Target Market Descriptors

A target market is a group of people with certain characteristics in common, characteristics that are likely to influence leisure needs and interests in predictable ways. By conducting research into the presence and distribution of these characteristics throughout a given population, leisure services marketers and managers can identify which groups are present, then use this information to forecast the leisure needs and interests likely to exist within that given population. Leisure services can then be designed to address specific leisure needs and interests of specific groups. Put another way, leisure service organizations can target specific groups with programs, services, and facilities highly likely to address their leisure needs and interests.

Target Market Descriptors

Target market descriptors are the characteristics that identify the commonalities and differences among people used to create target markets. Remember that what makes a characteristic relevant to us is the likelihood that it influences people's leisure behaviors.

There are five generally accepted categories of leisure descriptors.

1. Leisure needs and interests: People have many different leisure interests. These can be identified by participation patterns or interest surveys. Among the most common interest clusters are the arts, hobbies of various types, physical activity (e.g., organized competition, informal sports, fitness activities), outdoor recreation (which covers a very broad range of activities), volunteering and community service, socializing, creative pursuits (e.g., writing, art, photography, theater), self-improvement and study, and travel.

    We must know more than just what people's leisure interests are in order to predict leisure behavior, however. Although people share a common interest in a leisure activity, they may fill very different leisure needs by participating in it. Leisure services providers must always be careful not to assume that all the people participating in an activity are doing so for the same reason. The concept of leisure need helps us understand the diversity of motivations for leisure activity. Among the more frequently identified leisure needs are relaxation and escape from the daily grind, using physical and mental energy or skills, displaying or establishing skill and ability, experiencing a sense of belonging or group membership, being creative, seeking new experiences, gaining recognition from others, and fulfilling a desire to serve others.

    Once we know what leisure interests a person has, we must also understand why if we are to create programs or services targeting those interests.

2. Geographic factors: Traditional brick and mortar leisure services organizations must be concerned with where people live, where they work, and where they recreate. Each of these factors will influence the decisions people make about their leisure. These decisions will in turn affect the extent to which they might be part of a viable target market for a specific leisure services agency.

    Where people live (or place of residence) is the most obvious geographic factor influencing people's leisure behaviors, particularly with regard to public services (which might be restricted to residents of a town, county, or state). Among the issues to be considered here are population density (urban, suburban, or rural), residence types (e.g., single-family house, town house, condo, multi-family apartment buildings), residential patterns (e.g., blocks vs. cul-de-sacs, separated by residence types or mixed, lot sizes), available transportation, green space, and proximity to commercial centers.

    Where people work (or place of employment) has become steadily more important as a geographic influence on people's leisure behavior because many people now spend the majority of their waking hours at work or traveling to and from work. This factor therefore includes not only the where a person's job is located, but also commuting routes, hassles, and time; and the availability of alternative leisure resources near workplaces and along commuting routes.

Where people recreate is influenced by the accessibility of leisure facilities. In this context, accessibility means where a leisure facility is located in relationship to a person's place of residence or place of employment, including all the features of those places mentioned above. A commercial fitness facility or a public park located twenty minutes from home by car may be accessible to a person whose commute is relatively short and hassle free, but inaccessible to someone who has already been in the car for an hour dealing with heavy traffic. Similarly, a distant resort may accessible for someone living in an area served by a medium or large airport, but considerably less accessible for someone who must rely on small feeder airports or who must travel a substantial distance to reach an airport.

3. Sociodemographic factors: This may be the largest and most frequently category of target market descriptors (they are also frequently referred to as demographics). One reason for this is that sociodemographic information is relatively easy to collect, for example, from Census reports (online at http://www.census.gov/), other federal government agencies (a good place to start is the FedStats portal at http://www.fedstats.gov/), state and local governments (these may vary in quality and thoroughness), state and local economic development and business groups, and area universities or university extension offices.

A second reason for the frequent use of sociodemographic factors, as Crompton and Lamb point out (1986, p. 121), is that there is a growing body of research linking sociodemographic factors to specific patterns of leisure preferences, interests, and needs. These linkages exist because by their very nature, sociodemographic factors are often stand-ins for other, less easily measured influences on leisure behaviors.

Age, for example, indicates not just possible physical activity levels, but also what are called socialization or cohort effects. People who grow up or come of age in a particular era often share expectations, attitudes, or beliefs that are different from those of people who did so in another era. Obviously, expectations, attitudes, and beliefs acquired early will evolve as time goes by, but they nonetheless tend to remain influential throughout people's lives.[1] Thus people who came of age in an era when the economy was healthy and incomes rising may well have different expectations about discretionary spending than people who came of age in an era when the economy was uncertain and wage growth stagnant.

Another example of a sociodemographic factor that is a significant stand-in for expectations, attitudes, and beliefs is ethnicity. What is relevant about ethnicity for leisure marketing is not that a person is a member of one or another ethnic group, but that different ethnic groups display different patterns of expectations, attitudes, and beliefs about leisure, and thus different patterns of leisure behaviors.

In an early analysis of the significance of sociodemographic factors in marketing analysis, Kotler (1980) suggests the following factors tend to have the most influence on individual preferences and behaviors, and are therefore most important for marketers:

age	family life cycle stage	income
education	family size	race
ethnicity/nationality	gender role identification	socio-economic class class

It is important to note that social research consistently shows that education, income, and occupation are very closely associated with each other.

