Psychographic Segmentation of Youth Sport Camps: From the Eyes of the Parents

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According to the National Camp Association (NCA), youth camps are an 11 billion dollar industry. Nearly ten thousand camps are offered in the U.S. alone, with over six million children participating each summer. The youth camp market is becoming a fiercely competitive market attracting children who wish to enhance their skills or learn new ones. A growing trend in youth camps is increasing specialization and concentration on specific skills (Orecklin, 2005). Like other products and services for youth, summer camps are designing more specialized services to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Riding the crest of the wave of specialization in youth camps are sport camps, particularly sport camps affiliated with university athletics departments. With so many camps available, camp administrators find themselves in an increasingly competitive environment. Universities have responded by broadening their camp offerings to include team sport camps focused on providing basic skill, camps designed to provide advanced, specialized skill, and individual sport camps that cater to both the beginner and advanced participant. Yet, rarely do the marketing strategies account for the varied needs and characteristics of campers seeking the different camp experiences. Targeting marketing strategies and tactics to these diverse markets can help camp marketers to survive in this competition intense market. Previous research suggests that beginners and less highly skilled athletes seek different dimensions of experience than those sought after by more elite athletes (Baker, 2003). The purpose of this study is to identify the psychographic differences among parents purchasing different camp experiences for their children.

Participants' parents (N=412) were recruited from a well-known university in the Southwestern United States. Children had participated in one of the 18 camps in 9 sports. Participants fell into one of three camp category types: general skill camp (N=137), advanced skill camp (N=105), and individual sport camp (N=150). Children's age ranged from 6 to 18 years old and parent's mean age was 42.97 years old for fathers and 43.10 years old for mothers. Data were collected via a web-based questionnaire. All variables were measured using six-point likert-type scales. Data were then analyzed through a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to determine whether the six benefit factors, four specific satisfaction factors, general satisfaction, parents' involvement in their child's sport, and brand perception significantly differed by the types of sport camp (general, advanced, and individual camp). The MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect, F(20, 391)=2.99, p<.001. Tukey's HSD post hoc analysis was further used to identify the difference among the types of sport camp. Univariate analyses of the benefit factors revealed that camp types differed significantly in terms of the degree to which parents sought "status," F(2,412) =4.50, p<.05, and "advancement," F(2, 412) =12.07, p<.001 for their child through camp participation. Tukey's HSD shows that parents choosing advanced camps (M=3.017) were significantly more motivated by status than were parents of children in individual camps (M=2.63). Parents of advanced skill camp participants (M=3.98) were significantly more likely than parents of either individual (M=3.41) or general skills (M=3.16) camp participants to choose the camp on the basis of the "Advancement" motive.

Univariate analyses revealed that camp types differed significantly on parents' satisfaction with their child's "sport experiences", F(2, 412)=5.54, p<.01, and their child's "interaction with staff", F(2, 412)=5.23, p<.01. Tukey's HSD found that parents choosing individual camps (M=5.14) were significantly more satisfied with their child's "sport experience" than were parents choosing advanced skills camps (M=4.71). Parents of individual camp participants (M=4.99) were significantly more satisfied with their child's "interaction with staff" than were parents of advanced skill camp participants (M=4.615).

"Parent involvement", F(2, 412)=6.17, p<.01, "general satisfaction" F(2, 412)=6.26, p<.01, and "brand perceptions" F(2, 412)=4.97, p<.01, showed differences among camp types using Tukey's HSD. Parents of advanced skills camp participants (M=5.16) were more "involved" in the sport their child participated in than were parents of general skills camp participants (M=4.78). In "general satisfaction", parents of individual camp participants (M=5.04) were significantly more satisfied with the overall camp than were parents of advanced skills camp participants. And finally, parents of general skills camp participants (M=5.28) had significantly higher positive brand perceptions about the service provider than did parents of individual camp participants (M=4.99).

The overall findings show that there are significant differences among purchasers of different types of sport camps. Parents of advanced skill camp participants showed higher involvement in their child's sport which can also be tied their strong motivation for advancement. The higher interaction satisfaction from the parents of the individual campers seems logical since their children will have more opportunities to interact with their coaches than other types of camps. The highly favorable brand perceptions of parents of general skills camp participants might indicate that the brand factor was a draw to their enrollment. The identified difference among types of sport camps suggests that sport camp providers and marketers should market each
sport camp differently in order to effectively and efficiently reach their targeted market segment. Identification of benefits, satisfaction, parents involvement, and brand perception can not only enable program providers to refine their promotion tools but also help them build a framework that can retain their customers and encourage repeat purchase via the full product line - general skills camps, advanced camps, and individual sport camps.