

Effective Marketing Communication Efforts of Sports Development Initiatives: A Case Study of the Public Sector in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Questions could be had that there should be an increased focus in the area of marketing communications of sports development initiatives within the public sector to its consumers. Drawing upon marketing theory and sports marketing literature, the primary aim of the research was to investigate the marketing mix variables and how these impacted consumers' selection of a sports development initiative. Data for this case study were collected from a public sector sports facility located in the United Kingdom (UK) focusing on the gender and age of the sport development consumer as well as the main sport in which the consumer participated. A self administered piloted questionnaire was carried out in December (2008) with twenty consumers (n= 10%). Developments were then made to the questionnaire before it was administered to the sports development initiatives participants (N=200). The participant's abilities were varied, and the questionnaire, to cater for this diversification, contained a range of nominal, ordinal, and interval questions. The findings suggested that people selecting a sport development initiative based their choices on the marketing mix variable of place. In terms of promotion, the findings revealed that word of mouth communications had an influence on sports development initiatives.

Keywords: sport policy, sports consumer, marketing mix, facilities, word of mouth

Introduction

This research argues on how some of the tools and variables that make up marketing communications such as the marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) work in harmonization with the promotional mix to sway the consumer's decision when consuming various types of development initiatives to increase participation in sport. Drawing upon marketing theory, and in particular sports marketing literature, the primary aim of the research was investigate what variables affected the selection of a sports development initiative. To address this, information and data was drawn from a public sector sports facility. Previous research (Westerbeck & Shilbury, 1999) has looked at what impact the marketing mix has had in the way of facility lead marketing and there was also some tenuous links by Schiender & Bradish, (2006) to that of place as a means of the distribution of the sports development initiatives. However this was one element of the marketing mix and not how all the variables could or worked in harmonization with each other or more in importantly the psycho-graphical affect upon increasing participation in sport as the sport development initiative does. Many would argue (Houlihan, 1997; Thomas, 2000) that there has been a non-interventionism approach to the development of sports which is reinforced by Green & Houlihan, (2006) who referred to it in the UK as it more like a "piece meal approach" or unstructured (Houlihan, 1997).

Review of the Literature

From the nineteenth century, and into the first half of the twentieth century, the development of sport, and the UK government's role could have been characterized as haphazard and ad hoc (Houlihan, 1997). A piecemeal and reactive approach to sport and recreation at the central government level seemed to continue right up until the early 1960's (Green & Houlihan, 2006). The UK has more recently undergone radical changes within sport due to the government's changed agenda to improve the quality of life and tackle social issues (Department of Culture, 1997) through sports. The government achieved this through a policy of change which was first identified at least four decades ago. In the 1960's, the first major development occurred in sports policy with the publication of the report of the Wolfaden Committee, "Sport and the Community". The report suggested that the government set up a council in community development to promote sport at all levels (Gratton & Taylor, 1991). It suggested that the empowerment of the community through development in sport would create individuality and address mainstays in social welfare policies and economic development similar to other governments around the world (Lawson, 2005). And more recently, both concepts have become priorities in health and criminal policies (Blair, 2003). This growing popularity suggests that something important is occurring.

If this is so, then there is a need to determine whether the government should be concerned with community development. And if there is still some confusion, then how is the government to harness these two concepts, and improve their practices and programs (Lawson, 2005)? With the government's change within their agenda on tackling issues through community development, they took the lead on developing a specialist council, and subsequently the Sports Development Council was born (Gratton & Taylor, 1991). They had to identify the barriers to sports participation and increase physical recreation through frameworks and initiatives. Some may suggest that sport and physical recreation frameworks/initiatives are a way of breaking down barriers. Marylebone cricket club attempted this in Afghanistan through investigating ways to assist sports development in the country, by supporting an emerging cricketing nation (Beckman, 2007). This was another way of using sport as a tool for the general improvement/development of individuals and communities based on the growing number of programs and organizations promoting development through sport to have a world wide appeal (Guest, 2006). However, Guest (2006) goes onto argue this somewhat ironically. The belief that the potential of the development of communities through sport has led to a more critical perspective, especially when the key issues promote sport to be a vehicle for improving health and society

Through the government's social inclusion policy, it highlighted that everyone can enjoy sport and promoted improved quality of life and economic prosperity (Mason, 1994). Sport England has conducted research and highlighted through its annual report in 2003 that sports have added 9.8 billion pounds (1.6%) to the UK economy (Sport England, 2003). In addition, there has been a further 1.6 billion pound input into community sport through Active Sport, and 2.5 million pounds into schools through the Physical Education School Sports Club Links (PESSCL) program (Draper, 2003). UK Prime Minister at that time, Tony Blair (2003), stated that this was not just a sports policy council, but also a health policy, an education policy, an anti-crime policy, and anti-drugs policy. But more importantly how can sport tackle such wide and expansive and deeply embedded issues?

