Průzkum loajality zákazníků sportovního průmyslu Huddersfieldu se zaměřením na ženy ve středním věku

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Zásady pro vypracování:

Úvod

I. Teoretická část

- Zpracujte teoretické poznatky v oblasti marketingu se zaměřením na loajalitu zákazníků.

II. Praktická část

- Proveďte analýzu současného stavu loajality zákaznic ve středním věku sportovního průmyslu v Huddersfieldu.

- Na základě výsledků situace současné loajality zhodnoťte nákupní chování žen ve středním věku.

- Navrhněte doporučení pro zvýšení loajality zákaznické skupiny v dané lokalitě.

Závěr

Introduction

I.   **Theoretical part**

- **Examine theoretical knowledge in Marketing regarding the customer loyalty**

II.   **Practical part**

- **Analyze the current loyalty situation of middle-aged women in the sports industry in Huddersfield**

- **According to the results of the loyalty situation analysis evaluate the customer behaviour of middle-aged women.**

- **Suggest the recommendation for increasing loyalty of given customer segment in chosen area**

Closing

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[2] PITTS, B. G.; STOTLAR, D. K. Fundamentals of sport marketing. 2nd ed. Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, 2002. 405 s. ISBN 1-885693-33-8.

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ABSTRAKT

Vzhledem ke stále rostoucí konkurenci ve sportovním průmyslu se mnoho sportovních společností snaží navázat dlouhodobě prosperující vztah se svými zákazníky. Loajalita zákazníka se stala jedním z nejdiskutovanějších témat v obchodní i akademické sféře. Většina akademiků se shoduje, že „relationship marketing" je jedním z nejdůležitějších taktik pro dosažení loajality. Ve světové literatuře je uvedeno mnoho různých způsobů k docílení této loajality, ale jen malá část z nich se dá uplatnit na průmysl sportovních služeb. Také je velmi málo výzkumů, které by se zaměřovaly na zákaznickou loajalitu právě u uživatelů ženského pohlaví ve středním věku.

Tudíž záměrem této bakalářské práce bylo prošetřit zákaznickou loajalitu žen ve středním věku ve sportovním průmyslu identifikací faktorů marketingové strategie ovlivňujících zákaznickou loajalitu. Za účelem návrhu vhodných sportovních marketingových strategií pro získání zákaznické loajality ženských účastníků ve středním věku žijících v Huddersfieldu byl navržen a vypracován dotazník a vypracována focus group. Výsledky obou metod byly analyzovány metodou dlouhého stolu.

Výsledky této bakalářské práce odhalily, že nejdůležitější jsou ty faktory, které souvisí se zákaznickým servisem a dobrou kondicí vybavení. Ženy ve středním věku také ukázaly jasnou preferenci pro sportovní centra zaměřená pouze pro ženy. Analýza dat prokázala, že jednotlivé faktory nemohou být rozděleny do určitých marketingových oblastí, ale měly by být realizovány odděleně.

Proto je možné doporučit zaujmutí všeobecných marketingových způsobů k zákazníkům a vyvinout interaktivní strategii, která umožní společnosti zvládnout problémy, které vznikají z jednotlivých unikátních požadavků kladených na oba průmysly, průmysl sportovní i průmysl služeb, než rozdělovat tyto faktory nebo se odkazovat na specifické marketingové oblasti.

Klíčová slova: loajalita zákazníků, jednaní se zákazníky, spokojenost zákazníků, služby, marketing

ABSTRACT

Due to the growing competition in the sports industry, many sports companies desire to build a long-term profitable relationship with their customers. Customer loyalty has been one of the most discussed topics in the business and academic world. The majority of academicians agreed that relationship marketing is the most important tactic for achieving this. There are a number of different marketing tactics considered for retaining customers in global literature, but only a small part of them could be applicable to the sports service industry. There is also a lack of research regarding the loyalty of female participants in middle-age.

