



## The Affect the Marketing Mix Has on a Consumers Choice for Local Authority Leisure Facilities in the United Kingdom

Ian Arnott

Teesside Business School, University of Teesside, Middlesbrough, Tees Valley, TS1 3BA, UK

Tel: +44 1642 342809 E-mail: [i.arnott@tees.ac.uk](mailto:i.arnott@tees.ac.uk)

### Abstract

United Kingdom local authority leisure facilities are beginning to move into a developing era of demand by the consumption of those who wish to use it due to the promotion of a healthier lifestyle. Because of this there is an increasing demand for those facilities to compete with private and not-profit organisations who have experienced and trained marketing departments to attract and publicise their products and services to the consumers out there. Therefore to stay in the market place and compete with the different sectors of the leisure provider a clearer understanding of the consumer base needs to be understood.

For the effective marketing and the facility management of those leisure facilities practioners need to understand more and more about what decisions are made when the leisure consumer makes a choice of a particular leisure facility over another and in what way marketing influences this choice?

Therefore this study looks at Leisure Divisions within three Local Authorities and to support this it draws upon marketing and consumer behaviour literature. The primary aim of the research was to investigate from the consumer's perspective what external marketing variables affected their choice on a local authority leisure facility. To establish this information, data was drawn upon visitors from facilities spanning across three local authorities situated and then a qualitative analysis was conducted in form of interviews to establish what decisions were made from the leisure consumer's perspective when making choices on a leisure facility.

80 were administered in a face to face questionnaires at each of the facilities by the researcher which were then completed by March 2007.

The consumer's abilities ranged from the recreational/ infrequent consumer through to the regular/ physically active consumer and the questionnaire contained ten questions incorporating a variety of ordinal and nominal questions as well as likert scale questions.

The response rate was fairly high at 100% (N=80) respondents represented the sample frame a cross section of gender, age and abilities. The quantitative data was analysed via SPSS 13.0 which is a statistical package. This revealed a variety of statistical results of approximately twenty with statistical findings ( $P>0.05$ ) conducted then a further 5% (N=4) was used for a qualitative analysis.

The most influential things that were found were that leisure consumers selected facilities based on locality and the most powerful marketing tool was word of mouth.

In discussing such findings, a number of recommendations have been made as to the future management and marketing of the leisure facilities as well helping to develop this subject matter further.

**Keywords:** Professionalisation of marketing, Facility objectives, Word of mouth

### 1. Attitudes towards leisure facility marketing

Over the last 25 years attitudes have changed significantly towards facility objectives, design, and the management of opportunity and participation programmes. Also what has also become very prevalent that quality awards are at the heart of the industry such as QUEST? Part of these awards are linked to marketing efforts (Evening Chronicle, 2007) Prior to the 1960's there were very few indoor sports facilities; local government, now a major provider had a less influential role. The 1990's into the millennium has seen a very considerable resource including a majority of purpose built facilities (Elvin, 1993). Because of this facility explosion, there is a greater need for more professionals to manage and oversee such facilities and operations to ensure that local authorities are meeting the demands with in the consumers needs. The growth of indoor

provision in Britain is moving towards a total of 2,500 or so sports and leisure centres, has undoubtedly led to increased participation in sport. Although it is difficult to be precise about the number of indoor sports centres and halls it has been estimated 3500 in Great Britain

27.5 million people participate in sport and recreation in the UK at least once a week, in comparison to 15 million, five years previously. In 2002 the government's Game plan was a turning point for sport with in the England as to achieve inclusion with in communities by the use of and building of more sports facilities (Sport England, 2006). Because of this increased demand the way in which leisure facilities and their programs are projected require a more professional approach to marketing in attracting the discerning consumer,

### *1.1 The Professionalism of the image of facilities through marketing*

The marketing of leisure facilities is a complex situation especially in the attraction of the diversity of its consumer. Two of the most difficult areas to define in leisure facility management are marketing and leisure (Crump & Clowes, 1992). Each one with in its own right is a multi disciplinary subject, and each one is becoming a growing area of academic study in the past ten years (Beech and Chadwick, 2007). Yet markets and leisure have existed in some form as a long form of human society (Mills, 1992).

Most marketing theory is based on the manufacturing industry, but today it is widely becoming a wide base in employment. With in the UK. It also must be recognised that the diversity of the range of employment in this area. Globally the sport and leisure industry has become what is now recognised as a major economical force that is an integral part of modern society (Haggerty & Patton, 1994) so more marketing professionals are required.

Marketing with in sport and leisure is an area that these leisure professionals are seeking help (Steer, 2005). A number of sport and leisure facilities especially in light of today's market place with increased governmental pressure on meeting financial targets are expected to entice its consumer base and compete with other leisure providers. Due to Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) during the conservative government and now "Best Value" through the Labour a more professional approach to marketing is needed.

Though there is an increased demand for leisure, and government legislation is pressurising its providers and managers there are still a number of sport and leisure facilities struggling to produce a profit (Howards & Compton, 1995) in a highly competitive marketplace, and many are seeking to improving marketing efforts to strengthen their organisations (Mullins, Hardy & Sutton, 2000)

Over the last two decades demands on the provision of leisure services has increased in demand for the provision of sport and recreation facilities (Beech & Chadwick, 2004). Leisure professionals need to understand the key concepts of marketing and understand the decision in choice of its consumer, but yet this is the area they lack understanding in.

### *1.2 Leisure facility marketing still young in development*

Leisure facility marketing is still a young and developing discipline and it is helpful to determine the direction of this field. One such area that appears to be vital to the practioner in a competitive leisure market place is the need to better understand consumer behaviour. Only when the leisure facility marketer appreciates the needs and decision making processes of its consumers can he/she determine a sustainable competitive advantage and improve his/her marketing communications

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate; *The Affect the Marketing Mix has on a Consumers choice for Local Authority Leisure facilities in the United Kingdom*. The general framework underpinning this is from Engel, Kollat and Blackwells model of consumer behaviour shown in figure 1. Being first introduced in 1968 and updated in 1990 (Rice, 1997), this model identifies key variables that allow the marketer to understand the early searching stages in a making to pa particular leisure facility.

By using this model it takes the process of purchasing as a problem solving/ decision making exercise. In the marketing context, Engel, Blackwell and Miiniard (1990) suggest that this becomes: Motivation and recognition of need, information Search, Evaluate alternatives, Purchase and Outcomes (Lancaster & Reynolds, 2002). By using this model, it provides the manager with a largely theoretical approach to investigate the consumer buyer behaviour unlike the fragmented approach in the past (Chelladurai, 1994).

More specifically, this study focused upon the decision making process of the leisure consumer and in particular what will determine the process and factors that influence their choices in choosing a leisure facility.

This model has been applied by Brassington and Pettitt (2000) to the product decision making process as such as purchasing a car or a bar of chocolate, but what must be argued is it applicable to leisure services? What attracts a person to a particular facility when there are so many other facilities to choose from with in the local area?

Given, the limited information and application of consumer needs to leisure facility marketing the research looks at a number of different profiles behind leisure facility consumers in England and furthermore why they chose them. And then subsequently looking at the decision making processes they went through.

## **2. Further understanding of marketing through Literature**

Cowell (1978) three decades ago found that there was no major evidence of marketing being applied to local authority recreation in sports centre planning and provision. However, the question now rises is how good is marketing in this field today? There are exceptions to the general finding since then because marketing has received far greater attention than ever before (Torkildsen, 2005). Even so, the overall picture is one of limited evidence of effective marketing communications. Demand assessments were rarely undertaken before facilities were built, but the climate has now changed. However, there are few price experiments (discounts apart) or use of prices as promotional tools and promotional budgets are small and inadequate due to funding being allocated to other areas (Torkildsen, 2005).

Even though with this constraint in budgets, marketing could be done internally with in leisure facilities, but do their managers have the skills and expertise? Cowell (1978) states:

*“That the absence of substantial marketing should not necessarily be seen as a criticisms or expertise”*

Though Cowell (1978) suggests this could be argued, how can leisure facilities move forward with in their own field and stay competitive with in its changing environment?, how affective is marketing be practised? Three main possible reasons were put forward for the relative lack of effective marketing in governmental institutions; general institutional constraints and service constraints. Do they still apply today? Local Authorities still want to be all things to all people (Torkildsen, 2005).

It is clear that, while marketing may have considerable benefits in local authority provision and management and recreation, the use of marketing approaches must be adapted to suit the consumer base. Herbert (1989) suggested, we should approach marketing with five key questions:

- (1) Where are we now
- (2) Where do we want to be
- (3) How might we get there
- (4) Which way is best
- (5) How can we ensure survival

He further supports this through a diagrammatical representation shown in figure 2 in the leisure planning process

Though this model is useful and offers some guidance it does not clearly define the consumer in the context of leisure. The purpose of the marketer is to take them outside of the organisation and put themselves in the shoes of the consumer to fully understand why they make choices of leisure facilities? Understanding how an individual makes a decision to choose leisure facilities or a sport is critical to marketers who want to make customer orientated plans (Kang, 2002). In particular, how applicable are the many theoretical decision making process models to a consumers choice in leisure facilities? (Mcghee, Yoon & Cárdenas, 2003). If leisure facility marketing ideally consists of activities designed to meet the wants and needs of the leisure/sports consumer, then historically the industry has been guilty of a lack of foresight in marketing.

