



How Do the Internal Variables of the Sport Konsumer Affect the Marketing of ports Events; Case Study Triathlon in the UK

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Abstract

Triathlons and their events are in a new era in the consumption of sport. Because of this increased funding more professionals are needed to understand what attracts sports consumers to what is seen as a gruelling but enjoyable multi sports event.

For affective marketing and event management, practioners need to understand more and more what decisions are made when the sports consumer makes a choice for a particular sports event.

This study is focused at the National Governing Body for the sport of Triathlon in the United Kingdom and also the Regional/ local event managers and marketers. Drawing upon marketing and consumer behaviour literature, the primary aim of this research was to investigate from the consumer perspective how their internal variables during the decision making process of consumer behaviour affects the selection of sports event, namely triathlon. To establish this information, data was drawn upon previous participants of a triathlon event, then a further investigation into what decisions were made from triathlon consumer's perspective when selecting an event.

A self administered piloted questionnaire was done in January (2005) with twelve active local triathletes. A further 60 were then posted and electronically mailed to previous participants of a Triathlon event 2005 at the end of January (2005). The consumer's abilities ranged from the recreational participant through to the elite athlete and the questionnaire contained eighteen questions incorporating a variety of ordinal and nominal questions as well as likert scale questions. The questionnaires were both returned electronically and by post.

The response rate was fairly high at 92% (n=55), respondents represented the sample frame representing 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 ($P < 0.05$). Event selection was made from athletes' experiences from internal factors of what they held in memory to what they wished to achieve in the sport. Interestingly enough, all the respondents came from one of the three disciplines in the sport.

Keywords: Lifestyle, Performance, Motivation

1. Introduction to Sports Marketing

Marketing is an area in which sports practioners are seeking help. A number of sport organisations are struggling to produce a profit (Howard & Compton, 1995) in a highly competitive marketplace, and many are seeking to improve marketing efforts to strengthen their organisation (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 1993). Therefore to understand how an individual makes a decision to participate in sport or exercise is critical to sport marketers who want to make customer-oriented marketing plans (Kang 2002). In particular, how applicable are the many theoretical decision making process models to a consumer's choice in the field of sport (McGhee, Yoon & Cardemas 2003)? Asseal (1992) paralleled this largely theoretical involvement with a consumer's belief systems, decision making process, brand loyalty, and product identification. Specifically, it is argued that a consumer who indicates high levels of involvement is more likely to become more loyal and resist buying another product brand than a consumer with low levels of involvement. By studying groups of consumers who are loyal to a product or activity, marketers may become more informed as to how to market their product. So 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 organisations have shifted their perspectives, marketing myopia is reported still to be a widespread affliction in many industry segments (Mullins, Sutton & Hardy, 2000).

Given the unique characteristics of marketing myopia, what are the factors that should be considered in making the decisions about packaging, promoting, and delivering sport and sports events? Who will be attracted to a sport or in particular sport events and how will the packaging, promoting and delivering of the events influence the consumer's

experience and perceptions, now and in the future? How does the sports marketer understand the decision making process of the sports consumer and their choices within the participation in sport and more specifically between sports events?

1.1 Sports Events

Although a great deal of attention has been given to events in general, and to some impacts of sports events, little research is being directed in the supply/demand system as a whole and therefore many specific issues are being ignored (Getz, 1998). More importantly sports events with multi disciplines which have a variety of elements such as triathlon.

The sport of triathlon is still in its infancy and is evolving slowly although the demand to host events has risen considerably over the last five years (Lole, 2004). The market place is now very competitive and to survive, a more professional approach is urgently required to understand and meet the needs of the increasing discerning triathlon consumer. Triathlon has grown in number which is demonstrated in table 1, this growth accounts now to approximately three triathlons a week. With the scale of triathlons growing, how will the triathlete make decision to choose one event over another? And is this purely down to sport beginning to play a significant role in today's society?

1.1.1 Statement of the problem

Though it transcends that sport plays an increasingly important role in society, there are still many areas of sports management that are under researched (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 with in this field. One such area that appears to be vital to the practitioner in a competitive triathlon event market place, and there is also a need for a better understanding of consumer behaviour with in this subject area. Only when the event organiser appreciate the needs and decision making processes of the triathlon consumer can he/she determine a sustainable competitive advantage and improve in his/her marketing communications in the attraction of people to their event.

1.2 A Further understanding of the term events through literature

Shone & Parry (2001) described that special events are the phenomenon arising from those non routine occasions which have sport, leisure, cultural, personal or organisational objectives they are set apart from the normal activity of daily life, whose purpose is to enlighten, celebrate, entertain or challenge the experience of a group of people (Shone & Parry 2001). Goldblatt (1990) goes onto suggest, "a special event recognises a unique moment in time with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs". Though this definition clearly works for events like weddings, parades, and so on, but it works less well for activities like sport events etc. Getz (1997), refers to experience which participants have, he states:

To the customer a special event is an opportunity for a sport, leisure, social cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond experience.

Despite this definition being cited in many key event management texts (Goldblatt, 1990, Getz, 1997, Shone & Parry 2001), it appears to have one fundamental weakness, namely that it focuses upon the subjective nature of 'special' but barely defines the nature of 'an event' (Emery, 1997). In addressing this issue, Shone & Parry (2001) characterise into four categories shown in figure 1 based on concepts of having leisure, cultural, personal or organisational objectives.

It is crucial to bear in mind when considering this categorisation that there are frequent overlaps, therefore to categories an event even by analysing its objectives. There must be reasons for the organiser's origins, and motives for running the event (Shone & Parry 2001). In addressing this issue. Welsh-Heron and Stevens (1990) propose that the main distinguishing characteristics is the component of time. Specifically referring to tourism, they suggest that visitor attractions are predominantly permanent features whereas events are of a temporary nature (Emery 1997). Torkildsen (1999) similarly draws the attention to events carrying opportunities to capture the imagination of sellers and buyers. They can be a means of promoting or raising the profile of a sport like triathlon or an event to also encourage participation in a sport like triathlon. However it could be argued, how can we classify a triathlon event? Within consumption is it a whole product or a service?

1.3 Sports Events as Service

Sports Events have become a vital component of the marketing mix (Getz, 1998; Gibson, 1998). As a sports event, the main product is therefore service orientated with the distinguishing features of intangibility and tangibility (Palmer 1994). Why sport is considered a service (Shilbury, Quick & Westerbeck, 1998). A common theme of authors writing on sport marketing (Mullin et al. 1993; Mullin) has been their agreement on how unique characteristics of sports events as a product requiring marketing personnel to adopt different strategies from those traditionally exposed (Shilbury, Quick & Westerbeck, 1998). Although many of these writings are void of specific references to services marketing discussions pertaining to these unique characteristics align sport events to the attributes of a service. In summary the characteristics distinguishing goods from a service in Table 2. However, as the final sports event (a service), it is a composite of those interrelated tangible elements. He elaborates, by arguing that there are two types of consumers, the immediate (spectators, participants and volunteers) and the secondary consumer (auxiliary users of the sport). A great deal of

satisfaction is therefore gained directly from the event environment, in a person or via the media, their high levels of satisfaction from the feeling of event ownership (Emery, 1997). Though begins to give use direction on the term event and more importantly establishing the links to being a product or service, it could be argued has does this encapsulate the sport of triathlon? Or more importantly a triathlon event.

