2003

Organization of public parks and recreation web pages : application of social marketing concept

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.6ced-uznm>
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ORGANIZATION OF PUBLIC PARKS AND RECREATION WEB PAGES:

APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MARKETING CONCEPT

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Recreation and Hospitality Management

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

By

Peggy Hiu-Nam Choi

May 2003

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ABSTRACT

ORGANIZATION OF PUBLIC PARKS AND RECREATION WEB PAGES: APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MARKETING CONCEPT

by Peggy H. Choi

This thesis served as an exploratory study to examine if social marketing messages were observable at public parks and recreation agency Web sites. A sample of 138 Web sites were chosen by a systematic method from 216 California Parks and Recreation Society public agencies. The initial assessment procedure examined Web site contents using computer content analysis and resulted in frequency counts of terms. It was found that more than 93% of the CPRS agencies had one or more social marketing messages in their Web sites. Recreation benefit descriptors *play, fun, learning, nature,* and *flow* were the most frequently stated recreation benefits in agency Web sites. The results also revealed no significant difference between agency budget size and use of Web site social marketing messages. The conclusion was that agencies with Web sites invested conceptually and extensively social marketing, adopting language of the national recreation benefits campaign.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank for Dr. Maureen Glancy who guided me through the whole thesis process. Without her guidance, I never could put all my vague ideas into a thesis. I also appreciate the other two committee members, Dr. Tsu-Hong Yen and Dr. Pettis Perry, who really took time from their busy schedules to help me out.

I would like to show my greatest appreciation for my family members who always support me in whatever I do and especially for supporting my decision to pursue the Master's degree in the US. Moreover, the encouragement from my friends in Hong Kong and San Jose always motivated me to complete the thesis. Special thanks to my classmate Naho Maruyama. We shared and encouraged each other in the thesis process and the three years of international student life at SJSU.

Last but not least, I would like to say "thank you" to Alan Cheung who is always on my side, as my friend, boy friend, and husband to be. This thesis served as one of my precious gifts for my wedding in summer 2003.

THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US,

AND WE ARE FILLED WITH JOY

- Palm 126: 3

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Changing social values, financial opportunities, and political climates have resulted in the growth and expansion of a marketing orientation for public and nonprofit leisure and recreation agencies in the United States (Johnson & McLean, 1996). In the last two decades, however, it also has been a controversial issue in managing public recreation services. Since marketing was a means of promoting, advertising, and selling merchandise with the goal of increasing profit, the application of marketing strategies for public parks and recreation services has been criticized as a form of commercialism (Crompton & Lamb, 1986; Crompton & Novatorov, 2001; Havitz, 2000).

Gradually, scholars and professionals in the field shifted from an emphasis on the economic costs, values, and savings of their programs and services to an accounting of their social value to the individual and the community. In the late 1980s, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) heavily promoted members to endorse a benefits approach to recreation marketing. The NRPA developed guidelines, handbooks, and workshops as encouragement for its members to embrace the benefits approach in agency vision, mission, strategic plans, and program delivery. Similarly, the California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS) developed a focus on “leveraging the benefits of parks and recreation” in 1995 and “benchmark marketing” in 2000.

Recognizing the challenge to achieve social and professional acceptance of marketing in public sector services, Bright (2000) suggested that the social marketing

concept can help recreation professionals plan, develop, and communicate recreation opportunities to the community-at-large. The focus of social marketing is to influence behavior through the adoption of commercial marketing technologies that reveal the socially redeeming value of services (Andreasen, 1994). The health service industry has successfully introduced social marketing programs related to such issues as AIDS prevention, smoking cessation, and healthy diet. The goal of leisure and recreation services is to make recreation benefits known by the public-at-large (Driver, 1999). Bright (2000) stated that leisure and recreation agencies should utilize a systematic social marketing process to articulate and promote the benefits of leisure.

Social Marketing

Social marketing is a theory for marketing government and nonprofit services. The origin of social marketing can be traced to the article by Kotler and Zaltman (1971) in the *Journal of Marketing*. They stated, "Social marketing is the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research" (p. 5).

After publication of Kotler and Zaltman's article, applied marketing techniques were gradually developed in government and non-profit agencies. Missions of public agencies were directed toward social change by applying social marketing techniques.

Different Goals Served between Commercial and Social Marketing

Social marketing is more than commercial marketing because it serves added goals both in theory and in practice. Social marketing shares a similar emphasis with

commercial marketing because it is driven by consumer research and depends on constant feedback about customer needs. Commercial marketers, however, apply the consumer survey information and sales of attractive products or services to benefit their companies. On the other hand, social marketers use information to encourage people to voluntarily adopt practices or use products that will benefit themselves and their society (Bryant et al., 1998). In practice, social marketers also face many unique challenges that differ from the commercial approaches. According to Bryant et al., these challenges to social marketers include having less flexibility in modifying products (e.g., environmental issue of parks), asking people to change deeply ingrained personal habits and adopt behavior with intangible benefits (e.g., smoking cessation, exercise), and targeting various audiences with limited resources.

Commercial marketing relies on consumer research, marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion), and marketing segmentation analysis to identify target consumers so as to maximize profits. Similarly, social marketing adopts commercial marketing methods to develop strategic plans and implement programs. However, with the unique goal of social marketing being to motivate people to adopt socially beneficial behaviors, social marketing activities also employ strategies of consumer education, policy development, and promoting realistic services and expectations. In other words, to influence a target market to undertake change in behavior for personal and social benefit, the product or service must be well-understood, based on values, and trustworthy.

Social Marketing on the Internet

Social marketing involves communicating messages via different media (Fine,

1990). Public and nonprofit organizations communicate with clients in various ways, such as through speakers, meetings, public events, publications, and mass media. Since 1990, the rapid development of Internet technology has provided an ultimate medium for commercial product marketing and increased the velocity of the public relations process. Marken (1995) explained that the World-Wide-Web (WWW) is a perfect channel for outreach to educate, inform, and persuade audiences. Primarily, the Internet is a tool for marketing and a means to obtain feedback to improve public relations. According to White and Raman (1999), the development of the Internet can be considered the first public relations mass medium that allows managed communication to flow directly between organizations and mass audiences.

As reported, the social marketing approach has been established in public agencies for many years. Philosophically, it addresses concerns that many recreation and leisure professionals may have because social marketing is based on social values rather than profit making. Rapid development of the WWW and increasing household use of the Internet provide a good opportunity for incorporating social marketing techniques as a communication vehicle for public leisure and recreation services. In addition, the Internet provides opportunities to answer applied research questions related to recreation marketing (Andreasen, 1994). Over time, the Internet may be an untested tool to reduce barriers to diverse and inclusive recreation experiences because of the combined outreach and market survey potentials.

Statement of Problem

This study examined how Web sites were being used as a social marketing tool by public parks and recreation agencies. Specifically, this study analyzed use of the Internet to convey information about recreation benefits related to recreation programming.

Descriptive research questions included the following:

1. Were social marketing messages observable at public parks and recreation agency Web sites?
2. What social and personal benefits messages were explicated in the public parks and recreation Web pages?
3. Did budget size correlate with their Web page design in number of social marketing messages?
4. What were the most frequent recreation benefits messages explicated in small-budget agencies?
5. What were the most frequent recreation benefits messages explicated in large-budget agencies?

Need for the Study

This study provides a baseline for describing the development of how the WWW is used in relation to social marketing in public parks and recreation Web sites. Findings produced in this study may encourage recreation professionals to use the WWW as a new or expanded marketing tool, to develop techniques specifically to promote the beneficial approach of recreation, and to advance the application of social marketing in recreation program delivery and promotion.

Design of the Study

This investigation was conducted as an exploratory study of municipal recreation Web sites for the purpose of assessing use of social marketing techniques. Since no other research has been reported on this concept in the field of leisure and recreation, this will be an exploratory study with description being the ultimate goal.

Public agencies from the California Parks and Recreation Association (CPRS) were used as the sample frame. From the 216 agencies which have published Web sites, 138 Web sites were chosen by a systematic sampling method. This study incorporated quantitative measures to examine the Web site contents. The quantitative dimension of content analysis consisted of recording and classifying the data numerically and tallying the data by category. The coding system used was amended from an empirical study by Esrock and Leichty (1998) on content analysis of Web pages. Their study coded corporate Web sites for the presence or absence of messages related to 13 social responsibility content areas.

