

# **The Benefits of Redefining a Round of Golf: An Analysis Based on Leisure Constraints Theory**

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*The golf industry plays an important role in the economy. However, shifts in the marketplace have created challenges for the industry. The purpose of this research is to discover potential marketing strategies to recruit and retain golfers that focus on eliminating leisure constraints. Using a survey, this research asked golfers about their interests in playing different golf course configurations instead of the traditional 18 holes. Results show that a majority of participants prefer shorter rounds. The results of this study can assist golf course owners in developing marketing strategies that remove leisure constraints for consumers, therefore increasing participation and profitability.*

*Keywords: leisure constraints theory, golf industry, marketing strategy, sports marketing*

## **INTRODUCTION**

If golf were (re)invented today, what would it look like? Are the needs of modern golfers different? Perhaps golfers in today's fast-paced environment would prefer shorter rounds. Traditionally, a course is eighteen holes. Nine-hole courses and rounds exist; however, is there a better design that meets the modern recreational golfers' desires? In this paper, the authors suggest that there are fundamental changes that could (and should) occur to the game of golf, such that traditions are not lost, yet keep the sport sustainable into the future when fewer resources such as land and water will exist. The golf industry plays a crucial role in both the economy and the lives of millions of people worldwide. The popular pastime generated \$101.7 billion in direct economic activity and employed over one million individuals in 2022 just within the United States (American Golf Industry Coalition, 2023). In addition, much like other leisure industries, golf serves as a means for people to unwind and socialize.

Although golf has seen a consistent rise in the number of golfers for the last six years after over a decade of decline, the industry still faces challenges in growing and maintaining participation in on-course participation (Golf Industry Facts, 2024). Traditional on-course golf, characterized by a round of 18 holes, can take up to five hours to complete, and research has shown this traditional format may not be compatible

with today's lifestyles, which require time flexibility and time efficiency (Fitzpatrick, 2011; McGinnis, Gentry, & Haltom, 2021).

To recruit and retain more golfers, it is important that we understand the preferences of both golfers and non-golfers (who may be interested in playing golf). Understanding the preferences of these consumers is essential in order for the golf industry to adapt to the world today. This study aims to investigate these preferences and identify the underlying factors that influence them, providing golf course owners and managers valuable insights. Course owners and managers are beginning to think creatively about their golf rounds as inventory. Is there a better way to broaden their product offerings and/or reallocate their inventory that is more profitable and sustainable while at the same time meeting golfers' expectations?

To frame this study, the authors used the leisure constraints theory, which considers internal and external factors that prevent an individual's participation in leisure activities (Crane & Temple, 2015; Jackson, 1997). Although a few studies have investigated these constraints within the golf context (Choi, Greenwell, Hums, & Hambrick, 2019; Lyu & Lee, 2018; Reis & Correia, 2014; Won & Hwang, 2008; Won, Hwang, & Kleiber, 2009), very few were done with U.S. golfers (Won & Hwang, 2008), and none have examined alternative golf configurations. In addition to uncovering what factors prohibit a consumer's participation in golf, the current study also asks which types of golfers and non-golfers (those who are not active but are interested in playing) will be interested in playing alternative golf configurations such as 3 holes, 6 holes, 9 holes, 12 holes, or 15 holes, instead of the traditional 18 holes.

Uncovering the constraints that prevent more golfers from participating and their views on alternative golf configurations has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by providing additional empirical evidence regarding the types of constraints consumers face within the golf industry. In addition, the findings are of great value to practitioners. Eliminating the perceived constraints of consumers is an effective way to grow and retain business. Furthermore, understanding the opinions of existing and potential consumers regarding alternative golf course configurations may suggest product alterations that can be used as a differentiation strategy to help increase profits. The purpose of this study is to understand golfers' interests in shorter rounds and to discover marketing strategies to increase participation in on-course golf by controlling and removing perceived constraints.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

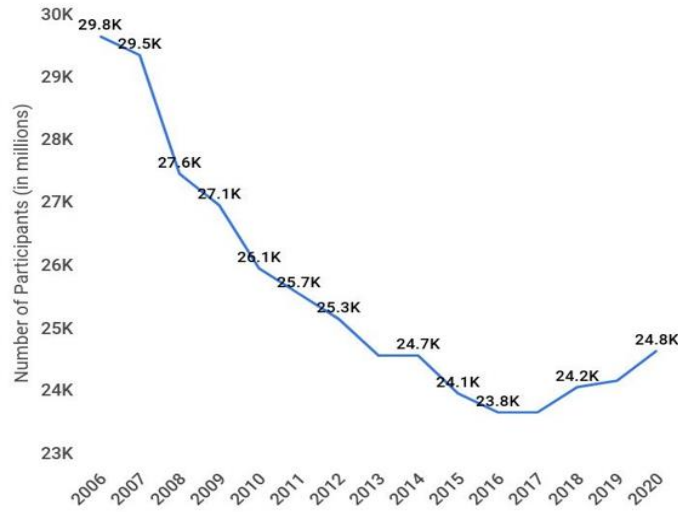
### **The Golf Industry**

The golf industry represents an important segment within the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry sector, driving nearly \$102 billion of direct economic activity in 2022 (American Golf Industry Coalition, 2023). The industry includes a wide variety of activities and operations including golf courses, equipment manufacturing and sales, amateur and professional tournaments, coaching services, tourism, and entertainment golf facilities. These related activities helped to drive nearly \$125 billion of indirect economic activity, creating a total impact of almost \$227 billion in 2022 (American Golf Industry Coalition, 2023).