1.4 Triathlon a Sporting Event

The key case study that this research is centred on is the sport of triathlon with its specific nature being a triathlon event. This is an emerging sport, but what are its origins? In 1971, there was a jogging crazy era in America. To differentiate between running events there was a move to add a different perspective to sport by incorporating a friendly but multi disciplined competition, in California, USA (Shannon 1999). But it was not until a group of physical instructors from the services ran an event for a bet in Hawaii that triathlon really started. The first race comprised of a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bike ride followed by a marathon. All these distances were based on existing events on the island. Thus the first Ironman as it has become known was born (Budgett 2000).

Though a sport like triathlon is fairly technical, especially as it compromises of three different disciplines how can it be organised? In some cases it is a question from an event organiser's point of view to understand what attracts the triathlon consumer to that particular event (Lole, 2003). It is essential that event managers need to understand who the potential customers might be and who the current customers are in the triathlon as all of the consumer are fairly diverse and are all motivated differently (Darlymple & Parsons, 1990).

The sport of triathlon has now been growing in popularity in many parts of the world. For example, in Australia the number of triathletes registered with the national association (Triathlon Australia) has grown from under 5,000 at the beginning of 1992 to over 8,000 by the middle of 1993 (Martin, Chang, Lester & Johnson, 1995). Although astonishing growth cannot be expected to continue indefinitely, it is reasonably clear that triathlons (and other similar multisports events) are here to stay. However, even today, relatively little is known about why some people are predisposed to engage in triathlon whereas others are not (Moss, 2004). Several attempts were made to form a world governing body for triathlon (ETU 1999). Finally in 1989 the International Triathlon Union (ITU) was formed, initially with 29 member countries. In that year, the first official world championships were held. In 1991 triathlon was given Olympic recognition, with the event being included in the Olympic programme for the year 2000 (Springman 1998).

So how should marketers segment the triathlon population and identify individuals with high a probability of engaging in the sport? (Shoham, 2000). Lawson (2004) suggests that a sport like triathlon has very few events around and there is need for more people to run these events. Questions could be asked about the sport of triathlon, is it because there is a lack of knowledge in this field? Are there enough athletes participating in the sport? In the United Kingdom the sport has grown over the last four years as shown in Table 3.

Within the scope of this study it must be defined exactly what or who is the triathlon consumer? As the sport of triathlon is purely based on an individual's own performance, what defines a participant?

Mullins, Hardy & Sutton 2000 attempt to do this in the role of marketing, they give an example of this where 18 million soccer participants in 1996 who played once a year as seen in table 4. This is a fairly typical use of the term participant, but it has obvious limitations. It can be helpful in tackling long term interest, but it has little to do with marketing of events in sport. These statistics provide a very limited snapshot – one year's rate of change. Their real importance lies in their more precise approach to defining participation. Casual or careless use of definitions will severely limit the utility of statistics (Larson, 1995). Therefore it is essential that marketers must consider more than one measure when writing or reading the sport consumer (Thav, 1995). A step forward in the right direction maybe profiling the triathlon consumer by their demographics which then may give some idea of the implications involved both in marketing and delivery of a sports event.

1.5 Demographic Implication on Sports Events

As a marketer it is essential to understand the unique and physical components of the types of consumers that are attracted to an event, especially those who consume international events to the characteristic types of those who take part in local events. Demographic information segmentation can be useful as it tends to rely on stereotypical images of groups of people who are linked through gender, age etc. Segmenting based on demographic characteristics would be like trying to plan a party for a variety of consumers (Parks, Quaterman 2002). They then go onto define demographic segmentation:

“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 primarily concerned with nose counts. The importance of demographic studies in the field of sport cannot be over estimated. One critical argument could be is to ask why should we waste such efforts and resources? Most business practitioners feel that effective marketing is a

prerequisite for achieving event objectives (Fullerton & Dodge, 1995). Brooks, (1990), feels that demographic studies are crucial to sport marketing in identifying consumers who are most likely to use certain types of products or services. Further more, Mile and McDonald (1999) suggest that success in sport marketing requires an understanding on what factors influence sport consumption during this stage.

Marketers are aware that sports' marketing is now becoming a major business and in 1987, sport in the United States' was the 23rd largest industry, totalling \$50.2 billion a year (Sandomir, 1988). Organisations selling a sport product are, of course, in the business of trying to attract a large audience/consumer base (Horface, College, Burman & Dewilbe, 1992) subsequently to increase their profit margins and become a major industry as was highlighted by Horface et al, (1992). But what other areas with in sports consumption patterns must be considered? The sports industry, though clearly a large, what are the other key factors about this area of specialism must be understood. Athlete's or participants? What considerations must be taken into account there?

Other factors could be based on a particular event falling into place with the athlete's training program. This is where the preparation for achieving an athlete's lifetime competitive goal of Olympics or World title, etc. commences with the earliest experience of sport and is brought to fruition sometime during the athlete's performance years in his/her chosen sport (Dick 1997). So in the case of the athlete, it is essential that both training and event participation are well organised. This means that their training and peak performances are balanced (Ackland 1999), However this is then influenced by motivational influences and also the individuals personality.

1.6 Personality Traits in Sport Events

One key area in sports events that lacks research is the personality characteristics of the people who consume sport. However even today, relatively little is known about why some people are predisposed to engage in sports events where others are not (Shoham, 2000). How should marketers segment the general population of engaging in sport event consumption by their personality? This issue has been relatively understudied for the exceptions on risky sports (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi, 1992; Celsi, Rose & Kahle, (1998). Briefly, risky sports differ from many leisure activities which entail low levels, of risk. Schiffman and Kanuk, (2000), categories this, where they discuss about personality reflecting individual differences. Nevertheless, many individuals may be similar in terms of single personality characteristics, but not in terms of others (Shoham, 2000). Consumers tend to buy into events that closely match their own personality or that strengthen an area they feel deficient in (Hawkins, Best and Convey, 1995). In some cases some sports consumers perceive self images or perceptions of self in the sport or event, they are closely linked with (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). Personality in the individuals who buy into sports/events whose image corresponds to their own self images in essence; consumers seek to depict themselves physically in their event/sport (Karande, Zinkham & Baord, 1997). Kang (2002), further goes onto support this in the decision making process for participant consumption, where a certain product/service cues (event/sport type) with images it activates self image and beliefs (Sirgy, 1982). It is important that the sport/event fit the consumer's personality types and vice versa. Shilbury, Quick and Sutton (1998) identified that a basic understanding of personality types ensures that a wide range of consumers as possible are being catered for. However, Brassington and Pettitt (2000) link purchasing and personality patterns from personality to their individual traits as a person, but subsequently at best tenuous, suggesting that this is not a reliable source for marketers to act on. Kassarian (1971) probably best summed up the situation in a review of a previous study that showed a strong relationship between personality and purchasing, the majority showed at best a weak relationship. Lancaster & Reynolds (2002) question this is, as they liken it to self-concept and that purchase decisions are likely to reflect their personality, and marketers must consider this when making marketing appealing. Because personality links with motivation in social psychology then a further study is needed into what drives them to make a choices.