To ensure reliability of this study being reported, a computer content analysis program was employed for data collection. A recreation benefits coding scheme was developed from the five areas of recreation benefits developed by Driver and Bruns (1999) and was supplemented from a study by Schreyer and Driver (1989). The exact words from the coding scheme were coded by using the *Diction* computer content analysis program, resulting in frequency counts. The frequencies were analyzed using the *Statistics Package for Social Science* (SPSS) to explore and describe the patterns and significance of the findings.

Definition of Terms

Social marketing. Social marketing refers to “the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of their society” (Andreasen, 1994, p. 7).

Public parks and recreation agency. “Government funded and organized agencies have traditionally become involved in leisure as a result of the perceived need to regulate popular recreation as a part of the growth of the welfare state” (Slack, 1999, p. 399).

Benefits-based programming. This is “an outcome-oriented approach that focuses the programmer’s efforts on producing identified benefits for participants as a result of their participation in specific recreation programs” (Rossman & Schlatter, 2000, p. 54).

World-Wide-Web (WWW). The Web is an electronic medium which provides graphic images or document pages which link to a wide selection of information resources located all over the Internet (Hanson, 2000).

Summary

This exploratory study analyzed use of the WWW as a medium to convey social marketing values and benefits associated with municipal parks and recreation agencies. A content analysis was employed to examine the public parks and recreation Web page contents in relation to social marketing. The results may serve as a baseline for

describing how the WWW is used as a social marketing tool for public parks and recreation agencies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The objective of this review is to examine how to use Internet-mediated social marketing techniques for public parks and recreation agencies. Three areas of this topic will be discussed: social marketing, marketing for parks and recreation, and marketing communication.

The growing emphasis on material things was accompanied by widespread social change following the industrial revolution. Overcrowded urban areas developed new social problems which gave rise to various social services and social goals. Social marketing became widespread in the public sector following the Great Depression at which time the government began disseminating information and reducing budgetary support in various social service agencies (Fine, 1990).

The basic concept of social marketing was to adapt commercial marketing technologies for “analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs assigned to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of their society” (Andreasen, 1994, p. 7).

Theoretical Foundation

The underlying motive of social marketing is to lead people to take action for their own or others’ betterment. Many social psychological theories have addressed influencing human behavior with the theory of *reasoned action* (e.g., Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Manfredo, 1992; Krasner & Ullman, 1973; Winett, 1992).

Reasoned action. The theory assumes that human beings use their ability to reason and, therefore, systematically utilize or process information available to them (Fishbein, 1980). In general, a person has gone through the process of evaluation of outcomes before performing a given behavior. For instance, if a person believes performing the behavior will lead to positive outcomes, the person will more likely to engage in the behavior. In social marketing, the message constructed is for positive outcomes related to behavior. The *reasoned action* theory has been used, to explain how social marketing influencing behavior such as smoking, drinking, signing up for a treatment program, and using contraceptives (Fishbein & Manfredo, 1992).

In leisure and recreation, Winett (1992) suggested use of behavior-influencing strategies to direct and guide people and to facilitate some degree of appropriate change. The process of influencing people's recreation behavior is, thus, based on the concepts of *reasoned action* theory and an extension of persuasion and for information and education.

Persuasion. The goal of persuasion is "to bring about a change in attitude or behavior" (Rossman & Schlatter, 2000, p. 240). Central and peripheral methods are suggested in persuasive communication theory (Ajzen, 1992). In the central method, behavior changes through a process of rational examination and evaluation of ideas and information. In contrast, the peripheral method achieves persuasion tangentially or unconsciously through the content of the message without thoroughly processing information but influence by creating through the credibility of the presenter or the communication source (Rossam & Schlatter). For example, a person may not like doing exercise, but may change his or her mind and join a fitness program because of a

convincing testimonial by a celebrity featured in a weight-loss story on a television program.

Advertising is a more aggressive way to persuade someone to purchase products or services. It simultaneously uses both central and peripheral persuasive methods. The recent smoking cessation public service announcement advertising campaign uses both central and peripheral methods to persuade different target groups, such as pregnant women and youth, to stop smoking.

Information and education. According to Knopf and Dustin (1992), the most desirable way to maintain free choice behavior and influence behavior is through information and education. They suggested four organizing concepts in persuasive communication effectiveness: sources, message, channel, and recipient. People can initially accept or reject a persuasive communication on the basis of the credibility of the source. Typically credibility is achieved by using expert advice, background evidence, and reports of consistency. Persuasive messages should meet the standard of high level comprehensibility, organization, coherency, and clear reasoning to hold audience attention. In addition, messages have to use a variety of communication channels to persuade audiences.

Non-Profit and Public Sector Use of Social Marketing

Beyond advertising and promotion, the social marketing concept has functioned to foster socially beneficial changes (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998). It served as a driving force for many health and safety programs that have been successfully introduced such as controlling blood pressure, wearing seat belts, and preventing sudden infant death

syndrome (SIDS). Social marketing has also been a global force; perhaps most familiar is the promotion of condom use. The effects of this marketing program helped to reduce AIDS expansion and limit growth of worldwide population.

The Partnership for a Drug Free America (PDFA) is a coalition of communication professionals dedicated to helping children and teenagers reject substance abuse by influencing attitude through persuasive information. In 1999, the PDFA, in cooperation with the Glennie Stamnes Strategy of Canada, developed a social marketing project for a drug-free campaign for middle-school children. They produced a national television campaign using different scenarios of children being easily tempted by drugs. Their aim is to tell children “they wouldn’t look like a loser and be rejected if they turned down dope” (Fraser, 1999, p. 32).

The study by Bryant et al. (1998) showed how to use formative consumer research for improving participant and employee satisfaction with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). With qualitative research of interviews from 293 participants and a 22% rate of return from staff questionnaires, both participants and staff described their perceptions, problems, dissatisfaction, and suggestions for the service. The results from the participant and staff components were combined with the enrollment component to formulate a social marketing plan with guidelines for developing strategies to strengthen WIC’s image, increase enrollment, and enhance the WIC experiences in both groups. Implementation of the marketing plan has been a gradual process, starting with the media campaign in 1995 and proceeding to its implementation in 1996. After complete implementation of

the plan, a permanent data collection system was used to evaluate impacts from the plan and provide continuous, in-depth analysis of staff and participant reactions to program changes. In 1998, the participant and staff research results showed that applications of the social marketing approach increased consumer satisfaction in the public health-care programs.

Marketing for Parks and Recreation

Since marketing has been widely recognized as a profit-making tool for business organizations, much resistance has been generated to adopting a marketing approach in public parks and recreation services (Crompton & Lamb, 1986; Havitz, 2000).

Hemingway (1999) stated the issue directly when he wrote that marketing puts leisure into a class where it will be “marketed and sold as any other commodity” (p. 34). Since public parks and recreation services are believed to extend to most members of a community, many people criticize marketing segmentation as being unfair to certain people. Another major concern is that marketing was causing many to forget that the public parks and recreation service is not a business; it is a humanistic and social service.

Marketing advocates have responded to such criticism rather defensively by acknowledging that there is a need to apply the commercial marketing technique for public parks and recreation services (Havitz, 2000). Moreover, Novatorov and Crompton (2001) also believed that a widely adaptive definition of marketing conceptualization should be introduced for public parks and recreation agencies rather than just imitation of a commercial sector approach.

Empirical Studies in Parks and Recreation

Traditionally, government agencies at different levels have policies to guide their involvement in the field of art, sport, and parks. Since the tax revolt movement in the early 1980s, traditional ways of the financing and operating public parks and recreation service were forced to change. In twenty years or so, many public leisure services administrators looked to business-sector marketing for inspiration. At the same time, leisure scholars increasingly explored the extent to which marketing concepts and techniques could be adapted for public parks and recreation services.

Studies on segmentation, customer orientation, and pricing were popular marketing research topics for public parks and recreation. Crompton (1983) identified the requirement for effective segmentation by defining common descriptors of user groups, potential target markets, and prioritization of the target markets. With limited financial resources, he emphasized the most critical issue facing park and recreation agencies often was what strategies may be most useful to attract those who are apathetic, disinterested, or reluctant to use service offerings. Consumer research offers considerable insight to leisure professionals in providing participant-centered orientation programs (Donnelly, Vaske, Deruite, & King, 1996). Cato and Kunstler (1988) generated a study that compared two different groups in regard to preferred-leisure activities and reasons for participation to market the potential consumers by understanding their needs and preferences.

