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Abstract

The golf industry has expanded over the past 50 years throughout the world, particularly in America. The number of golfers in the United States has increased seven-fold since 1950, as the game was transformed from an expensive diversion of the rich to a mass-market pastime. A number of recent studies have shown that demographic variables such as age, gender, occupation, income, and race are –in general– poor predictors of golfers' consumer behavior and, consequently, less than optimum bases for segmentation strategies. Because of those problems associated with demographic segmentation, benefit segmentation has become a favorite tool of marketers; to satisfy target consumers' needs, benefit needs and product attributes are the most popular variables for segmenting the target market. The main strength of benefit segmentation lies in the causal relationship to perceived future behavior. The purpose of this study was to identify the benefit needs of golfers who frequent public golf courses. Implications for public golf course owners or managers are then discussed with strategy considerations about golf marketing for a variety of benefit segments.

Key Words: *Golf, consumer behavior, benefit segmentation, marketing.*

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The golf industry has expanded over the past 50 years throughout the world, particularly in America. The number of golfers in the United States has increased seven-fold since 1950, as the game was transformed from an expensive diversion of the rich to a mass-market pastime. In the 1980s and 1990s, the golf industry was a picture of prosperity, basking in the glow of unfettered growth. Graves and Writer (2003) support this notion by stating, «Forty-five million Americans call themselves “Golfers”» (p. 24). Consumer purchases of mainline recreational sports equipment, reported by the National Sporting Goods Association (2002), shows golf as one of the largest recreation and leisure sports.

Golf consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by many factors, including: direct marketing (TV, print and radio advertising), in-short marketing (price promotions and providing events), and personal referrals from friends and families (Stanley, 2000). In that environment, it is evident that the marketing department of a sport firm doing business in golf is of primary importance when it comes to selling golf products. If the company has a good product and wants to realize profits, it needs to have a unique marketing strategy.

One common denominator in marketing is the consumer. Understanding the consumer plays a key role in developing products and services in the sports business. Market segmentation is the currently favored strategy in marketing. The most basic advantage offered by market segmentation is that it provides a structured method of viewing the marketplace (Wilkie, 1994).

Market segmentation can be subdivided into several categories. The most common segmentations are geographic, demographic, socioeconomic and psychographics or behavioral segmentation. As product brands have begun to gain national acknowledgement, however, demographic segmentation has become more popular. Marketers analyze consumers' purchasing decisions based on factors such as age under this segmentation. Unfortunately, a number of recent studies have shown that demographic variables such as age, gender, occupation, income, and race are –in general– poor predictors of behavior and, consequently, less than optimum bases for segmentation strategies.

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Because of those problems associated with demographic segmentation, benefit segmentation has become a favorite tool of marketers. Benefit segmentation identifies market segments based on causal rather than descriptive factors (Haley, 1995). Wu (2001) defines benefits as «the sum of product advantages or satisfactions that meet an individual's needs or wants» (p. 2).

To satisfy target consumers' needs, benefit needs and product attributes are the most popular variables for segmenting the target market (Toombs & Bailey, 1995). The main strength of benefit segmentation lies in the causal relationship to perceived future behavior. During the more than 20 years since its inception, the technique of benefit segmentation has become a familiar method of analyzing markets to discover segmentation opportunities. Almost every major marketer of consumer goods and services has attempted to use this method one or more times.

There are many market segmentation research studies on the demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic dimensions in golf. However, there appears to be no substantial research about the golf benefit needs market. The significance of this study rested in the development of questions and responses that enhanced our understanding of benefit segmentation (or needs). Therefore, this study is significant for the following reasons:

- 1.** Benefit segmentation in golf, based on the golfer's benefit needs, is one of the new research approaches to determine the marketing strategies of golf courses; it can illuminate what drives individuals to participate in golf, and the criteria they employ to select the type of golf courses they go to play the game.

- 2.** The identification of benefits is very important for organizations that evolve around the golf industry; if marketers know which factors impact one's determination to participate in playing golf, they can make an effective marketing plan for their target market.

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefit needs of golfers who frequent public golf courses. Implications for public golf course owners or managers are then discussed with strategy considerations about golf marketing for a variety of benefit segments.

Review of Related Literature

For nearly two decades, the golf industry basked in a golden age of growth and prosperity. Productivity, profitability and popularity had reached historic heights. A poll conducted at the dawn of the new millennium identified a record 45 million Americans who called themselves «golfer». In addition, this poll ranked golf and NASCAR racing as two of the fastest-growing television spectator sports in popularity (PGA Magazine, 2003).

Sports and recreational activities are potent lifestyle affinity tools for reaching nearly every segment of the American marketplace. According to National Demographics and Lifestyles (NDL)'s *The Lifestyle Market Analyst* (1994), there are several sections of demographics analysis for the golf industry, including age, gender, income and lifestyle. According to this analysis, people aged 35-44 (24,1%), married (68.5%), and with a \$ 50,000-75,000 income range (24.5%) had the highest percentage of golf participation.

However, in 2003 the National Golf Foundation (NGF) found that the total rounds played in the US were 504.4 million in 2002 versus 518.1 million in 2001, a decrease of 3%. Hardest hit regions were the Lower Midwest, the Southeast and Northeast regions, with declines of about 5%. In terms of reasons for increasing rounds, weather (33%), course conditions (16%), advertising and marketing (14%) all had an influence in determining the rounds played.

In assessing golfer's declining popularity, Graves (2003) said, «Golf is surrounded by a team of doctors trying to diagnose its ailments and restore the health, wealth and double-digit annual growth to which the game grew accustomed throughout the 1980s and 1990s» (p. 32). Golfers' symptoms seem small individually. According to *PGA Magazine*, rounds played have declined annually for the past three years, falling 3.1% nationally from 2000-2002. In 1991, according to an NGF survey, there were 6.13 million core golfers (8- to 24-round players) and 5.3 million avid golfers (25-plus rounds annually), the segments that produce the lion's share of annual rounds played. By 2000, the core golfer segment stood at nearly 7.4 million, and the avid segment claimed nearly 6.3 million golfers. By 2001, the numbers had dwindled to 5.6 million core players (a loss of over 1.7 million) and 5.9 million avid players.