### *2.1 Consumer Behaviour*

Understanding consumers' wants and needs is fundamental to managing a successful leisure facility (Lancaster and Reynolds 2003, pg 50). This entails comprehension of the consumer behaviour, which has been defined as:

*The acts that individuals are directly involved in obtaining and using economic goods and services, including the decision process that precede and determine acts* (Walter 1978).

Consumer behaviour is a subdivision of human behaviour, and the understanding of this depends on the clarification of the other (Douglas, Field & Tarpey 1974).

But who is the consumer, and what categories of the leisure consumer exist? Mullins, Hardy & Sutton (2000) suggest one such approach, namely the categories “frequent”, “core” and “aficionado” are applied to football participants reflecting intensity of participation similar to an escalator (Mullins, Hardy & Sutton, 2000). Just as importantly though, participation can also be classified according to demographic parameters.

### *2.2 Demographic Implication on the choices of leisure facilities*

As a marketer it is essential to understand the unique and physical components of the types of consumers that are attracted to a leisure facility, either as a spectator or participant. Demographic information segmentation can be useful, although it tends to rely on stereotypical images of groups of people who are linked through gender, age etc.. Parks & Quaterman (2002) define demographic segmentation as:

*“Dividing the market into groups based on demographic variables such as age, sex, family size, income, occupation, education, religion and ethnicity”.*

It attempts to chronicle what consumers are, in terms of observable attributes and quantifiable data (Walters 1978). The importance of demographic studies in the field of leisure facilities should not be underestimated. Though Brooks, (1990),

feel that demographic studies are crucial to leisure marketing because by identifying consumers who are most likely to use certain types of leisure products or services enables a more market driven focus on customer attributes (Manly, 1993). Further more, Mile and Mcdonald (1999) suggest that success in leisure marketing requires an understanding on what factors influence leisure facility consumption.

One such influence is the family. In what way will this affect their children's perceptions/influences on choices of leisure facility? Family structure has the potential to influence both participation and spectatorship (Cutler 1990). Having children in organised activities requires time and effort on the part of the parent(s), such as driving children to practices and competitions (Dick, 1997). This can affect later behaviour because participation in youth activities encourages future adult behaviour (Waldrop & Exeter 1990). What role do mothers as opposed to fathers have in their children's leisure facility consumption? How much time do single parents have to encourage sports participation at a leisure facility and how do leisure facility marketers motivate consumption on the part of the parents with limited time?

### *2.3 Motivation of the consumer in choice of Leisure Facilities*

Motivation is the mixture of wants, needs and drives within the individual which seek gratification through the acquisition or object (Rice 1997). Marketers continually ask what ultimately promotes the consumer to purchase their products (Mullins, Hardy & Sutton 1993). Clearly consumer motivations are complex, and marketers must work vigorously to uncover them.

It is clear that a greater understanding is required. According to motivation theory, environmental stimuli may activate the drive to satisfy an underlying need. Theorists like Abraham Maslow, Henry Murray and David McClelland have elaborate models of the way physiological, psychological, and social needs influence behaviour (Korman 1974). Of their categories of motives, several seem to recur in sport literature. McClelland believes that some needs are socially acquired and picks out specifically the need for achievement (Rise 1997).

Achievement - several studies of university students have a tendency to bask in reflected glory when one's school team wins athletics contest. In a recent USTA, survey, serious players listed winning as a major reason for playing. In each case the urge to achieve appears to have been an important motivational force (Game Plan 1997). What may have a major link on the impact of playing may be the consumer on how they both value themselves and value their performance, or what value they hold on the leisure facility they choose.

### *2.4 Principles in the choices of leisure facilities*

Values were originally defined in psychology (Florenthal, 2000). Spranger (1928), developed a value system based on personality characteristics, which is confirmed by Vernon and Allport (1931) as a system that generalised men. In general the values are based on the combined personal impact of the intersection of individuals (Grunet & Scherton, 1990). Therefore the individual's value system (Fig 3) represents personality characteristics as well as self actualisation, self fulfilment and cultural influences on the basis of social norms within sport (Florenthal, 2000).

Previous research has identified characteristics sensation seeking (Zukerman, 1974) and personal states of mind-arousal seeking (Apter, 1982) that drive individuals to search for leisure facilities. The value systems should represent this need for the consumption of leisure/ leisure facilities. Lee and Beatty (1992) argued that this system is another dimension of selection in leisure facilities within personal values. The most noteworthy approach to state of mind segmentation was developed by the Stamford Research Institute (SRI), called the values and lifestyles (VALS) typology (Shank, 1998). It assumes that attitudes, opinions, desires and other psychological collectively govern behaviour (Mullins, Hardy & Sutton, 2000). Although one study of exercise showed a relationship between VALS categories and exercise "inner directed" people exercised at twice the rate of "outer directed" people.

Although internal influences play a major role in the decision making process of a person's consumption of leisure and leisure facilities, there is still further research required in this area and there is no conclusive evidence to support this. Outside the internal influences there are external variables that can sway a person's choice, namely thoughts that make up the marketing mix. This area is fairly well researched in the consumption of products, e.g. running shoes etc. But very little is known about the consumption in the choices of leisure facilities.

### *2.5 Products that satisfy needs*

A product is anything that satisfies a need, it can be tangible or intangible. Tangible products are physical goods, such as drinks, which are consumed to satisfy needs. Less tangible products that satisfy consumer needs include (1) people, (2) places, (3) events, (4) ideas, and (5) services. These kinds of products offer experiences that satisfy (Wells and Prensky 1996). Leisure facilities can satisfy the needs of its consumer by offering an experience where you can participate directly in activities such as badminton, or you can observe an activity by watching from a spectator gallery. The goal is the satisfaction of their desires by goods and services (Wasson, Sturdivant & McConaughy 1968). The consumer must make specific types of decision in order to purchase or select a particular leisure facility.

Recently, Shoham and Kahle (1996) introduced the concept of consumption communities to the marketing of leisure

services. They define a consumption community, as “a group of people having common consumption interests” (Shoham & Kahle 1996). Similarly Shouton and McAlexander (1995) use the term subculture of consumption, which they define as “a distinctive subgroup of society that self selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a product class, brand, or consumption activity, this was a similar view shared by Brooks (1998) in her study of sport and exercise. Applying these concepts to this research, it is expected that leisure consumers exhibit distinct attitudes and behavioural tendencies (Shoham, Kahle, Rose and Kropp 1997). The Theory underlying this approach was based on group behaviour research (e.g. Bearden & Etzel, 1982) where individuals use the behavioural patterns of reference group members as informational cues to fill group behavioural expectations to acceptance and status, and as a reference point for self image (Bearden, Netemyer & Teel, 1989).

In order to better understand how people attach meaning and value to the products they consume, Keller (1993) like Brooks (1998) identified three categories. This categorisation draws on the work of Park, Jaworski, and MacInnins (1986), who identified three types of needs that are satisfied through production consumption: functional, symbolic, and experiential. The definitions of Park et al, (1986) were used as the basis for identifying benefits in professional sports. Functional needs are “those that motivate the search for products that solve consumption related problems. Consumers may purchase a certain cereal because it has less nutrition or certain toothpastes because they are proven to keep teeth whiter (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Symbolic needs are those “that fulfil internally generated needs of self enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego identification” (p.136). Consumers may purchase a luxury automobile because of what the ownership of a luxury automobile convey to others. Experiential needs are “desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety, and/or cognitive stimulation” (p.136).

Based on these definitions, it has been identified that the constructs could be classified as benefits in the professional leisure industry; participant identification, peer group acceptance, escapes, nostalgia, and pride in place. Identification with a leisure/sport facility/event is one more widely constructed in literature (Sutton, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Wann & Brandscombe, 1990; Cialidini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976). Cialidini et al (1976) first offered the notion of basking in reflected glory, by observing individuals that publicise their association with successful leisure facilities and local authorities, here it is conceptualised that identification components of the pride in place of the brand association framework (Gladden & Funk, 2002). That is, identification with a particular event that fulfils a leisure consumer’s needs to affiliate with something successful or desirable and thus in one form of brand association, Shani (1997) further supported this as a successful relationship in marketing as it involves the core service the marketing mix and the other ‘P’ (Promotion, Place & Price), where a customer relationship can be built. Leisure facility products must provide the opportunity for such customisation. Leaf argued that leisure is an ideal medium for personalisation. “The service” can be tailored to satisfy very narrow individual needs. This might explain the proliferation of the new innovative leisure facility ideas that are tailored to unique needs (Milne, Sutton, & McDonald, 1996).