In addition to the impact on the economy's well-being, golf also contributes to the physical and mental well-being of individuals (American Golf Industry Coalition, 2023). This low-impact, moderately intense exercise is excellent for people of all ages and has been shown to increase life expectancy (R&A, 2020). In addition to the physical aspect, golf can also benefit individuals mentally. Studies show that beyond the physical benefits, individuals play golf to relieve stress and to socialize (Berlin & Klenosky, 2014; Stenner, Mosewich, & Buckley, 2016).

While golf is an ancient game with origins dating back to at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Evans, 2023), it is still a popular pastime today with roughly 45 million Americans participating in some form of the game in 2023 (Golf Participation Update - Bigger, Younger and Cooler, 2024). While the golf industry saw a boom during the 1980s and 90s leading to a record-setting number of over 30 million on-course golfers in 2003 (Deegan, 2019), sometime around the first decade of the 21st century, the numbers started declining. As shown in Figure 1, the number of on-course golf participants in the U.S. decreased significantly from around 30 million in 2005 to less than 24 million by the year 2018 (Ariella, 2023).

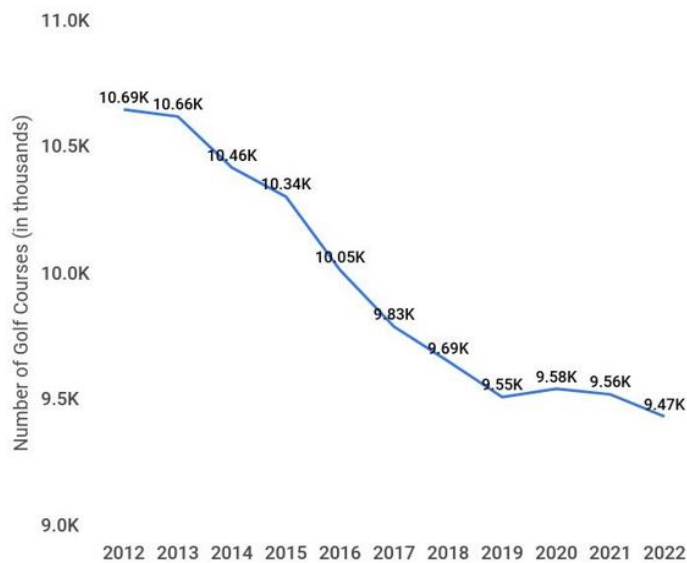
**FIGURE 1**  
**NUMBER OF U.S. GOLF PARTICIPANTS OVER TIME**



Ariella, 2023

In addition, the number of active golfers who play at least eight rounds per year in the US has decreased by 3.0 to 4.5% every single year since 2006 (Ariella, 2023). Another study (Crompton, 2020) determined there was a consistent decline annually in the number of golf players, finding that there were 6.8 million fewer golfers in 2018 compared to 2003 with a decline of nearly 22 percent. The decrease in golf participation and subsequently reduced revenues led to the closure of many golf courses in the U.S., most of which were value-priced courses (Golf Industry Facts, 2024). As seen in Figure 2, the number of golf courses reduced from a peak of around 11,000 in the year 2010 to less than 9,500 courses by the year 2022 (Ariella, 2023).

**FIGURE 2**  
**NUMBER OF U.S. GOLF COURSE OVER TIME**



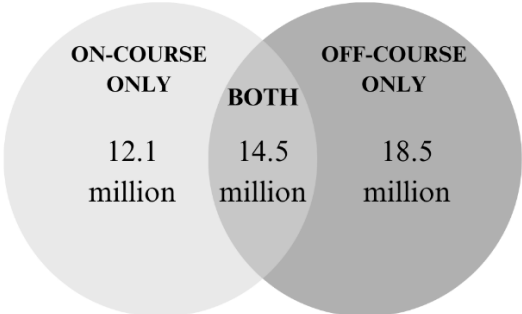
Ariella, 2023

While most of the sports industry suffered during the 2020 COVID pandemic, the golf industry experienced an upward trend in terms of an increase in the number of people participating and playing golf during the pandemic. Unlike most other sports, golf provided a socially distanced, recreational opportunity that allowed more people to participate and play golf during the pandemic. According to the National Golf Foundation, 24.8 million golfers in the U.S. played on-course golf in 2020, an increase of nearly 500,000 golfers compared to 2019 which is the largest net increase in 17 years (Stachura, 2021). The trend continued with 26.6 million people playing on-course golf in 2023 compared to 24.2 million people in 2018 (Carpenter, 2024).

Although golf has seen an increase in participation for the last six years (Golf Participation Update - Bigger, Younger and Cooler, 2024), traditional golf courses face increasing competition both inside and outside the golf industry. The availability of the internet, social media, and video games has significantly impacted the game of golf (Wood, 2023). Before the internet and social media, playing golf with family and friends was a weekend routine for millions of Americans. However, the internet, social media, and video games created new distractions and opportunities, especially for the younger generations (McGinnis, Gentry, & Haltom, 2021). Even for individuals who are interested in playing golf, several economic conditions may prevent their participation such as recessions, rising student loan debt, increased equipment costs, and the diminishing middle class (McGinnis, Gentry, & Haltom, 2021).