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The impact of losing millions of rounds played annually from these all-important golfer segments is significant. Core and avid golfers playing fewer rounds translates to a loss of revenue across the board -green fees, lessons and caddie fees, golf-car revenues, ball equipment and merchandise sales, food and beverages, and hotel rooms at golf destinations, among others. The estimated annual loss to the golf industry is about \$2.77 billion per year (NGF, 2003). Add this to the mix a downturn in the global economy, a surplus of high-end golf facilities to create an imbalance of supply versus demand, flat retail sales and hundreds of furloughed employees in the golf-manufacturing and destination-resort sector, and one can see that there is cause for concern.

According to NGF data (2003) *Reasons for Increasing/Decreasing Rounds*, we can focus on the increasing and decreasing reasons (except for these that are out of human control, such as the weather) for the number of rounds played per year. Advertising, marketing, and management for factors increasing golf participation, and the economy and competition for factors decreasing golf participation are the main considerations.

To produce a successful marketing strategy in golf courses, country clubs and resorts, customer segmentation (research) is being conducted. With increased competition, golf courses have realized the importance of customer feedback. To support private clubs and resorts in their efforts to grow rounds, and thus, revenue, the NGF has released a private club version and a resort version of its Customer Loyalty and Satisfaction Program (CLASP). Creating a club response to current market conditions, and addressing the growing need for facilities to increase revenues and the number of rounds played, CLASP provides detailed information about what customers value most, enabling facility operators to gain a better understanding of their customer base. These data indicate what must emphasize in order to facilitate economic success.

Benefit Segmentation

Morrison (1989), defines market segmentation as «the division of the overall market for a service into groups with

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common characteristics» (p. 140). He maintains that these divisions are usually termed *market segments* or *target markets*. A market segment involves an identifiable target group of an overall market whose members have something in common, and to which a specific service appeals.

Benefit segmentation is one method of market segmentation. Haley (1995) defines this type of segmentation as «an approach to market segmentation whereby it is possible to identify market segments by casual factors rather than descriptive factors» (p. 2). The belief underlying this segmentation strategy is that the benefits which people seek in consuming a given product are the basic reasons for the existence of true market segments. According to Haley, experience under this approach has shown that benefits sought by consumers determine their behavior much more accurately than do demographic characteristics or volume of consumption.

This idea does not mean that the kinds of data gathered in more traditional types of segmentation are not useful. Once people have been classified into segments in accordance with the benefits they are seeking, each segment is contrasted with all of the other segments in terms of its demography, its volume of consumption, its brand perceptions, its media habits, its personality and lifestyles, and so forth. In this way, a reasonably deep understanding of the people making up each segment can be obtained. Moreover, by capitalizing on this understanding, it is possible to reach people, talk to them in their own terms, and present a product to them in the most favorable light possible. Haley believes that this approach is based on being able to measure consumer value systems in detail, together with what consumers think about various brands in the product category of interest. While this concept seems simple enough operationally, it is very complex. However, the benefit segmentation approach is of particular interest because it never fails to provide fresh insight into markets. Then, the question as to whether benefit segmentation is practical must be asked. Furthermore, one must ask whether benefit segmentation is truly operational. According to Haley, the answer is yes. In effect, the crux of the problem in choosing the best segmentation system is determining which system has the greatest number of practical marketing implications.

The disadvantages of segmentation methods can be overcome by using benefit segmentation, a form of behavioral

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segmentation. The proponents of benefit segmentation argue that the benefits that people seek constitute the basic reason for purchase, and therefore form the proper basis for market segmentation (Assael, 1995). Kotler (1994) goes so far as to call it a «powerful form» of segmentation.

Methods for Identifying Benefit Needs

Benefits are the sum of product advantages or satisfactions that meet an individual's needs or wants. Benefit needs can be identified through a variety of techniques, including, but not limited to focus groups, the Delphi approach, in-depth interviewing and quantitative research (Weinstein, 1994). Maloney (1961) suggests three general sources of benefit identification. The first source refers to «incidental-to-use-experiences». This source does not relate to the functional use of the product or services, but rather to external or tangential issues, such as maintaining or buying a product or service. The second source considers «use experiences» and relates to the feeling involved when using, experiencing, or simply associating something with a product. The third source relates to «results experiences» and involves an end product of the use or experience, such as feeling confident (Lautman, 1991).

Benefit Segmentation for the Sport Industry

Greenwell, Fink and Pastore (2002) investigated how selected demographic and psychographic variables may influence service experiences. According to their article, their findings revealed that age, gender, household income, and team identification all influenced one or more elements of the service experience. However, when evaluating service experiences, customers also evaluate multiple quality targets (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000). Specifically, customers evaluate the inanimate environment and service personnel, in addition to the bundle of service benefits (Langeard, Bateson, Lovelock & Eiglier, 1981). In a spectator sport context, these three quality targets translate into the physical facility, the service personnel, and the core products of a game. Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton (1993) reported, «Sport

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marketers have little control over the game, but have much greater control over the other elements of the customers' experience. Marketers, therefore, must target all service experience elements to satisfy customers» (p.12). How differently customer segments evaluate the three service experience elements has been explored in retail service settings, where Grove, Fisk and Dorsch (1998) found that different types of customers were likely to rate each of the three service experience elements differently. Study results revealed that different customer segments exist in terms of how they see the service experience elements.

Methodology

Henderson (1991) suggests qualitative methods for recreation and leisure researchers because qualitative approaches enable one to richly depict the participants' experiences and can identify complex behaviors. A qualitative approach is particularly effective for studies with exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive purposes due to its descriptive property approach. The identification of golfers' benefit needs focuses on their behavior; therefore, the research questions posed in this study point to qualitative research as the most appropriate method.

The aim of the methodological initiative of this study was to encourage active involvement and to listen to the participants' experiences and perceptions. The sharing of personal accounts was desired and was essential in order to better understand the role of golf in the participants' lives. It was important to paint the cultural scene and to identify all participants in order to allow the researcher to gain insight into their lives. In addition to importance, understanding the language and the voices of the participants is also essential. Without this basic understanding, the transcribed data would be known only via the interpretation of the researcher and would thus be ill founded and inaccurately based in terms of understanding the true the voices of the participants.

Multiple strategies can be used for gathering qualitative data. One of the most widely used strategies is the interview. One important aspect for both the researcher and the participants in interviewing is to become comfortable

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with one another. Bias may occur in the data collection and in the integrity of the investigation. Therefore, careful consideration must be paid to the necessity of allowing trust and rapport to build before delving into the personal lives, experiences, and perceptions of the participations.