It has been identified that sport directly contributes to the socialization process, particularly to the characteristics historically discussed as "building character" and those currently under discussion, "developing life skills". Many have discussed the importance and positive outcomes of sport and physical activity especially in a child's development (Bailey, Bloodworth, & McNamee, 2007; Cote, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008). However, the notion of building character and developing these life skills may be popular yet difficult to support empirically (Guest, 2006). Because of this, questions are now being raised, and more importantly, there is a dominant body of academic discourse being generated in the international community from scholars within the field of sport (Lawson, 2005) raising such concerns. For these colleagues, sport is an all encompassing concept, as well as the sport related dialogue which comprises a variety of activities and programs, supporting it. Crum (1998) referred to this as a movement in culture. Crum (1998) further developed and elaborated this classification of activities, including the implementation of sport development programs. Bramham, Hylton, Jackson, and Nesti (2001) referred to sport development as a contested term, by looking first at the word '*sport*', because at times sport is narrowly defined as a competitive, rule governed game involving some degree of physical activity. '*Development*' is then considered as conjuring ideas of maturation, education, and consolidation of competencies, skills, and knowledge.

If government is to tackle social issues, then they will have to remove the perceptions of competitiveness from the public, as suggested by Bramham et al. (2001). Also, with sports practitioners having limited knowledge of its future direction, how could they communicate, persuade, and market sport to break down barriers in this way? Brooking (2001) stated that whatever people think, there needs to be a value for sport as it is responding to the challenges that society is facing today due to its ever changing circumstances. He claimed that sport has the ability to make a difference in people's lives and society, similar to that of Blair (2003). It also needs to show that for every pound invested in sport, there needs to be multiple returns such as improved health for the individual and less demand on the health services by those of middle to older age groups (Sport England, 2003).

Clearly, what has been identified is that there is reason for sport in society today, and more importantly, the development of sport and the initiatives necessary to do this. But how do academics, government officials, and practitioners intend to measure the effectiveness of the initiatives through communication methods such as marketing, a key vehicle to persuade people, especially at the local level? Many studies looked at national trends (Rowe & Bibby, 2006; Sport England, 2005, 2007), but there is limited work on initiatives at a local level especially the frameworks that underpin the initiatives by such means as the promotional methods employed through marketing communications.

The Active Sports Frameworks were clearly put in place for the player pathway, community development, and educational reform in the UK, which may have an impact on achieving the objectives of the program; mass participation in sport. As well as the program, it has also been one of the catalysts of forging of partnership between public sector and National Governing Body's (NGB) in working more effectively together, and in some cases many for the first time. This point was reinforced in the public sector where Sunderland City Council (Elvin, 1993) attempted to implement programs and frameworks, but they lacked structure and processes to continue sustainability. A question could be raised: Why did it lack the processes to continue its lifespan? Clearly, the public sector and certainly today's NGB's are judged on key performance indicators (KPI's), and from this, funding naturally comes from achieving such KPI's. Some may argue this was due to a lack of partnership or a lack of communication through ineffective marketing. To make Active Sports a success, likewise any other initiative, the frameworks that are used either in marketing communications or marketing research need to be continually evaluated on their performance so the corrective measures or the appropriate action can be taken.

This has more recently been identified through Sport England's (2007) policy statement on the delivery system for Sport in England (See Figure 1.1). The document outlines a number of networks/ frameworks in sports partnerships and claims that through effective marketing communication, its methods can increase participation by 85%. The document goes on further to describe that the delivery system itself will support the achievement of the frameworks and outcomes so that the government's public service agreement can be achieved (Sport England, 2007). Therefore to achieve this using many different networks and partners, they will need to coordinate their communicational methods through the marketing of sport (Insert Figure 1.1 about here). Sports marketing communications have to be tactical in a changing environment. Kotler and Armstrong (1994) suggested that sports marketers should be able to manipulate the marketing mix and it should be controllable with tactical marketing tools that a firm blends to produce the response it wants to evoke from its target market. However, a question remains of how the government can achieve this in an area that lacks an understanding by sports practitioners, especially those in the public sector. Sport arguably is a highly competitive marketplace due to football, but many practitioners are still seeking to improve their marketing efforts and strengthen their organization (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000).

It has been identified that improved marketing efforts will undoubtedly improve the future of sport development initiatives, and this will enable sports marketers to hopefully be in a position to control the consumer's response (Croner, 1988). Furthermore, it will enable the sports marketer to measure the success of the impact on their marketing communications/methods against the development initiative. Needless to say, a type of measurement tool within its social and managerial processes on the successes of the actual sport development initiatives would be useful because it could be used to identify the impact on achieving the wants and needs of the consumer as well as the value of what was defined by Shilbury, Quick and Westerbeck (1998) as a service. There is a need for more continued research in this area of marketing. If sport marketing ideally consists of activities designed to meet the wants and needs of the sports consumer, then historically, the industry has been guilty of what Levitt (1960) called "marketing myopia" or a lack of foresight in marketing ventures. Although some organizations have shifted their perspectives, marketing myopia is reported still to be a widespread affliction in many industry segments (Beech & Chadwick, 2007; Mullin, Sutton & Hardy, 2000). This is reflected in the way of a continued emphasis on sales and promotions and reflects the lack of understanding in the number of professionally trained marketers and the way sport is sometimes communicated.