Even if we narrow the entertainment/leisure choices down to golf-related activities, consumers still have a wide range of alternatives to choose from. In addition to the traditional on-course golf participation, we have several off-course golf participation activities that a consumer can choose to participate in. Perhaps the most well-known are golf entertainment venues (Topgolf, Drive Shack, GolfSuites, etc.) where individuals of all ages and experience can participate in these activities. These golf entertainment venues typically include driving ranges, golf simulators, food and beverage services, event spaces, and/or miniature golf courses. Off-course participation also includes stand-alone driving ranges, not connected to a golf course. Another form of off-course participation that caters to all ages and levels of golfers is the fast-growing golf simulators. These golf simulators can be set up in home, mobile unit, as well as at a commercial venue (Matuszewski, 2023). Roughly 6.2 million Americans utilized a golf simulator in 2022, which is an increase of 73% compared to participation before the pandemic (Simulator Golf Sees Real Surge, 2024). While not all off-course activities are enjoying the same growth, it is clear that traditional golf courses face stiff competition from these alternatives. On-course golf participation has been steadily declining for the last 20 years. In fact, on-course golf saw a decline of over 6.8 million players between 2003 and 2018 along with more than 1,200 golf course closures during that time frame (Crompton, 2020). The National Golf Foundation (Golf Participation Update - Bigger, Younger and Cooler, 2024) states that while 18.5 million consumers participated in off-course golf activities, only 12.1 million participated in traditional on-course golfing solely, with 14.5 million participating in both, as shown in Figure 3.

**FIGURE 3  
ON-COURSE AND OFF-COURSE GOLF PARTICIPATION**



*Note:* Data source: (Golf Participation Update - Bigger, Younger and Cooler, 2024)

Traditional golf courses are typically composed of 18 holes, which is what most golfers consider a “round of golf”. Currently, a round of golf can take over five hours to finish. For some golfers, spending this amount of time may be fine and desired. However, many people are working more hours and modern life often leaves people with limited leisure time to play golf and also maintain a good work/life balance (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Potential golfers weigh this time commitment against other recreational choices and regularly choose other options that can be completed within one to two hours.

### **Leisure Constraints Theory**

Leisure constraints are internal and external “factors that inhibit or prohibit participation in leisure activities” (Crane & Temple, 2015, p. 117; Jackson, 1997). Although a few studies, primarily focused on socioeconomic and physical constraints to leisure participation were conducted earlier (Thomas, 1956; Wood, 1971), the leisure constraints research stream saw a surge during the 1980s. While some studies focused on just a few constraints (Romsa & Hoffman, 1980), others focused on a more diverse range (Henderson, Stalnaker, & Taylor, 1987; Jackson, 1988). The most common conceptual differentiation in these studies was between internal and external constraints (Howard & Crompton, 1984; Jackson, 1988; Searle & Jackson, 1985), although not all studies agreed on which constraints should be categorized as internal versus external constraints (Boothby, Tungatt, & Townsend, 1981; Francken & Van Raaij, 1981; Jackson, 1988).

In an effort to conceptually define and expand upon existing models of leisure constraints (Iso-Ahola S. E., 1981; Iso-Ahola & Mannell, 1985), Crawford and Godbey (1987) introduced their leisure constraints model in their theoretical article regarding family leisure participation. The author’s conceptual model identified three categories of constraints: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints refer to internal factors that are crucial to determining desire and preference for a leisure activity such as attitudes, anxiety, and perceived perceptions of ability (Crane & Temple, 2015). Interpersonal constraints refer to “social factors that affect leisure preferences resulting from interactions with others” such as whether your friends and family participate or encourage participation (Crane & Temple, 2015, p. 117). Structural constraints refer to external factors that prevent participation in leisure activities even when the desire and preference are present, such as money and lifestyle (Choi & Bum, 2020). While initially the negotiation process was thought to be linear (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991), whereas participation was dependent on consumers’ successful negotiation of intrapersonal constraints before moving to interpersonal and finally the structural constraints, newer research claims that the negotiation process is more circular (Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2010). Since its conception, researchers have used the theory to investigate the factors that influence preference and participation in leisure activities within a variety of industries.

The theory of leisure constraints has been used to develop urban planning strategies to increase participation in numerous leisure activities (Mouratidis, 2021). It has also been used to examine sport tourism (Higham & Hinch, 2018; Nishio, 2014), risk and uncertainty in tourism (Karl, 2018; Khan, Chelliah, Khan, & Amin, 2019), the effect of a travel companion on tourism (Su, Cheng, & Swanson, 2020) and factors involved in dark tourism (Zhang, Yang, Zheng, & Zhang, 2016). Researchers have used the theory to examine the reasons why children drop out of organized youth sports (Crane & Temple, 2015; Witt & Dangi, 2018) and the constraints involved in sports event attendance (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2020). Studies have also utilized the theory to assist with developing marketing strategies for the cruise industry (Tang, Weaver, Shi, Huang, & Liu, 2019), fishing industry (Arlinghaus, Tillner, & Bork, 2015; Arlinghaus, et al., 2021), lodging industry (Gao, Li, Liang, Yang, & Law, 2022), film industry (Kerrigan, 2017), food & wine industry (Cho, Bonn, & Brymer, 2017; Gu, Qiu, King, & Huang, 2020), higher education (Gómez, Urzúa, & Glass, 2014), and national parks (Ghimire, Green, Poudyal, & Cordell, 2014; Xiao, Lee, & Larson, 2022). The theory has also been used to examine leisure constraints for several sports (Kim, Cho, & Park, 2020; Kono, Ito, & Loucks-Atkinson, 2021), as well as for specific sports such as triathlon participation (Ma, Ma, & Chen, 2022), tennis (Deelen, Etteme, & Kamphuis, 2018), esports (Pizzo, Na, Kim, Alexandris, & Hyun, 2023), mountain skiing (Alexandris, Du, Funk, & Theodorakis, 2017), and hunting (Metcalf,

Graefe, Trauntvein, & Burns, 2015). In addition, because it is a popular leisure activity, the theory has also been used in many studies relating to golf.