Therefore, the aim of this dissertation was to investigate the customer loyalty of middle-aged women in the sports service sector by identifying the most influential factors of marketing strategy affecting customer loyalty. In order to suggest the appropriate sports marketing strategy for retaining the customer loyalty of middle-aged women participants living in Huddersfield, the focus group and questionnaire research were conducted. The results of both methods were analysed by the long table approach.

The results of this dissertation revealed that the most important factors are those connected with customer service and condition of equipment. The middle-aged women also showed a clear preference towards women-only sports centres. The analysis showed that factors cannot be divided into specific marketing areas but should be implemented separately.

That is why it is advisable to take a general marketing approach to customers and develop an interactive strategy which will allow the company to manage the issues resulting from the unique requirements of both the sports and service industry rather than separating the factors or referring to the specific marketing areas.

Keywords: customer loyalty, customer relationshio, customer satisaction, services, marketing

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1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part provides the background information relating to the research topic. The second one states the aims of this study and the last one explains the structure of this dissertation.

1.1   Background

Marketing was firstly defined at the end of the Nineteenth century. In that period changes in economic activity such as increasing supply and decreasing demand forced producers to find a solution of how to promote their products, but with the changing environment, is changing also the angle of view on marketing (Foret, 2008).

In 1970, just ten years after the invention of marketing mix, when services started to become the largest sector in industrial economies, academicians began to discuss an inadequate explanation of the marketing of services (Baker & Hart, 2008). Marketing was more and more moving to an intangible point of view on exchange process that nowadays could be wholly defined in terms of relationship (Baker & Hart, 2008).

In the recent years the most widely used definition of marketing is the definition by Kotler. Kotler (2003, p. 9) described marketing as a "societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and exchanging products and services of value with others". For a managerial definition marketing could be seen "as the art and science of choosing target markets and getting, keeping, and growing customers through creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value" (Keller & Kotler, 2006, p. 6).

These definitions are usually elaborated on by other authors in order to apply them to specific industries, for example to sports which is advancing on many fronts. The sports business industry has experienced phenomenal growth in a relatively short period of time. In the last decade the sports industry has changed as a whole economy. It also starts to be considered more as a business than as a recreational activity.

"Although sports and recreational activities, events and business have been around for a very long time, "...there has never been a period of explosive growth like the last 30 years" (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002, p. 18).

For this growth there are a number of reasons. Pitts & Stotlar (2002) pointed out the following examples. Firstly the opening of new markets for sports products or developing of new sports services in form of businesses like sports marketing research firms. Secondly the growth of existing markets and products like the explosion of girls and women in traditional sports such as basketball and football. Finally the remarkable growth of new sports such as gyms, fitness and other recreational or leisure activities which could offer a variety of entertainment to new market customers since the 1970s must not be forgotten. "Unfortunately the sport marketing practitioners and academicians are not keeping pace" (Milne & McDonald, 1999, p. 1).

Sport marketing is generally considered to be quite a new field of study. Although that the body of knowledge is growing, it simply does not contain a substantial body of knowledge yet and it is necessary to admit that sport marketing is still in its infancy in comparison to fields of study like medicine, education, law, management or marketing (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

In spite of plenty of definitions of sports marketing, academicians still have not agreed on what sports marketing is (Shannon, 1999). As the Table 1 below shows academicians are generally divided into two ideological groups (Milne & McDonald, 1999).

Table 1 : Sport Marketing Fundamentals and Theory (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002, p. 82)

Narrow focus, exclusive:	Broad, inclusive, contemporary
Marketing sports and events to two groups of consumers: participants and spectators.	Using sport marketing fundamentals in any business that is part of the sport business industry.
Definition is based on concept of selling and promoting sports activities and events.	Definition is based on the broad concept of contemporary sport management and the industry.

First, the bigger, group usually associates sport marketing with marketing of sport events. They believe that sport marketing concerns only the selling of sports events and sport products (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Even though this group commonly use terms as participants and spectators the participants are considered either as professional players or customers of sports shops and betting agencies (Beech & Chadwick, 2007).