Given the unique characteristics of marketing myopia, what factors should be considered in the making of and the decisions about the packaging, promoting, and delivering of sports development? Who will be attracted to the sports they wish to develop and how will they be delivered, marketed, and communicated to influence the consumer's choice for now and in the future? How does the sports marketer measure the effectiveness of their marketing efforts and more specifically the sports development initiatives? When marketing a sports development initiative, it must be decided if it is a sports product or service?

Smith (2008) provided a useful way to address such questions in the way of the sport product continuum. He points out that some of the products are mainly tangible like tennis balls and fitness equipment, but also how they might offer intangible benefits to the consumer (Shank, 2007). If that is the case then what concepts of marketing does it fall into? It could be argued that it falls into relationship marketing where the service itself has a focus on a relationship between the seller or provider (Public Sector facility) and the customer (Nesti, 2000). Whatever the case may be, the sports development initiative is essential to the public sector for two reasons. First, it keeps up to date with the current trends on increasing participation in sport and also improving lifestyles-trends.

Secondly, if the sports development initiative is unsuccessful, a new initiative must be introduced continually to maintain targets for the local authority (Shank, 2007). This is essential because there has been declining or stagnate sports participation globally in recent years (Vail, 2007). Research concerning the public sector, at the local level, is important when investigating this issue. Though this is relevant, there is motivation and an understanding required to meet the wants and needs of the sports consumer through marketing (Arnott, 2008). Smith (2008) and Shank (2007) pointed out that the elements of sports development initiatives are mainly intangible, so it could be argued that this is something hard to quantify. It is what the sports consumer may feel or think, so the outcome is not a solid element like tangible goods. How can they increase participation through marketing as the sports development initiatives set out to do? Fullerton and Merz (2008) highlighted some of the basic principles for the marketer, and contextualized this in sport with a link to sports participation as a sports product (See Table 1.1).

Insert Table (1.1) about here

The table draws the specialist nature of this area similar to that identified by what Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2007) described; “as the uniqueness of sports marketing” (pg 17). What sports marketers must remember is that effectively marketing the sports product (sports development initiative) will initiate a relationship with the sports consumer potentially for the long term (Daniel & Johnson, 2004). Shank (2007) indicated that sports marketing may not form the desired relationship that it was intended and subsequently the sports development initiative may not succeed or survive. New initiatives are not always in existence, so the fine tuning of the current sports product may be needed and transmitted through effective marketing, so it meets the sports consumer needs (Daniel & Johnson, 2004; Jobber, 2004). What might be an effective way of doing this is bundling of the benefits (Mullins, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007) of the sports product in different ways with minimal effort, and then it could be marketed effectively (Daniel & Johnson, 2004).

But the critical management of this activity is to coordinate each stage of the marketing mix (Beech & Chadwick, 2007) so the longevity of the sports development initiative can continue as it is. However, some incongruence has also been observed between the sports consumer and the marketing mix, suggesting that the sport organization needs to present the positive and specific features of the sports development initiative (Filo & Funk 2005; Gladden & Funk, 2001). Leaf (1992) supported this assumption because the sports development initiative was the ideal medium for personalization if executed accurately. The activities within this type of service can be tailored to satisfy the individual’s needs to ensure those personal touches are matched to the sports product (Shani, 1997). The challenges that face the sports marketers is that they are still unskilled in this area and they need to develop an infrastructure and strategy to deal with the marketing mix successfully to promote the sports product (Beech & Chadwick, 2007) in the tailoring element.

What is now noted from this is that all aspects of the marketing communications and essentially the marketing mix play an integral part when the consumers are making their choices (Arnott, 2008) and with that in mind, the appropriate strategies need to be developed. Also, it is essential that all the areas are taken into consideration (Arnott, 2008) such as the place or venue where the sports development initiatives are purchased and consumed as this happens simultaneously (Bitner, 1992; Westerbeck & Shilbury, 1999). The specific element of the place serves as both a physical location and means of distribution for a sports development initiative (Schneider & Bradish, 2006). Yet this component of the marketing mix is often regarded as the most difficult of all the marketing components to adjust (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). If this component is one of the most difficult within the marketing mix, then how can the marketer establish the common grounds to develop it in their marketing strategy? And more importantly has there been sufficient research undertaken in this field to begin with to proceed as a starting point?

The subject of place has been touched broadly from a sport policy prospective (Chalip, 1996), and it has been useful in the way of sports development (Bramham et al., 2001; Pitter, 1996). Their research critically examined the use of sport policy in community development, and they used a sport marketing strategy (Schneider & Bradish, 2006). Though this was useful, there needed to be a clearer focus on the place and not as a tool for political policy and ideologies. The concept of place is an integral part of the sport marketing strategy, as well as the presentation of the place. It has an impact because it acts as a psychographic tool for consumer behavior in sport (Rooney, 1974; Schneider & Bradish, 2006). Also, there is an argument based on how the place helps shape promotions and the delivery of the sports development initiatives (Westerbeck & Shilbury, 1999). Therefore, the sports marketer must consider this, especially as some of the key components impact the consumers experience in ways such as location and accessibility, design and layout, facility infrastructure, and customer service (Smith, 2008).