**Golf and Leisure Constraints**

Leisure constraint research within the golf industry has examined the leisure constraints of women golfers (Reis & Correia, 2014) and how golfers perceived constraints influence their decision in choosing a golf course (Won, Hwang, & Kleiber, 2009). Using choice modeling, Lyu & Lee (2018) found the biggest constraints were time, specifically travel time to golf courses and overcrowded facilities. In addition, the study showed less experienced golfers preferred easier golf courses with a high level of service, while experienced golfers preferred more difficult courses with a medium level of service at the facility. Another study found costs to be the biggest constraint perceived by golfers (Won & Hwang, 2008). In the same study, the authors also found that those who highly identified with golf perceived the constraints more strongly than those who did not highly identify themselves with golf. In a study examining the differences in constraints between outdoor and virtual golf, Choi et al. (2019) found that time and costs were the two most important constraints to those surveyed and naturally those constraints were lessened with virtual golf, which requires less time and money than traditional outdoor golf. They also found that more experienced golfers and those with higher incomes (both virtual golfers and outdoor golfers) reported fewer constraints overall.

Although no formal research has been completed on alternative golf configurations, practitioners have started to experiment with alternative setups. To encourage golf participation among younger children and their families, some golf courses have built a 3-hole beginners’ course. For example, Rich Valley Golf Course in Mechanicsburg, PA, and Sun’ N Air Golf Center in Danvers, MA, built 3-hole golf courses that have generated enough interest among many young children and their families to play golf, who may never have considered playing golf if not for the 3-hole beginner’s golf course. Similarly, to encourage junior golfers, busy parents, and working professionals to play more golf, Arlington Lakes Golf Club, which is located in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago, reconfigured its golf course to allow players to play 3-hole, 6-hole, 9-hole along with the traditional 18-hole round of golf. To make the Arlington Lakes golf course more enjoyable and quicker for younger players and new players, golf architect Mike Benkusky expanded the greens and removed many bunkers and trees. Table 1 shows the cost of playing only 3-holes or 6-holes at the Arlington Lakes Golf Club. In a major metropolitan city like Chicago, both time and money to play golf is surely a major factor in how often people can play golf, and allowing people to play only 3-holes or 6-holes and pay the appropriate cost surely helps more people to play golf more often, potentially increasing the revenues and profits for Arlington Lakes golf club. An article in Golf Course Architecture by Dudley (2016) suggested that golf course administrators should consider having 6-hole and 12-hole golf tournaments which will help to encourage more people, especially young golfers as well as busy professionals to play more golf and participate in these tournaments that take less time.

**TABLE 1  
ARLINGTON LAKES GOLF CLUB RATES FOR 3 AND 6 HOLES**

<b>Number of Holes</b>	<b>Adults</b>	<b>Juniors/Seniors</b>
3 Holes	\$11	\$8
6 Holes	\$13	\$10

Likewise, some golf courses have been designed or converted into 6-hole or 12-hole golf courses to attract more golfers to play these courses. For example, the 6-hole River Oaks Golf Course in Paso Robles, California, was built for both junior players and regular players to learn and develop their golf game. Another example is the 6-hole Peninsula State Park Golf Course in Fish Creek, Wisconsin where all holes

are par 3 to help players of all ages and skill levels to develop their golf game. To encourage more young golfers between the ages of 6 and 13 years old to play golf, First Tee (PGA Jr. League Golf, 2024), which is a PGA Junior League, sponsored by PGA of America gives young golfers the opportunity to compete and play on a 6-hole golf course in a format that is fun and suitable for young golfers. A typical match usually takes around 1.5 hours to finish once a group tees off from their first hole. These shorter, faster, and more flexible play options can help attract both young and old golfers who may have limited time and resources available to play golf. An article in National Club Golfer (NCG) by Carroll (2020) suggested that building golf courses with only 12 holes not only helps increase the number of people playing more golf but can also help in sustainability efforts as it uses less land and resources. Also, in recent years, golf course designer Terry LaGree, who has won national recognition for golf course design and build, has encouraged golf course owners to consider building 6 holes and 12 holes regulation golf loops (6 and 12 Hole Golf: A Concept Who's Time Has Arrived!!, 2024) to enable golfers to play either 6 holes or 12 holes based on how much time and money they want to spend, instead of the traditional 18-holes golf course.