1.6.1 Motivation of the consumer in choice of events

Motivation is the mixture of wants, needs and is driven within the individual to seek gratification through the acquisition of an object (Rice 1997). Marketers continually ask what ultimately promotes the consumer to purchase their products (Mullins, Hardy & Sutton 1993). Within sports events the opinions can be varied and inconsistent. Clearly consumer motivations are complex, and marketers must work vigorously to uncover them. It is clear that a greater understanding is required. The former Mets (American Football) marketing president, Michael Aronin, put it, "As an industry, we haven't had a good understanding of what motivates people to make a purchase" (Moore, 1987). According to motivation theory, environmental stimuli may activate the drive to satisfy an underlying need. Theorists like Abraham Maslow, Henry Murray and David McClland have elaborate models of the way physiological, psychological, and social needs influence behaviour (Korman 1974). Of their categories of motives, several seem to reoccur in sport literature. McClland argues that many needs are not as universal as Maslow proposes. He believes that some needs are socially acquired and picks out specifically the need for achievement with in the scope of a persons lifestyle (Rice 1997).

1.6.2 Lifestyle Impact on Sports Consumption

William Lazer (1963) who is given credit for introducing the lifestyle concept suggests that lifestyle is defined as a person or a family's distinctive characteristics mode or manner of living. Marketers tend to determine lifestyle by activities, interests and opinions (Plummer 1974). He then attempts to conceptualise and the application of lifestyle segmentation to it being drawn upon their perceptions and opinions. Plummer (1974) being the early exponents of lifestyle segmentation, breaks it down into four categories looking more expansively than his model he goes onto discuss each one individually in its application:

- Activities: Includes all the things people do in the course of their lives. It therefore covers work, shopping, holidays and social life. Within that, the marketer will be interested in people's hobbies and their preferred forms of entertainment, as well as sports interests, club memberships and their activities with the community.
- Interests refer to what is important to the consumer where their priorities lie. It may include the things that are very close to them, such as family, home and work, or their interest in sports participation and choice of events.
- Opinions comes very close to the individual's inner most thoughts by probing attitudes and feelings about such things as themselves, social and cultural issues and politics. Opinion may also be sought about other influences on society, such as education, economics and business. Closer to home for the marketer, this category also investigates products and individual's view of the needs and wants that are likely to Change (Brassington and Pettitt 2000).

It could be argued that Plummer's view on opinions is guided through sport? He goes onto segment their interest on achievement, culture and stage in the life cycle, but not all consumers fit into this category. Lifestyle segmentation is an altogether more difficult area to define, as it involves intangible variables such as beliefs, attitudes and opinions of the potential sports consumer (Brassington and Pettitt 2000). What ever the case may be participation with in sport is ever increasing not just in triathlon but also other sports as well to suit people's lifestyles.

This can be a great leveller, as performance is related to ability rather than a participant's financial means of social standing (Barnard 1998). Marketers however created another status hierarchy through the increasing emphasis on the labels and brand of sports clothing and equipment. Whether the sport is golf, cycling, sailing or tennis and that image statements are seen as a functional benefit. This phenomenon is not only in clothing and equipment. Elids Faberge launched a new range of body care products, Physio Sport, which aimed to attract worldwide sales of £300 million within two years. The target is 'serious' sports people of either sex or the range covers personal freshness, washing, hair washing and chafed skin. This was launched at the London Triathlon of that same year and therefore there was a brand association to a particular sport.

Within certain sports such as triathlon to have the correct sports equipment is essential, so does this mean that the sport is only accessible to people who can afford it? Is it affluent households who constitute an especially attractive target segment because its consumer who has incomes that provides them with a disproportionately larger share of all discretionary income (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000)? The extras allow them to consume other areas of triathlon.

For almost 25 years Mendelshonn Media Research has conducted an annual study of the affluent market. While it consists of only 21% of all households, this upscale market segments consumes sport other than that of non-affluent households (Mendelshon, 1998). The average household purchases up to three other affluent segments (Figure 2a) furthermore, affluent consumers in sports participation, of the three segments of affluent consumers (Figure 2b). The results reveal that the most affluent are more likely than members of the other two consumers to participate in a sample Observations from research (Quick, 1995, 1994) with psychographic dimensions suggests less than 5% of sports events participants travel to another venue (restaurant, bar or hotel) after sports. Furthermore, the TV is a major source of event information for sports consumers. (Shilbury, Qucik & Westerbeck, 1998). However this is highlighted by Brooks (1994) where the sports product itself is a composite of these interrelated tangible and intangible elements. He elaborates, by arguing that there are two types of sports consumers, the immediate (spectators, participants and volunteers) and second consumer (auxiliary users of the sport). Therefore psychographics can be more important than demographics in the consumer decision making process. However they are often more difficult to quantify, and they are also based on values. Values play a big part in a person consuming sport, because this combines all of the individual internal influences of personality, motivation, and lifestyle. A clearer understanding of the individual's value of sport should be considered.

1.6.3 Principle Values in sport

Values were originally defined in psychology (Florenthal, 2000). Spranger (1928) developed a value system based on personality characteristics, which is a confirmed system that generalised men. In general the values are based on the combined personal impact of the intersection of individuals (Grunet & Schemon, 1990). Therefore the individual's value system (Figure 3) represents personality characteristics as well as self actualisation, self fulfilment and cultural

influences on the basis of social norms within sport (Flortenthal, 2000). Previous research has identified characteristic sensations on seeking (Zukerman, 1974), personal state of mind-arousal seeking (Apter, 1982) that drive individuals to search for sports events/activities. The value systems should represent this need for participation in a sports event. Many have argued that this system is another dimension of selection in sports events. Mullins, Hardy & Sutton (2002) referred to this as a state of mind segmentation where the consumer is divided by personality traits, lifestyle characteristics such as attitudes, interests and opinions. The most noteworthy approach to state of mind segmentation was developed by the Stamford Research Institute (SRI), called the values and lifestyles (VALS) typology. 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 sport and sports events, 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 of sports events.

Based on these definitions, it has been identified that the constructs could be classified as benefits in the professional sports industry; participant identification, peer group acceptance, escapeism, nostalgia, and pride in place. Identification with an event or organisation is one more widely constructed in literature (Sutton, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann & Brandscomber, 1990; Cialidini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976). Cialidini et al first offered the notion of basking in reflected glory, by observing individuals that publicise their association with successful sports events, 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 fulfils a sports consumer's needs to affiliate with something successful or desirable and thus in one form of brand association, This further supports ideas that for a successful relationship in marketing it involves the core service the marketing mix and the other 'P' (Promotion, Place & Price), where a customer relationship can be built. The core service must be in the long term in nature and allow service augmentation and customisation (Gonroos, 1990). The sports product must provide the opportunity for such customisation. Many have argued that sport 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 sports that are tailored for unique needs (Milne, Sutton, & McDonald, 1996). Mullin (1985) identified this by expressing that sport marketing holds special characteristics. In examining these characteristics he noted:

Almost every element of marketing requires significantly different approaches when the product being is sport. Predictably, the critical differences lie in the unique Aspects of the sport product/service, and the unusual market conditions facing sport Marketers.

The characteristics noted by Mullin are summarised in Table 5, with supporting examples.

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 however that all areas are taken into account and further study needs to be clarified. Those each one of the elements plays an essential role with in influencing the consumer on their choice of triathlon events, what and who is the event participant? It was established earlier who was the triathlete but how can it be established?