Bale (1994) further supported this by emphasizing the importance ‘visually’ of the sports development initiative because the place is not always the only important element. The location, surroundings, and architecture can also contribute to the overall experience for the sports consumer when they attend. Unfortunately, these variables are uncontrollable from the sports marketers’ perspective, as the organization may not communicate this in sufficient time and therefore cannot be transmitted correctly through marketing communications or the marketing mix.

What must be further understood is that the place can play a pivotal role in the decision making for the organization when they are developing their sports marketing strategies. In the initial development of the marketing of the sports service, they must consider this when it comes to the promotion and also in the short term, the communication of the price that the consumers are willing to exchange for it. The overall experience and satisfaction for the sport consumer will be impacted by this (Schneider & Bradish, 2006). Along with the sport service/product (development initiative) and the place, promotion may also impact the consumer decision making process. Also Schneider and Bradish (2006) point as well the elements of the marketing mix that have been identified will another variable such as price impact the consumer decision making on sports development initiatives, e.g. how much are they willing to spend?

It must be generalized that price plays an important role upon the consumers choice for a sports development initiative. Often literature refers to price as what the consumer reacts to and is influenced (Arnott, 2008; Kyle, Kersetter, & Guadagno, 2003). Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) prospect theory also provided a framework for analyzing the consumer’s reaction to price (Kyle, Kersetter, & Guadagno, 2003). Though this is a useful concept to discuss in summary, it is based on the consumer expectations of the product, or in this case, the sports development initiative (McCarville, Crompton, & Sell, 1993). This is further reinforced by Westerbeck and Shilbury (1999), who agreed with McCarville et al. (1993) as they described the sport service as the consumer perception of the value or the physical evidence that has been gained from it (e.g. what they get for their money). What is clearly evident from this is that price impacts the consumption patterns of the individual when choosing a sports development initiatives. However, even today, relatively little is known about why some people are more predisposed to engage in sport whereas others are not (Shoham & Rose, 2000).

Considering some of the variables involved, when consumers react to price, how can the marketer segment the general population and identify the individuals with a higher probability of engaging in sports (Shoham & Rose, 2000)? Research has suggested that the degree of engagement could also be linked to demographic factors with one key area such as income (Armstrong, 2001). Colburn (1999) reinforced Armstrong’s (2001) point through his research that poor people (regardless of race or gender) were more likely to be less physically active. Bradish, Lathrop, and Sedgewick (2001) underpinned this theory when they found that in the case of females, that though the social context was supportive, the economic status and environment (sports) was still an issue to deter women from participating.

Therefore, if the development initiative fails to encourage the consumer, especially within its environment, then the acceptability of the price (through the communication of the program) is then a key element within the marketing mix (Kyle et al., 2003). This finding was somewhat compelling given that the traditional public sector communication and promotional efforts have heavily relied on the provision of the basic program information with limited information on price (Johnson, Tew, Havitz & McCarville, 1999; Kyle et al., 2003; McCarville et al., 1993). It is evident that sports marketers must focus their efforts more in this area as the price and promotion act as an important messages to the consumer when considering the sports development initiative (Smith, 2008). Armstrong and Kotler’s (2005) model on the effects of internal and external influences to the organization further reinforced this point by considering such elements as product, promotion and distribution and then external factors such as consumer demand, competition and the legal implications that may influence a consumers’ choice on the sports product itself. The model also further looked at issues beyond promotion. It is worth acknowledging some of the other factors internally and externally when setting pricing and bringing into context issues raised by Bradish, Lathrop and Sedgewick (2001) and Colburn (1999) when they discussed the environment (external factors). Considering these factors when planning for promotion frequently resulted in the lowering of the perceived price (Arnott, 2008). Thus, the long term impact, when evaluated against previous promotions, was sometimes judged less attractive to the sports development consumer (Arnott, 2008).

What sports marketers need to consider is to improve and understand their marketing efforts. They must recognize that the current sports market is becoming extremely competitive both in the public, private, and not for profit sectors as there is an increase in the providers (Shani, 1997).

Also, competition between sports providers is becoming very intensive when other leisure activities within the home and outside are included (Evans, James & Tomes, 1996). In many cases, their main aim is shared, and that is to increase the number of participants and the frequency of participation in a specific activity (Fullerton & Merz, 2008). Yet their aim is to achieve this, their understanding remains limited and needs to be further developed with a clearer focus when it comes to marketing (Arnott, 2008; Fullerton & Merz, 2008). What also seems to be evident is that organizations want to increase participation through vehicles such as the sports development initiative. To raise the awareness, the most important area they need to consider possibly is price and effective promotion.