It is clear that all aspect of the marketing mix play an integral part in the consumer decision process when they are making choices. It is essential that all areas are taken into account and further study needs to be clarified especially such areas as the place.

### *2.6 Leisure Facilities the Place*

Getz, (1998) seems to be one of key the researchers in addressing sport and leisure, by their destination, it addressing it as a component of supply and demand. He looks at it as destination, therefore drawing people to a significant place for participation. A key question has to be addressed, “what attracts the leisure consumer to a particular place or leisure facility?” Getz, (1998), goes further on to define sports/ leisure tourism, as a destination for development and marketing leisure facilities to obtain economic and community benefits. It could be argued that from the leisure consumers’ prospective, do they really pay much attention to the economic benefits of the community in their choices? Shilbury, Quick & Westerbeck (1998) describe a location that determines the catchments area of potential consumers and hence partly determine the profile of the customer. Within the leisure facility choice, it could be questioned in relation to that described by Shilbury et al (1998) as it is a specific consumer type. Mullins, Hardy, & Sutton, (2000) describe that consumers developed perceptions of the place in which it is situated, namely a facility image. Lancaster & Reynolds, (2003) described it as the transportation of goods from the manufacturer to the end customer. Whichever way that place is described, marketers must recognise that the leisure consumer seeks multiple places for their product consumption (Mullins, Hardy & Sutton, 2000).

More of an understanding needs to be established on why the leisure facility consumer is attracted to certain leisure facilities. Product and place are only two of the variables that play their part in the marketing mix. Price and promotion, what role do they play in the attraction of the consumer in this field?

### *2.7 Pricing Versus promotion in the choices of leisure facilities Consumption*

According to Kotler (1999), sales promotion consists of diverse collection of incentive tools, mostly short term, designed to stimulate quicker and/or greater purchase of particular products/services by consumers. Fullerton & Dodge (1995) argue that perhaps the dominant marketing mix component is promotion. In leisure facilities, sales promotions have traditionally been in the form of price or non price promotions (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2000). Price promotions occur when everyone or a selected group is admitted to the facilities at less than the regular price (McDonald & Rascher, 2000). ‘ Non price

promotions are those facilities where everyone or a selected group of consumers receive merchandise or when value added entertainment (i.e. firework displays, San Diego Chicken night) is provided (take 'em Out, 1998). In leisure, as well as the whole experiences, there are price promotions for product extensions such as clothing, additional classes offering great reductions. In all industries, rapid growth in the use of sales promotions has resulted in promotional clutter, with a danger that consumers will become increasingly immune to their influence (Kotler, 1999). While this concept makes intuitive sense, there has been no empirical evidence to support this concept in the leisure facility marketing literature (McDonald & Rascher, 2000). There is however, theoretical support (Helson, 1964) for the expectation that frequency of price promotions will have a negative impact on sales response to price promotions.

Adaptation level theory (Helson, 1964) indicates that exposure to past stimuli (i.e. price) determines the adaptation level or the reference price. The frequent price promotion results in the lowering of the perceived price. Future price promotions, when evaluated against this lower reference price, are judged less attractive to consumers. This existence and impact of reference prices on purchase behaviour has been empirically tested (Kalwani, Yim, Rimme, Sugita, 1990; Nagle, 1987). The direct effect of frequency of price discount promotions on short term sales response has been tested within the context of retail grocery stores (Kumar & Pereira, 1995). Results indicate that the effect of frequency of price promotions depends on the extent of consecutive scheduling with the interaction of these two variables negatively affecting the short term sales response.

The study however, involved products and not services, and focused entirely on price promotions (Mullins, Hardy & Sutton, 2000). Kyle, Kersetter and Guadagnolo (2003) did a study in the consumer price expectations, with this in mind; the purpose of the investigation was to examine methods of manipulating consumer price expectations for a 10K road race offered by a public sport and leisure service provider. In the marketing literature price, it has been often associated with consumer's reaction to price. Mullins (1985) supported this theory through demonstration of his model on the unique characteristics of sport/leisure marketing, by the price paid by the sport/leisure consumer which is invariably quite small in comparison to the total leisure facility cost. It is generally defined as the standard price against which is the actual price of activity at a leisure facility they are considering to purchase (Kumar, Karande & Reinartz, 1998) and is based on the premise that consumers do not respond to prices absolutely, but only relative to the reference price. Reference considered in terms of internally and externally held standards. (Kyle, Kersetter, Guadagnolo, 2003). Internal reference prices (IRP) are stored in memory on the basis of actual prices paid, perceptions of fair prices, the price last paid, or a combination of these concepts (Mayhew and Weiner, 1992). The existence of an IRP is supported by adaptation level theory (Helson, 1964), which suggests that people adapt to the level of past stimuli and judge new stimuli in comparison with the adaptation level. External reference prices (ERP) are provided by observed stimuli in the purchase environment (Mayhew & Winter, 1992). Such stimuli could be provided by a point of purchase shelf tags that contain information "suggested retail price" or the actual price of another product against which price can be compared. This suggests that the ERP is based on the price of all event categories usually at the time of the leisure consumers purchase. Leisure consumer compare internal and external reference prices to the actual price of an activity in determining whether or not to buy it. Mayhew's & Wenier's (1992) theories are very compelling in today's marketing environment, but there is very little indication if price and promotion play a large decision in the leisure consumer decision process cycle. Kyle, Kersetter and Guadagnolo (2003) is the most recent and up-to-date in the way pricing expectations are perceived in the choice of leisure facilities. Yet this is not conclusive and therefore there is insufficient literature to support this study when the consumer is making choices during the decision process in leisure facilities.

### *2.8 The Decision Making Process of the Leisure Consumer*

The consumer decision-making process is a widely researched component of the marketer's understanding of the behaviour of individuals when satisfying their needs in purchasing goods and services (Lancaster & Reynolds, 2003; Brassington & Pettitt, 2000; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000; Kotler, 1999; Statt, (1997); Wells & Prensky, 1996; Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1990 Walters, 1978). There have been numerous models presented (Figure 4) to gain a better understanding of the psychic sides of individuals.

Many academics within the fields of sport have made some attempt to apply this to conceptualise some of these models and apply them to the sport consumer (McGhee, Yoon, Cardenas, 2003; Parks & Quaterman, 2002; Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2000; Kang, 2000; Shilbury, Quick & Westerbeck, 1998; 1997) However very few have attempted to do so to the leisure facility market. Mullins, Hardy & Sutton, (2000) attempted to make some rationalisation in their model of understanding consumer behaviour in sport in figure 6. Like all models, figure 5 is a picture of a complex process, not a formula that guarantees understanding and correct decisions, but factors to sift through in order to understand and develop consumer decisions.

The subjects that have been broadly researched have been sport event tourism and the economic impact of events that have been evaluated and measured (Gratton & Henry, 2001; Gratton, Hobson, & Shilbi, 2000; Getz, 1998) Economic impact is not the only topic of interest for researchers (McGhee, Yoon & Cradenas, 2003). There are a variety of segments within sports events that have been identified and examined from a perspective. Sports events have been segmented by gender (Nogawa, Yamagashi, & Hagi, 1996) sexual orientation (Pitts, 1999) and event types (Johnson, 1992), but most of this

research has been directed at the spectator. This study on the decision making processes will focus on a different group that historically has been understudied; leisure facility consumers and more importantly the amount decision making involvement

### *2.9 Participant Decision Making Involvement*

Involvement is defined by Havitz, Dimanche and Bogel (1994) as an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest that has been evoked by a particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties. Involvement is a means of understanding a person's consumer behaviour and decision-making processes (Assael, 1992), enduring by nature therefore different from consumption patterns (Havitz & Dimanche and Bogel, 1998), the continuous and measuring pleasure and value as aspects of consumer behaviour and decision making (Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgeway 1986). The involvement in decision making construct has roots in the consumer behaviour and marketing (Bechling, 1999); Bech, Larson & Nielson, 1999; Broderick & Mueller, 1999; Donovan & Jalleh, 1999). Consumers may exhibit varying levels of decision making. In a study of consumer behaviour, Assael, (1992) paralleled variance involvement with the decision making process. Specifically, a consumer who indicates high levels of decision making involvement is more likely to become loyal to one leisure facility and resist buying into another than someone with low levels of decision making involvement. In marketing, it is important to understand how to use involvement in decision making as a theoretical construct for understanding the decision making cycle of the leisure facility consumer (McGhee, Yoon, & Cardenas, 2003). Consumers with higher levels of involvement take longer to make a decision than those leisure facility consumers with lower levels of involvement (Assael, 1992, 1987; Maheswaren & Meyers-Levy, 1990). Those with high levels of involvement actively search for information in the decision process

Brassington and Pettitt (2000), describe that when psychological needs are involved, the need recognition may be slow dawning or may lead to a sudden impulse, when the leisure consumer, realising that the current position or feeling is not the desire, decides to do something to change it through a purchase. The individuality of each person is greatly complex, consumer decision making especially in leisure is difficult to encapsulate. There have been attempts to try and capture the richness of the experience, such as those proposed by Howard and Sheth (1969) and Engle, Kollat and Blackwell (1978). The Engel, Blackwell and Miniard model presented in Figure 6 although a more concise and a simpler outline, it provides a framework that still traces the progress of purchasing the leisure facility stage by stage from the leisure consumer point of view (Brassington & Pettitt, 2000).