Kurtzman and Zauhar (1998) were among the first in North America to include the examination of the sports event participant. They divided the sports participant into four distinct classifications or concepts; organised structure or team sports, sport spectator, heritage sport enthusiast, and individual sport participant. The last category consists of individual sports participants who are primarily competing against themselves. They are self-motivated intrinsically. Some would argue that they would fit into Walter's (1978) model of consumer rationalisation in figure 4

The traditional focus is based on the economic man, but it is deficient for two reasons. It fails to recognise the difference between the reason for a decision or action and the decision itself. The second, economic man concept rationally implies that physical and emotional motives are two different things (Walters, 1978). In fact the two cannot be separated practically on people. While this is valid an important methodology for eliminating models against the sports participant, it may prove problematic. For many sports events promotions to operationalise and incorporate into marketing strategies it does not take into account all the variables in the way that it affect a person's decisions in choosing events.

Shilbury, Quick and Westerbeck (1998) attempt to apply an approach as shown Figure 5. As a person is influenced by a number of different elements, the person specific factors, which are similar to those that Kollat, Engel and Blackwell (1990) identified in their model of consumer behaviour, e.g. that psychological influences and social forces all play a

part in constructing the context from which the decision to purchase is made.

While Jackson, Reeves, and Collins (1998) examined this area further, little is known about triathletes and their specific behaviour/decision making in choosing events. As a result, marketers especially in the field of triathlon have little or no understanding.

1.7 Participant Decision Making Involvement

Involvement is a means of understanding a person's consumer behaviour and decision-making processes (Assael, 1992), enduring by nature, therefore different from simple participation. The involvement in decision making construct has roots in consumer behaviour and marketing (Bechling, 1999); Bech, Larson & Nielson, 1999; Broderick & Mueller, 1999; Donovan & Jalleh, 1999; Assael, 1992).

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 sports consumer (McGhee, Yoon, & Cardenas, 2003). Consumers with higher levels of involvement take longer to make a decision than those sports consumer 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 (Figure 6). Rice's (1997) decision making model is based on being faced with a choice during the initial information search, what value is attached to the outcome? In sport that can be very subjective to the motivation and the personality of the athlete. The second is the perception of the probability of satisfaction; yet again this is very subjective with regards to why the athlete is taking part in this particular event. Do something to change it through a purchase. The individuality of each person is greatly complex, consumer decision making especially in sport is difficult to encapsulate.

2. Research Methodology

In summary, 60 triathletes from a local 2005 Triathlon were invited to provide retrospective data on the choice in the selection of participating in the Triathlon event and some previous events they have taken part in. This sample constituted triathletes ranging in abilities from a complete novice; intermediary athlete (participated in more than three triathlons and advanced athletes competing in under 65 minutes for a sprint event (400m swim, 20K bike race, 5k run). Of these 60 participants 10% six were selected for the qualitative analysis in the form of interviewing to gain an understanding of their decisions in the choice of triathlon events. The athletes that were chosen for his part of the analysis were a combination of participants through to the elite athlete. The reason for this was so that the results would not be biased towards one particular level of athlete. By using a variety of abilities and ages ranging from 20 – 60 would allow the researcher to gain a mixture of views from triathletes in their selection of events. Also there was a cross section of males and females (3/3) which allowed responses from an equal segmentation from the triathlon community

2.1 Questionnaire Design

Most of the previous competitors were from the North East of England, and the furthest coming from North Yorkshire. A mailed questionnaire was deemed the most appropriate research tool (Laborvitz & Hagedorn, 1976). The passed participants who had email addresses were also contacted electronically as this was deemed a good idea for a quick response (Emery, 2004). Using this form of contact allowed respondents to be contacted interactively, this allowed more than one person to be surveyed simultaneously (Irwin, Sutton & Gladden, 1998).

For comparative purposes the questions were structured to aid event managers/marketers in the decision purposes. Categorisations within questions were, where appropriate based, on some previous research in this area (Emery, 1997). For example "reasons for choosing an event in the Liker scale, were based on consumer behaviour research done by, Dimanche & Havitz (1999).

A more in-depth analysis of the third aim in the identification, why triathletes make decision about the choices of events was conducted, with some of the information that has already collected by the some of the aspects of the questionnaire. The selection was conducted by taking 10% of the total cohort from the questionnaire, e.g. 6 respondents. By taking this approach it would ensure a more qualitative way of research. The selection of the respondents was made by those respondents who completed the questionnaires and returned them in the first instant.

2.2 Respondent Overview

Although all questionnaires were returned and the data was collected, the sample type was very limited with regards to the demographic types of people, e.g. predominantly male and very few females to get a gender differences in the sport as shown in table 6.

The respondent rate for males was 67% and females 33%, subsequently this was further supported with the numeric representing males being 1.0, the most reoccurring number to appearing as the mode.

Using a cross tabulation, previous performance can be further compared with the level of athlete. Figure 7 illustrates that using Kruskal-Wallis Test, that there is no significant findings with a P value =0.05, the results prove this with an

assumed significance level of $t = 0.729$ meaning that the level of significance in the relationship of the two variables grouped is $t = > 0.679$. It is very evident that 72.7% of the total population that there is a peak and that the novice and participant sees this as a great importance (7.0, very important) to them, but for the intermediate and elite athlete there is not, which explains the further 27.3%.

There were further cross tabulations with level of athlete and race distance, place, atmosphere and experience, cost and promotion and awareness but there were significant findings from using a Kruskal-Wallis Test which is demonstrated in Table 7.

The only statistical finding that was close to the P value = 0.05 (95% relationship) with this type of statistical test was one factor:

- An athlete's choice based on the level of competition ($t = 8.870$; $p > 0.05$ by 0.026) this suggest that the elite and intermediate athletes (20.9%) are selecting their events based on this which is a small percentage. This is further demonstrated in table 20.

Figure 8 provides an insight from the population being researched and it has a value of 22% (mean = 4.58) of $N = 12$ that feel it is fairly important in the selection of one event over another, and a further 27% ($N = 15$) with a range of 5.0 (1.0 not important and 7.0 very important) The values from 5.0 – 7.0 = 54.5% demonstrates that the cost of the event will possibly assist them in making a decision. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, there were no significant relationship found between age and cost ($t = 0.388$; $P > 0.05$).

3. Research Analysis Findings

The research intended to look at how the internal influences of person will affect their decision making on sports event? Namely the construct for this was the sport of triathlon. What can be clearly seen taking a snap shot at demographics as it would be useful just to briefly acknowledge this that the sport is predominantly is engaged by males (table 6). It would be then fare to say is this a true reflection on the sport internationally?

So one of the questions raised is that do women feel that this is a male sport more so than a female? If this is the case then this would bias any decision in choosing a sport/sports event because of their perceptions. This is further supported by in a major triathlon event (more than 1,000 consumers) the split from males and females is very high (Casey, 2003), (See Table 8)

Table 8 demonstrates that disparities in gender participating in triathlon is fairly extreme, ranging from 75/ 25 in the male sprint event to and 82/18 split in the Olympic distance event. The overall gender difference equating to an 80/20 split at this one event. Nationally the current number of memberships affiliated to the British Triathlon, the sports National Governing body is a total of 6842. 5300 males and 1542 females with 78/22 split in gender (Moss, 2004). Presently the sport recognises that they must do something about this to attract and encourage more females into the sport, and hope to do so by the employment of the development officers in all the UK regions and the establishment of more event managers (Brook, 2004).

