I. Research Problem

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.

II. Issues

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. 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: player performance, aesthetic environment, self-service technology, respectful access, fan loyalty program, and fan community. However, their findings are context-specific and cannot necessarily be generalized beyond the context of college football in the United States (U.S.). It is still unclear whether or not the same factor structure would be found if a sample of spectators outside the U.S. were surveyed. The innovativeness of participant sport consumption experiences has also been ignored to a great extent.
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.

III. Summary

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). 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). 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. In order to measure the proposed constructs (i.e., the six innovativeness dimensions, consumer satisfaction, brand attitude, and behavioral intentions), we adapted the items used to measure the constructs from previous research (Brady et al., 2008; Yoshida & James, 2010; Yoshida et al., 2013).

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. Of the 360 questionnaires that were distributed, 278 usable responses were obtained. The second data collection was conducted at a running station in Tokyo. There is a 5 km-loop around the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, and 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. From the 339 questionnaires that were distributed at the running station during weekends in the peak season between September and November, 329 usable forms were returned.

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.
IV. Analysis

The psychometric properties of the items were assessed through a CFA using LISREL 8.8. The fit of the measurement model was acceptable for both samples. Furthermore, follow-up analyses based on the recommendations of Fornell and Larcker (1981) provided support for the convergent and discriminant validity of the proposed constructs in both settings.

An examination of the hypothesized relationships was achieved through SEM using LISREL 8.8. The fit measures were acceptable for both samples. In the baseball setting, the innovativeness of aesthetic environment, facility convenience, brand community, and loyalty programs had a positive effect on consumer satisfaction. Also, aesthetic environment innovativeness and brand community innovativeness were significant positive predictors of brand attitude. Furthermore, behavioral intentions were positively influenced by brand community innovativeness and consumer satisfaction.

In the running station setting, consumer satisfaction and brand attitude were each positively impacted by the innovativeness of sport performance, aesthetic environment, and online services. In contrast, brand attitude was negatively influenced by brand community innovativeness. Furthermore, behavioral intentions were positively influenced by facility convenience innovativeness, consumer satisfaction, and brand attitude.

The R² 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.

V. Discussion/Implications

The current 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. 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. The CFA results revealed clear evidence of convergent and discriminant validity in both settings.

Second, 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. The findings of this study strengthened this contention.

Third, 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 (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). In the current baseball and running station settings, wide concourses, clear information signs, and numerous concession stands were all part of superior access.

Fourth, 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. The baseball team we studied has developed one of the most unique fan communities in Japan. Based on the results, 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.

Fifth, the findings indicated sport performance innovativeness played a particularly important role in increasing consumer satisfaction and brand attitude in the running station setting. In the year studied, there were approximately 30 competitors around the Tokyo Imperial Palace. 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.

In this study we presented a multidimensional conceptualization of an innovative sport consumption experience, including 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 U.S.