Leisure researchers also showed increased interest in understanding the aspects of leisure behavior in relation to pricing. (e.g., Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994; Kerr &

Manfredo, 1991; McCarville & Crompton, 1987). In the leisure-as-symbolic-consumption approach, marketing strategies were described as proactive in designing services that respond to consumer needs for self-expression and responding to psychological price limitations (Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994). According to Johnson-Tew, Havitz, and McCarville (1999, p. 18), for public parks and recreation services, “marketing theory specifies that if fees are applied they should be based largely on clients’ ability or willingness to pay.” The results of the study showed that marketing orientation in Canadian agencies assigned price levels that were influenced by the clients’ ability to pay. However, complicating this finding was the fact that the agencies considered meeting agency cost-criteria their primary obligation beyond any other factors.

With the rapid expansion of marketing orientation, leisure professionals focus on the marketing mechanism rather than articulating the social merits of leisure. Making the point clearly, Driver and Bruns (1999, p. 353) criticized that “instead of benefits, we are now emphasizing administrative efficiency and rely more and more on ‘bean counting’ to justify programs.” Applying a market-based initiative to parks and recreation programs does not mean we have to give up the benefits produced for the participants. According to McCarville (1999), however, no matter whether the product is an idea, a social practice, or a service, all marketing efforts must focus on the benefit package that it provides to each client.

Although widely adopted by public parks and recreation agencies, which marketing approaches are used and how agencies actually develop their programs are

often questioned. Schreyer and Driver (1989) suggested that public parks and recreation agencies should promote the beneficial consequences of leisure activities in their program delivery. After 10 years, Driver and Bruns (1999, p. 351) stated that “leisure is big business and probably the most beneficial social service is not fully understood or appreciated by the public and by leisure professionals in the United States and Canada.” They strongly recommended adoption of the Benefits Approach to Leisure (BAL) with its advantages over other approaches: “It is not only a philosophy about the roles of leisure in society but how leisure services delivery systems should be managed” (p. 349).

To arrive at their conclusion, Driver and Bruns (1999) examined and summarized past research and publications on leisure benefits to individuals and society. They found that recreation is not only beneficial in personal, physical, and psychological aspects, but it is related to social and cultural benefits, economic benefits, and environmental benefits.

If marketing is desirable for public service and if public recreation service agencies want to become more marketing-oriented for diverse populations, agencies must communicate the benefits of recreation in their program delivery. The value of parks and recreation must be made clear by defining how it fits into the concept of a balanced community (Abele, 1995). Moreover, Wigginton (1995) believed that the impact of a structured recreational program has more potential to change an individual’s behavior in a positive direction than any jail or criminal institution. Recently, professional parks and recreation organizations attempted to educate and promote the importance of parks and recreation benefits to their members and recreation professionals in general. For instance, the NRPA developed national campaigns to publicize the social and personal

benefits of recreation participation. The California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS) also developed two projects, one called “leveraging the benefits of parks and recreation” in 1995 and another called “benchmark marketing” in 2000.

Social Marketing in Parks and Recreation

In studying social marketing as a concept to be applied to recreation and parks organizations, several key functions have been discovered. Bright (2000) was the first to integrate the concepts of social marketing with achieving the missions of parks and recreation agencies. Chief among the three roles he identified is use of the particular benefits as a resource to guide service development. Specifically, Bright (p. 14) emphasized that “the bottom line of social marketing should be focused on behavior change.” Leisure and recreation benefits should be identified and incorporated into parks and recreation service delivery to influence positive behavior.

In addition, program or service-market segmentation must communicate clearly the inclusive nature of the benefits to be experienced. Although the purpose of marketing is to influence behavior, there is little reason to believe that “certain” groups of people ought to be inadvertently or intentionally excluded from any program they might see themselves as desiring or being qualified to attend. In other words, segmenting a community into markets for certain programs should emphasize the personal and social benefits to be experienced rather than negate certain categories of people who might otherwise wish to be included. This suggests that a swim program can be beneficial when stratified (segmented) in one or more ways into ability groups; age groups; coed and single-sex groups; inclusive and special needs groups; and adult, family, and children

open swim. This allows everyone to be included and receive special services if desired. In addition, market segmentation can aid planners in responding to market groups need for the development of programs, budget allocation, and information provision enhancing agency inclusion goals.

A final point made by Bright is that social marketing strategies should be customer-oriented, meaning they must focus on the values and needs of the participants. Thus, in addition to program innovation to meet local market needs and values, other aspects of marketing concepts should reflect the targeted customers. These aspects include place (where and when), price (how much and what special supplies, equipment, or clothing is needed), and promotion (by what means and languages, how long and how often do communications appear).

Overall, a case can be made for the benefits associated with adopting a social marketing approach to planning and promoting parks and recreation services and program. To illustrate, the NRPA has joined with the Center for Disease Control to assist leisure service providers in specifying benefits of physical activity to different segments of the public. The Illinois Association of Parks District has used social marketing to design a public education program to influence attitudes about the importance of preserving open space (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998). Thus, the social marketing approach can address philosophical concerns for public parks and recreation professionals. It also provides ways of improving marketing efforts because of better use of information.

Marketing Communication

Theoretically, the consumer buying process is complex, and consuming decisions involve being aware of needs, information processing, evaluation processing, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Schoell & Gultinan, 1992). Various communication channels are used to assist the buying process. Decades ago, advertising for information and sales purposes started with the use of sides of barns, walls, handbills, sideshows, news, and short film features. As technology developed, marketing communication on brochures, radio and television advertisements, and promotional feature programs were introduced. More recently, consumer research, mass mailing, and the Internet have become popular media to achieve the consumer buying process.

In social service industries, communication channels are used to bring the attention to agency's services and to influence positive behavior by the intended audience (Kotler & Andreasen, 1987). To a certain extent, media campaigns may serve to increase awareness about the message being communicated (Slater, 1992). Basically, with formative research, social marketing involves targeting specific communications and programs to specific audiences (Winett, 1992).

Marketing on the WWW

With rapid development of the Internet in the last decade, the Internet has been a favorable theme for numerous studies and reports. Many studies have shown the positive impact of the Internet on industrial organizations (Metha & Sivadas, 1995; Stump & Sriram, 1997; Thompson & Kaul, 1995). Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) initiated an empirical study regarding the marketing activities influenced by use of the Internet. The

study obtained 134 company responses from surveys through email. Their findings showed that the Internet assists companies in putting marketing communication into practice and allows sales departments to have interactive communication with their customers.

Focusing on advertising, researchers have compared the effectiveness of Web sites with traditional media. Leong, Huang, and Stanners (1998) used correspondence analysis and cluster-analysis techniques to examine how web managers perceived the Web site in relation to eight traditional media. Their findings showed that the web managers considered the Web site to be similar to direct mail in the ability to convey information and details. The Web site is cost-effective over the long term compared to all other media. Unlike television's ability to stimulate emotions, a Web site is perceived as a rational medium in communicating detailed information to its audience. Web sites also are considered effective for both short-term and long-term promotional objectives. In short-term promotion objectives, the Web site is not as effective as point-of-purchase or telemarketing, but it is more effective than other traditional media like television, magazines, or the newspapers. For long-term promotional objectives, managers perceived the Web site to be effective for creating brand awareness and communicating corporate image.

With the fast development of the Internet technology, organizations of all sizes rush to establish Web sites to conduct business and to foster positive public relationships. Some organizations developed a Web site simply in fear of being left out of the communications revolution or being placed at a competitive disadvantage, so many Web

sites are developed with little planning or research (White & Raman, 1999). Because Web sites have increased in importance, various authors have proffered recommendations on creating effective Web sites (Falk, 2000; Middleberg, 1996; Solberg, 1995). To sum up their recommendations, an effective Web site should meet seven criteria: up-to-date of ongoing services, ease of use, workable links, clarity of purpose, emphasis on content, interactive capabilities, and availability of contact information.

Hallahan's (2001) research on developing an effective Web site suggested that two criteria are paramount in Web sites: content and design simplicity. He suggested, therefore, that content is the driving force behind acceptance of Web sites. The researcher recommended that organizations rethink their Web site strategies to invest in content rather than in complicated and costly advanced designs or navigation components. Korganonkar and Wolin (1999) studied why people were attracted to a commercial site. They found that obtaining information is one of the major reasons. On the other hand, regardless of how interesting or relevant a Web site's content might be, accessibility and ease of use are also important to the users.