Riley (1996) adds to the above sentiment that interview questions should be of an orienting nature and should avoid specifics so that the informants can speak about what is important to them. The interview questions used in this study were developed by the researcher utilizing a review of the relevant literature. To reduce interviewer bias, the interview questions were honed to follow a more general protocol, where the participants would be able to express their experiences. The interview questions for this study were developed based on the inquiry of, «Why do I play golf?» This study includes multiple types of golfer participation levels, golfer characteristics, perceived benefits, and preferences of golf courses (*Table 1*). The questions were reviewed by an expert panel consisting of professors with experience in marketing, sports, and golf.

Sample Selection

The sample for this study was a purposive convenience sample. In other words, the sample was selected both purposively and theoretically (Devers, 1994). Because of the purpose of this study, the participants were selected golf consumers playing at public golf courses. To obtain the general data, various age groups, gender, and occupational information were considered. Informed consent was granted from all of the participants, and a letter regarding study participation was sent to the managers of these golf courses prior to the interviewing process in order to obtain permission for conducting the research.

Selecting the appropriate number of participants for a qualitative study is of high importance. Griffin and Hauser (1992) suggest, «Identifying customer needs is primarily a qualitative research task, and in a typical study between 10 and 30 customers are interviewed for approximately one hour in a one-on-one setting» (p. 12). Accordingly, the subjects for the study consisted of 10 male and female golfers in the Terre Haute, Indiana area. The ages of the subjects ranged

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from 15 to 78. The gender distribution of the subjects was 6 males and 4 females. Three participants were students (high school or college); five were engaged in various occupations, and two were retired. The years of experience playing golf for the participants ranged from 1 to 26 years, and the handicaps of the participants ranged from 5 to 50.

The managers of these public golf courses were contacted in order to secure their permission for the researcher to conduct interviews with their customers. A study participation letter was provided in terms of recruiting prospective participants. The authors spoke with numerous contacts and requested golf participants who might be interested in being interviewed about their perceptions and experiences with golf. Each contact introduced the authors to referrals, presented the purpose of the research, and provided a copy of the informed consent detailing the procedures of the research to the participants.

Data Collection-Interviews

The data gathering used formal in-depth interviews with pre-determined questions. As Devers (1994) suggests, interviews should be conducted at a time and place convenient for the participants. Accordingly, interview times were between 30-60 minutes for each respondent. The interviews were scheduled at locations designated through collaboration between the participants and the researchers. To insure confidentiality, each participant was identified with a number. Most participants gave permission for the interviews in this study to be tape-recorded; written notes were also taken at the same time in order to highlight particular responses given by the participants.

Analysis of Data

Data analysis in qualitative research is continual and inductive. Constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is a basic strategy for qualitative research data analysis. Conceptual coding transforms raw data into patterns and constructs, as mentioned by Schreiber (2001): «By coding data and comparing the codes with data, the researcher identifies categories and their properties emerge» (p. 69).

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There were three levels of coding in this study. The data were first coded on a line-by-line basis (open coding, Level I codes). Level I codes are those in which small portions of data are conceptualized, using the participant's words as much as possible. Schreiber (2001) suggests, «This level coding is done by reading through the transcript, carefully examining the data, and selecting phrases, words, or stories that, taken individually, contain a single unit of meaning» (p. 69). There were 39 Level I codes.

Level I open codes are clustered into categories known as Level II codes. These Level II codes are more abstract and represent a synthesis of Level I codes, examining and collapsing codes into categories or higher-level concepts. There were 8 Level II codes. The goal of Level II coding, according to Glaser (1978), is the generation of «an emergent set of categories and their properties which fit the data, work, and are relevant for integrating into a theory» (p. 56). The next step integrates the categories into yet more abstract, conceptual units referred to as *core variables* (Level III codes). These Level III codes hypothesize the relationships among the lower-level codes. These three code levels could be concepts, categories, and relationships, respectively. There were 3 Level III cords. Some core variables, known as *core categories*, could appear at this stage. The core category is the central phenomenon, or the main concern for the people in the setting when viewed from their own perspectives.

After the initial coding of the first interview or notes, memos should be written as ideas and should document recurring themes noted in the data. Corbin (1999) maintains that memos are the analyst's written records of the analytical process. Corbin states, «Memos allow the analyst to keep a record of and to order the results of the analysis, and they also enable the analyst to know where he or she has been, is now, and needs to go in the future of the research» (p. 108). It is in memos that hypotheses are recorded, compared, verified, modified, or changed as new data come in.

Validity and Reliability

Although qualitative research and alternative warp of knowing have become more accepted as sound research

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methodology in academia, qualitative researchers are sometimes confronted with having their analytic procedures judged by quantitative rules (McCracken, 1988). When establishing the credibility of analysis, however, the tradition of the investigator-as-expert is reversed. *Credibility* refers to the truth value or believability of a study, roughly analogous to the quantitative concept of internal validity. *Member checking* (Guba, 1989) is a strategy that can enhance credibility in qualitative studies. The function of members checking one another's data varies, from members reviewing the adequacy of the transcription to members evaluating the analyst's interpretations. Guba notes that member checks can be solicited from one respondent, all respondents, or from a selected group.

During the course of this study, the early results of the analysis were shared with several golfers. After the study was completed, additional individuals who were golfers, but who had not participated in the research, were asked to read the results and give feedback regarding the congruence of the study results with their own opinions. When these individuals declared that these accounts were compatible with their own opinions, they let the researchers know that the results were credible.

Analysis and Discussion of Data

Individual Participant Descriptions

Participant 1

The subject was an 18-year-old student who participated in the school golf and tennis team. I met her at the Human Links Golf Course with her school golf coach after she finished her practice. She was an only child in her family, and she lived with her parents, who had a membership in a private golf club. She was a very active and outgoing person, and she liked almost every kind of sport. She was a very competitive individual, and she felt like she could be the best in many sports, and not only golf. She enjoyed the contact of sports, especially of tennis, and she wished to obtain a scholarship for university athletics.

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Participant 2

The subject was a 65-year-old retired man who spent most of his time with his family and friends. He described himself as an average golfer, but his handicap was 17, and he had been playing golf since he was 50. His favorite sport was basketball when he was young, but he changed his favorite sport to golf because he was not able to play basketball anymore. He became injured several years ago from a car accident. After the injury, he played golf frequently in order to improve his health. He said that he also traveled extensively to play golf, and he preferred public golf courses because of the relatively inexpensive price.