Even the golf legend Jack Nicklaus designed and built a 12-hole golf course called Red Ledges Signature Golf Park in Heber City, Utah (Red Ledges, n.d.), where golfers have the option to play 6-holes or 12-holes based on their skill level and time availability. This course offers multiple tee locations and a choice of standard-sized or oversized cups giving golfers the options to make this golf course as challenging or as easy based on their skill levels. On their website, they describe this course as: "One-part Golf, one-part Park, and countless parts Fun" with the intention to attract traditional golfers as well as young golfers to play golf more often and have fun in the process. In addition, Jack Nicklaus mentioned in one of his interviews (Nicklaus, 2011), that existing 18-hole courses do not have to remove any holes, but redesign the existing course to create three, 6-hole loops. So, players can have the opportunity to play 6, 9, 12, or the traditional 18 holes depending on how much time and money players are willing to spend on playing golf. To increase golf participation, especially among the younger generation as well as busy people, golf courses should consider redesigning their golf courses for shorter rounds, such as 3-hole, 6-hole, 9-hole, and 12-hole options along with the traditional 18-hole golf rounds. Although a few courses are straying from the traditional setup of 18 holes, no formal academic research has examined consumer preferences for alternative golf course configurations utilizing the leisure constraints theory.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

This research study uses survey methodology to determine which types of golfers and non-golfers (non-active golfers, but those that are interested in playing) will be interested in playing different golf course configurations, i.e., to increase golf participation, which types of golfers and non-golfers will be interested in playing only 3 holes, 6 holes, 9 holes, 12 holes, or 15 holes, instead of the traditional 18 holes (and pay the appropriate cost to play only those number of holes). Our research will be useful for golf course owners and designers to build or redesign their golf courses appropriately to help increase on-course golf participation which in turn will help to increase their revenues and profits.

Through this research study, we hope to answer the question, "Which types of golfers and non-golfers will be interested in playing different golf course configurations?" To answer this question, we developed a survey to collect data to discover the current constraints and characteristics of golfers who would be interested in playing different golf course configurations.

The following hypotheses were tested:

***H1.*** Golfers prefer a round of golf to be less time and fewer holes than the current eighteen-hole configuration.

***H2.*** Golfers with less experience prefer a round of golf to be less time and fewer holes than more experienced golfers.

***H3.*** Golfers with less income prefer a round of golf to be less time and fewer holes.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used an online cross-sectional survey to determine what constraints golfers face and which types of golfers would be interested in alternative golf course configurations. The target population for this study was adults living in the United States. Qualtrics® was used to collect the survey data. Participants were recruited using CloudResearch® Connect. Connect is similar to MTurk and other crowdsourcing platforms. However, unlike other platforms that have suffered from inattentive participants and bots, CloudResearch® Connect participants were found to be more attentive, follow instructions, be methodical, and have the highest quality responses (Douglas, Ewell, & Brauer, 2023; Stagnaro, Druckman, Arechar, Willer, & Rand, 2024).

The questionnaire was split into two sections based on whether the participants had played golf in the last five years. If they had played golf within the past five years, they were asked several questions regarding their golf preferences and activity, such as “Would you prefer to walk or ride in a cart while golfing?” and “How many rounds of golf do you play per month during your peak golf season?”. From there, they moved on to part two which surveyed the participants regarding their preferences regarding the number of holes and time playing golf along with demographic questions.

If they had not played golf within the past five years, they were asked what their first and second main constraint was. Participants could choose among intrapersonal constraints of “not interested in golf”, the interpersonal constraint of “no friends to play with”, or structural constraints of “time”, “money”, or “no energy”. Participants could also choose “other” and write in a response. The two written responses received were “no course near my home”, and “lower back pain makes it difficult”. Constraint choices and scale questions were chosen based on past research (Tiger, Kamalapur, & Moody, 2020). At the beginning of the survey, if a participant answered one of these questions with “not interested in golf”, the survey ended.

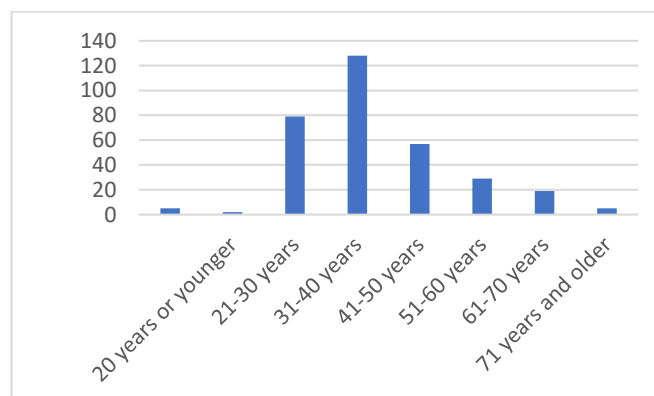
Three hundred forty-six (346) participants responded to the survey. Of those, eighty-nine (89) had not played in the last five years. Of those eighty-nine (89), twenty-two (22) responded that they were not interested in golf, leaving a final sample of 324 participants.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Profile of Participants

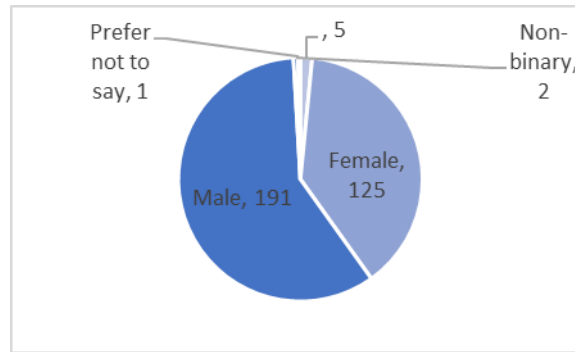
Participants came from 43 different states, with the largest percentages of participants coming from California (9.2%) and Florida (8.6%). There were 191 males (58.9%), 125 females (38.6%), and eight who preferred to self-describe, not to say, or leave blank (2.5%). The largest age group was the 31-40 age group (39.5%), followed by the 21-30-year-olds (24.4%). The other age groups were 20 and under (0.6%), 41-50 (18.3%), 51-60 (9.3%), 61-70 (5.9%), and 71 and older (1.5%). See Figures 4 and 5 below.