Differences in level of involvement and decision making in various studies examining consumption of leisure and leisure facilities are not as conclusive as those in the more general areas of consumer behaviour (McGhee, Yoon & Cardenas, 2003). To address a leisure facility selection that is still evolving and trying to establish itself, and way and means of life is still very young. Questions have to be asked about leisure. Is the reason due to the lack of knowledge by leisure facility marketers/ managers who do not understand the complexities of the leisure consumer? Is leisure, due to its logistics and organisation due to its operational issues to technical? There has been very little research into the decision making process of the leisure consumer especially those who choose facilities. The demand for managers/ marketers to fully understand the complexity of the leisure, will ensure that the leisure and knowledge would and could enable it to develop and go further and reach the levels it is capable of.

### **3. Research Methodology**

In summary three local authorities leisure facilities were chosen for the collection of data purposes. A total number of 80 subjects were given a questionnaire with a series of questions on. The parent population was chosen by random selection on visitors to the facilities of the three local authorities were used during this study. The age range was from 15 -60 with a range of ability types of the consumer being selected for the purpose of the project. By using a variety of abilities and ages ranging from 15 – 60 allowed to get a mixture of views from the leisure consumer on their choice of leisure facilities.

The research is broken down into two significant areas to understand consumer behaviour in the leisure industry. Using regression equations representing the relationship between consumers and selection of leisure facilities and casual variables, such as age, gender etc. This has led to growing interest in improved methods of measuring the behaviour and attitudes of the consumers in leisure as they have a wide range of goods and services. It has become apparent that by investigating the consumer's feelings about why they consume leisure, a more subtle approach is needed with direct questions (Chisnall 2001).

Qualitative analyses offer a more flexible approach which can unearth more in-depth attitudes towards Leisure. Veal (1997) points out that qualitative research will enable a more fluid relationship between various elements of the research to better understand the consumer's state, decision making process, and general impressions regarding the marketing event communications vehicle encountered.

A more in-depth analysis of the aim research was the identification, why leisure consumers make decision about the choices of leisure facilities was carried out. Some aspects were already discovered through the quantitative approach. The selection was conducted by taking 5 % of the total cohort from the questionnaire, e.g. 4 respondents. During this period all the

questionnaires were completed. The qualitative aspects of the research were lead by the researcher in an environment where it was conducive for the respondents.

### 3.1 Data Results

The total number of respondents was 80 and there were no spoilt responses who did not take part in the survey/questionnaire. 80 (100%) respondents met the criteria of the questionnaire. Of the 80 respondents a four (5%) were used for interviews in the analysis of the qualitative data. The selection of these respondents was based on how quickly their questionnaires arrived in relation to matching the criteria of the respondent type. The respondent rate for females was 66.1% and for males 33.9%.

The independent variables represent the main factors from the demographics, e.g. Age.

### 3.2 Frequency of the use of Leisure by the Consumer

The facility managers rely on demographic information to assist them in facility programming especially as this will dictate who will actually make the most visits to the venue. The unique nature of sport and leisure is it strives in communicating to every individual no matter how old they are based on lifelong learning and sustaining a healthier, brighter vision in continuing physical activity. The minimum visit was 1 through to in some cases seven visits in a week. What is clearly evident that average visits made per week are between one and two (Figure 7) with is reinforced with a mean value of 2.33 which represents the average visits made by an individual.

Using a Man Whitney U test there were no findings in a cross tabulation at the 95% significance level (P value =>0.45) with a frequency of visits made and gender. See figure 8.

Using a further cross tabulation with the number of visits made to a local authority leisure facility dependent on the external marketing variables that they were no significant findings using a Kuskal Wallis test at the 95% significance level (table 1)

In elaborating on the diversity of the level of response with the reference to the total numbers involved in the study with the parent population N=80, the level of response varies (see table 2) with just one of the variables (Place) of the marketing mix. Table 7 highlights that 71.6% (range from 4.0-7.0) feel that the location of a venue is fairly important factor when they select a leisure facility.

the mean represents the average of the total population in their ratings of level of importance.

### 3.3 Pricing Strategies Affecting Consumers Choices

The cost of travel can play a big part in this due to the narrowing options to the venue because of the bearing of funds available. When cross tabulating location with price using a Kruskal Wallis test there was a relationship above the 95% level (P= >0.05, Table 3). So this is further reinforced in figure 9 where it seen as a great importance to most consumers used in this study. Also there was another significant finding above the 95% with the whole experience (Product) where a leisure facility is situated. There are a number of variables could affect this such as a new facility, socio demographical make up of the people in the area along with the users. The knowledge of the staff and instructors could have great bearing on it

Further cross tabulations were made using the types of activities undertaken based on how effective the promotion is off their facilities and the activities undertaken at the venues. Using a Kruskal Wallis test there were no significant findings at the 95% level (P=> 0.301) (See figure 10).

### 3.4 Leisure Consumer Interviews

Numerous issues were highlighted during the individual interviews when selecting local authority leisure facilities, the demographic background on the leisure consumers backgrounds were very similar (Table 4).

One of the consumers worked in professional environment on a day-to-day basis and there was one student. The remaining consumers spent time at home and were not employed (2 responses). All of the consumers had access to transport for travelling too from venues (4 responses) and had some sources of income

### 3.5 Decisions when making choices

A range of issues were highlighted when the leisure consumers made their decisions when they chose of a leisure facility (Table, 5), but all of the consumers felt that location/place (4 responses) were very important when they select a leisure facility during the information search process. The price of facilities/ activities at venues also played a key importance (4 responses) a further issue was raised when they were alternatives to choose from is that how the facility was run and the welcoming atmosphere and experience (4 responses); product and packaging (3 responses); promotion (2 responses). A further interesting response was that people would revisit facilities either from word of mouth and how well people felt there experience was in attending the venue

## 4. Research Analysis Findings

The research title “*The external marketing variables that impact the consumer’s choice of local authority leisure facilitie*“?

Whilst the total parent population for this case study was 80, the respondent frame constituted was 80 (100%) with all of the

respondents making constructive comments on the research being carried out. Taking these factors into account, the main independent variables that will be used to support this discussion are gender, the number of visits made to leisure facilities and the types of activities consumed at the local authority leisure facilities.

#### *4.1 Demographics*

There were a large number of disparities in the consumers used in this study where there was a considerable difference in male/ female consumption of leisure 33.9%/ 66.1% respectively in gender split. Though this study took place directly after schools completing their day, e.g. 4pm and the questionnaires being completed by 5.30pm may have clouded the collection of data should it had been evenly distributed throughout the full working day and facilities opening hours.

However nationally participation levels are beginning to increase throughout all local authorities on their participation/ usage levels by females (see table 6). This is further reinforced by respondent C who states:

*Having had children now and they are all attending school it allows me to visit my local leisure centre and keep my self generally fit. But Also I can do things I could of before children.*

This is further supported by physical activity levels of shown in figure 11 that shows changes in activity levels between 1994 and 1998 (Department of Health, 1998). Over this four year period there was no change in the percentage of men who were achieving activity for health guidelines but there was a reduction in the medium category and an increase in the percentage of men who were sedentary (from 30% to 35%) (Sport England, 2004). For women there was increase in the percentage 'active for health' from 22% to 25%.

What is now clearly demonstrated through table 6 and figure 11 that females are now more actively involved in leisure participation. This view was reinforced from respondent A and C that leisure facilities must now promote more female orientated programs not just in the evening but also by day.

#### *4.2 Place and Promotion*

All Though 71.6 % of the number rated place a high level of importance (4.0 and above), when tested against the other variables there were no significant findings (figure, 14). Though there was one significant finding that a consumer may choose a leisure facility based on the price. There are many determinating factors could be play a part of this. One of those was stated by respondent A,, B & D (2007):

*Many people choose their facilities because of child care arrangements or family living close by to help with the cost. Therefore ideal is one on your door step close tom home and so expensive.*

The best form of promotion was not through routine channels for leisure facility selection, e.g. magazine, media etc, but by word of mouth. This supports Silverman's (1997) theory as he describes, "word of mouth is the most powerful force in the market place". Word of mouth refers to person to person communication and a communicator who is perceived as non-commercial regarding the service (Arndt, 1967). Several studies have shown that word of mouth communications can have an extremely powerful influence on the consumer purchasing process. As the accessibility and reputation of a leisure facility increases, the consumer is more likely to use it when making their selection and purchasing decisions (Biehal & Chakravati, 1986; Wyer & Srull, 1986). Figure 16 reinforces that the consumer will tend to look at the programme and what it offers, but for the more mature consumer the association comes from reputation, passed experience and what people are feeding back about the venue for travelling distance. Word of mouth would appear to be especially important today as sport/leisure related word of mouth is being spread rapidly via email, radio, discussion groups and websites (Sawnsen et al 2003).