Participant 3

The subject was 78 years old and lived with her husband. She had many children and grandchildren. She said that she started to play golf after her sister's suicide. At that time, she needed something on which to concentrate. The main reason she played golf was sociability because she needed many friends with whom to spend time. She played golf with her husband and friends, up to three times a week. She also joined the community golf league, called the «Ladies Nine Hole League,» and she enjoyed competitions through this league. She and her husband enjoyed the traveling aspect of golf, and they were able to see new areas and play on different courses about which they did not know. They usually went to Florida during the winter season.

Participant 4

The subject was a 53-year-old teacher. He was a mathematics teacher and a school golf team coach. He had passion about almost every sport, such as football and basketball, including golf. He had a very sports-minded family. For example, his father plays golf, his brother works for a golf course, and his son plays basketball on his high school team. His father was the one who suggested that he play golf. He usually played golf with his own father and son.

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Participant 5

The subject was a 15-year-old high school student, and she also participated on the school golf team. She was the youngest child of a family who had enjoyed a great amount of success in golf, as well as extensive participation in sports. She lived with her parents (who are school teachers) and one sister. She spoke very proudly of her family and learning life's lessons from them. She was a very intelligent and articulate young girl, earning primarily A's and B's in school.

Participant 6

The subject was a 22-year-old college student who in majored radio/TV/film. He lived in a university dormitory with one roommate with whom he played golf. He had a great deal of respect for the game of golf and had been taught the lessons of hard work and determination by his older brother and his father. His family had been involved with sports for as long as he could remember. His favorite sport was basketball and football before he started golf; however, he now loves to play golf. He had part-time job experience on a golf course, which gave him more opportunities to enjoy playing golf for free.

Participant 7

The subject was a 40-year-old accountant. He liked to play golf for entertainment, and he also had a part-time job at the golf course in order to play golf for free. He was concerned about his mental health because his job gave him great deal of stress. That was one reason for why he decided to play golf. He lived with his wife and younger brother, who was a college football player. He enjoyed learning the aspects of sports from his younger brother and also from his father.

Participant 8

The subject was a 45-year-old high school teacher who had 18 years of teaching experience. He lived with his wife and two daughters. He was a very outgoing person, and

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he said that he liked playing golf with many friends. He stated that golf came third in his life behind God and family. He described himself as an average golfer now, but he said he used to have 4 handicaps. He said he traveled extensively to play on different golf courses, and he usually traveled around to escape and play during the summer.

Participant 9

The subject was a 26-year-old computer analyst. He lived with a roommate who had introduced him to golf. He usually played golf with his roommate, and he enjoyed being outside with friends. He was a fairly busy worker; however, he wanted to play golf every weekend. His parents lived in Tampa, Florida, so he played golf in Florida whenever he visited his parents. He was a well-spoken man.

Participant 10

The subject was a 32-year-old pharmacist. She started to play golf just several years ago with her husband, who was 40 years old and owned a computer store. She described herself as a hard worker who had a high income, and she said she was satisfied with her life. Although they had a private country club membership, they liked to play on a public golf course because the one they played on was very close to their home.

Data Analysis

The data represents the perceived benefit needs that people gain from participation in playing golf, and the relationships between the constructs. The analysis allowed the classification of benefit needs to be integrated into constructs. The three constructs that emerged were satisfaction, achievement, and well-being. The satisfaction construct included three categories: enjoyment, convenience, and the costs that participants accrued, including all satisfying psychological outcomes, such as fun, entertainment, and inexpensive prices related to playing golf. The achievement construct included two categories: personal growth and mental development, which involved achieving individual

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goals. The well-being, golf as a quality-of-life construct included three categories: physical health, mental health, and social communication.

This study's data is presented through a conceptualization in which selected portions of data are analyzed, using the participants' words and categorizations. These words and categorizations are more abstract and represent a synthesis of conceptualization codes, which were then collapsed into categories or higher-level concepts. The coding, supported by a process of memoing, resulted in the data analysis.

Although many studies, theories, and models attempt to explain the golf consumer, this study defined 39 benefit needs that influence behavior at Level I coding, which used the participants' words as much as possible. Classifying 39 benefit needs by similar meanings and making them more generalizable resulted in 8 categories. These 8 categories were then subsumed into 3 constructs based on Myers' (1996) *Benefit Structure Analysis* (BSA) attribution. The result of this analysis yielded 3 constructs, 8 categories and 39 concepts.

Indications of Satisfaction

A common definition of satisfaction is a good feeling that people have when they achieve something, or when something that people want to happen does, indeed, happen. As viewed in this study, combined with a leisure study perspective, satisfaction is a «multidimensional construct in which one feels relatively free from constraints, has a feeling of positive affect, is motivated by internal forces, and allows the activity of perceived competence» (Edginton, et al. 2002, p. 6). Mannell (1999) defines satisfaction from a leisure research perspective: «Need-satisfaction and various terms including preferences, psychological outcomes and benefits, and experience expectations have been popular motivational constructs in leisure research» (p. 242). Satisfaction influences the way the individual interacts and makes sense of golf. Categories included in the satisfaction construct are enjoyment, convenience, and cost. The anticipation of satisfaction suggests to the golfer that the cost is outweighed by the enjoyment. Convenience is related to satisfaction in that it reduces the effort in terms of the time required to start a golf game.

Enjoyment

One of the categories of the satisfaction constructs is enjoyment. Golf, in terms of a leisure activity, could relate to leisure theory. Kraus (1994) indicates that many leisure participants pursue leisure primarily for «fun» and «enjoyment». The concept of fun, entertainment and «liking to hit the ball» are all related. A desire to achieve fun is one of the conceptions of satisfaction. Freely chosen sports involvement anticipates intrinsic rewards. Sports provide something akin to enjoyment for the participants. Indeed, the argument that sports are fun, that large numbers of people enjoy them, and thus participate in them, is a common justification for sport marketers. Fun or enjoyment is one of the most important reasons for participating in a sports activity:

I started playing because it is fun. Some of my friends asked me, why do you play golf? All you do is hit a ball, and go chase it, and go hit it again. It isn't any different than baseball or anything. All they do is hit a ball and chase it. Some of my friends love playing golf, and some of them hate it. When you guys are going to play golf, we will see you in three hours or whatever, and they just take off. It is always fun taking new people who haven't been there before, you know. The first swing, it's always fun. (Respondent 6)

Respondents 1 and 3 also mentioned fun with respect to why they played golf:

The greatest benefit of playing golf for me is, I have fun most of all. I play tennis, also. Tennis is hard, but hitting the ball is easy. But a golf club is only a small figure, so it's pretty hard to hit a little thing. It's fun. I never play to hit the same shot; the ball is never in the same spot. (Respondent 1)

If you play at a public golf course, there's going to be people they just like you. There are not professionals. They're not going to make fun of you or anything. There's no pressure. I haven't really played with a professional or anything, but public golf courses are more fun. A certain part of fun is when you get a good shot and get a good score; that makes it fun. (Respondent 3)

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Entertainment is a kind of enjoyment. Respondent 7 mentioned that golf is entertainment for him.