Social Marketing on the WWW

Commercial organizations use the Internet as a tool for business and marketing. In recent years, the Internet has also been used by public or nonprofit agencies as a low-overhead marketing tool to reach clients and for public relations. In addition, researchers have begun to investigate opportunities on marketing public and nonprofit services in the Internet such as the social marketing concept of commercial corporations, fund raising, campaigning, and advocating a group's influence.

Social marketing concept for commercial corporations. Commercial branding strategies use the social marketing concept to create what is called brand-building by linking the brand with a well-known charity as a sponsor of public or nonprofit programs and addressing social responsibilities as part of the company's mission or philosophy. Meill (2000) stated that Web sites can provide links between commercial and non-profit entities and be an effective channel for communicating social sponsorships to the public. Commercial corporations also use the Internet to promote social responsibility in their business practice. A study by Esrock and Leichty (1998) revealed that 82% of the Fortune 500 company Web sites addressed at least one corporate social responsibility issue.

Campaigns. According to Riedman (1998), public and nonprofit organizations spent 5.2 million dollars for Online Advertising Council Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaigns in 1997. Riedman interviewed the global online marketing company director and the Advertising Council Vice-president and concluded that Web sites allowed for delivery of more content than a half-page print advertisement and a television commercial. Moreover, Web sites allowed traditional media companies and agencies to preview and download the public or nonprofit agencies' print and television campaigns.

Fund raising. Siddiqi (2001) studied nonprofit organization use of the Internet as part of their communications mix and how they integrated online strategies for fundraising. Multiple case studies were conducted in this research by conducting interviews of four upper management employees in four non-profit organizations. The results showed that the most popular tool for fundraising via the Internet was email to

communicate with donors, perhaps because it was direct, electronically replicable and filed, rapid, and reduced postage and paper costs.

Advocacy groups. With two case studies, Coombs (1998) illustrated the stakeholder theory to explain that the Internet, when used effectively, allowed activist groups to become more powerful and to command the attention of an organization. The Internet's unique multi-dimension communication features (email, usenet, chat-room, and discussion board) allow activist groups to network with other stakeholders. Coombs learned that the Internet helped to organize stakeholder networks and, thus, serves as a powerful tool to challenge irresponsible behaviors by organizations.

A variety of communication processes are available on the Web (email, chat-rooms, viewing sites, and interactive sites), and business has developed skills for using these processes to its advantage. The WWW has evolved into a powerful and low-cost marketing tool for organizations that serves mass markets which can be highly specialized, individualized, or very broadly. The WWW also provides an efficient and affordable communication channel for the public or nonprofit agencies marketing their services.

Public Parks and Recreation Marketing on the WWW

The rapid development of the Internet and broadband cabling offer a broad range from alternative entertainment to online business. The variety of multimedia entertainment choices and the Internet create a great impact on leisure consumption behavior (Veal, 1999). Using the Internet can be considered as passive as watching television because "it offers so little opportunity for reflection and contemplation"

(Rybczynski, 1991, p. 193). From an optimistic perspective, Veal (1999) mentioned that human beings are social animals and seek to do things together so most people will not actually spend most of their free time looking at the computer monitors. In essence, the Internet is not used solely for entertainment or business, but its greatest impact is in the role of an "information highway." This reinforces the prospect that the Internet can serve as an important information dissemination and collection vehicle to aid marketing objectives.

According to Homff and Glaser (1997), the Internet can also be a massive and accessible medium for leisure and leisure education. In regard to the therapeutic recreation, computer-assisted leisure education improves clients' leisure status because the Internet is available to, accepted by, and effective for a large number of participants at a low cost. Mainville (1998) developed a pilot study using leisure education on the Internet for the prevention of alcohol abuse. The pretest-posttest randomized-groups design was used to test changes in knowledge of the benefits of leisure and in expectations of alcohol consumption. The social validation survey results demonstrated that use of the Internet was accepted by participants and that delivery of leisure services on the Internet is possible.

In the field of public parks and recreation management, a study by Jackson (1999) showed that 30% of the Great Lakes Region of NRPA agencies did not have Web pages created for their programs. At the same time, 81% of parks and recreation directors responding to this survey also felt that they should maintain WWW pages to improve their marketing, disseminate information, increase exposure, and increase customer

services. In addition, the most common activities of agency WWW users were email, researching publicity materials, program information, and on-line registration.

It cannot be denied that there is a need to establish WWW pages for future public parks and recreation programming, especially in terms of social marketing. It can be a medium for publishing an organization's vision, goal, and program and as a communication tool between the agency and its clientele. Moreover, professionals in leisure and recreation can also obtain information about Web site visitor interests or attempt to change opinions through organization of Web sites.

Summary

The main focus of social marketing is to foster rewarding change of behavior which is suggested by *reasoned action* theory. Basically, social marketing employs commercial marketing strategies which involve specific communication practices to reach target audiences for their own benefits. Since 1990, the WWW has evolved into a powerful and low-cost marketing tool for commercial organizations to reach mass markets. Research suggests that public and nonprofit agencies can also market their socially beneficial programs through the Internet medium. Public parks and recreation agencies have been pressured by reduced public funding, thus the WWW seems ready to provide an opportunity for promoting agency services and the beneficial values of recreation and leisure while reaching constituents more broadly and supplying more information in the process.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine public parks and recreation agency Web sites for the purpose of describing the use of social marketing. This chapter discusses the method used in this study, including research design, sample, and method .

Research Design

The theoretical basis of social marketing is the theory of *reasoned action* which assumes human behavior will be led by one's salient beliefs of positive outcomes. To achieve the social marketing goal in public parks and recreation services, the benefits of engaging in recreation should be associated as rewarding personal and social outcomes and incorporated in service delivery planning to influence positive choice decisions (Bright, 2000). Included in planning is the advertising created to attract people to socially and personally beneficial recreation. Increasingly, public parks and recreation agencies have developed Web pages on the Internet for advertising their services. Thus, this study examined the content of public parks and recreation agency Web pages to see if the benefits of recreation participation are communicated to their audiences.

Sample

The sample for this study was chosen from the California Parks and Recreation (CPRS) Directory and Resources Guide (2001, pp. 39-71). The directory listed 515 California public parks and recreation agencies in alphabetical order and provided information about population and budget. Of the 515 agencies, 42% (N=216) had established Web sites.

According to the recommendation from Krejcie and Morgan's study (as cited in Patten, 2002, p. 137), to achieve reliability, a sample size of 138 is needed with a population of 216.

Sampling Procedure

The researcher drew a systematic sample of 138 agencies with Web sites from the CPRS directory. Systematic sampling requires a random start followed by calculation of the sampling interval before selecting the sample (Babbie, 2001). In this study, the sampling interval between population size and sample size is 1.6, so 138 case were chosen with every second element (1.6 was rounded up to 2) after a random start of 4, using a random numbers table (Beyer, 1968, cited in Babbie, 2001, p. A33). In a case where a Web site was not listed or the URL address was not correct, the Google.com search engine was used to locate the Web site.

The budget range among the 138 agencies varied from \$18,588 to \$554,000,000 with a mean of \$13,000,000. This dramatic difference in fiscal resources was deemed a possible factor influencing key components of this study, namely access to state-of-the-art technology and technology expertise. Since the budget values were strongly skewed toward higher budgets, which tend to pull the mean toward the higher budget values, the median was used to signify the mid-point of all agency budgets. The median of \$3,525,456 separated the upper 50% and lower 50% of the sample. For the purpose of this study, small-budget agencies were defined as those with budgets less than \$3,525,456 (n=69), and the large-budget agencies were the agencies with budgets of \$3,525,456 or more (n=69).

Method

To conduct a descriptive study of Web sites, quantitative content analysis techniques were employed to account for Web site contents and their relationship to social marketing. Since no other research has been reported on this concept in the field of parks and recreation, the goal of this exploratory study was descriptive.

Instrumentation

The research method was based on an idea from research by Esrock and Leichty (1998) who studied social responsibility and corporate Web pages as self-presentation or agenda-setting. They randomly sampled 100 company Web sites from a sampling frame of Fortune 500 companies. Each Web site was coded for the presence or absence of messages relating to 13 social responsibility content areas.

The social marketing coding instrument developed for this study used Esrock and Leichty's coding system but with content based on the summary of all past research about recreation benefits by Driver and Bruns' (1999). Five categories with sub-lists of recreation benefits were indicated: economic, environmental, physiological, psychological, and social. Some supplementary items were also drawn from other research by Schreyer and Driver (1989), Appendix A. The coding scheme was developed to account for the presence of each benefit characteristic, Appendix B. Contents of each Web site page were analyzed and observations recorded to see if they addressed leisure and recreation benefits in the home page, program introduction, or press releases.