The second group represented by authors such as Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton (2007), Pitts & Stotlar (2002) or Shank (2005) is contrariwise criticised by the first group for the simple use of the generic definition of Marketing and its expanding by inserting the word sport. Beech & Chadwick (2007) stressed that this expansion is impossible because of the unique characteristics of sport and the whole sports industry.

Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton (2007) and Pride & Ferrell (1977) admitted that despite of unquestionable advantages of implementing the generic definition by Kotler into the sports industry, it is still missing the intangibility of the sports service and exchange process. Shannon (1999) summarised this discussion by the observation that there are too many definitions of the sports business industry. According to him mostly each author creates own definition what cause problems in general agreement.

In spite of all efforts to cover the whole sports industry there is still a substantial gap in sport marketing literature that is closely related to the current definition of participants using sports services such as sports, fitness or leisure centres.

1.2   Aims of study

Customer loyalty is one of the most significant current discussions in the business sector. Due to the growing competition in the sports industry, many sports companies desire to build long-term profitable relationships with customers by achieving customer loyalty (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1984; Javalgi & Moberg, 1997). During the last three decades the relationship marketing has been considered as the most important way of achieving loyalty (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1984). Despite the number of different relationship marketing tactics that are considered for retaining customers in literature for global business, only a small part of them could be applicable to the sports service industry.

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the customer loyalty of middle-aged women in the sports service sector in Huddersfield by identifying the most influential factors of marketing strategy affecting customer loyalty.

The main reason for this research is to fill a gap in sport marketing literature as the majority of authors focus mainly on sports management and marketing as the management and marketing of sports events (Graham, Goldblatt, & Neirotti, 2001; Schaaf, 2004) and to suggest the appropriate sport marketing strategy for retaining the customer loyalty of middle-aged women participants.

This dissertation is going to stress that sports marketing is not useful for sports events only. In the sports business industry there are plenty of spaces where sports marketers could play a main role.

Specification on women in middle-age was chosen after interviews with managers of fitness and leisure centres in Huddersfield. According to one of these interviews the middle-aged women are the most sporadically attending group in sports centres

(Anonymous, 2010). This presumption supports the research that was done by Fitness Energie in September 2009. According to this research only 7% of the female population in the UK use a gym regularly. Even though that the women are usually motivated by a personal interest such as keeping healthy and getting fit, the obesity is still the number one health issue in the UK (Aldridge & NIACE, 2002; Meritage Healthcare Strategies, 2006).

Development of a marketing strategy that will fit to the needs of middle-age women thus could help to improve the worsening situation connected with either decreasing loyalty of sports and leisure centres or growing obesity of female population either.

This research should help to answer following research objectives:

1. To identify the current level of participation by middle-aged women in the sports industry
2. To find out those factors which evoke customer loyalty and to examine which of these factors are the most influential in determining the loyalty of middle-aged women in the sports industry
3. To discover which areas of marketing strategy might be useful in enhancing the customer loyalty of middle-aged women

1.3   Overview of chapters

Concerning the background information the following chapter describes the necessary steps that sport marketers should adopt in order to develop the appropriate marketing strategy and summarizes the current literature concerning research objectives. Themethodology part provides the rationale for chosen research methods and explains how the research will be done. After that research findings will be presented and analysed in the discussion and analysis chapter. Finally, the dissertation finishes with an overall conclusion and recommendation.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part provides the general overview of current literature concerning research objectives. The second part shows the guideline that sport marketers should adopt in order to develop appropriate marketing strategy for middle-aged women in the sports industry.

2.1 Loyalty – Emerging Issue

Customer loyalty is one of the most discussed topics in the business and academic world (Oliver R. L., 1999; Reichheld, 2001). Even though that academicians and practitioners have studied customer loyalty from many different angles the process of its formation is still unknown (Bodet, 2008). Nevertheless they have identified a number of antecedents that were previously misunderstood as loyalty itself (Kumar & Werner, 2006; Shaw & Ivens, 2002; Bodet, 2008).