#### *4.3 Product*

The packaging/programming of a leisure facility ranges from the minute a booking is made and payment is received through, to the information search and alternative evaluation stages of the decision making process. Moving through the decision making process through to the consumption (purchase and outcomes) stages, can result in either a bad or good experience for the consumer. The packaging of the facility plays a key factor and can assist a consumer in choosing one facility over another. From the initial packaging stage it can play an important role in the repurchase stage of a leisure consumer and their association with that facility (Gladden, & Funk, 2002; Mullins, Sutton & Hardy, 2000, Keller, 1993; Park, Jaworski, & Macinnis, 1986). According to Keller (1993) he relates the service/product consumption to the whole experience and where the consumers attach themselves to the facility itself. In addition the consumption of the leisure service/product it is also seen as experiential and in some cases often emotional (Mullin et al, 2000) therefore it is seen as intangible and cannot be taken away, only held in memory. Consuming the leisure provides virtually no tangible benefits (Gladden & Funk, 2002), though there has been a great deal of research into service/product association. There is very little evidence to support this especially in facility consumption

#### *4.4 Price*

Research into the costing, can be classified as an internal reference to the leisure consumer. Kyle, Kerstetter and Guadagnolo (2003) associated this work with the consumer's reaction to price; they further went on to define the standard price against

which the leisure consumer would evaluate the actual price of the activity they are considering for purchase (Kumar, Karande, & Reinartz, 1998). The key research that Kyle et al, (2003) substantiates his work is based on the Mayhew & Winer (1992) on internal reference Price (IRP) and external reference Price (ERP). Statistically there were no key findings (figure 15) or relationships to leisure consumption of facilities based on the price other than that of location, but there was a suggestion that leisure consumers base their selection on ERP's. Respondents A, C, & D (2007) go on to further support this finding by stating:

*People do not mind purchasing an activity at a facility as long as it is local. But when there are two facilities close together people will tend to choose the cheaper one of the two.*

In doing so, consumers consider the discrepancy IRP and ERP in their purchase decision. It could be argued that Kaheman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory also provides a framework for analysing the leisure consumer's reaction to price.

#### 4.5 Consumer decision making process of the leisure Consumer

Consumer behaviour research into local authority leisure facility consumption is very limited; if at all it has been attempted. Linking theorist models to a very diverse and driven consumer with a wide range of both internal and external influences in their attraction to the leisure and leisure can sometimes be misinterpreted by the facility manager/marketer. While models of leisure consumption tend to fragment consumer behaviour and can dilute the strategic value for leisure marketers, they also capture important distinctions. Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1978) present their model on decision making in going through stages of problem recognition right through to outcomes and satisfaction or dissatisfaction (figure. 1). However complex this model is, it only represents the decision processing unit partially and it links to some of those influences that affect the leisure facility consumer. It is apparent that through this research in the collection of data and its analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, that there are no significant relationships between the key variables that may influence a person's decision during the information search stage of the decision process and this has been highlighted. Though the key influences are not linked to the leisure consumer. Kollat, Engel & Blackwell's (1978) model of consumer behaviour can be related to at various stages dependent at what level the consumer perceives their rationale for selection. This clearly links with McGhee, Yoon & Cardenas (2003) theory of high and low levels of involvement during this stage. Whereas an active leisure facility participant and beginner/ embarking on physical activity for the first time, because they have low levels of involvement, are less selective about their leisure facility and make decisions quicker because of other reasons, some of these could be things such as location. This will be clearly evident beyond the problem recognition stage and moving onto the information search recognising that internal and external influences play a vital role at this stage. Wells & Prensky, (1996) present a more comprehensive model going through this stage. This model allows the consumer to search dependent on their own personal goals and memories of experiences and the accumulated knowledge that has been learned over the years (Wells & Prensky, 1996). Wells & Prensky's (1996) model is more comprehensive in explaining this phase of the leisure consumer decision making process and may assist leisure facility managers/marketers to better understand this process; it certainly has a relationship to the leisure consumer. But Silverman's (1997) approach expressing word of mouth is a major influencer in selection of leisure facilities. This then brings into the actualisation that the exchange of thoughts/ideas occurs between two or more leisure consumers, none of whom is a marketing source. So the consumer tends to follow the internal direction (figure 4) during the search for alternatives during the latter stages with an accumulated shared knowledge from rich associative networks (leisure/ sport community). Prensky's model to be a more preferred model to adopt for the leisure consumer than Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1978). Wells and Prenskys (1996) model adopts that memory plays a powerful medium in the satisfaction stage of consumer behaviour leading to the belief for repurchase. This model is further supported by table 6 and respondents A, B, C & D, that their new experiences are shaped from their previous experiences which follows Wells & Prenskys (1996) model through the internal search stage basing it on stored memory

## 5. Principle Findings

### 5.1 External Influences

The sample used provided an insightful source of information on the basis of whether external factors, e.g. the marketing mix (Price, Product, Place & Promotion) entices the consumer to select a leisure facility. Though there was very little evidence to support this. Price was an issue in some cases due to a situational (lifestyle, e.g. income) circumstances such as children and income played a role in this choice.

Location of a leisure facility was also a key contributor when some consumers during the problem recognition stage (1) information search stage (2)/search for alternatives stage (3) when consuming leisure. This was due to the locality within the region and travelling distance to and from home. But this was on a whole not substantiated. The product/ service packaging featured as a partial influence amongst some of the respondents; however it was not a key feature. The general clarity of this point was down to the booking of an activity/use of a facility been completed the experience of taking part using the facility and being part of it.

### 5.2 Understanding the consumer decision making process on leisure facilities

Numerous authors have provided different models of consumer behaviour decision making and they have been predomi-

nantly directed at the consumption patterns of products. Many of these models have a sound methodical and structure in addressing each stage of the consumer decision making process, but really do not address the diversity of the leisure consumer and especially in the selection of leisure facilities.

It was found through the parent population in this study that Engel, Kollat and Blackwells (1978) model of consumer behaviour, though very useful in general terms did not fully address all of the key influences during the external factors of the service industry. Some of these factors were in some cases powerful influences during the information search stage during leisure facility selection, e.g. location and place. Yet again other key authors in sports/ leisure marketing such as Mullin, Sutton and Hardy (2000) have also attempted to adapt Engel et al (1978) model to the sports/leisure consumer, but base most of their theory on the sport /leisure experience and believe that satisfaction leads to direct repetition of purchase. Though this model goes some way in addressing the sports/leisure consumer it still misses the primary stages of the awareness/ information search stage. What must be clearly understood that more attention needs to be paid to this stage as it seems to directly influence the parent population in this study. During the problem recognition stage of the decision making process, most leisure consumers already by passed this stage because their need in some cases has already been addressed as they are already active in leisure facility usage. What must be noted is that word of mouth is becoming a powerful marketing tool. It has been discovered through this research that most decisions are made through this process and the marketing mix though a powerful tool plays only a partial factor in this unique and up and coming field.

For leisure facility practioners, to make progress and gain a better understanding of the leisure consumer they need to begin to adopt Statt (1997), Wells and Prenskeys (1996) model of consumer behaviour in stages one and two. These stages will assist the leisure practioners more so in the packaging and promotion of a leisure facility for re-purchase, due to the leisure facility experience. By gaining a better understanding of this process and the alignment of the primary key stages of the decision making process this will aid and hopefully improve the future leisure facility consumption leading to satisfaction.