Validity. In essence, validity expresses the degree to which an instrument measures what it intends to measure. Lacking validity, findings associated with a study

would be untrustworthy (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989). In relation to the present study, validity was approached in respect to construct, content, and external means for ensuring, to as high a degree as possible, that the instrument used did measure the concepts intended and produced findings that could be trusted.

Construct validity. On the face of it, the list of benefits seems to incorporate characteristics which, while not directly observable, are assumed to be linked to their subsuming category heading. For example, economic benefits subsume characteristics such as decreased job turnover, economic development, economic growth, financial return, and others, and physical benefits subsume characteristics such as better connective tissue, cardiovascular benefits, cure, decreased obesity, and others. Benefits-based research and marketing can be linked to the theory of *reasoned action* (Fishbein, 1980), strengthening the assertion of construct validity.

Content validity. In content analysis research, it is important to justify “how much a measure covers the range of meanings included within a concept” (Babbie, 2001, p. 144). In this study, content validity was verified by following the suggestion of Bright (2000) to adopt the validated list of concepts termed the recreation benefits developed by Driver and Bruns (1999). This widely accepted list 182 elements cover five main categories with sub-categories expressing the scope of benefits that NRPA advocated agencies communicate to the participants or communities-at-large.

External validity. Generalizability of findings is important if research is to contribute to a discipline’s knowledge-base (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989). In this case, two steps were taken so sample results can represent adequately the population of

public parks and recreation agencies in regard to use of social marketing. The population from which the sample was drawn was limited first to a systematic random sample of California agencies with membership in the state organization and second to all those agencies which indicated Web addresses or Internet information. In addition, all data were collected directly from the Web sites so agency personnel did not interact directly with the researcher in any way. Thus, it can be assumed that the findings ought to reflect at least the marketing strategies of California public parks and recreation organizations which are members of their organization and also use the internet as a resource.

Reliability

According to Babbie (2001, p. 140), “reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, yields the same result each time.” The reliability of this study was ensured by systematically following the established assessment procedure and using a computer content analysis program. First, the researcher amended the study by Esrock and Leichty (1998) on content analysis of social responsibility among corporate Web sites. They coded the presence of 13 social responsibility concepts and evaluated the reliability of their tool by analyzing inter-coder reliability. In this study, however, this process would have been time-consuming and expensive, requiring employment of two or more coders to code the content of 138 Web sites.

Coder reliability is a serious issue in content analysis done by hand, especially where scoring schemes are complex. According to McTavish (2001), computer content analysis “can handle coder-reliability issues and provides a more sensitive and systematic

scoring of textual data” (p. 113). The *Diction* program was developed by Hart in 1983 and now is in its fifth edition. *Diction* is a dictionary-based program that uses a relatively large number of concept categories in social science, and it is one of the most popular computer content analysis program in the market (Neuendorf, 2002). Thus, this study employed the *Diction* computer content analysis program to code the exact words and frequencies of the five categories (182 characteristics) of recreation benefits appearing in the Web pages sampled.

Data Collection

From Hart’s *Diction 5.0* computer content analysis, a set of words, phrases, parts of speech, or other word-based indicators can be assessed in its pre-written standard dictionaries. However, these handy dictionaries had nothing to do with the variables the researcher hoped to measure. For that reason, only the most basic quantitative output of word counting as frequencies was considered. The contents of 138 Web sites were copied, converted to text files and stored in the *Diction* program. Subsequently, the recreation benefits characteristics were entered to a custom file in the *Diction* program. After that process, the computer program automatically counted the contents of each Web site for frequency of benefit characteristics. Thus, for each sub-category different frequencies could occur, resulting in a range of summed values for each category. A final output report showed the frequency of benefits characteristics. Referring to the coding scheme, Appendix B, the researcher recorded the results in accordance with each benefit category in order to create a summary report, (see sample in Appendix C). The

report showed the presence and frequency of the benefits characteristics and also the aggregated frequencies for each of the five benefit categories.

Data Analysis

Based on the *Diction* content analysis output, the summary report provided benefits data prepared for data analysis. Scores of each social marketing category were calculated by summing the number of appearances of sub-category terms. The *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS), version 10, was used to analyze data.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to show the results in percentages for each coding category for each agency. The statistics answered the research questions on whether social marketing messages were observable, and, if yes, what benefit messages were explicated in public parks and recreation Web pages. The researcher also employed Pearson correlations to identify if there were relationships among the five categories of benefits characteristics. Finally, an independent t-Test was used to examine the difference between small-budget and large-budget agencies in regard to social marketing messages in their Web pages.

Delimitations

This study was intended to produce findings related to Web site messages providing recreation information for the public. The sample was limited to Web sites listed in the CPRS 2001 Directory and Resources Guide. If a Web site was subordinated under the state/county/municipal government Web sites, only the parks and recreation pages were examined. Each content page from the parks and recreation Web site was examined, including the home page, program introduction pages, and press releases.

Information and messages, such as agency brochure and newsletter or related links to other Web sites were not counted if they had to be downloaded to see the contents.

Limitations

Since there is very little past research related to using Internet marketing in public parks and recreation services, this was an exploratory study to learn more about use of the Internet as a social marketing tool for public parks and recreation agencies. Since the word or phrase search was limited to the exact words on the coding instrument to ensure reliability, it was possible to miss some of the indirect messages or underlying meanings that might have conveyed social or personal benefits using different descriptors.

Summary

This exploratory study examined public parks and recreation Web sites and described social marketing applications. From the CPRS directory, 138 public agencies with Web sites were chosen. The *Diction* computer content analysis was used to tally social marketing messages from the Web sites. After calculating the median budget for the sampled agencies, 69 agencies with budget less than \$3,525,456 were grouped as small-budget agencies, and, the other 69 agencies were grouped as large-budget agencies. In the final procedure, the SPSS was used to analyze descriptive statistics to see if public parks and recreation agencies communicated the benefits of recreation through the Internet. Furthermore, a t-test was employed to examine if there was difference between the small-budget agencies and large-budget agencies regarding the number of social marketing messages on their Web sites.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This exploratory study was intended to produce findings related to recreation benefits on CPRS agency Web sites. According to the investigation of 138 Web sites, 129 Web sites (93.4% of the sample) had one or more social marketing messages in their Web pages. Web sites described benefits in terms of social benefits (81.88%), psychological benefits (81.88%), environmental benefits (47.10%), physical benefits (42.75%), and or economic benefits (23.91%), Table 1. Clearly, agencies deem social and psychological benefits most likely to result from engaging in the recreation opportunities they provide.

Table 1

Number of CPRS Agencies Using Social Marketing Categories

Social Marketing Categories ^a	Number	%
Social benefits	113	81.88
Psychological benefits	113	81.88
Environmental benefits	65	47.10
Physical benefits	59	42.75
Economic benefits	33	23.91

^an = 138 for each category

Results of the benefit analysis revealed both striking similarities and differences. Within the social benefit category, play led he promised rewards with fun, Table 2,

closely following as the psychological outcome in popular usage, Table 3. Although other benefits were expressed by many agencies, only learning, also in the psychological category, and nature in the environmental category, Table 4, can be cited as having a notable presence in the Web sites. Fully arrayed in their respective categories (Table 2-6), the variety of personal and social benefits can be better imagined.

Overall, reference to social benefits ranged in use from about 80% of the Web sites to a little less than 1% of the sites, Table 2. Following play, there is a cluster of 4 benefits that relate to socially interactive opportunities fostered in group experience (communication, cooperation, involvement, socialization). Somewhat less frequently cited are attributes that might express the social situation created by recreation engagement (harmony, meet new people, community involvement). Appearing far less were the benefits of conflict resolution, sensitivity, and cultural awareness, suggesting the relative absence of conflict and differences among people in the recreation setting.