**FIGURE 4**  
**AGES OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS**



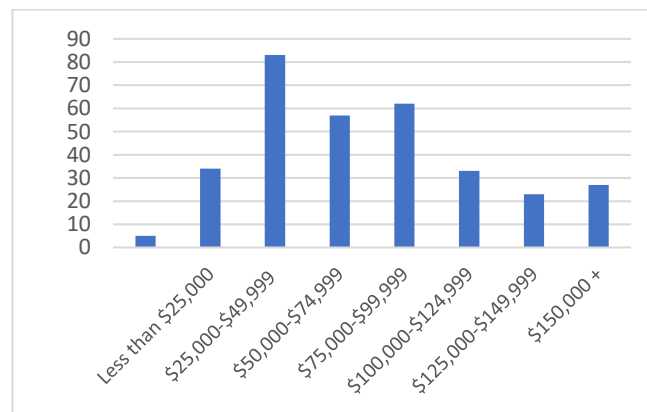


**FIGURE 5  
GENDER PROFILE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS**



For race and ethnicity, 68.8% of participants identified as White/Caucasian, 15.7% as African American, 6.5% as Asian, 4.6% as Hispanic, 2.2% as Native American, and 2.2% as Other or leaving blank. As far as marital status, 47.2% of participants were married, and 36.4% reported being single and never been married. A large majority of participants reported having a bachelor’s degree (42.6%), with the next largest group holding a master’s degree (18.8%). Others reported a high school diploma (9.9%), some college (11.7%), an associate degree (10.2%), or a professional degree or Doctorate (5.3%). In terms of annual income, most participants earned between \$25,000-\$49,999 (25.6%), followed by \$75,000-\$99,999 (19.1%), \$50,000-\$74,999 (17.6%), less than \$25,000 (10.5%), \$100,000-\$124,999 (10.2%), more than \$150,000 (8.3%), and \$125,000-\$149,999 (7.1%). See Figure 6 below.

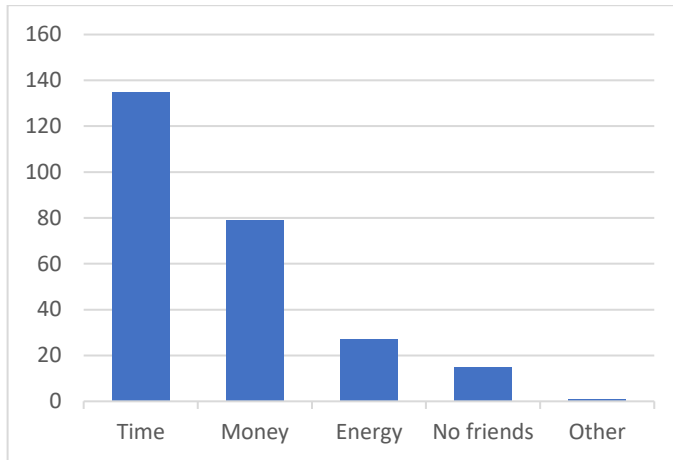
**FIGURE 6  
ANNUAL INCOME OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS**



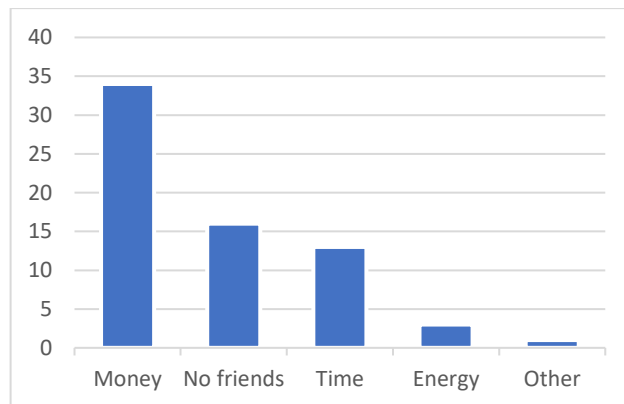
**Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics revealed that for active golfers ( $n = 257$ ) as shown in Table 2, the top constraint is time (52.5%), followed by money (30.7%), then energy (10.5%), no friends to play with (5.8%), and ‘other’ (0.4%). For inactive golfers (i.e., those who have not played within the last five years) but are interested in playing ( $n = 67$ ), as shown in Table 3, the top constraint was money (50.7%), followed by no friends to play with (23.9%), then time (19.4%), then energy (4.5%), and ‘other’ (1.5%). See Figures 7 and 8 below.