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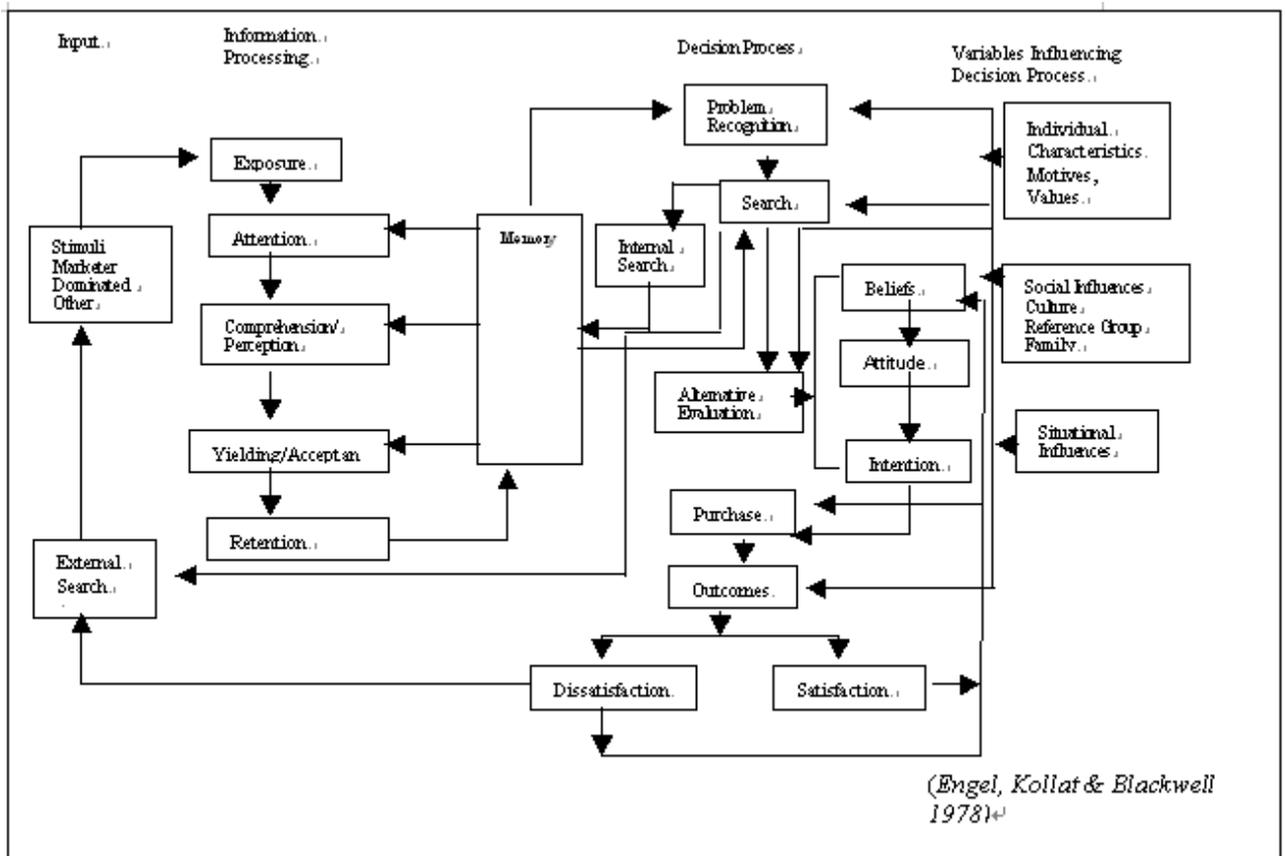


Figure 1. Complete model of consumer behaviour (Engel Et al 1990)

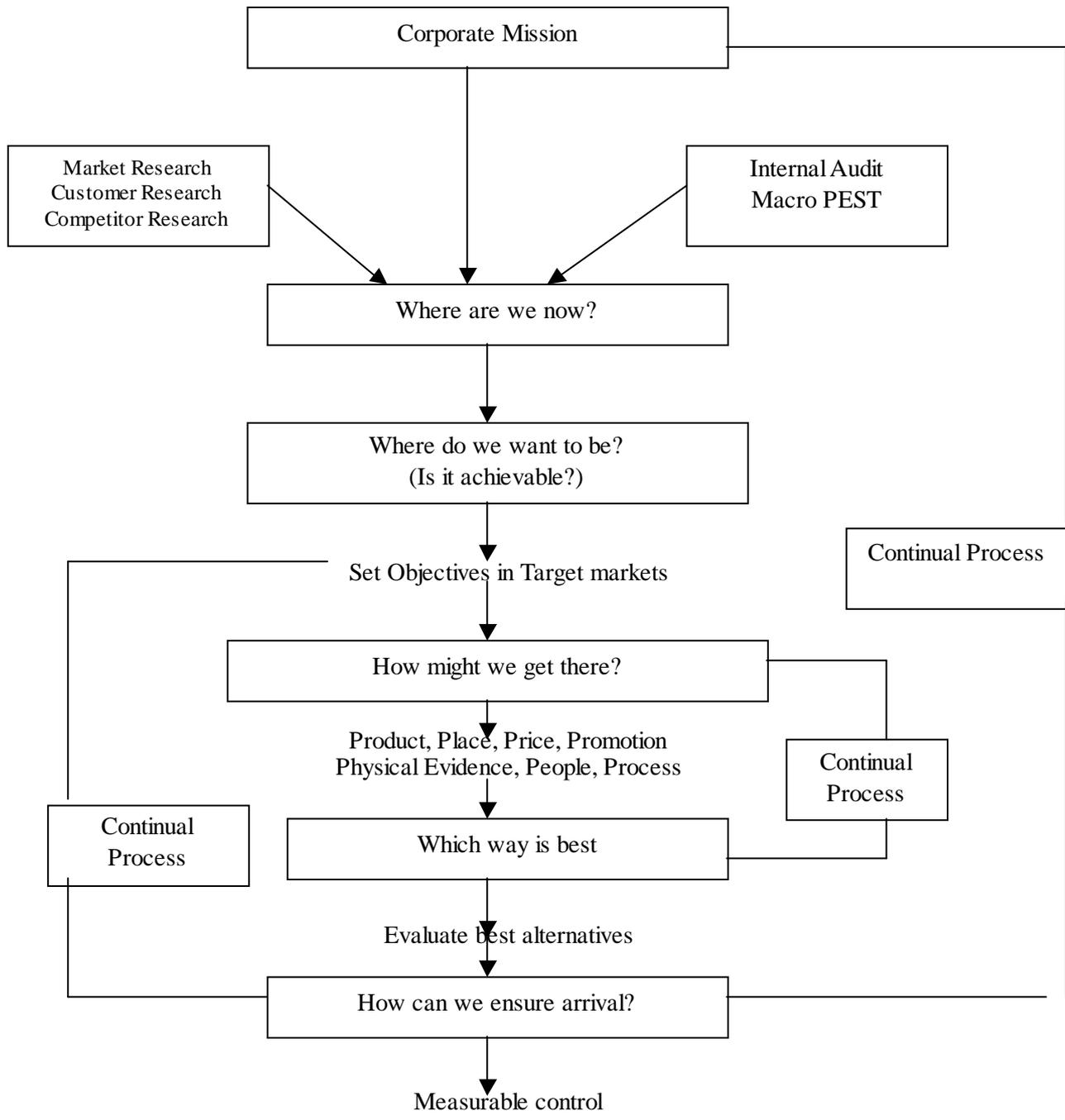


Figure 2. Leisure Planning Process (Adapted Herbert, 1989)

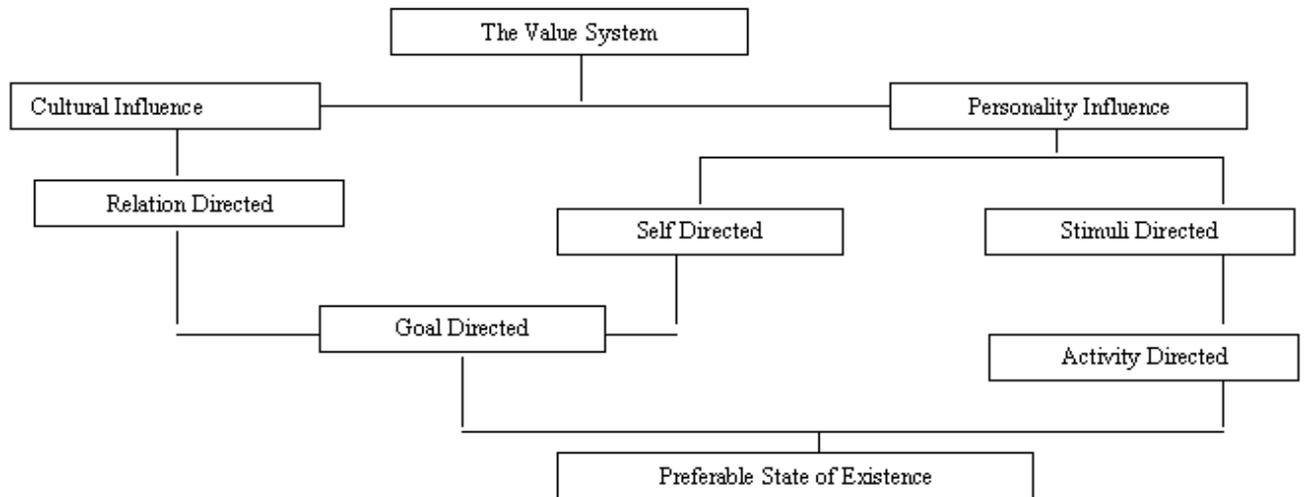


Figure 3. The Value Structure: A conceptual Model (Florenthal, 2000)