I play golf for entertainment. Just come out and have fun with the other guys, something to do. Some people go to the movies, but I like to play golf. (Respondent 7)

The conceptions and categories generated in this construct are consistent with the patterns discovered by other researchers in recreation benefits.

The other kind of enjoyment of this study's conception is being outside. This concept of «being outside» might be passive or mental only, such as through meditation, day-dreaming about a favorite recreation area, or just gazing out a window at a pleasant natural view.

I'm not very physically capable of doing many things, like running and physical exertion. But golf is, it's a game that you either you love to hate or hate to love. It's one of those «hate and love» relationships. But, I just like it. Being outside, and playing golf. It's one of my favorite pastimes. Nice course, freshly cut grass, birds. (Respondent 6)

This reply also includes the enjoyment of the entertainment meaning. Respondent 3 mentioned being outside, which was related to easing stress, and travel.

I kind of travel around and escape to play. During the summer, I have a lot of time, so I'm available to travel around to play different courses. I try not to play at the same course very much. I just like to see different places. (Respondent 3)

Respondents understand that golf is where they can enjoy the outdoors. They participate in golf because it is interesting to them, they like the competition, and they just like to hit the ball.

Most sports came very easy to me. I think golf is difficult. But it's really interesting to me. I played basketball at ISU, but I was so slow footed. Golf is a good game for people that are not quite as quick as they like to be in

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an interesting sport. I consider that I like a little bit a competition. It makes you a better player, the more stressful and more I try to do, but I still like a little competition. I think competition builds character. (Respondent 4)

Convenience

Another category of the satisfaction construct is convenience, which was a naturally emerging category starting as a construct. This category dealt with the quality of being useful, easy or suitable for playing golf. Some of the characteristics that emerged included «anyone can play», «it is easy to schedule», and «it is close to my home». Some respondents said:

I play most at Rea Park because of its convenience. This is close to my home, just about 5 miles. (Respondent 7)

It's a sport you can play your whole life. It's not a team sport where you have to get 5 or 10 guys to play like basketball. (Respondent 8)

A few my friends play golf, and it is a sport that anyone is welcome to play in high school. (Respondent 5)

Cost

The last category of the satisfaction construct is cost. A «beneficial consequence» has been defined as «a consequence that improves the state or condition of a person or society, or prevents a worse state» (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991, p.). The question as to what an economic beneficial consequence is should be posed. Economic benefit really concerns the measurement of the value of goods and services, which contribute to an individual's utility (Johnson & Brown, 1991). The economic definition of benefits is different from the financial definition. The economic approach measures benefits as the net gain in welfare to an individual or society from some change. Some respondents mentioned economic benefits, as one of the reasons that they played golf. A respondent with a part-time job at a golf course said the following:

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I work at Rea Park part time, so I don't need to pay anything. The other guys buy a season pass, I think \$420 a year, and every time you come out, you have to pay a \$2 user fee. I just work here, like bring carts down and washing, picking a ball... everything. I work here 3-4 nights a week, 4-5 hours. Nowadays, I actually work at a golf course. I work in the kitchen so I get to play free golf. (Respondent 7)

The financial measure incorporates only monetary values. According to Johnson and Brown (1991), «Both the economic approach and financial approach measure benefits in monetary terms, but the financial approach makes no attempt to include the value of changes in welfare that do not result in monetary flows» (p. 387). Price is one of the decision-making processes for participating in sports. One respondent admitted to playing golf because of the inexpensive price:

Here it is good for playing golf because the price is cheap. You can get it all. Being cheap to play is very important. I have a season ticket for Rea Park, we pay \$500 for that. But I also figure it out if I ride a cart, my husband walks, and we have to pay \$2 every time we play, even with a season ticket. And I looked at my monthly bills, I was paying \$100 a month other than my season ticket. It's expensive today. But we enjoy golf, and we would put money there. (Respondent 3)

It is important that economic benefits be strictly the result of the consumer's choices.

Indications of Achievement

As viewed in this study, achievement deals with improving one's skills and personal growth. Achievement is often subjective and philosophical, rather than an outcome that can be stated in objective terms. Researchers in sports psychology have for years been concerned with the relationship between achievement and sports performance. At the University of Illinois, research in the early 1970s introduced the social psychological method to the study of

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leisure. Crandall (1980) identified seventeen meaning factors that have been found consistently using these methods, including the «achievement» factor. Golfers desiring success must recognize the importance of believing in their ability and recognizing the important role that effort plays. Achievement was divided into two categories in this study: mental development and personal growth.

Mental Development

Mental development in this study includes self-motivation, concentration, mental development, and self-blame. Recently publicized by a number of leading psychological authorities, the concept of mental development seems likely to have entered the national conversation to influence our fundamental views of personality, the requirements for success in the business or professional world, and the kinds of qualities that make for happiness and security in one's personal life. A level of achievement motivation may be important to perceived success in golf.

You hit the golf ball; it is a good shot when you can produce a shot again. If you have desire, and you miss the shot, then you try to re-tee and you can do better. I think it's such a great game because it's you. There are no officials to blame. You can't ask somebody to set a screen for you like basketball; you can't handle a quarterback throw with the ball like football. So it's you, and there are elements. There's competition involved, but that competition is only for you. Basketball and football are great sports, too, but I think that's what makes me stand up. There's no one else to look at yourself when the day's over. And the effort you put in. It's a very big benefit for me. (Respondent 4)

I wouldn't call golf «relaxing» for me because I'm learning, and I'm trying to get better. But I have to think about something different when I'm playing, but it's not stressful. (Respondent 5)

A respondent who is a high school teacher said:

Golf makes me look at myself and makes myself better. I mean, I had no one to blame for bad shots but me;

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nobody congrats me for a great shot. So it's just a self-display and self-motivation. (Respondent 4)

This participant is both a math teacher and a golf coach at a high school, so he said he mentioned these things several times to his students. He believes that golf is a good sport for children because it is good for their education, as well.