In recent years loyalty is considered to be the heart of customer relationship and is taken as a critical variable of marketing approach (Rust, Zeitham, & Lemon, 2002). There is a saying that no business or organisation can succeed without building customer satisfaction and loyalty (Timm, 2008). This supports also the researcher done by management consultants Bain& Co who indentified the reasons why the loyal customers are more profitable then new ones (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002, p. 8).

- Retaining is cheaper than attracting new ones: "It costs five times as much to recruit a new customer as it takes to retain one existing customer" (Cram, 1994, p. 44)
- Current customers buy more: "loyal customers buy more products for longer period of time than do occasional purchasers" (Stotlar, 2001, pp. 113-117)
- Repeated orders cost less to serve

- Loyal customers are often willing to pay a premium prices
- Loyal customers cause problem to enter new market for competitors

Bodet (2008) and Javadein, Khanlari, & Estiri, (2008) pointed out that retaining customers through increasing their loyalty is even more important in service industries, particularly in the sports industry. In addition there is a potential threat connected with changing lifestyle. Although the General Household survey shows a continuous increase of sports participation, the other surveys show a massive decline of loyalty patterns in the whole service sector (Kumar & Werner, 2006).

2.2   Women and Sport

In each culture people have some expectation about how representatives of both genders should behave (Solomon, Bamossy, & Askegaar, 1999). Solomon, Bamossy, & Askegaar (1999) explained that culture thus influences all aspects of consumer decision process and stressed the gender differences in consumer behaviour.

These differences are particularly evident in the sports industry. Many authors such as (Connell, 1987) hold an opinion that sport is generally created to form a masculinity which is unsuited to or even especially hazardous to women's bodies and inappropriate to women's role in society (Houlihan, 2003). Moreover those authors claim that women engaging in sport are an unattractive spectacle (Houlihan, 2003). Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics even tried to expel women from participation in the Olympic Games in 1930 (McPherson, Curtis, & Loy, 1989).

In Britain this situation became evident at the end of the nineteenth century. In order to encourage women to participate in sports activities the government implemented PE into educational institutions (Houlihan, 2003). Although the differences in participation between both genders were minimal at primary school, cultural

perceptions of female roles caused a drastic decline in the proportion of girls who enjoyed PE in secondary school and even further decline in adulthood (Houlihan, 2003).

The proportion of women participating in the sports industry has increased when the perception of their role in society has become less restrictive (Houlihan, 2003). On the other hand many sports are still considered as more suitable for men than women (Houlihan, 2003). To summarize women are no longer restricted to participate in any sport, but sport is still considered as "comprehensively masculine through its history of male control" (Houlihan, 2003, p. 90).

The position of women in modern society is changing rapidly. Women score not only on working positions but also in personal life. This behaviour change reflects also changes in women's consumption. Even though that women have always been associated more with buying "symbolic and self-expressive goods concerned with appearance and emotional aspects of self" modern women are connected with purchases traditionally concerned as male purchases (Solomon, Bamossy, & Askegaar, 1999, p. 185).

Similarly the number of women participating in sports that are traditionally conceived as male has increased. According to the latest research the percentage of women involved in sports and leisure centres has increased from 29% in 1960s to 58% in 1990s (Aldridge & NIACE, 2002). The General Household Survey 2002 also shows that 31% of women attend sports centres regularly (Office for National Statistics, 2004).

Houlihan, (2003, p. 95) pointed out that women who actively participate in sports report "positive changes including increased self esteem, personal development, physical power and wellbeing". On the other hand he also stressed that even though

women's participation in sports has increased during the last years the women are still less active than men.