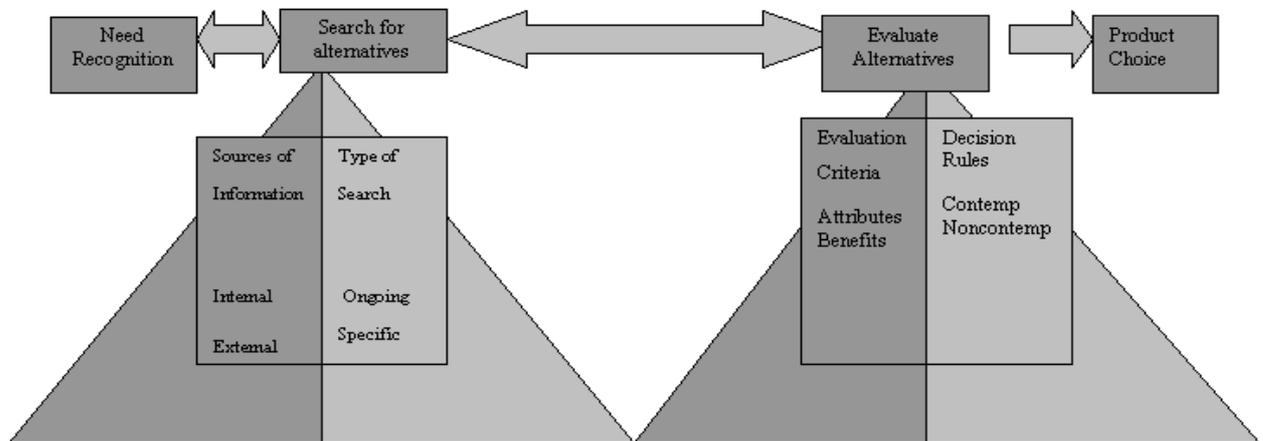


Figure 4. The decision making process (Adapted from Wells & Prenskey, 1996)

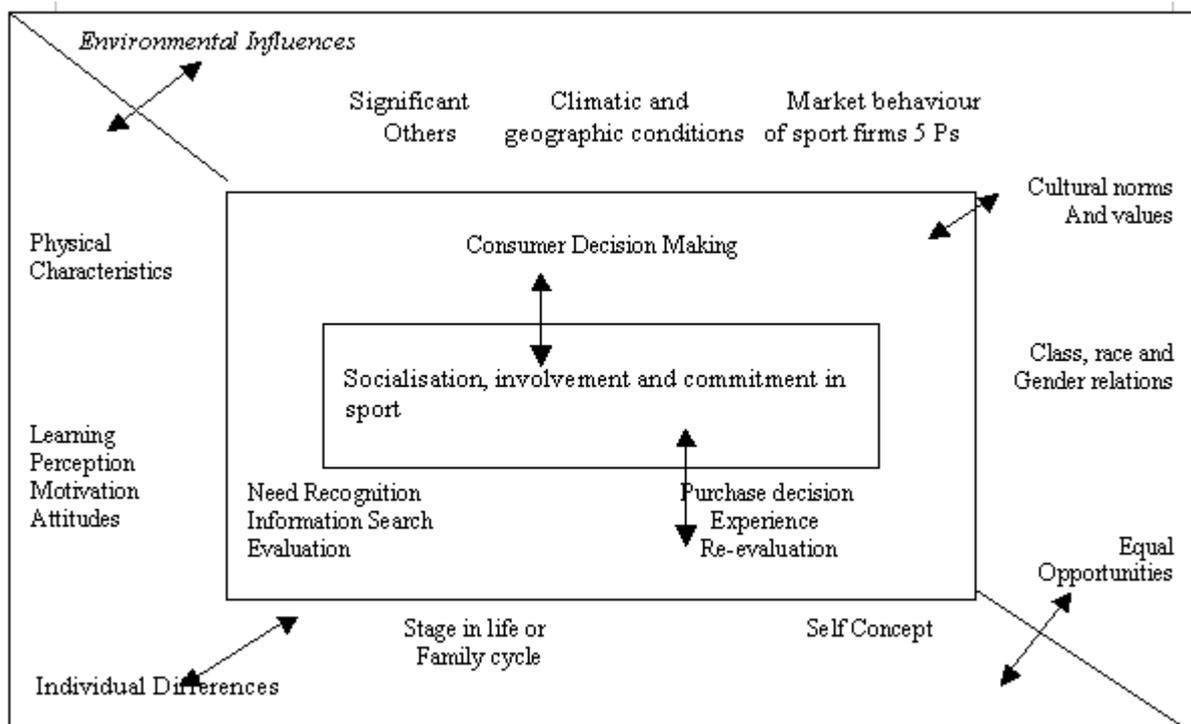


Figure 5. Consumer behaviour in sport (Adapted from Mullins, Hardy & Sutton, 2000)

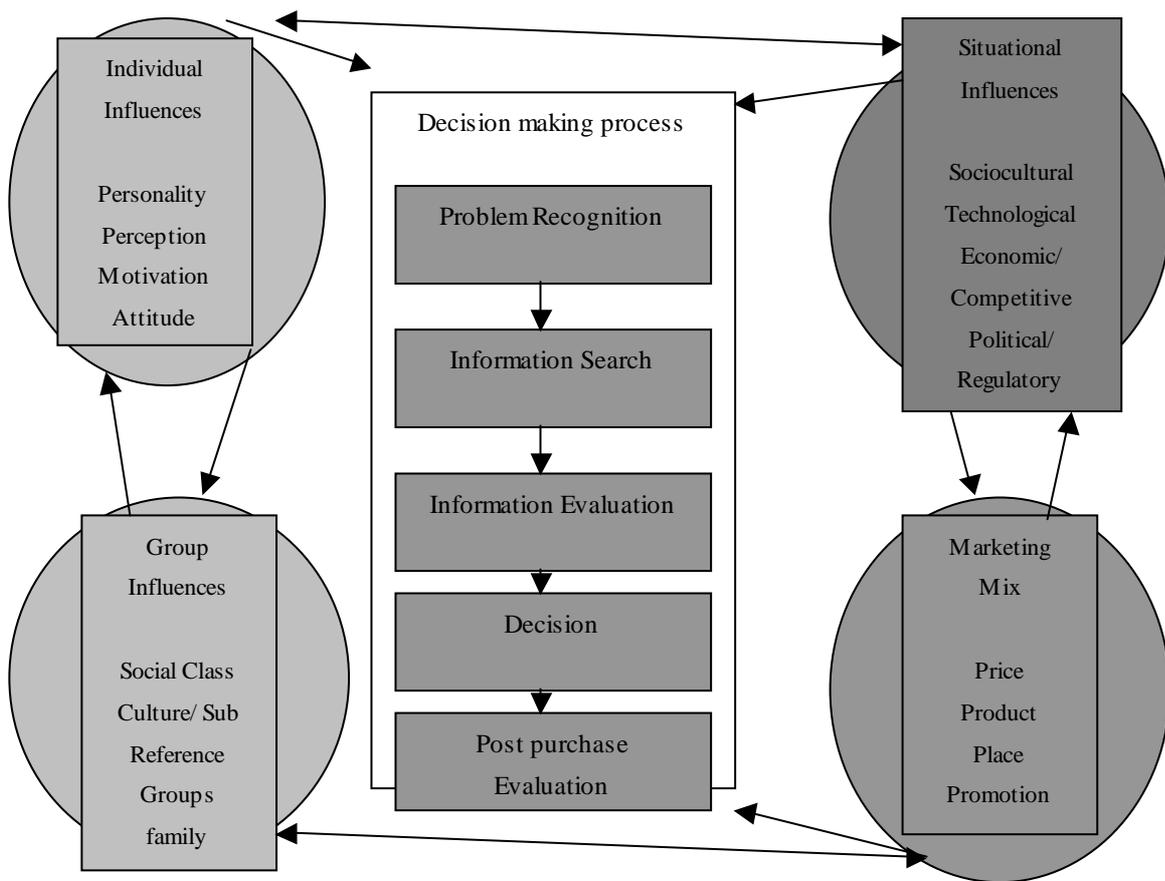


Figure 6. The Consumer Buying decision making process and its influencing factors  
 (Adapted from Brassington and Pettitt, 2000)