Table 2

Number of Agencies Using Benefit Characteristics from Social Benefit Category

(n = 138)

Characteristics	Number	%
Play	111	80.4
Communication	23	16.7
Cooperation	22	15.9
Involvement	21	15.2
Socialization	18	13.0
Harmony	10	7.2
Meet new people	9	6.5
Community Involvement	6	4.3
Conflict Resolution	3	2.2
Sensitivity	3	2.2
Cultural Awareness	1	0.7

Several psychological benefit characteristics were frequently used in agency Web sites. More than 25% of the agencies used the descriptors of psychological benefits: *fun*, *learning*, *flow*, *adventure*, and *challenge*, Table 3. It seemed recreation professionals most accustomed *fun* in the psychological benefit category. Less cited benefit of *learning* also oftenly considered as an important outcome or objective for participation in recreation. Descriptions on *flow*, *adventure*, and *challenge* were formed as a cluster in

around 25% to 30% of agency Web sites corresponded to personal rewards in the category. A complete listing of findings for all 32 elements appears in Appendix D.

Table 3

Number of Agencies Using Benefit Characteristics from Psychological Benefit

Category (n = 138)

Characteristics	Number	%
Fun	104	75.4
Learning	55	39.9
Flow	43	31.2
Adventure	38	27.5
Challenge	36	26.1
Quality of Life	26	18.8
Creativity	23	16.7
Leadership	23	16.7
Happy	21	15.2
Sharing	19	13.8
Independent	19	13.8
Excitement	18	13.0
Exploration	18	13.0

The descriptor of *nature* was coded as the highest score in the environmental category. It provides a sense of appreciating one's place in the natural order. Appearing far less after *nature*, the benefits of *conservation*, *preservation*, and *conservancy* were coded (only around 7% -9%). They are knowledge-based skills that can be learned and allow people to act ethically in the environment. From the observation of ethic-based environmental benefits (*steward*, *husbandry*, *environmental ethic*), only few were coded in agency Web sites.

Table 4

Number of Agencies Using Benefit Characteristics from Environmental Benefit Category (n = 138)

Characteristics	Number	%
Nature	55	39.9
Conservation	13	9.4
Preservation	13	9.4
Conservancy	10	7.2
Natural environment	4	2.9
Scenery	4	2.9
Steward	3	2.2
Husbandry	1	0.7
Environmental ethic	1	0.7

The characteristics from the physical and economic benefits appeared less frequent in the agency Web sites. All the characteristics in these two categories coded less than 20% in agency Web sites, Table 5 and Table 6. The reason behind that, may due to the descriptors coded were very subjective as people feel gains in these areas (*cure, prevention, therapeutic, physical fit, relaxation, well-being, healing*).

Table 5

Number of Agencies Using Benefit Characteristics from Physical Benefit Category

(n = 138)

Characteristics	Number	%
Cure	23	16.7
Prevention	16	11.6
Therapeutic	14	10.1
Physical Fit	13	9.4
Relaxation	13	9.4
Well being	9	6.5
Healing	7	5.1
Physical health	2	1.4
Weight control	1	0.7

Clearly, economic benefits are not an emphasis in terms of advertising or objectives people would seek to accomplish through recreation. This is interesting because there is a sense among professional' that recreation not given credit for its important role in keeping people and communities socially and psychologically healthy which would benefit the economic sector.

Table 6

Number of Agencies Using Benefit Characteristics from Economic Benefit Category
(n = 138)

Characteristics	Number	%
Income	24	17.4
Economic Development	13	9.4
Productivity	2	1.4

The researcher observed that agencies scoring high in one recreation benefit category also had relatively high scores in the other four categories. Therefore, Pearson correlations were calculated, using aggregated frequencies of characteristics within benefit categories. The finding revealed all 10 relationships significant, Table 7. Since all correlations were positive, the nature of the relations among the five categories is positive, that is, the promotion of one benefit category is not likely to be in conflict with any other benefit categories. This also supports the idea that, if an organization promotes one benefit category as an outcome of recreation participation, it is likely to promote several categories of benefits.

Table 7

Correlation Among Recreation Benefits in the CPRS Agency Web Sites^a

	Psychological	Environmental	Physical	Economic
Social	.823**	.395**	.775**	.218**
Psychological		.451**	.653**	.328**
Environmental			.344**	.190*
Physical				.275**

^a n = 138 Web sites

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

This study also investigated whether budget size had associated effects apparent in Web site messages. Results showed that the mean scores of recreation benefit messages in large budget agencies were higher than the small-budget agencies, Table 8. Due to the observed differences between small-budget and large-budget agencies, an independent t-test for examining the differences between means was conducted. However, the result showed that there was no significant difference in all five areas of recreation benefits, comparing agencies grouped by budget size, Table 9.

Table 8

Mean Scores for Frequency of Recreation Benefits in Small-budget and Large-budget Agencies

	Small-budget agencies (n = 69)		Large-budget agencies (n = 69)	
	$\bar{X}_1$	SD	$\bar{X}_2$	SD
Social	13.35	21.02	18.75	34.53
Psychological	17.87	25.56	24.83	38.62
Environmental	1.59	3.89	3.68	7.95
Physical	1.86	7.22	2.62	9.7
Economic	.75	1.95	1.52	5.20

Table 9

The t-Test for Comparing Recreation Benefits by Agency Budget Size

	t	Level of significance
Social	-1.111	.269
Psychological	-1.248	.214
Environmental	-1.958	.052
Physical	-.528	.599
Economic	-1.148	.253

It was interesting to observe the particular benefits characterizing of Web pages, and an effort was made to compare organizations based on budget size to observe if patterns were similar, Table 10. With comparison of the most frequently used recreation benefits, the results appeared quite similar. Small-budget and large-budget agencies were similar in terms of the most frequently cited characteristics, specifically *nature*, *cure*, *fun*, and *play*. Only the economic benefits registered a slight difference. The small-budget agencies had more descriptions related to *economic development*; whereas, the large-budget agencies referred to *income* more often.

Table 10

Most Frequently Used Recreation Benefits Descriptions in Small-budget and Large-budget Agencies.

	Small-budget agencies (n = 69)		Large-budget agencies (n = 69)	
	Description	%	Description	%
Social				
	Play	75.36	Play	85.51
	Cooperation	21.74	Communication	15.94
	Involvement	18.84	Involvement	11.59
Psychological				
	Fun	69.57	Fun	81.59
	Learning	39.13	Learning	40.58
	Flow	27.54	Flow	34.78

Table 10 (Continued)

Most Frequently Used Recreation Benefits Descriptions in Small-budget and Large-budget Agencies.

Small-budget agencies		Large-budget agencies	
(n = 69)		(n = 69)	
Description	%	Description	%
Environmental			
Nature	34.78	Nature	44.93
Conservancy	11.59	Conservation	15.94
Preservation	5.80	Preservation	13.04
Physical			
Cure	18.84	Cure	14.49
Prevention	10.14	Therapeutic	14.49
Physical Fit	10.14	Prevention	13.04
Economic			
Economic development	14.49	Income	24.64
Income	10.14	Economic development	4.35
Productivity	1.45	Productivity	1.45

Summary

The results showed that more than 93% of the CPRS agencies had one or more social marketing messages in their Web sites. The social and psychological areas of recreation benefits were the most popular social marketing message among all Web sites. The descriptors of play, fun, learning, nature, and flow were the most frequently termed recreation benefits in agencies Web sites. In addition, the Pearson correlation showed the characteristics with benefits categories were positive correlated to each other. With comparison of small-budget agencies and large-budget agencies, the study results revealed no significant difference between an agency's budget size and use of Web site social marketing messages. Furthermore, the most frequently used social marketing messages in small-budget agencies were quite similar to those of large-budget agencies.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study investigated whether public parks and recreation agencies had social marketing messages in their Web sites. The results showed that most Web pages from the CPRS agencies had one or more messages related to recreation benefits (93.4% of agencies), and the social and psychological benefits (81.9% of agencies) were the most frequently used messages explicated in public parks and recreation Web sites. The description of recreation benefits appearing most in the agency Web sites were *play*, *fun*, *learning*, *nature*, and *flow*. However, beyond the results of this study, we should note that, within 515 CPRS agencies, only 42% of the agencies had Web sites developed in 2001. For this reason, we can state that there is still room for more public parks and recreation agencies to consider using the WWW, and, as late-comers to use of this established trend (Jackson, 1999), these agencies are likely to follow the patterns of social marketing established by early adopting agencies.

The psychological and social benefits description appeared most often in public parks and recreation Web site contents among all five benefits areas. Particularly, *play* and *fun* were cited on agency Web sites. This is evidence, perhaps, that in the minds of recreation professionals, the general public identifies *play* and *fun* as the most recognized benefits of recreation programs. The benefits of *learning*, *nature*, and *flow* were also highly promoted on agencies Web pages. Taken together, these messages suggest that currently there are very limited ways used to express the values and rewards of participation. Moreover, recreation professionals also may support development of

environmental awareness through recreation, as about 40% of the agencies mention *nature* through Web site contents. However, the scope of environmental benefits appears rather poorly tapped. It is unclear whether these findings indicate a weakness in ability to express recreation opportunities more vividly or evidence of different program opportunities for the public.