The job of event managers and development officers is to break down the social issues surrounding triathlon for women participating in the sport.

3.1 Performance

The abilities ranged from the complete beginner/participant with 16% (Figure 7) through to the elite athlete 25% with only >9% difference between the numbers of higher levelled athletes to those who wish to participate in their first event. Such findings all relate purely to participant numbers and can be principally explained to the event nature, with triathlon events possessing very different profiles from other events (Emery, 1997).

It has also been identified (Table 7) that a number of respondents feel that the type of event is important in relation to their training calendar. Most athletes will select an event with regards to its time of year so fits into their training calendar. Though this is a valid piece of information and it should be noted, this tended to be a reason why the elite athlete was more. The athlete is more selective about a course based on their previous performance because it allows them to gauge their level of fitness at that point of the season (Maw, 2005), this will then help the athlete make a decision on which events they wish to participate in or not. As the management of the training calendar is just as important as participating in a event as it has to fit into an athletes training. Though performance is a linked to a consumer's lifestyle and is partially related to beliefs, a more thorough understanding needs to be provided and there is more research required in this field.

3.2 Internal Influences

A demographic trend related to income is leisure time (Hofacre & Burman, 1992), both men and women have more leisure time now than they had in 1965.

Lifestyle refers to how people spend their time participating in a wide range of activities, such as consumption patterns

etc (Assael, 1998). Therefore triathlon consumption is linked to the patterns in their lives. Many triathletes today come from professional backgrounds and are maturer athletes and some are students with very little income. Stanford Research Institute (2002) has found that some people in the higher levels of the VALS (Values and Lifestyles Survey) are in the age of 45 years of age, married, highly educated with high incomes and holding professional jobs, which in the sport of triathlon are the consumers who participate and are more likely to choose a triathlon event. Generally, it is assumed that values and personality influence activity participation and purchasing consumption behaviours (Stanford Research Institute, 2002, Todd & Lawson, 2001, Assael, 1998; Zins, 1998, Weinstein 1994) because in most cases a sport like triathlon can be very expensive. Armstrong (2004) further supports this assumption by stating:

A sport like triathlon can be very expensive unless you have a modest income and as the equipment is very expensive. It tends to encourage more affluent older people than those who can actually afford.

Lifestyle relates to the economic level at which people live, how they spend their money, and how they allocate their time (Anderson & Golden, 1984). What is apparent is that triathletes do commit a lot of time to their training and it is seen as a major part of their life, irrespective of their income. Chelladurai (1997) further goes on to support this and elaborates that the total athletic experience involves training periods that are disproportionably longer than the performance periods in sports events. He further then goes to say, "given that athletes spend an inordinate amount of time in very agnostic prior to a event(s), their reactions to the experiences during these training periods become equally, if not more important. However there were no significant findings to relate lifestyle, personality and values to the quantitative and qualitative analysis and sport has become recognised as a major aspect of lifestyle activities and it is assumed that lifestyle will always, in the current climate, affect sport consumption (Todd & Lawson 2001; Zins, 1998; Rex, 1991).

3.2.1 Motives

Motives can be clearly linked to performance, why a person participates. Armstrong (2005), Riall (2005) felt that this was an important factor to them when choosing a triathlon event. This can be clearly linked to the level at which they participate. Figure 7 demonstrates that some athletes select events based on previous performance as a sense of motivation, but not all athletes at different levels choose to do so. Only 46 % of people felt that this was important and a motivational factor when choosing an event. While motives have been shown to be associated with event identification (Trail, Fink & Anderson, 2003, Funk et al, 2002, Wann, Royalty & Rochelle, 2002; James, 2001; Brewer, & Royalty, 1999; Wann, 1995), the relationship among specific motives to events is minimal. However, indirect evidence exists to suggest this might not be the case, (Funk et al, 2002; Funk, Mahony, Nazakawa, & Hirakawa, 2001), and the combination of direct and indirect evidence supports this in one of their models (Figure 9).

Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hikrawa (2001) model represents the separation of motives into a variety variables and the triathlete event consumers in same cases fit into this categorisation. One group, the overreaching variable, consist of the motives of social support and escape. A second variable consist solely of vicarious achievement motive. The third latent variable is the athlete's motives and consist of the aesthetic, drama/ eutress, acquisition of knowledge, and appreciation of physical drive motives. The vicarious achievement motive is directly related to latent variable termed sports event identification. This latent construct is represented by the five points of attachment; place, season, perception, persuasion and price. The athlete's motive is directly related to a latent variable labelled sport identification that consists of a two point attachment construct; type and level of sport (Funk et al 2001). In this model, sports event identification and sport identification are related. Separation of the motives of trathletes has not been proposed before now. However, Sloan (1989) suggested that sports spectators and participants react differently to winning and losing, contingent on the specific motivational theory. However there is no supporting evidence to prove this in the form of trathletes and their selection of events. However McGhee, Yoon and Cardenas (2003) challenge Sloan's (1989) theory as they feel that consumer behaviour research indicate that triathletes with high levels of motivation form strong loyalties with events. This indicates that attracted athletes with high levels of motivation are more likely to return to an event than the attracted triathletes with medium levels of motivation.

Consumer behaviour research into triathlon events 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 a sport and sports event needs more attention. While models of sport consumption tend to fragment consumer behaviours and can dilute the strategic value for sports marketers, they also capture important distinctions. Lewis' (2001) contrast of symbolic fans is a good example as is the distinction Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw (2000) make between functional and dysfunctional sports participants.

Though the key influencers are not linked to the triathlon consumer there is some partial evidence linking to their motives on why they are participating in a triathlon in figure 7 and also table 7. These could then be said to be the key internal variables that motivate the triathlete. Though this is useful information it does not take account that larger fitness community as a whole. Therefore it is essential that sports marketers do a wider research on what other multi event individuals, and kept fit see as the key variables that internally motivate them to participate in sport like triathlon.

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Table 1. Events Sanctioned by the British Triathlon Association (Lole 2004)

Event Type	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Triathlon	98	110	143	151	192
Duathlon	60	66	76	74	81
Aquathlon	37	47	50	49	58
Other Events	2	3	5	5	8

Table 2. Characteristics distinguishing goods from a service (Shilbury, Quick & Westerbeck, 1998)

Intangibility	Service cannot be seen, tasted or smelled before they are bought. Services are performances rather than objects. For example, is it possible to describe what product benefits people take home with them after participating in a sports event? Or the benefits derived from watching a Triathlon event? There is no tangible take home product in this example.
Inseparability	Services are simultaneously produced and consumed. The product cannot be present during production. For example attending a sporting contest or visiting a physiotherapist. You need to attend.
Heterogeneity	Services are potentially variable in their performance, employees can come into contact with the consumer; therefore, consistency becomes an issue. Few sporting events and experiences are the same one week to the next, and the consistency of service delivery by people working at such an event can also vary.
Perishability	Services cannot be stored. Hotel rooms not occupied, airline seat not sold or tickets to a sporting event not sold cannot be reclaimed. Simply, it is lost revenue and indicates the importance of understanding that services are time dependent.