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[1] One caveat is important here: People who go into professional, managerial, or technical fields tend to adopt expectations and beliefs they believe are characteristic of those fields, even if these expectations and beliefs run counter to those acquired earlier in life.

O'Sullivan (1991, p. 31) borrows Kotler's list to show how various sociodemographic variables may be linked to leisure behaviors.

Sociodemographic factor	Link to leisure behavior
Age	• Physical & intellectual abilities • Expectations, beliefs, & attitudes about leisure • Leisure needs & interests
Education, income & occupation	• Expectations, beliefs, & attitudes about leisure • Activity preferences • Activity costs • Activity skill & experience levels • Participation rates • Participation preferences
Ethnicity/nationality	• Values • Customs & traditional practices
Family life cycle stage	• Time availability • Relational needs • Relational constraints • Socialization (learning new social roles)
Gender (sex roles)	• Social norms & expectations • Leisure needs & interests

4. <u>Behavioral factors</u>: It is a truism introduced in every introductory course that leisure involves people's choices on how they choose to use their discretionary time and spend their discretionary resources. Behavioral factors reflect these choices. A number of behavioral factors are identified in the marketing literature, including the following.

A. *Participation status* (also called usage status) indicates the extent to which an individual is committed to a specific activity and/or a specific service provider. One dimension of this commitment is the *frequency* with which people participate. Individuals may be identified as:

‣ Nonusers (have never participated in a specific activity or used a specific service provider)

‣ Ex-users (previously participated but no longer doing so)

‣ Potential users (have some level of interest or match a user profile, but haven't yet begun to participate

‣ Beginning users (have just begun to participate)

‣ Regular users (have regularly participated for some time)

‣ Irregular users (participation has continued for some time but with interruptions)

To simplify matters, Kotler (1980, p. 203) suggests grouping people into three participation categories: light, medium, and heavy.

Regular or heavy participants are an extremely important group. They constitute the *repeat business* that can sustain many programs and are often the source of the *word of mouth advertising* that is so effective. Knowing something about each category of participants will allow marketers to develop programs and services specifically designed to retain regular users, induce beginning and irregular users to increase their commitments, and encourage ex-users to resume participating.

B. *Skill and specialization status* refer to (i) the level of skill or ability a person has in a specific activity and (ii) the intensity of a person's involvement in an activity. It should be obvious that given the nature of leisure and recreational activities, this is a very important factor in marketing leisure services.

The most common means of identifying skill or ability level is the familiar division between novice, beginner, intermediate, and advanced participants. Novice designates those individuals who are just beginning to learn about an activity, while beginner refers to participants who have a acquired some basic skills. Intermediate participants have gone beyond the basic skills, while advanced participants have developed considerable expertise in the activity. In some cases, there are formally established and accepted standards for each skill level in a specific activity (e.g., the Red Cross classification of swimmers). In other cases, the standards are less formally established.

Leisure specialization is a combination of an individual's skill level and the frequency of her/his participation in a specific activity, plus the degree to which an individual concentrates on that activity to the relative exclusion of others. The more specialized a person is, the more likely he/she will be to spend money in order to increase her/his skill level and to participate.

C. *Motivations* for participation reflect the reasons people choose certain activities, which can be stated as the *benefits* people seek from these activities. It is dangerous to assume that commonalities in participation status or skill and specialization status imply common motivations for participating in an activity. Motivations for participation are quite variable, and where one person pursues a high adventure activity like mountaineering for its challenge and exhilaration, another person may pursue it as for the serenity of communing with nature.

D. *Loyalty status* is the extent to which an individual is committed to participating in a specific activity provided by a specific leisure services provider. The focus here is on the tie between the participant and the provider. Some people routinely shift among different providers, perhaps looking for better services or trying to save money or looking to increase their skill levels. Other people continue to patronize one specific provider. The reasons behind high loyalty are worth investigating for any leisure services marketing effort, given the significance of return business mentioned earlier and also given what can be learned about the features of a service most valued by committed participants.

E. *Readiness stage* is based on a continuum ranging from unawareness of an activity or provider to participation. A person must first become aware of the activity or provider, then acquire some minimum knowledge that stimulates sufficient interest in the activity or provider to make the individual ready to participate.

F. *Lifestyle* refers to combinations values, attitudes, and behaviors. A great deal of research has been devoted to identifying consistent patterns of values, attitudes, and behaviors resulting from them. Different schemes for classifying these patterns have been suggested, ranging from anywhere from nine categories to 480 categories. The underlying premises of this work are that (i) because different lifestyles generate distinct sets of needs, interests, and patterns, (ii) identifying which of these different lifestyles are present in any market will allow marketers to refine their program offerings more precisely.

5. Time-related factors: Among the most marked developments in American society during the last half of the twentieth century were changes related to time. People increasingly reported a growing sense of being rushed, of not having enough time for the things one must do and those one wants to do. Researchers have differed over whether the sense of a lack of time is accurate or not, and those researchers who agree there is a growing lack of time also differ over just how short of time people are. There is no doubt about a second time-related trend, however. Patterns of time use have been dramatically altered. The 8:00 to 5:00 workday, the Monday through Friday workweek, and the Saturday and Sunday weekend are no longer the standards by which many people organize their lives.

Changes like these make it increasingly necessary for marketers of leisure services to analyze not just the amount of free time people have, but when they have it. Target markets can be identified according to the time of day, the day of the week, month, season, and the amount of time people have at their

disposal (whether it is available in large chunks concentrated on certain days or at certain hours of the day, for example, of distributed through the week in smaller bits).

References

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