Surprisingly, the results showed that the five categories of recreation benefits from the agency Web sites were significantly and positively correlated with each other. From these results, we can say that once the agency Web site had a social marketing message in one recreation benefit area, they were also likely to use descriptors in other areas. Thus, attributing one benefit to recreation experience is likely to mean that more if not all benefits will be promoted, implying that the full scope of the NRPA “benefits are endless” campaign may be adopted once it is implemented in Web site advertising.

With respect to the research question relating budget size with the social marketing messages, the researcher discovered that the budget size of agencies did not have any relationship with the number of social marketing messages in the Web sites. This result suggests that social marketing messages on the Web pages were not restricted by agency budget size.

An important theory of this study is that *reasoned action* suggests human behavior will be led by one’s salient beliefs of positive outcome (Fishbein, 1980). The theory suggests that public parks and recreation services incorporate recreation benefits in their marketing strategies because of the beliefs of professional decision-makers. Traditionally, public parks and recreation agencies were restricted by budgets in regard to

advertise programs and services. The newly developed Internet medium may provide a less costly and faster communication channel to the public. According to Riedman (1998), WWW allowed for delivery of more content than a half-page print advertisement and television commercials. A study by Jackson (1999) showed that 81% of parks and recreation directors surveyed also felt they should maintain Web pages to improve their marketing strategies. Once a Web site is developed, the content areas are not restricted by an agency's budget compared to other traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines; however, the initial time to be invested may be costly by comparison. Lacking research to verify this idea, we can only conjecture at which point(s). Costs may equalize or surpass each other in comparing various advertising media.

Although one can incur more expenses in employing special features, graphics, and animation on a Web site, the content is still the major force for attracting an audience. A study by Hallahan (2001) suggested an effective Web site should focus on content and design simplicity. Other complicated and costly advanced designs may not really be accessible to the audience due to the need for technology to view or download site contents. Thus, public parks and recreation agencies should focus on their Web site contents rather than on costly designs.

The results of this study showed that there is no significant difference between agency budget size and the number and type of social marketing messages on their Web sites. Moreover, small-budget and large-budget size agencies had similar emphasis on the recreation benefits descriptions since the most frequently cited recreation benefits

were quite similar. This finding suggests public parks and recreation agencies, especially the small-budget agencies, can use WWW to market recreation benefits and their programs. Indeed, use of an Internet Web site may serve as a equalizer between agencies with major resource differences.

The present study had some limitations. First, the descriptive findings are time-bound because Web sites keep on changing every day. The data may vary as time passes. Second, the coding system of recreation benefits served as a limiting factor because it did not assess the overall quality of Web site content. Since the findings were based on exact words in the coding scheme, it may understate the degree of variation in the contents of the Web pages addressing recreation benefits.

An important practical implication of this study is to encourage public parks and recreation agencies to communicate recreation and leisure benefits to the public through the Internet medium and, as a communication channel for marketing public parks and recreation services, this channel appears to cross fiscal boundaries separating agencies. The findings of this study suggest that additional public parks and recreation agencies be encouraged to use the Internet as an advertising medium for the benefits of recreation. Apparently, size of agency budget is not a constraint that should prevent adoption of this approach.

Suggestions for Future Studies

As technologies advanced, Web site development became more popular and easier to use. More public parks and recreation agencies are likely to have their Web sites published in the Internet to serve as a marketing tool in the future. A follow-up

study is recommended after a few years for comparison to see if there is any difference of recreation benefits emphasis on agency Web sites.

Future research is also recommended to focus on the effectiveness of using the Internet as a communication and advertising channel for public parks and recreation agencies. Since there is no way to know the degree to which these messages saturate their markets, such as whether people take time to use the Internet or if they rely on other sources of information. Moreover it is also beneficial to know if people in their market segment have the Internet access and savvy.

Furthermore, the findings of this research reflect professional ideas about what is or should be important of addressing recreation benefits. Further studies should also focus on whether the recreation benefits content is influencing decisions to participate in recreation programs and services. Either quantitative questionnaire surveys or small group qualitative interview research can be done to achieve those goals.

Since most recreation professionals may not be directly involved in developing an agency Web site, it is also worthwhile to investigate the constraints and important information necessary for recreation professionals to be involved in developing Web pages. As an alternative, there is also no way of knowing, however, whether the sources of technical expertise needed to design Web pages differs, for example paid consultants, self-educated staff, or volunteers to name a few possibilities. In addition, there was no attempt in this study to evaluate technical design quality of the Web sites surveyed. Although differences were noted, these were not taken into consideration since this was

not germane to the purpose of this study. Those areas can also be considered for future studies.

Summary

This study served as an exploratory study to investigate if social marketing messages are explicated in public parks and recreation Web sites. It aimed to encourage the agencies to advertising recreation benefits in their Web site contents. The results were very positive, as most of the agencies surveyed have mentioned one or more recreation benefits in their Web sites. Moreover, the results also suggested that social marketing messages in Web sites were not restricted by an agency's budget. Small-budgeted agencies, especially, are encouraged to promote their program and recreation benefits through the WWW. Future research is recommended and encouraged to focus more on effectiveness of using the Internet medium for social marketing, the effectiveness of the beneficial approach of recreation in Web site content, and to identify the roles of recreation professional involvement in Web site content development.

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Appendix A

List of Recreation Benefits

Categories	Driver & Bruns (1999)	Schreyer & Driver (1989)
Economical Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - decrease job turnover - economic development - economic growth - increased productivity - international balance of payment - less work absenteeism - reduced on-the-job accidents - reduced health cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - financial return - income - productivity - utility function
Environmental Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ecosystem sustainability - environmental ethic - environmental protection - husbandry - improve relationship with natural world - involvement in environmental issue - learn about nature - maintenance of natural environment - maintenance of physical facilities - preservation - specifies diversity - stewardship - understanding natural world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conservancy - conservation - ecosystem appreciation - natural environment - nature - nature experience - scenery
Physical Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - better connective tissue - cardiovascular benefits - decrease obesity - decreased body fat - enhance concentration - improved bladder control - improved diabetes - improved neuropsychological functioning - increased bone muscle - increased life expectancy - management of arthritis - management of menstrual cycle - prevention - reduced cholesterol - reduced consumption of alcohol - reduced incidence diseases - reduced hypertension - reduced spinal problem - reduced use of tobacco - respiratory benefits - strength of children - tension release - weight control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cure - healing - physical health - physical fitness - relaxation - well being - therapeutic

Appendix A (Continued)

List of Recreation Benefits

Categories	Driver & Bruns (1999)	Schreyer & Driver (1989)
Psychological Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - absorption - academic performance - acceptance of one's responsibility - adaptability - adventure - aesthetic - autonomy - balanced competitiveness - balanced living - being control - catharsis - challenge - cognitive efficiency - cognitive performance - creative expression - creativity enhancement - cultural appreciation - cultural awareness - environmental awareness - exhilaration - flow - humility - independence - leadership - life satisfaction - mental health - nature appreciation - nature learning - nostalgia - positive change in emotion - positive change in mood - prevention of anger - prevention of anxiety - prevention of depression - prevention of problem to at-risk youth - problem solving - positive change in mood - quality of life - self actualization - self assurance - self competence - self concept - self confidence - self reliance - self sufficiency - sense of control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - achievement - creativity - empathy - escape - excitement - exploration - freedom - fun - happy - imagery - learning - nature kinship - nurturance - savagery - sharing - skill development

Appendix A (Continued)

List of Recreation Benefits

Categories	Driver & Bruns (1999)	Schreyer & Driver (1989)
Psychological Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sense of wellness - spirituality - spiritual growth - stimulation - stress management - tolerance 	
Social Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - value clarification - cohesion - community integration - community involvement - community satisfaction - community harmony - conflict resolution - cooperation - cultural adoption - cultural appreciation - cultural continuity - enhance world view - ethnic identity - family bonding - harmony - historical understanding - involvement - nurturance of others - political involvement - pride in community - pride in nation - reciprocity - reduced social alienation - social bonding - social identity - social mobility - social support - socialization - support democratic idea - tolerance of others - understanding others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - be with friends - communication - community stability - cultural pride - courtship - diversity - family solidarity - group cohesive - group identification - leading others - making friends - meet new people - moralistic - nationalism - organizational skill - patriotism - play - reduced social alienation - sensitivity - similar values - social validation