By gaining an effective advantage in this area, they will then hopefully reach their potential consumers (Mitre & De Pablos, 2009). Evans et al. (1996) shared this same view when highlighting that sport providers needed to embrace marketing as they were more likely to remain commercially viable in this intensive environment. The public sectors squeeze on subsidies, and without strong marketing, many sports and sports development initiatives will not survive, and will be in danger of disappearing (Evans et al., 1996). The opportunity for increased awareness through effective promotions will reinforce the image of the sports development initiative which in essence, will create synergies with its target audience (McKelvey, McDonald & Cramer, 2005) enabling its survival, especially the role sport plays in society. Though it transcends that sport plays an increasingly important role in society, there are still many areas of sports marketing and sports development that are under research (Chelladurai, 1994). As stated by Mahony and Pitts (1998), sport marketing is still a young and developing discipline and it is helpful to determine the direction in this field. One such area that appears to be vital to the practitioner is its impact on the effectiveness of sports development. Only when the sports marketers appreciate the needs and wants of the sports development consumer, can they determine a sustainable competitive advantage and improve in his/her marketing communications.

Method

An understanding of the consumer psyche was of great importance to this research, which was similar to that conducted by Bradish et al. (2001) when they looked at segmenting the market place in sport. However, their research was slightly biased towards 200 males, where this research study included both male and female responses. In summary, 200 participants from a public sector district were invited to provide retrospective data for their choice on the selection of participating in a sports development initiative in a large district in the North East of England (Tyneside). To gain a better perspective of the participants involved in this study were individuals who attended the sports facility who pay and play for the various initiatives that were run at the facility. The number of sports development initiative consumers used in this study was 92 males and 108 females. Historically, participation in sport in Great Britain, in the years 1996 – 2002, women took the lead in participation in sport, toppling men by a mere 1,021 in total (Sport England, 2005).

A self administered questionnaire was deemed the most appropriate research tool (Labovitz & Hodgeporth, 1976). Perhaps the most relevant research similar to this was conducted by Reese and Mittlestadt (2001). They submitted their questionnaires both electronically and mail respectively. Using this form of contact allowed the respondents to be contacted for a quick response (Emery, 2004).

This also enabled questionnaires to be sent simultaneously to more than one person (Irwin, Sutton, & Gladden, 1998). Though this was a useful method, the weakness of this is that it only allowed the consumers to rank the order of importance and since there was no interaction between the researcher and sample, this might question the validity of the instrument (Riske & Mondello, 2004). Whereas this research consisted of, in some cases, multiple choice questions similar to that used by Bradish et al. (2001) where guidance or probing may have been required. To make it a valid tool, the questionnaire was built around the purpose of the study and questions similar to that conducted by Brown (2002). That is why the approach to give out self administered questionnaires with face to face interaction gained a more positive response rate and a more holistic view of the research area.

The structure of the questionnaire followed a logical framework with progressive types of questions to build up a profile of the consumers for the purpose of data collection (demographics, age, gender, etc). Bradish et al. (2001) structure is the closest to this in their design of the questionnaire; however, they focused on social and cultural influences which were not deemed appropriate for this research because this research was focused on marketing communications. Marketing communications in mind, the questionnaire began to focus on the main sports the sample chose and what influenced this choice. Then, a clearer focus on the marketing variables that might have influenced their choice was presented in the form of a likert scale to gauge where they rated place on a scale of 1-7 on influencing their choice of sports development initiative and why they choose sports development initiatives.

From this approach, in the design of the questionnaire using a likert scale, enabled the demographical profiles of the consumer to be tested and represented using a variety of inferential statistical data using the package SPSS 17.0. Also where it was appropriate such demographical profiling in such areas as gender highlighted disparities which have been highlighted in the results.

Results

The total sample for this case study was 200, it constituted a 100% response rate from the questionnaires from this number of statistical test were conducted to establish what were the key influences that the consumer felt appealed to them in the selection of a sports development initiative. And what has already been discussed in the methodology section that an area of demographics were seen to play a key part within this! Therefore gender along with other key marketing variables were statistically tested in such areas as means scores, and what was demonstrated that when comparing those of gender and the sports people participated in, the results highlighted that they were dominated purely by males ($N= 1.2$; 1 the number allocated in the SPSS output viewer) and as the graph highlights (figure 1.2), the domination is those sports that are typically stereotyped for men such as football and also those that are seen aesthetically pleasing sports for women such as gymnastics. This continues throughout each of the sports ($N= 1.75$; 2 the number allocated in the SPSS output viewer) such as hockey and tennis which in particular age groups and maturation levels are female sports. However the mean average in badminton was 4.36, (Table 1.2) which is an indication that localized sports halls, that traditionally, badminton courts, are still seen as traditionally, a dominant activity that people wish to consume

Insert Figure 1.2 & Table 1.2 about here

Using a one way Anova statistical test in comparing means by the main sports they participated in to see if they were influenced on their choice of sports development initiative by the facility, (place) figure 6 shows that the standard deviation from the ($N= 171$) that the larger proportion of people felt it was as the mean was 4.45 ($N= 38$) important and the standard deviation from this 2.45. Further cross tabulations using an independent t-test with gender and all the other dependant variables on the consumers' choice of sports development initiatives based on the marketing mix. However there were no significant findings at the 95% (P value = <0.05) level. The only dependant variable that was close to this was consumers choice based on atmosphere or previous experience (P value = $0.072 = >0.05$) at the 97% confidence level.