**FIGURE 7**  
**MAIN CONSTRAINTS FOR ACTIVE GOLFERS**



**FIGURE 8**  
**MAIN CONSTRAINTS FOR INACTIVE GOLFERS**



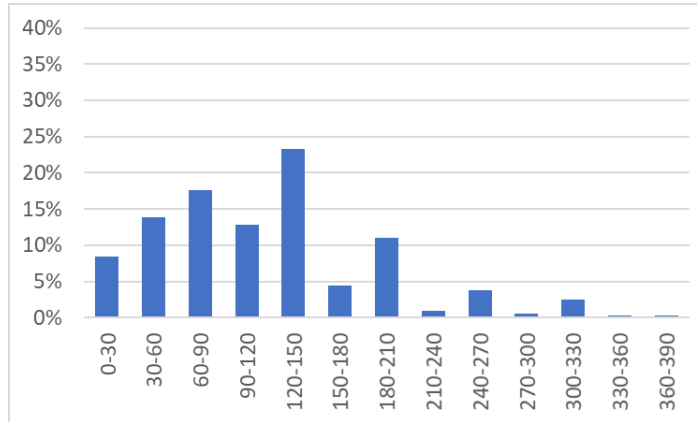
## ANALYSIS

Those surveyed were asked two primary questions,

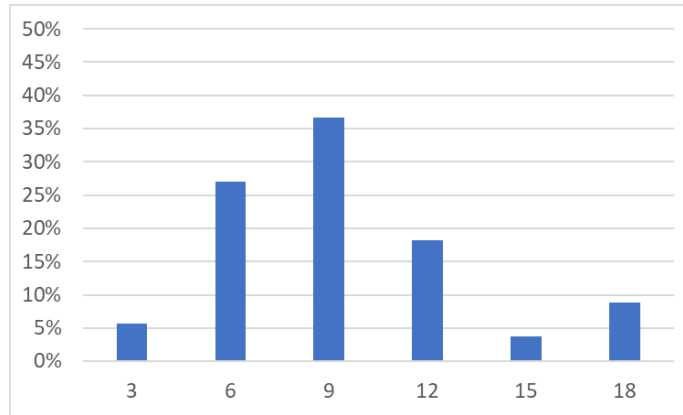
1. What is the ideal amount of time that you would like to spend playing a round of golf?
2. What is the ideal number of holes that you would like to play in a round of golf?

Figures 9 and 10 show the results for all those surveyed.

**FIGURE 9**  
**WHAT IS THE IDEAL AMOUNT OF TIME?**



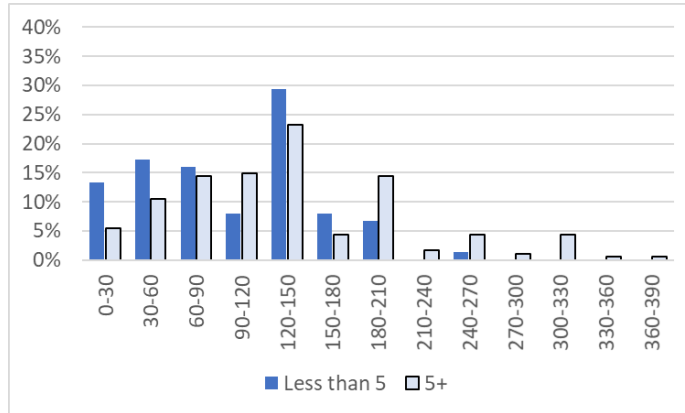
**FIGURE 10**  
**WHAT IS THE IDEAL NUMBER OF HOLES?**



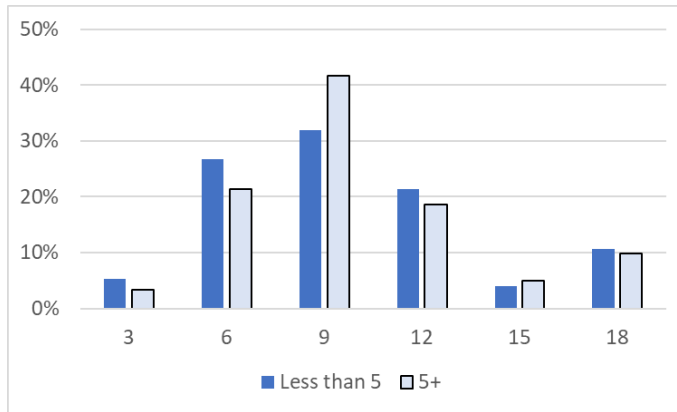
Both figures clearly show that a shorter golf round length is preferred, supporting H1. Most prefer approximately two hours with a large percentage preferring even shorter rounds such as sixty minutes. Similarly, a nine-hole setup is most preferred; however, over 30% would prefer fewer holes. Only a small percentage want to play golf for longer than five hours, and less than 10% want to play eighteen holes.

Figures 11 and 12 extend these questions based on experience. For those who responded, the darker bar shows golfers with less than five years of experience, and the lighter bar shows golfers with five or more years of experience. Less experienced golfers, which includes non-golfers, clearly prefer shorter rounds and fewer holes, supporting H2.