Personal Growth

Another category of achievement is personal growth. Driver and Brown (1986) presented taxonomy of the probable personal benefits that can be gained from leisure experiences in the outdoors. They said that personal growth or development is a strong motivating factor for the pursuit of leisure and sports opportunities. This category includes many individual factors: challenge, beating oneself, controlling oneself, helping one to study, and golf being an anti-drug. Golfers are becoming more aware of the challenges of the game of golf. Golf is a very individual game because there are no opponents and no umpire. Typically, people have treated the physical side of golf as being capable of modification through concentrated practice of the proper swing mechanics. One respondent started to play golf because of her family, but the significant desire for her was to beat herself after joining the high school golf team. She believed that the challenge made her improve herself in her game. She said:

I would like to say «challenge» or «shooting a better score» is my first benefit; and beating myself. I think it's mentally challenging. And some work's physically challenging because I walk all day during game. I set a goal every time I play, and I like to challenge my individual goals. (Respondent 1)

Another respondent thought that personal growth included self-control. People have images of how they think others view them, images of how they would like to be, and images of how they interact with particularly important reference groups. People think they can control themselves, but they also know how difficult it can be. A person learns to be a controlled athlete, despite initial awkwardness.

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I, like most, I have to control myself and beat myself, nobody else. I control my own destiny. I think it's a growing thing. You have to learn to control yourself. That's learning to be able to get beat. (Respondent 8)

Thus, many respondents of this study understand that self-control through playing golf is very important. Another respondent said:

When you play bad, it's frustrating, but that's just part of it. I can control myself. (Respondent 7)

I can control myself. And sometimes, when the golf game's off, you got to get it off the shoulder. You got to let it go. I don't usually get mad. Everybody hits a few bad shots every once in a while. Someday you have more bad shots than good, but I think that one good shot that you hit changes your whole day. (Respondent 8)

One of the respondents said that golf has made her a better student of math because golf swings always make her think about formulas, which can be thought of as personal growth.

Playing golf has a lot of to do with math, like it's different when you swing. It helps me to improve my math. And my golf coach is a math teacher, so he always compares it to math, so it's easier to be able to understand. It helps my swing. I play better. (Respondent 5)

Indications of Well-being

Diener and Suh (2000) maintain, «The good life is one replete with happiness and pleasure, and the desirable society is one that maximizes pleasure for all people» (p. 3). The culture and theories of well-being have many paths to happiness based on obtaining rewards such as fame, wealth, and health. The conception of well-being has appeared only relatively recently, and the study of well-being has become a systematic scientific endeavor. This idea is an important construct of human life. Well-being was found as one of the six components of meaning to

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factor in as a leisure activity by Beard and Ragheb (1980). They classified well-being as a physiological component. Well-being, as used in this study, represents a combination of three categories: mental health, physical health, and social communication.

Mental Health

The mental health category focuses on the concepts of relaxation, renewal, and stress relief. Some believe that stress affects the speed at which we age, so one could argue that the reduction of stress through sports activities could make people live longer. It certainly makes sense that it could make people stay healthier. It is most likely that not having enough sports activities may be stressful; therefore, golf can be a good sports activity for easing stress. One respondent is an accountant who has a great deal of stress.

Golf is really good for me to forget about my real job. My real job is stressful. Golf for me, I have to concentrate hard to play good, and when I'm thinking about golf, I forget about everything else. (Respondent 7)

Several influential theoretical perspectives on human environment interactions converge in predicting that if individuals are stressed, sports activity encounters with the most natural settings will have stress-reducing influences (Ulrich, Simons, & Losito, 1986). Implicit in their study was the perspective that stress tends to be a deleterious phenomenon, and that reduction of stress or stress relief is a benefit.

Golf is just the ball and I. I think it is a stress reliever for me, anyways. Makes me feel better after I get done playing golf. If anything has got me down, I think it's a big time stress reliever for me. That's what I get out of it. Having a hard day or a hard week... You go out on a weekend, just play 18 holes. It's just you and the course. I don't know if it makes me feel a lot better when I'm done. That's probably the best benefit like mentally, stress relieving. Makes you feel better emotionally. You don't have to be carrying the world. It's just you and the ball. (Respondent 6)

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Golf has many advantages as a treatment modality for stress. It is an effective and convenient, why to lessen the effects of psychological tension.

Physical Health

The real importance of physical exertion to vitality and survival has been appreciated since the middle of the 20th century. Since that time, many researchers have indicated the physical influence of golf. Among these is the great diversity of potential golf activities that must be considered. Many respondents in this study replied that golf is good for exercise or health if they are working during a round. Many respondents spoke about the physical side of benefits.

I think there are a lot of benefits physically; because I am walking. Most people do use carts, but I usually walk. (Respondent 6)

Some of my friends say in order to get mental relief from the stress of work, you need to exercise a little bit. But I ride too much. I used to walk a lot. When the weather is hot, I ride. (Respondent 7)

A major benefit for me is exercise. If I walk, that is good exercise. I walk when I play golf. It keeps my body healthy and fights disease. (Respondent 9)

Some believe that walking while playing is good exercise. A physical benefit provides another reason for why older golfers enjoy playing golf. Because golf does not require strong muscles as in other sports, or great skill, it merely gives the players moderate exercise. Respondents who were retired replied:

I think the benefit for me is health. It gives me a reason. Golf has been a wonderful thing for my husband; he is 82 and I, we have a lot of enjoyment playing golf together. (Respondent 3)

Golf is the only one sport I can do at my age. I loved to play basketball when I was younger, but now... (Respondent 2)

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One respondent who was just 40 years old expected to keep playing golf in his old age.

I think another thing is that you can keep playing golf when you're old. We've got some guys that I play with; some of these guys are 70-80 years old. They are a bunch in their 70s. It's also a good game that older people can play. (Respondent 7)

Some golfers believe that golf is a good sport to recover from their physical conditions. Golf is not hard work, and it is a good sport for many older people. A respondent who had physical injuries several years ago thought that when he was injured that he could not play sports anymore. He loved to play basketball when he was young, but after his injury, had to give up basketball. He discovered that golf was good a sport for people who had injuries like him; thus, he started to play golf. He said:

I injured myself 4-5 years ago. Before that, I used to play everyday. When I got the injury, I could not play in the daytime. I can't practice, but I need to exercise. (Respondent 2)

Social Communication

Any consideration of socialization and social integration must be framed with the contrasting perspectives of social stability/harmony and social change. Successful adaptation within any social system requires assimilation of the requisite norms and values. The relationship between different social groups constitutes one important aspect of stability and change within a society. Cheek and Burch (1976) suggest numerous social benefits, including family cohesion and social interaction, as motivators of leisure activity. Golf is a great sport which contributes either to differentiation and stratification or to integration in the overall society because people usually play golf with others.