Table 3. Individual Memberships and Club Memberships 2001-2004 (*adapted from Moss, 2004*)

	2001	2002	2003	2004
Individual Members Affiliated	4164	4967	5939	6400
Club Memberships	234	214	246	260

Table 4. Soccer participation, 1995 – 1996 (*Mullins Hardy & Sutton, 2000*)

Category	1995 In millions	1996 In millions	% increase 1995-1996
Total Participants	16.8	18.1	7.7
Male	9.5	10.9	14.7
female	7.3	7.2	-1.3
Under 18	13.3	13.4	0.7
18 and Over	3.5	4.7	34.2
Frequent 25 or more days per year	7.3	7.7	5.4
Core ; 52 or more days per year	3.2	3.2	0.0
Afionadoa: Soccer is favourite activity	3.7	4	8.1

Table 5. Gender

	N	Numeric	Valid %	Mode	Mean	Median	Std dev
Male	37	1.0	67.3	1.0	1.327	1.000	.4735
Female	18	2.0	32.7				
Total	55						

Table 6. Kruskal Wallis Test: Level of Athlete

	course	level of competition	Race distance	Location/ place	Training calendar	Pre & post event management	Experience & Atmosphere	Cost	Promotion and awareness
Chi-Square	3.835	6.870	4.130	.496	5.599	2.364	4.535	1.777	1.045
Df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.280	.076	.248	.920	.133	.500	.209	.620	.790

Table 7. Gender differences of participants entering the London Triathlon in 2003 per event (*Casey, 2003*)

	Junior Event (Under 16)	Super Sprint (400m swim, 10k bike, 2 K run)	Sprint Event (750m swim, 20 k bike, 5 k run)	Elite Olympic Event (1500m swim, 40k bike, 10 k run)	Olympic distance event all age groups (1500 m swim, 40k bike, 10 k run)
Male	20	151	931	59	1513
Female	8	31	310	20	328
Total	28	182	1241	79	1841

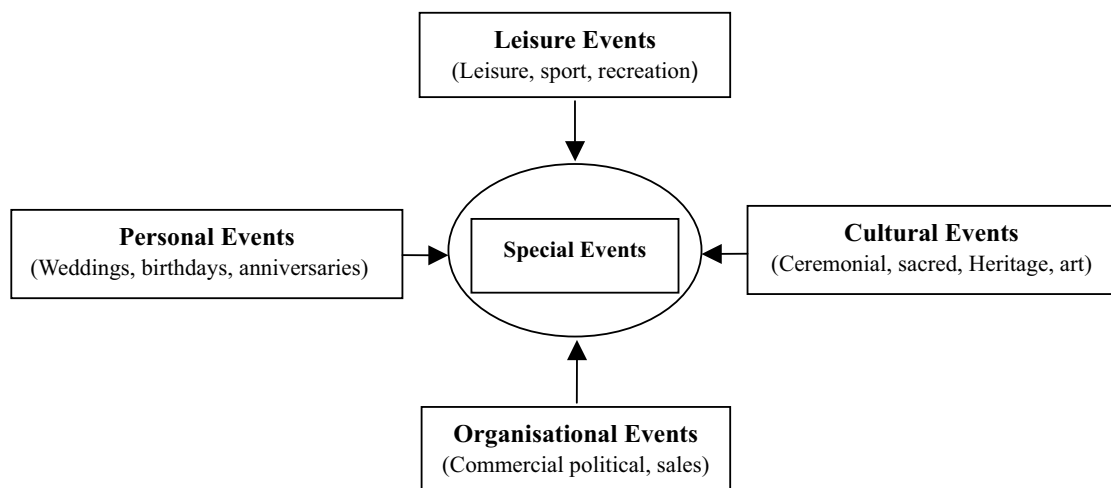


Figure 1. Suggested Categorisation of Special Events (Shone & Parry 2001)

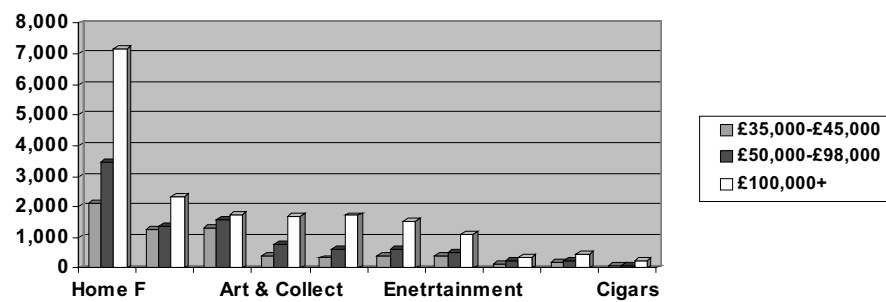


Figure 2a. Three segments of affluent Consumers Average Household Expenditures
(Among Purchasing households) (Source: Mendelsohn Affluent Survey 1998)

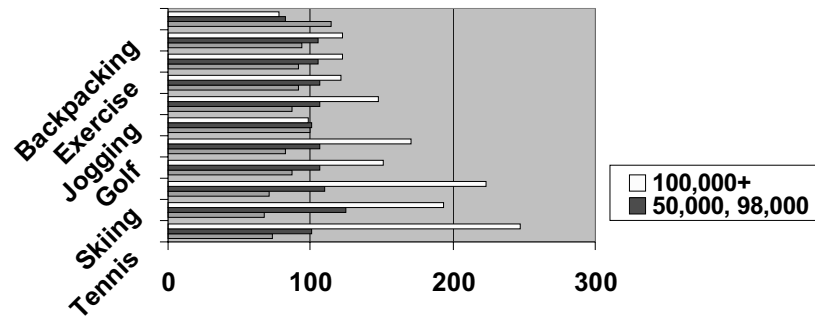


Figure 2b. Affluent Consumers Participation in Selected Sports
(Number of days in past year indexed to each three income segment)

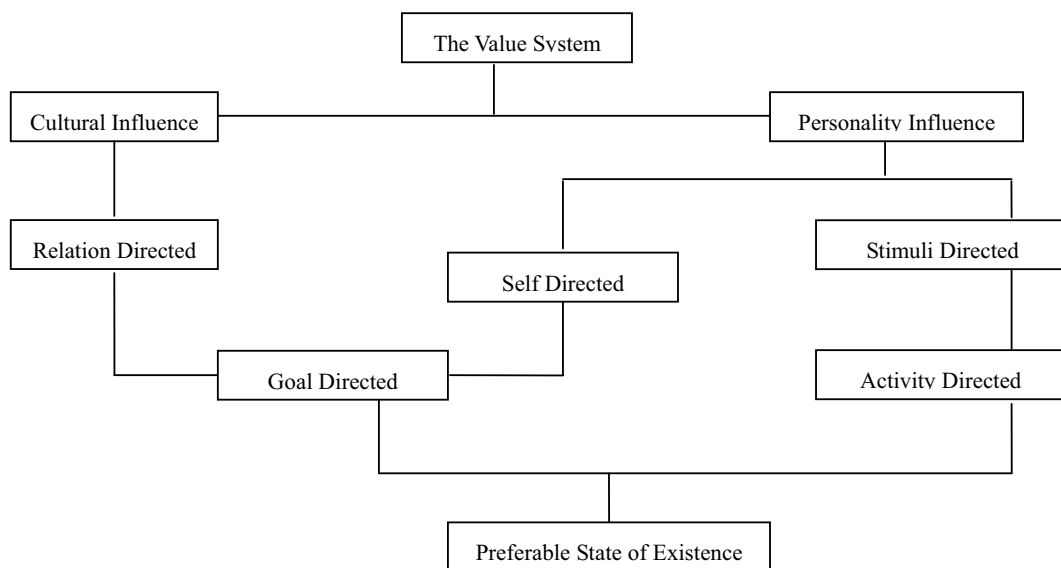


Figure 3. The Value Structure: A conceptual Model (Florenthal, 2000)