**FIGURE 11**  
**WHAT IS THE IDEAL AMOUNT OF TIME VS. EXPERIENCE?**

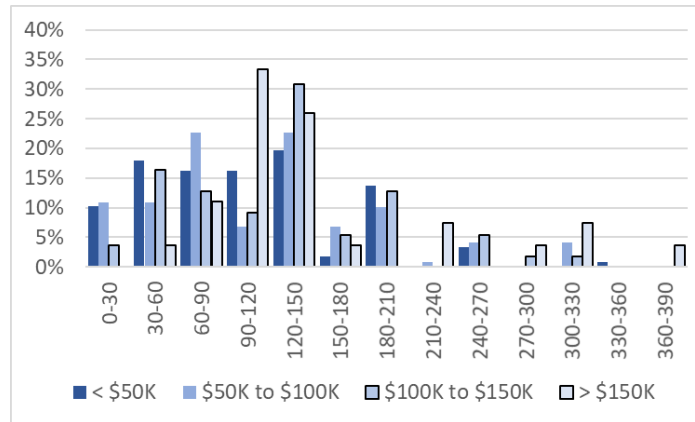


**FIGURE 12**  
**WHAT IS THE IDEAL NUMBER OF HOLES VS. EXPERIENCE?**

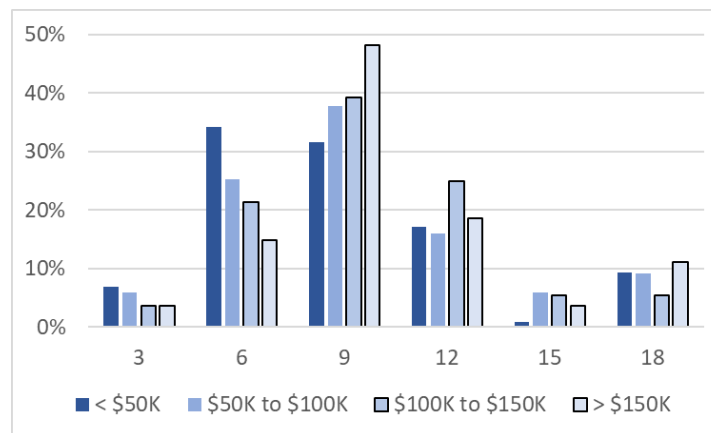


Finally, figures 13 and 14 break down these questions based on annual income. Darker bars show those with less income and lighter bars show those with more income. Forty-four percent (44%) of those who earn less than \$50,000 annually prefer rounds less than ninety minutes, while only 15% of those who earn over \$150,000 annually prefer rounds less than ninety minutes, supporting H3. Forty-one percent of those who earn less than \$50,000 annually prefer six holes or less, while 19% of those who earn over \$150,000 annually prefer six holes or less, supporting H3.

**FIGURE 13**  
**WHAT IS THE IDEAL AMOUNT OF TIME VS. INCOME?**



**FIGURE 14**  
**WHAT IS THE IDEAL NUMBER OF HOLES VS. INCOME?**



**DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to discover golfers’ and potential golfers’ interests in shorter rounds and to uncover marketing strategies that can be used by the golf industry to increase participation by understanding the constraints faced by golfers and potential golfers and what type of golfers would be interested in golf courses that deviated from the traditional 18-hole setup. Given the economic impact the golf industry has and the challenges it faces in the marketplace, it is important to understand the preferences and desires of today’s consumers so the industry can adapt to meet those preferences if needed. Consistent with previous literature (Choi, Greenwell, Hums, & Hambrick, 2019; Lyu & Lee, 2018; Won, Hwang, & Kleiber, 2009), the descriptive statistics show that overall, the two biggest constraints preventing golfers from playing more golf were time and money. For active golfers, the biggest perceived constraint was time, revealing that those who play frequently understand how time-consuming the traditional 18-hole setup can be. Money was the second perceived constraint for active golfers and the first constraint for participants who had not played in the past five years, but who were interested in playing, illuminating the fact that golf is seen as an expensive activity by both current consumers and potential consumers.

Aligning with the constraints, the findings show that participants prefer golf rounds that take less time, perhaps leading to their preference for fewer holes. A majority of participants preferred rounds of nine holes and playing for approximately two hours. Additionally, the less experience and annual income the

participants had, the bigger this desire was. It is a lot easier to find two hours of free time to play golf than it is to set aside five-plus hours. Furthermore, fewer holes mean less money spent on the game as well, alleviating the overall second biggest constraint.

In order to recruit more golfers and maintain current golfers, the golf course industry must adapt to changing consumer needs and their preferences. Theodore Levitt warned that marketing myopia, a shortsighted focus on products rather than the needs and desires of customers, can lead to the failure of any industry (Levitt, 2006). Many businesses have failed because they hold on to their once-thriving, successful products for too long, rather than having customer-centric strategies and continually adapting to meet changing consumer needs and desires.

Golf course managers can be creative to meet both those who want shorter rounds as well as those preferring traditional rounds. Rather than defining a round as an 18-hole 'product'. Course designers and course managers might want to consider offering different products: 3-hole rounds, 6-hole rounds, 9-hole rounds, and 12-hole rounds along with the traditional 18-hole rounds. Perhaps on a busy day, course managers of an 18-hole golf course could offer three different 6-hole shotgun rounds. Each hole has a group, and about 100 minutes later, the shotgun rounds are over, and the traditional 18-hole play begins.

In addition to meeting consumer needs, another benefit of redefining a round is the ability to increase revenue without adding capacity. Shorter rounds produce less queuing and waiting. A six-hole round will have less waiting than an eighteen-hole round; consequently, shorter rounds produce higher throughput. Additionally, predictive models such as those found in Tiger & Ellerbrook (2016) can help design and manage these types of scenarios.

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