Thoughtfully, I don't usually play by myself. I usually take a bunch of my friends, and have social interaction. (Respondent 10)

Also people think that meeting new people is a good benefit for them. Two respondents replied:

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I belong to a league, named the «Ladies Nine Hole League»; it gives me a reason to get up and have to do something. I have played in the League for a long time, and I enjoy the sociability. I meet a lot of new friends in golf. (Respondent 3)

I think meeting so many nice people is part of the biggest benefits. (Respondent 4)

I like meeting new people. Everyone that I meet at a golf course, they are always friendly, and they give me advice about something; it's nice. (Respondent 5)

The benefit of sociability or social interaction may be important in attaining an individual's social goal, such as life satisfaction or well-being. One respondent said that golf provides a lesson on how to belong with people.

Golf teaches me how to handle losing and winning. And it gives a lesson on how to belong with people or exposes this. And then disappointment and being patient and good. I still want to play a good social game. (Respondent 3)

I had good friends when playing. In order to be with my friends, I had learned how to play golf. (Respondent 8)

People could want to merely make good relationships or may enjoy playing with their friends in their neighborhood, but those things also relate to social interaction or sociability.

I have many friends who I play golf with. We had 35 guys today. There are 10-15 guys in that group that I consider pretty good friends. We have a group that shows up on the weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, these kinds of leagues. (Respondent 7)

The potential value that sports experiences can play in family bonding is a comparatively new insight. The value that shared sports experiences can have for families has been widely acknowledged. One study found that a national sample ranked such things as liking the same kind of activities as more important to marital success than

having children or financial security (Roper, 1974). Many respondents in this study replied that they started to play golf because of their family.

I like to play golf with my family. That's one of the reasons I started to play golf. I had an uncle I played with. He kind of got me hooked into it. (Respondent 2)

By the 1980s, the desire for companionship reached almost Universal proportions (United Media, 1982). According to that article, when asked about their primary leisure sports objectives, a national sample of adults listed «spending time with your family» and «companionship» as the two most common objectives. Respondent 8 added that golf is a good family experience.

I have many friends and family to play golf together. My younger son plays. He's played 4 years at high school. We play once a week probably. (Respondent 8)

I think golf has not been through the business since we like to make money. My boys play, my dad plays, my brothers play. It's good a family experience for us also. (Respondent 4)

One of the more common phrases used to promote family recreation is the adage, «The family that plays together, says together». This phrase suggests that golf experiences do more than promote family satisfaction and interaction; they also promote family stability.

Relationship and Uniqueness of Each Construct

The constructs and categories suggest a pattern of benefit need. Explaining the relationship between the constructs and categories at first seemed difficult. There were some obvious linkages, as well as disconnects. Myers (1976) suggests using a linkage analysis model, which shows schematically the principal types of analyses, and the relationships useful for the majority of market planning purposes. Myers (1976) says, «A benefit structure study shows what types of constructs are seen by respondents

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as being most closely associated with any single benefit or any group of related benefits» (p. 321). This provides linkages between the benefit needs constructs. Applying the constructs and categories to the Myers model allows the emerging data to attain a level of sense-making. Figure 1 graphically represents the data that emerged from the interviews and the subsequent analysis.

Data Interpretation

The model further suggests that constructs and categories constantly interact. As shown in this model, the three constructs are not independent, but rather relate to one another. In terms of these relationships, Myers asserts, «Of course, the relative importance of these types [relationships] will differ from one need area or category to another, but all should be at least considered for each study» (p. 298). Satisfaction, achievement, and well-being were simply related in this study because the categories under each construction could relate to some point. Categories are represented in the model by the solid lines linked to a construct (representing a direct relationship). The model also suggests that constructs have a complex relationship with other constructs (the dotted lines linked to each construct). For example, physical health under the well-being construct and personal growth under the achievement construct could explain the same point in the standpoint of personal goals.

Model the Constructs to a Theory

Benefit Structure Analysis (Myers, 1976) provides an appropriate model to represent this study's findings. Eight benefit needs categories were classified, based on the BSA types of attributes in this study.

The achievement construct refers to personal development, or growth in the results of this study. «Personal imagery» serves as a reminder that products or services are more than purely functional. Achievement was located under this type of attribution. The satisfaction construct was located under the «benefit delivered» attribution be-

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cause «benefits delivered» refers to what the products or services do for the user. They are subjective, as perceived by the users or consumers, and they may or may not be easily understood or controlled by the experience. Ultimate personal goals and values are what people really want to accomplish in the needs area. The well-being construct was located in this attribution. According to Myers (1976), «characteristics» or «ingredients» refer to the composition of the product; «company imagery» was about the company. An «18-hole golf course» as «specific features, ingredients, or characteristics» and a «public golf course» as «company imagery» were established in the types of attributes.

Implications

Implications of Satisfaction

Satisfaction is one of the benefit constructs of the psychological approach. This approach of benefits accrues only to individuals and includes all satisfying psychological outcomes related to golf. The term satisfaction has had a variety meanings and applications in the study of leisure and sport services. These differences have their roots in the different conceptual and theoretical treatments of satisfaction found in the social science literature. However, *satisfaction* in this study is defined as a relationship with enjoyment, convenience and cost. The model shows that three categories are related under the satisfaction construct.

Enjoyment, including fun, being outside, entertainment, travel, interest, competition, and liking to hit the ball is a very simple concept to understand. This enjoyment can indicate the «feels relatively free from constraints, and allows the activity of perceived competence» definition. People often play golf merely because it is fun. This idea can be related to the participation category, including interest, competition, and liking to hit the ball. This study indicates that fun or enjoyment is one of the most important reasons for participating in golf. This is true for youth and adults engaged in sports or physical activities (Wankel, 1985). With respect to outcome information, participants also generally indicate that they have fun while participating in golf. The economic definition of the benefits of golf in this study really concerns the measure-

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ment of the value of goods and services, which contributes to an individual's utility or satisfaction.