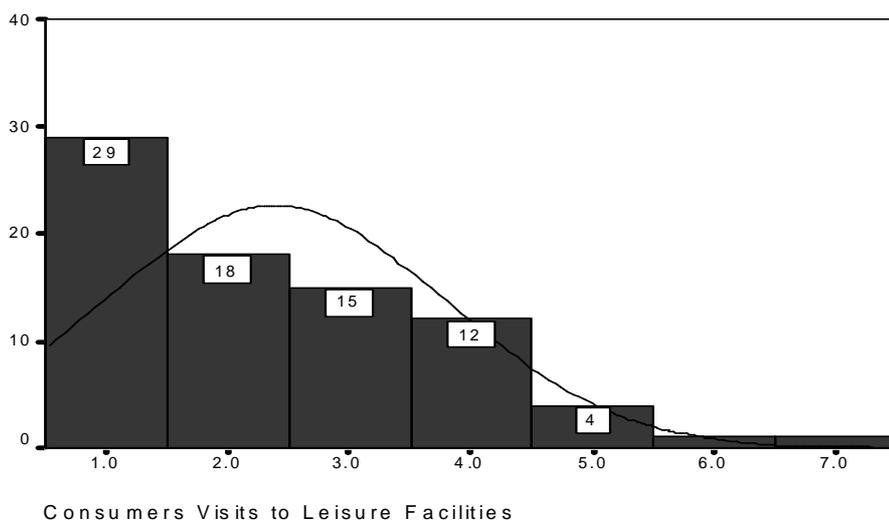


Figure 7. Consumers Visits to Leisure Facilities

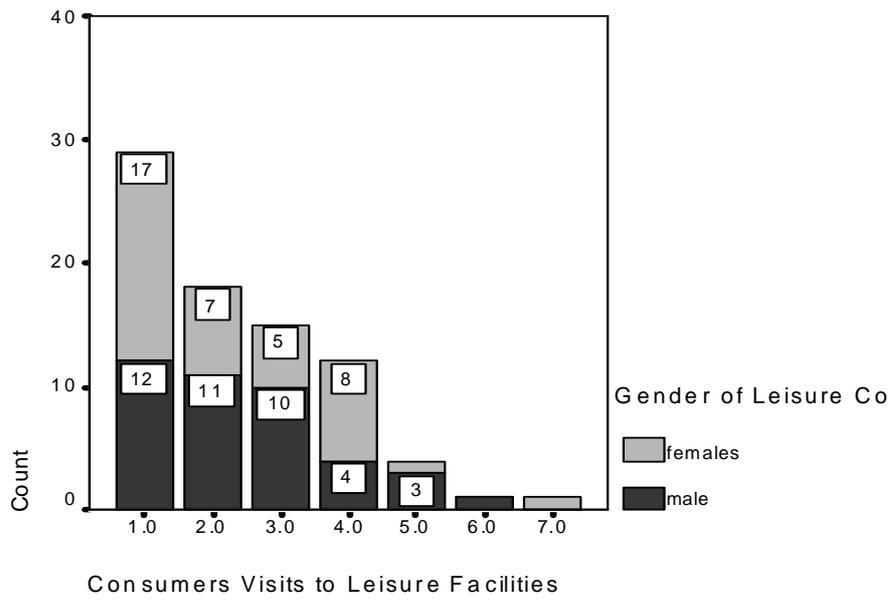


Figure 8. Consumer visits made to leisure facilities by gender

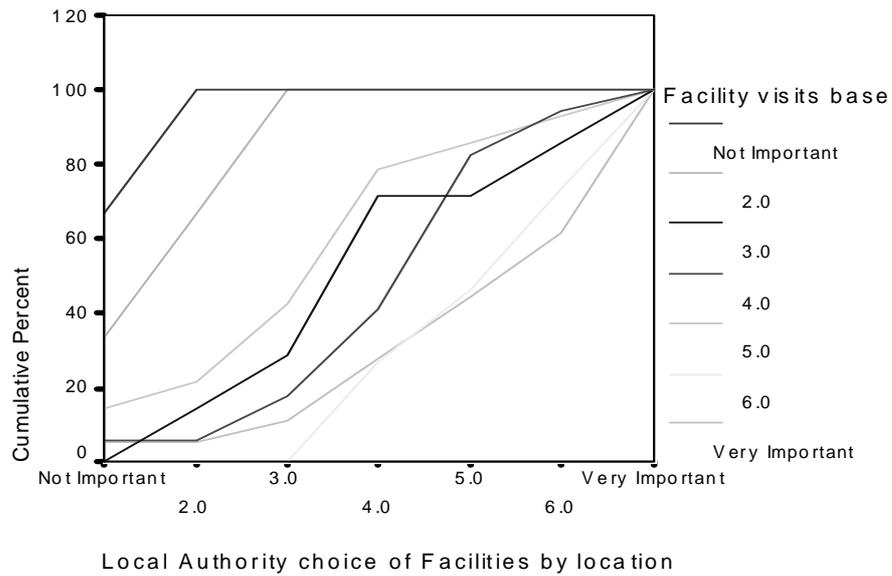


Figure 9. Selecting of facilities based on price of activities

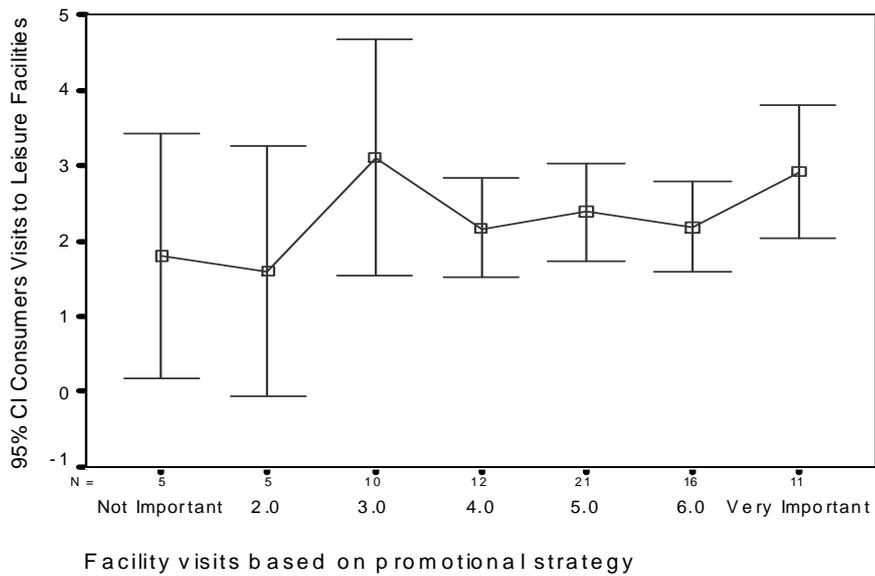


Figure 10. Activities/ Facilities chosen based on external promotion

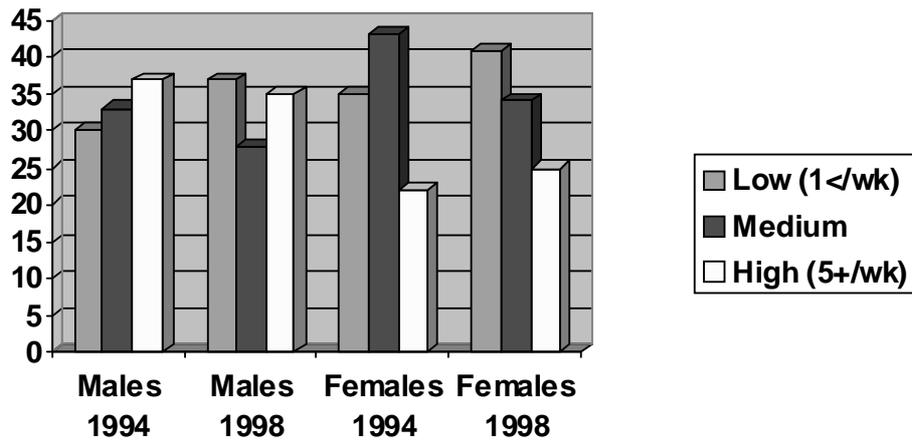


Figure 11. Physical activity level by sex, 1994 and 1998, England (Health Survey for England, 1998)

Table 1. Visits made to a local authority influenced by the marketing mix

	Local Authority choice of Facilities by location	Social Experience of Facilities	Word of Mouth/ regular user of the Facility	Facility visits based on pricing strategies	Facility visits based on promotional strategy
Chi-Square	4.257	1.336	3.184	1.421	7.507
df	6	6	6	6	6
Asymp. Sig.	.642	.970	.785	.965	.277

Table 2. Local Authority choice of Facilities by location

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not Important	9	11.3	11.3	11.3
	2.0	5	6.3	6.3	17.5
	3.0	8	10.0	10.0	27.5
	4.0	19	23.8	23.8	51.3
	5.0	14	17.5	17.5	68.8
	6.0	11	13.8	13.8	82.5
	Very Important	14	17.5	17.5	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Choice of Local Authority Leisure Facilities based on cost

	Local Authority choice of Facilities by location
Chi-Square	31.457
df	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Table 4. Consumers response lifestyles and backgrounds

Gender	Single	Marital Status	Children	Professional	Student	Travel	income
Male	2	1	1	1	1	2	2
Female	2	2	2	0	0	2	2

Table 5. Evaluating Leisure Facility Selection

Reasons for Event Selection	Number of Responses
Location/ Place	4
Price	4
Product/ Package	3
Promotion	2
Atmosphere/ Experience	4
Reputation	3

Table 6. Persons attending leisure and recreation classes by sex of participants: type of college or organisation running classes (GHS 2002)

Type of college/ organisation running classes	Men	Women	Total
	%	%	%
Local Education Authority	16	26	23
College of Further Education	10	7	8
University Extra -Mural	3	5	4
other	71	64	66
Weighted base(000's)	759	1,835	2594
Unweighted sample	257	663	920