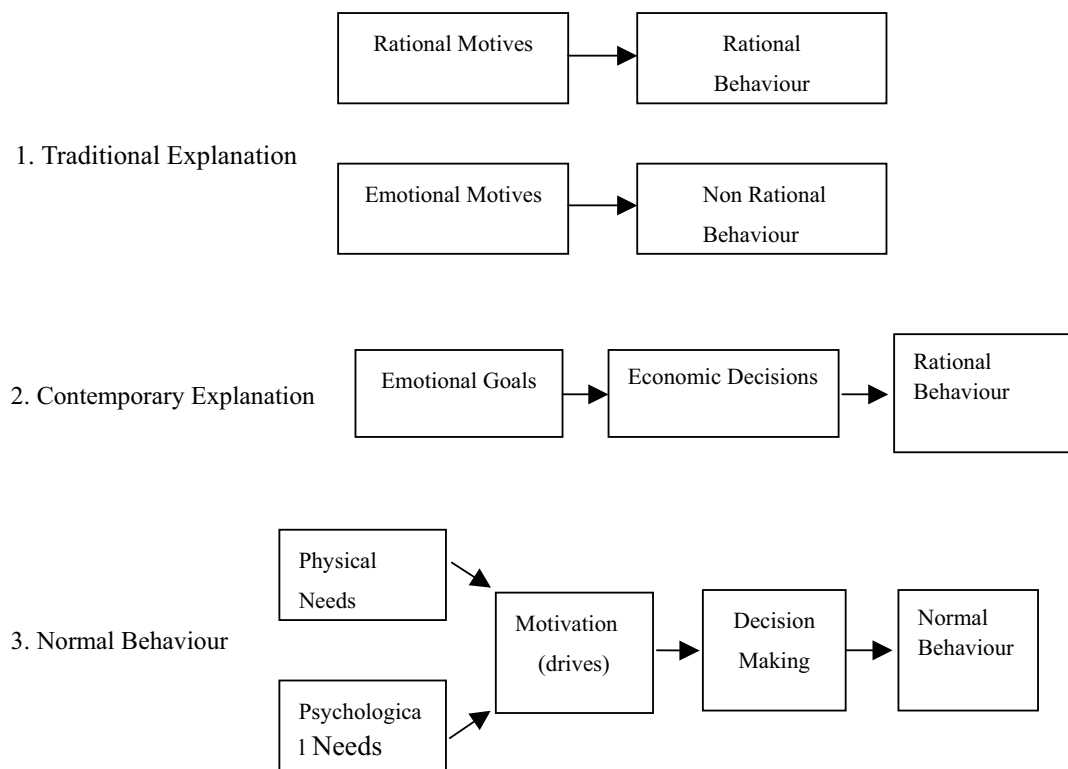


Figure 4. Concepts of Consumer Rationality (*Adapted from Walters, 1978*)

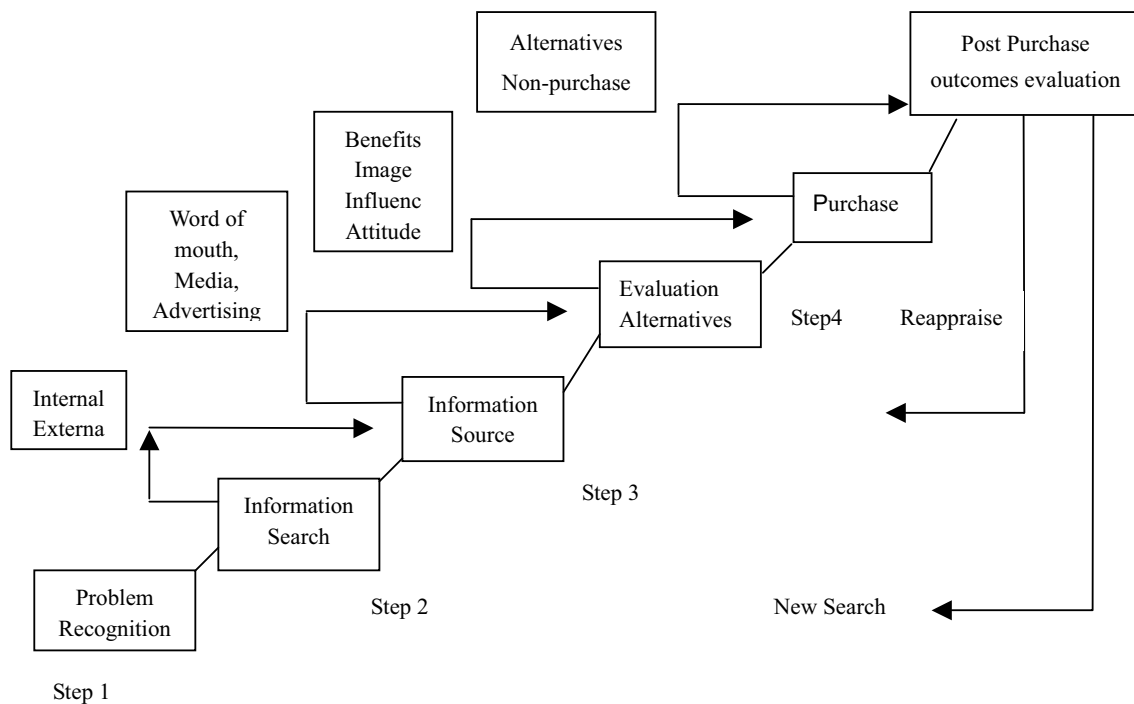


Figure 5. The Consumer Making Decision Making Process
(Shilbury, Quick & Westerbeck, 1998)