There were further cross tabulations using an independent t-test with gender. The other dependant variables were based on the consumers' choice for sports development initiative around the marketing mix such as the importance of price (P value = $0.59 = >0.05$). Furthermore this is evident, in what could be regarded as strong marketing tool for local authority sports provision is promotion ($P=0.25= > 0.05$) at 75% confidence level or public relations ($P=.061= >0.05$) at 39% confidence level. As well those that have been discussed there were no further significant findings at the 95% (P value = <0.05) level with product/ service. The only dependant variable that was close to this was the consumers' choice, where there was some affect based on the atmosphere or their previous experience (P value = $0.072 = >0.05$) at the 97% confidence level.

Using a one-way ANOVA statistical test, demonstrates that when specific sports were tested against the marketing mix variables, basing it on the consumers choice of the sport development initiative, there were findings at 99.9 % (P value = $0.001 = <0.05$) for the venue of the initiative and also word of mouth 95% (P value = $0.05 = <0.05$). This would suggest that there were some elements of the marketing mix that can clearly be attributed when people choose a specific sports development initiative. From the statistical tests that were carried out using demographics against consumer choice of sports development initiative what has become clearly apparent from the results that the marketing mix, though influential in many cases and has had influence in some cases, it is a limited link and therefore questions from the statistical results have to be raised about gender and others.

Discussion

The main independent variables that support this discussion are gender, age, and the main sport that the consumer participates in. This influences the way the consumers choose their sports development initiative and also the why they participate in their respective sports. This could be seen as also a key contribution to why they engaged in sport as was described by Bradish et al. (2001). Where, there was a decline overall in participation from 1996 to 2002. This was greater for men, with 51% of them taking part in sport in 2002, compared with 54% in 1996. For women, participation over the same period fell from 39% to 37%. This historically supports some of the findings of this research where women were more inclined to embrace sports development initiatives and engage in physical activity (Sport England, 2005). Also, Bradish et al. (2001) identified a similar pattern where 21.3 % were females and 20.8% were males.

However, in a more recent survey than Sport England's findings and publishing, Rowe and Bibby (2006) pointed out that there had been a significant rise (74.4%) of males participating in sport. Whereas females there were 9.9% (64.5%) less. From Rowe and Bibby's (2006) results, it could be argued that this leads to what Parks and Quarterman (2002) described as stereotypical imagery of society when it comes to link sport and gender. This is also similar to research conducted by Moss (2008) where there were gender inequalities in the sport of triathlon. He identified that 1513 males and 328 females had taken up memberships with its national federation, highlighting the disparities in the sport consumption by females. Great strides have been made in the sport in general, especially over the last three decades in participation opportunities for girls and women (Ridinger and Funk, 2006). Media visibility has increased for some female athlete's such as Serena Williams, and Mia Hamm (Bishop, 2003; Bernstein, 2002; Bruce, 1998).

However, some of this media recognition is portrayed through a narrow stereotype that remains perpetuated. George, Hartley & Harris (2001) found a lack of coverage of female athletes in the media as well as a marginalization of the female athletes' skills, focusing primarily on feminine traits, and not the abilities of the athlete. Sport has typically been classified as a male dominated activity, and female sports fans have been marginalized, especially in the media. Even though the results for participation (Rowe & Bibby, 2006) have shown promise, this study highlights that in terms of consumption patterns, sports related development initiatives remain on the increase. Women's sport is still caught in a "Catch-22" in terms of recognition, respect, and financial viability (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall & Taylor, 2002). Many sport marketers and promoters, still treat women as second class consumers (Branch, 1995; Ridinger & Funk, 2006). When female sports are marketed, they are represented in a sexual and trivial way, while male athletes are portrayed as strong and assertive (Lynn, Hardin & Walsdorf, 2004). The reality is that from a marketing perspective, it remains frustrating when gender differences are painted in broad strokes and not addressing what female consumers want and need.

Setting aside the gender differences, when a further demographic variable is used, what becomes clearly apparent is that from the ages of 10-20 years old, there are more people that consume the sports development initiatives which was similar to that found by Bradish et al. (2001) where the main participatory rate in that age bracket was 59.4%. However, this was not supported in more up-to-date research. For instance, Rowe and Bibby (2006) identified from the age brackets of 10-to-70 years that there had been a decline, with the most decline from the ages 16-to-19. Though this is useful to note, it serves as a good example from a national trends perspective. This research displays that within the public sector, initiatives were having an impact on increasing participation in the teen age group like Bradish et al. (2001) found.

