immediate financial performance (Avlonitis et al., 2001). The results of this study showed a similar pattern regarding the impact of sport performance innovativeness on consumer satisfaction and brand attitude.

Although we did not anticipate the non-significant impact of sport performance innovativeness on the outcome variables in the baseball setting, this finding was still meaningful from a practical standpoint. For professional sport teams, it is difficult to create a breakthrough innovation in the core sport product domain because sport leagues maintain a competitive balance (Noll, 2003). Without acquiring star players, winning a championship game, repeating a record-breaking performance, or moving to a new stadium, consumers are less likely to perceive their favorite team's sport performance as innovative. On the contrary, the current study highlighted the importance of managing more controllable elements of service- and relationship-related innovativeness. Specifically, the results indicated that innovative aesthetic environments, facility convenience, brand communities, and online services were significant antecedents of consumer retention. Through the careful and creative management of the service- and relationship-related innovation points, sport marketers may be able to contribute to the achievement of satisfying consumers, establish a radical brand image of sport organizations, and increase the likelihood of sustainable purchasing behavior. Given the theoretical importance of the controllable dimensions of service- and relationship-related innovativeness, it seems reasonable to believe that product extensions in the service and relational domains are effective to improve consumer outcomes.

Also, it should be noted that in the running station setting, the relationship between brand community innovativeness and brand attitude and the relationship

between online service innovativeness and behavioral intentions were weak but statistically significant in an unexpected negative direction. This finding may be a reflection of the setting. The participants at the running station setting had high ratings for brand attitude ($M$ = 5.61) and behavioral intentions ($M$ = 5.98). Conversely, the mean scores of online service innovativeness and brand community innovativeness were 4.18 and 4.17, respectively. The respondents' low evaluations of the innovativeness of online services and the brand community may have had an adverse effect on brand attitude and behavioral intentions.

## Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations and directions for future research can be identified from this study. First, the findings of this research might be context-specific and cannot be generalized beyond the Japanese sport context. Suggestions for future research include determining if the dimensions are conceptually sound in a cross-cultural setting, how consistently the dimensions are evaluated by consumers across different countries, and whether additional work is needed to further develop the construct internationally. Another limitation to consider is the omission of important variables. For example, sport marketing researchers have determined that team identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1990), team attachment (Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James, & Gladden, 2003), and psychological commitment to the team (Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000) are significant attitudinal constructs in sport consumers' decision-making. Future research should include these attitudinal constructs and examine their impact on the innovative sport consumption experience. Thirdly, the proposed innovativeness dimensions accounted for 23% to 36% of the variance in brand attitude, indicating additional factors influencing consumers' brand assessments. For example, this study did not include the innovativeness of various entertainment activities (e.g., halftime shows, mascots, giveaways, and food services) in the research model. Beyond the dimensions of sport-, service-, and relationship-related innovativeness, the innovativeness of promotional activities should be included in future research in order to explain more variance in brand attitude. The fourth limitation is in relation to data collection. For the spectator sport sample, questionnaires were distributed to individuals outside the stadium prior to the start of the baseball game. In the participant sport setting, data were collected from users of the running station during weekends in the peak season between September and November. These samples might be inclined to have greater levels of consumer loyalty, compared to the general population. If we were to replicate this study with a more representative sample of sport consumers, the findings will be more pronounced because there are more variations in consumer loyalty and innovation perceptions among the subjects. Finally, the relationships between the proposed constructs may change across different sport settings. The importance of the innovation points varies across sports (e.g., amateur and professional sports), athletic levels (Division I and Division II), and event types (e.g., re-occurring and annual events). Additional efforts need

to be made to identify which dimensions will be more or less innovative in other settings.

## Conclusion

The proposed framework was a useful model for understanding consumers' assessments of innovative sport consumption experiences based on specific innovation points: sport-related, service-related, and relationship-related dimensions. By investigating the construct of innovative sport consumption experiences across spectator and participant sports in Japan and examining its impact on consumer retention variables, the current study extended previous research that primarily focused on the innovative aspect of spectator sport events in the US. The developed scale to measure innovative sport consumption experiences provides numerous opportunities to continue advancing our knowledge of sport consumer behavior.

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