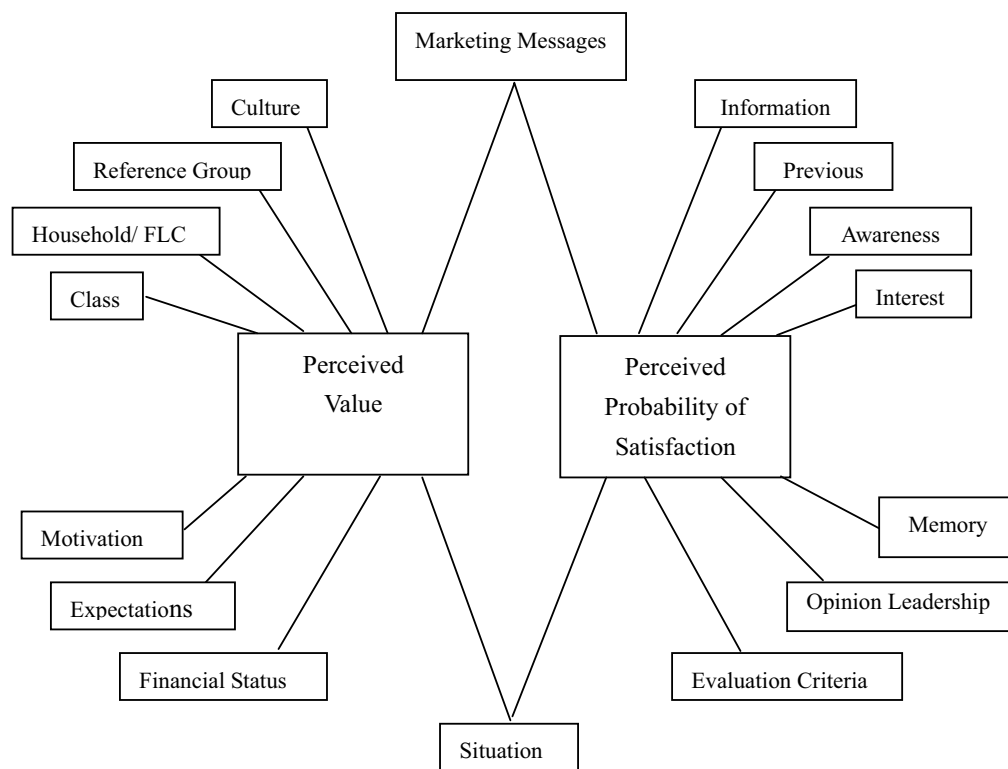


Figure 6. Perceived value/perceived probability of satisfaction model of consumer decision making.

(Adapted from Rice, 1997)

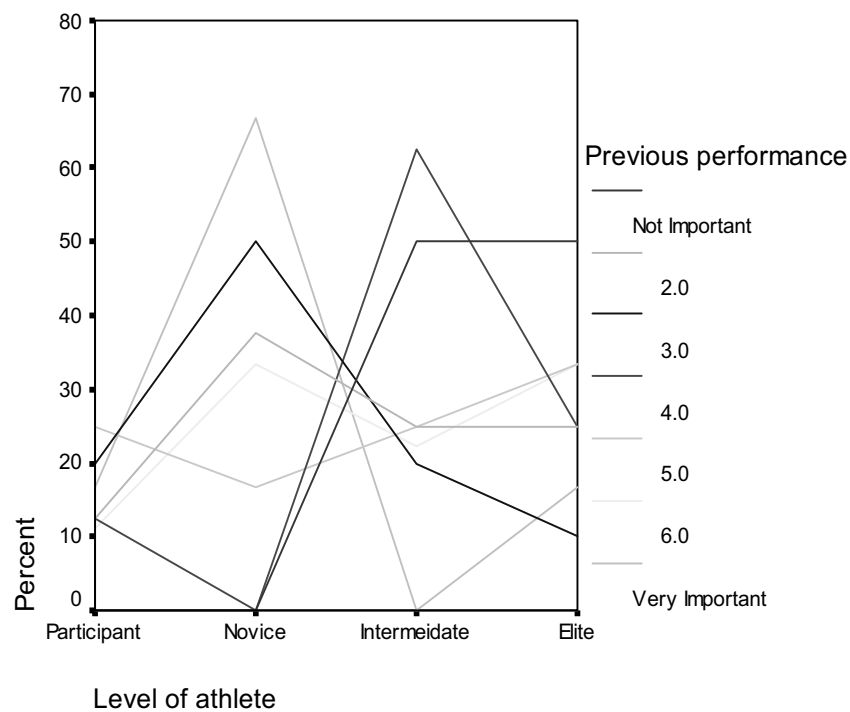


Figure 7. Level of Athlete's choice based on their previous performance

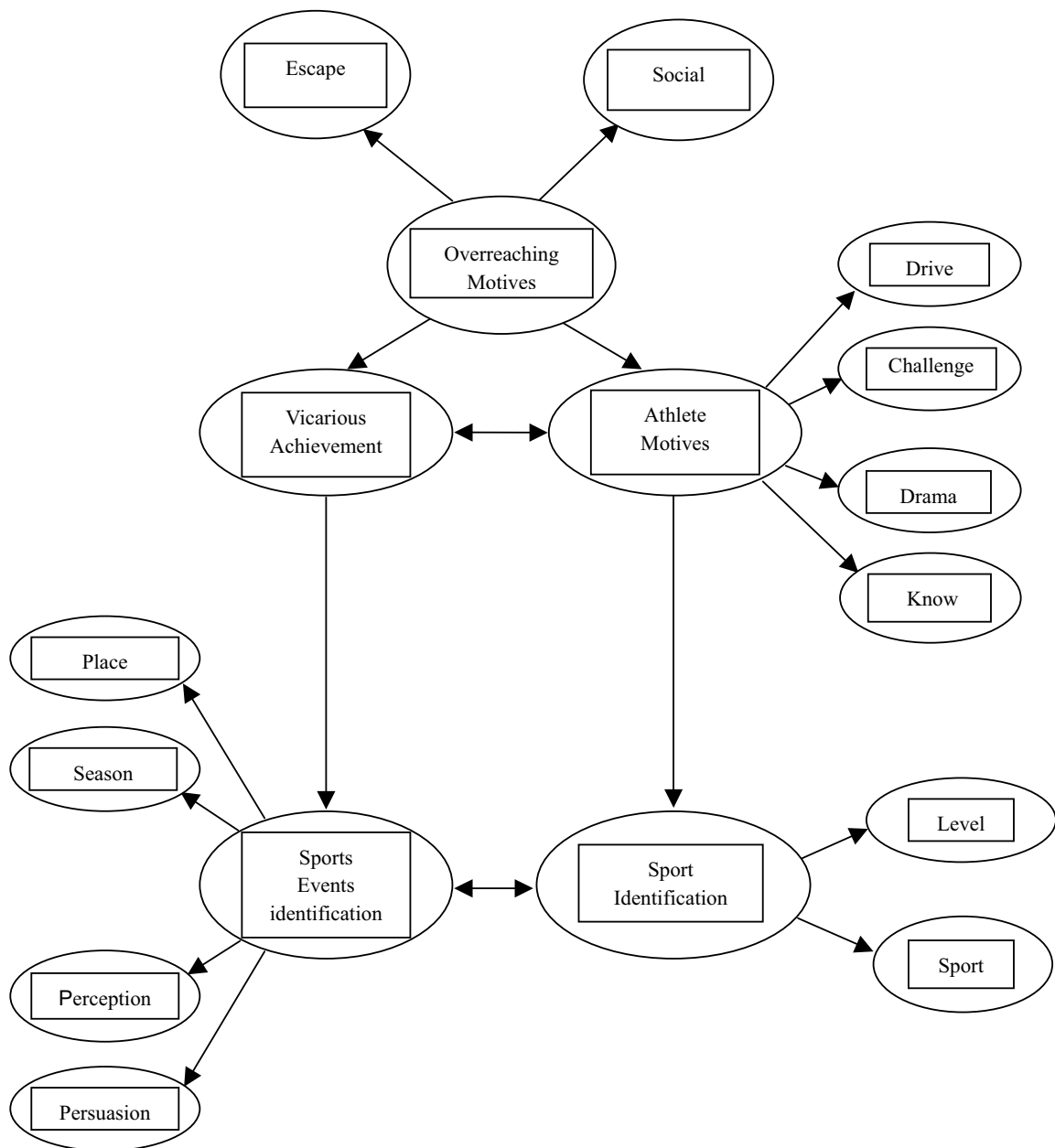


Figure 8. Sports Consumer Behaviour Motives Model
(Funk, Mahony, Nazakawa & Hirkawa 2001)