Many adult respondents, especially retirees, replied to these benefit needs; therefore, a golf course could target their market to retired golfers if their local populations fit these demographic characteristics. Golf marketers should make efforts to provide more quality accommodations, programs, and services. For example, many golf resorts in Florida operate with «Silver town» business.

Implications of Achievement

The respondents suggested multiple benefits about playing golf. Most of them recognize that mental development and personal growth are very important benefits for them. In this study, the effects of golf involvement on the individual were considered in terms of two major aspects: mental development and personal growth. Personal growth was defined as «a feeling of positive affect, motivated by internal forces» (Wankel & Berger, 1991). Personal growth includes challenges, beating oneself, controlling oneself, helping one to study and golf being on anti-drug, all of which are related.

I think every shot is a difficult shot. I have to forget about before the shot, and try to make a better one. That's the biggest challenge. My mental state is sometimes crazy, but I don't like to be really mad myself. I have to control myself. (Respondent 1)

According to this participant, controlling herself is part of the challenge for her. Also, the two categories of achievement can be related, or combined. A relationship between personal growth and mental development involves mentally controlling oneself.

Golf makes me mad every time I play. I have to play competitive golf, which I have done as much of coaching with kids. I have to be able to have fun with those emotions. I better control myself now. (Respondent 4)

This respondent feels like he is growing up through coaching golf to students. He learns not only how to control himself, but also how to develop his mental side.

Younger respondents replied that «achievement» was their main benefit need versus the older respondents. Therefore, golf courses which are targeted toward younger golfers should focus their management on more progressive marketing, such as designing challenging golf courses and providing golf schools or clinics.

Implications of Well-being

This study shows mental health, physical health and social communication as all related under the well-being construct. Much research evidence supports the association of well-being with regular involvement in sports activities (e.g., Sachs & Buffone, 1984). Golf course managers should focus on their marketing to satisfy their consumers' needs, such as providing health care centers at golf courses.

This study indicates that golf has many mental and physical health benefits, as was expressed by many of the participants' replies. In the research on leisure discussed as the antithesis of stress, we can see and easily defend the notion that one virtue of golf is stress reduction through this study. In the relationship between well-being and social communication, we know that there are many potential factors that influence the strength of social relationships, including sports experiences. Golf facilitates strong social communication because people often play golf with their families, friends and within their neighborhoods.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study indicates that golf participation can result in a number of benefits. In terms of the «benefit needs model» (*Figure 1*), it has been suggested that there are a number of benefits in each of the constructs: satisfaction, achievement and well-being. The benefit needs model is based on the premise that the three constructs emerged and are of major importance when evaluating public golf course activity. Each of the three constructs has several categories with contributing concepts, and each category has several subconceptions. The satisfaction construct included three categories: enjoyment, convenience, and costs that participants accrue, including all satisfying psycho-

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logical outcomes related to golf. The achievement construct included two categories: personal growth and mental development, which are also involved in achieving individual goals. The well-being construct, golf as quality of life, included three categories: physical health, mental health, and social communication. In terms of this model, ideal golf participation could be one that contributes significantly to all three types of benefit needs.

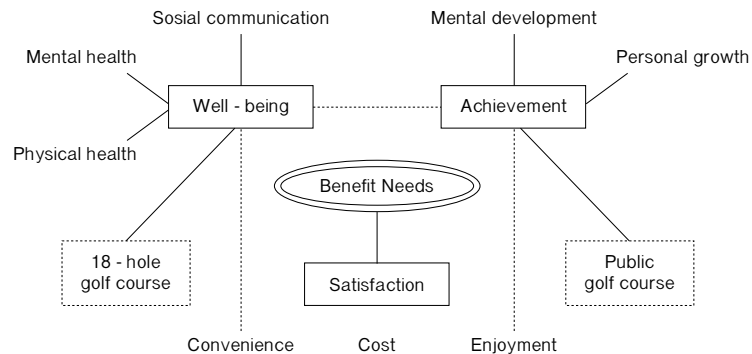


Figure 1 *Benefit needs model.*

The results of this investigation indicate that these 10 golfers had similar perceptions and experiences about the benefit needs of golf. The findings of the present research and studies supporting the existing theories indicate that the participants: (a) participated in golf for fun; (b) recognized what they hoped to gain from participating in golf, including personal advancement; and (c) believed that golf was perceived as an opportunity to be with friends and family, and to enhance mental and physical health.

Knowledge about the benefits of golf has increased considerably during the past decade. As managers or marketers learn more about the benefits of managing golf courses, they have recognized that the benefits approach of the marketing strategy needs to guide much of their research. Because marketers recognize that this approach constitutes an important paradigm shift in the way one perceives the delivery of golf services and behavior, they have supported the development and refinement of this area of research. From a managerial perspective in this study, managers should be concerned with two significant

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tasks. The first task involves determining which benefit outcomes are perceived to be most satisfying by particular types of golfer engaged in playing golf. The second task concerns knowing which specific determinative attributes of those benefits influencing the realization of satisfying and dissatisfying experiences are under managerial control. This study has elaborated on the golf benefits construct and provides justification for further scholarly work in this area.

This study identified the benefit needs of golfers who play on public golf courses. The future research of the golf market can then be segmented using benefit needs by consumers. These results could show that different segments have significant differences in benefit needs, lifestyles, or demographics, among other factors. Thus, we can prove that the benefit need is an effective segmentation variable for golf marketing. Based on those benefit needs results, marketing managers can focus on one or more segments that show salient consumer preferences for the benefits provided by their products or services. Satisfying the consumers' needs produces company or golf course success.

The following are some recommendations for future research:

- 1.** Examine the benefit needs of public golf course consumers who are average golfers. This information would allow researchers to compare and contrast the similarities and differences of these golfers' benefit needs.
- 2.** Examine the benefit needs of public golf course consumers raised in different demographic statuses and different geographic regions of the United States. This information may determine whether different demographic statuses, or geographic regions exist, and can offer different golfing opportunities, as a result.
- 3.** Examine public golf course consumers' perceptions regarding the physiological, socio-cultural, social-economic, and political agendas for golf opportunities. This examination may provide information regarding whether golf consumers are encouraged to participate in playing on certain golf courses because of cultural expectations, perceived opportunities, and/or financial constraints or freedoms that may interfere with or provide opportunities in playing golf.

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