Though these are useful points to raise, and there is some fairly extensive research to support such issues as gender inequality and age variability with participation in sport and the various development initiatives used as a vehicle (Bradish et al., 2001; Houlihan & White, 2002; Rowe & Bibby, 2006). There were no significant findings linked to marketing variables or communications. This is further supported by Wells (1975) who stated, "Essential though demographics may be, they have not been deemed sufficient (p 196)". Mullin et al. (2007) also criticized this traditional segmentation approach, suggesting that it lacks the depth needed for a successful understanding of the sports development initiative consumer. The sports development initiatives that people participated in were varied and expansive, football being the predominant sport (Figure 1.4). This supports Sport England (2005) research where participation is high from 16-29 year olds. Women have a higher percentage ($N=5\%$) than males in swimming which supports this research (Figure 1.5) where there is a high uptake among females ($N=17\%$). Rowe and Bibby (2006) further supported this where they demonstrated that it has had a higher uptake ($N=30.9\%$) where as other sports were in the mid range (cycling $N=20.4\%$, Snooker $N=14.2$, Keep fit/ aerobics $N=10.9$)

Surprisingly enough, football only had a low participation rate nationally ($N=10.3$). Though this is not explicit in detail, it does suggest that the initiatives used in the public sector are effective in targeting males (Figure 1.4). Arguably it is a sport that can be played anywhere from a community's point of view. And as Coalter (2004 & 1993) and Gratton and Taylor (1995) have indicated, these are sports where price has been reduced to encourage participation. However, as Rowe and Bibby (2006) indicated and further supported by Lera-Lopez and Papun-Garate (2007), reduced costs do not always encourage higher levels of participation. Sport England (2007), in their annual report, found 47% participated in sports development initiatives because of poor health and took pride for health improvement whereas 18.4% were not really interested and 18.4 found it was difficult to find time. Funk et al. (2001) further supported this where they used a Sports Interest Inventory on women. They indicated such issues as player interest, pride, excitement, and social opportunities were key issues. This indicated that intrinsic reasons for participation have some relevance to this study though they were not the key issues through the marketing mix.

The refocused sport marketing mix is derived from the importance of the facility as an outlet for social interaction and it is supported by Funk et al. (2001), and thus as a consequence, the use of the services marketing techniques are needed to maximize enjoyment (Westerbeck & Shilbury, 1999). What is clearly apparent from this research is that people who choose sports development initiatives, base that choice on the facility (99.9%). Often the provision of the sport activity services and sport facility services are closely linked because, as Bitner (1992) described, that they were consumed and experienced simultaneously.

Facility providers often control the activity provision as well as the sports development initiative (Westerbeck & Shilbury, 1999). This clearly has been demonstrated within this research. Consumers indicated that the facility (place) had a clear impact on their choice because of the main sport they participated in linked to the development initiative. This was similar in research conducted by Greenberg & Gray (1996), where they felt that attendance to the sport was generated by excitement similar to that of Funk et al. (2001). This was further supported by Danielson (1995) where he reviewed a franchise of a major sport over three years and found an average increase in attendance by 66%. In this case, it could be argued that attending the sports development initiative was because of the newness of the facility. This is also a view shared by Howard and Compton (2003) who conducted research on the facility as a novelty when it was new. They concluded from this that the trend data indicated that the novelty and initiative declined at a new facility substantially in the first year. Despite the inability of new venues to sustain high levels of attendance, the data from (Table 1.3) shows that the initiative was invariably better off. This supports Getz' (1998) theory by describing the place as a component of supply and demand.

What has clearly been identified from this section is that (Figure 1.3) shows that sport development initiative consumers feel that place is clearly a marketing mix variable that needs to be considered with in the marketing strategy. Some may argue that these are two key variables influenced by one another and the marketing environment to which they operate. However, within the context of this research (Table 1.3), and as Keller (1993) has indicated, the product consumption depends on the experience and how consumers attach themselves to it. Within the context of price, people will pay the standard price against which the sports consumer would evaluate the actual price for the initiative they are considering to purchase (Kyle et al., 2003). Whatever the case may be with regards to the rationale put forward by Keller (1993) or Kyle et al. (2003), Table 1.3 demonstrates (P value \Rightarrow 0.05) that consumers did not put a high priority when choosing a sports development initiative on the cost of something (the pricing variable). No consumers rated this as a key factor (5.0) (P value \Rightarrow 0.05) or key contributor to their choice of a sports development initiative. However, another form of promotion which is not direct, did influence the consumers choice, word of mouth (P value = $<$ 0.05). It can be seen through the routine channels (e.g. magazines, radio, and television).

Bush, Bush, Clark and Bush (2005) referred to this as the new "buzz marketing" and indicated that this is an important component for consumer marketers. They then go onto describe that it is beginning to have a major impact on consumers purchase behavior, which is clearly evident in the case of sports development initiatives (Table 1.3). This supports Silverman's (1997) theory which incorporated Bush et al.'s (2005) theory of word of mouth, and suggested this was becoming the most powerful force in the market place. Several studies have shown that word of mouth communications can have an extremely powerful influence on the consumer purchasing process (Bush et al., 2005). What has been demonstrated within this study is now becoming clear that word travels about sports development initiatives. What is also clearly evident is that word of mouth appears to be especially important today as sport related word of mouth is being spread via email, discussion groups, and websites (Swanson et al., 2003). Also, though the key factors were marketing variables, what can be established from the research that the profiles of the sports development consumer that their demographic is important in establishing this.

Conclusion

The different profiles concerning people who participate in sports development initiatives in the public sector were one of the main variables investigated in this study to establish the profile of the sports development consumer. These areas were gender, age and an additional area, though not related specifically to demographics, included the main sports development initiative they participated in.