Appendix B

Coding Scheme of Recreation Benefits

Agency: _____ File Name: _____

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Subcategory	Frequency
Economical Benefits	- decreased job turnover	_____	- increased productivity	_____
	- economic development	_____	- international balance	_____
	- economic growth	_____	- less work absenteeism	_____
	- financial return	_____	- productivity	_____
	- income	_____	- reduced accidents	_____
			- reduced health cost	_____
		- utility function	_____	
Total :				_____
Environmental Benefits	- conservancy	_____	- involvement in environmental issue	_____
	- conservation	_____	- learn about nature	_____
	- ecosystem appreciation	_____	- maintenance of	_____
	- ecosystem sustainability	_____	- natural environment	_____
	- environmental awareness	_____	- maintenance of physical facilities	_____
	- environmental ethic	_____	- natural environment	_____
	- environmental protection	_____	- nature	_____
	- husbandry	_____	- nature experience	_____
	- improved relationships with natural world	_____	- preservation	_____
			- scenery	_____
			- specifies diversity	_____
		- stewardship	_____	
		- understanding natural world	_____	
Total :				_____

Appendix B (Continued)

Coding Scheme of Recreation Benefits

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Subcategory	Frequency
Physical Benefits	- better connective tissue	_____	- management of arthritis	_____
	- cardiovascular benefits	_____	- management of menstrual cycle	_____
	- cure	_____	- physical health	_____
	- decrease obesity	_____	- physical fitness	_____
	- decreased body fat	_____	- prevention	_____
	- enhance concentration	_____	- reduced cholesterol	_____
	- healing	_____	- reduced consumption of alcohol	_____
	- improved bladder control	_____	- reduced diseases	_____
	- improved diabetes	_____	- reduced hypertension	_____
	- improved immune system	_____	- reduced spinal problem	_____
	- improved neuropsychological functioning	_____	- reduced use of tobacco	_____
	- increase bone muscle	_____	- relaxation	_____
	- Increased life expectancy	_____	- respiratory benefits	_____
			- well being	_____
			- strength of children	_____
			- tension release	_____
			- therapeutic	_____
			- weight control	_____

Total : _____

Appendix B (Continued)

Coding Scheme of Recreation Benefits

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Subcategory	Frequency
Psychological Benefits	- absorption	_____	- mental health	_____
	- academic performance	_____	- nature appreciation	_____
	- acceptance of one's responsibility	_____	- nature kinship	_____
	- achievement	_____	- nature learning	_____
	- adaptability	_____	- nostalgia	_____
	- adventure	_____	- nurturance	_____
	- aesthetic	_____	- positive change in emotion	_____
	- autonomy	_____	- positive change in mood	_____
	- balanced	_____	- positive change in emotion	_____
	- competitiveness	_____	- prevention of anger	_____
	- balanced living	_____	- prevention of anxiety	_____
	- being in control	_____	- prevention of depression	_____
	- catharsis	_____	- prevention of problem to at-risk youth	_____
	- challenge	_____	- problem solving	_____
	- cognitive efficiency	_____	- positive changes in mood	_____
	- cognitive performance	_____	- quality of life	_____
	- creative expression	_____	- savagery	_____
	- creativity	_____	- self actualization	_____
	- creativity enhancement	_____	- self assurance	_____
	- cultural appreciation	_____	- self competence	_____
	- cultural awareness	_____	- self concept	_____
	- diversity	_____	- self confidence	_____
	- empathy	_____	- self reliance	_____
	- environmental awareness	_____	- self sufficiency	_____
	- escape	_____	- sense of control	_____
	- excitement	_____	- sense of wellness	_____
	- exhilaration	_____	- sharing	_____
	- exploration	_____	- skill development	_____
	- flow	_____	- spirituality	_____
	- freedom	_____	- spiritual growth	_____
	- fun	_____	- stimulation	_____
	- happy	_____	- stress management	_____
	- humility	_____	- tolerance	_____
	- imagery	_____	- value clarification	_____
	- independence	_____		
	- leadership	_____		
	- learning	_____		
	- life satisfaction	_____		
			Total :	_____

Appendix B (Continued)

Coding Scheme of Recreation Benefits

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Subcategory	Frequency
Social Benefits	- be with friends	_____	- involvement	_____
	- cohesion	_____	- leading others	_____
	- communication	_____	- making friends	_____
	- community	_____	- meet new people	_____
	- integration	_____	- moralistic	_____
	- community	_____	- nationalism	_____
	- involvement	_____	- nurturance of others	_____
	- community	_____	- tolerance of others	_____
	- satisfaction	_____	- understanding others	_____
	- community stability	_____	- organizational skill	_____
	- community harmony	_____	- patriotism	_____
	- conflict resolution	_____	- play	_____
	- cooperation	_____	- political involvement	_____
	- courtship	_____	- pride in community	_____
	- cultural adoption	_____	- pride in nation	_____
	- cultural appreciation	_____	- reciprocity	_____
	- cultural awareness	_____	- reduced social	_____
	- cultural continuity	_____	- alienation	_____
	- cultural pride	_____	- sensitivity	_____
	- enhance world view	_____	- similar values	_____
	- ethnic identity	_____	- social bonding	_____
	- Family bonding	_____	- social identity	_____
	- family solidarity	_____	- social mobility	_____
	- group cohesiveness	_____	- social support	_____
	- group identification	_____	- social validation	_____
	- harmony	_____	- socialization	_____
	- historical	_____	- support democratic	_____
	- understanding	_____	- idea	_____
Total :				_____

Appendix C

Sample of Coding Summary for Recreation Benefits Data from First 16 Web Sites

Web	Eco	Env	Phy	Psy	Soc	Eco sub-category	Env sub-category	Phy Sub-category	Psy sub-category	Soc Sub-category
1	0	0	0	0	0					
2	0	0	0	0	0					
3	8	0	0	8	0	income[8]			fun[3] learning[1] play[3] quality of life[1]	
4	0	3	0	5	0		nature[3]		flow[1] play[3] quality of life[1]	
5	2	5	0	35	1	economic development[2]	nature[5]		exploration[1] fun[18] play[16]	meet new people[1]
6	0	0	0	0	0					
7	0	0	0	0	0					
8	0	0	0	0	0					
9	0	0	0	0	2					cooperation[1] harmony[1]
10	0	2	0	15	0		nature[2]		challenge[1] fun[5] play[9]	
11	0	0	0	4	0				play[4]	
12	0	0	1	20	0			physical fitness[1]	adventure[6] fun[3] learning[3] play[8]	
13	0	0	3	19	0			therapeutic[3]	adventure[1] freedom[5] play[13]	
14	0	4	0	43	2		conservancy[2] conservation[1] nature[1]		aesthetic[1] challenge[1] flow[27] fun[3] play[10] sharing[1]	communication[2]
15	0	0	1	22	0			prevention [1]	fun[4] leadership[1] learning[2] play[14] sharing[1]	
16	0	0	1	47	0			physical fitness[1]	fun[25] learning[2] play[19] quality of life[1]	

Appendix D

Number of Agencies Using Benefit Characteristics from Psychological Benefit Category (A Complete List)

Characteristics	Number	%
Fun	104	75.4
Learning	55	39.9
Flow	43	31.2
Adventure	38	27.5
Challenge	36	26.1
Quality of life	26	18.8
Creativity	23	16.7
Leadership	23	16.7
Happy	21	15.2
Sharing	19	13.8
Independent	19	13.8
Excitement	18	13.0
Exploration	18	13.0
Diversity	15	10.9
Achievement	11	8.0
Aesthetic	9	6.5
Problem Solving	9	6.5

Appendix D (Continued)

Number of Agencies Using Benefit Characteristics from Psychological Benefit Category (A Complete List)

Content area ^a	Number	%
Escape	7	5.8
Skill development	7	5.8
Freedom	6	5.1
Self confidence	6	5.1
Mental health	6	5.1
Spirituality	4	2.9
Expression	3	2.2
Imagery	3	2.2
Stimulation	3	2.2
Exhilaration	2	1.4
Academic performance	2	1.4
Tolerance	1	0.7
Self sufficient	1	0.7
Environmental awareness	1	0.7
Nostalgia	1	0.7