- i) Gender: The consumers were a combination of males and females and no one gender was greater than the other. This was the trend nationally but there has been a decline in both sexes in sports participation from 1996.
- ii) Age: The main age group that participated in the sports development initiatives was 10-15 years old. There was moderate activity level sustained in most age groups up to the age of 25, and then this tailored off.

iii) Main Sports Development Initiative: Football tended to be the main category of participation, and then followed closely by trampoline and swimming. Though this was useful to find, nationally, football had fewer participants than swimming (i.e. 10.9 and 30.9) representing a 20% difference.

The sample used provided an insightful source of information on the basis of whether the marketing mix (price, product, place, promotion) entices the consumer to sports development initiative. Place was a clear area that influenced a person's choice. However, it could be argued that it was because the facility was new and a novelty, supporting theories put forward by Mondello & Compton (2003). Promotion was another variable that had no statistical findings, but indirect promotion was word of mouth. This gave a useful insight for the future direction of the use of this tool as it is becoming more relevant in the current market place (Sawson et al. 2003). And more importantly, it is the "buzz word" in marketing (Bush et al., 2005), so marketers in this field must be aware of its implications. Word of mouth marketing may need to be more of a future focus on the way and how the sports development initiative is offered.

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Figure 1.1. The Delivery System in Sport (Sport England, 2007)

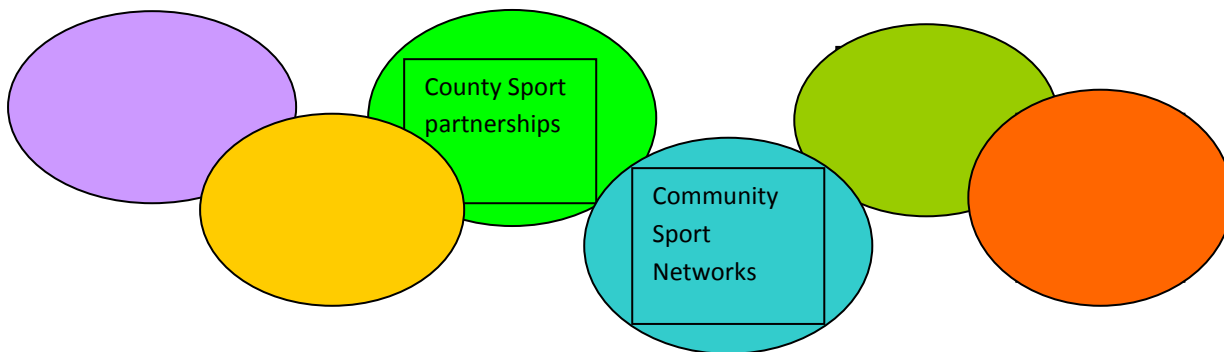


Table 1.1. The Basic Principles of Sport Marketing (Fullerton & Merz, 2008)

Nature of Sport marketing Focus	
• Marketing of Sports	
• Marketing through sports	
Products	
• Sports Products	Spectator Sports Participation Sports Sporting Goods, Apparel, Athletic Shoes, and Sport Related Products
• Non- Sports Products	
Level of Integration	
• Traditional	Target Market Selection Marketing Mix Decisions
• Sponsorship Based	Traditional Venue naming Rights Endorsements

Figure 1.2. Importance of place for Sports Development Initiative

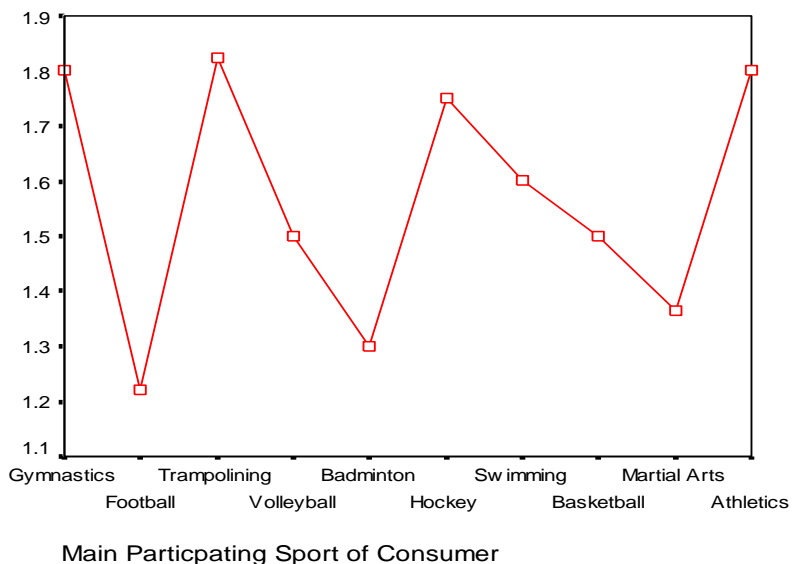


Table 1.2. Gender and Main Sports Participation

	Gender of Sports Development Consumer	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Main Participating Sport of Consumer	Male	92	4.3587	2.57025	.26797
	Female	108	.5278	2.61719	.25184