2.3   Middle-age

Traditionally, a number of authors have subscribed to the belief that middle-age begins around age 40 and ends in the early 60s (Whitbourne & Willis, 2006). Some authors such as Kowal & Fortier (2007) prefer the extended definition till early 70s, the others such as Johnson (1984) stress social and demographic changes affecting women in the past 2 decades and consequent changes in their consumer behaviour. This second group propose the new definition of middle-aged women between 30-50 years. For the purposes of this dissertation the middle-age will be defined between years 30-59.

Whitbourne & Willis (2006) call attention also to two different stages during defined middle-age. They pointed out that there is "little research that makes a clear distinction between early and late middle-age" (Whitbourne & Willis, 2006, p. 30).

The majority of authors also agreed that women in middle-age are more likely to spend time with their friends and family, joining health clubs for keeping fit and healthy and leisure centres for enjoyment (Aldridge & NIACE, 2002; Meritage Healthcare Strategies, 2006; Whitbourne & Willis, 2006).

2.4   Women Loyalty:

Concerning women's loyalty, there is little known about the existence of differences between men and women. Despite this according to Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran (1991) there are significant differences in women's behaviour. Women generally tend to be more loyal customers than men and require a "different selling approach, have different levels of customer value, and may respond differently to loyalty programs

and other actions aimed at enhancing customer loyalty" (Melnyk, Van Osselaer, & Tammo, 2008, p. 82).

2.5   The Customer Loyalty

Loyalty is "the ability to attract and retain customers" (Milne & McDonald, 1999, p. 46).

As was said before, the customer loyalty was one of the most discussed topics during last years. Although the loyalty was studied by both marketing academicians and real business practitioners there is still a question "what exactly loyalty means".

In order to develop the most suitable marketing strategy sport marketers have to firstly understand what customer loyalty is not (Timm, 2008). The loyalty is often misunderstood to be:

- Customer satisfaction itself
- Reaction to an interesting trial offer
- Large market share itself
- Repeated purchase itself

But all of these factors have been latterly re-analysed only as components or antecedents of loyalty (Best, 2008).

That is the reason why it is necessary to understand what customer loyalty is. There are numerous definitions describing customer loyalty. Some of them, for example definitions by Jacoby & Chestnut (1978) or Oliver (1997), are widely supported by academicians, but they are not preferred by practitioners.

Companies added that loyalty is "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronise a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same brand or same brand set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour" (Oliver R. L., 1997, p. 392).

Despite the numerous disagreements about the exact definition of customer loyalty, there are some generally acknowledged elements that express the relationship between customer and provider. These elements create a complex of three characteristics that defines customer loyalty (Best, 2008; Reichheld, 2001; Timm, 2008)

1. Overall satisfaction
2. Commitment or feeling of responsibility that a customers have towards a specific brand or company
3. Combination of attitudes and behaviours:
   - Purchase repeatedly and spend more money
   - Willingness to recommend the company by word-of-mouth marketing
   - Resistant to switch to a competitor

The Gallup Polling Organisation in 2003 confirmed these characteristics and added a fourth one- customer engagement (Timm, 2008). Customer engagement is the concept of involvement and psychological commitment that expresses the emotional connection with customers. This relationship between a customer's emotional connection and his acquiescence, propensity to leave, and cooperation can be regarded as behavioural outcomes of relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). A fully engaged customer thus could be considered as a satisfied customer who is emotionally connected to the company.

In order to explain the process of transformation from ordinary to loyal customer Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne (2002, pp. 48-49) introduced the relationship marketing ladder of loyalty (Figure 1) that explains simple steps that are necessary to manage customer loyalty. First of all marketers have to define the "prospect" by segmenting and targeting their customers, secondly they have to attract the "prospect" to first purchase by appropriate marketing activities. Then they have to turn the "purchaser" into the "client" by encouraging him to further purchases and consequently by more elaborated relationship building strategies into a "supporter" who enjoys company's products or services and becomes a satisfied customer. The next step is to change the satisfied customer into "advocates" who regularly use the word-of-mouth marketing to attract another "purchaser". Finally, the highest possible level of loyalty is "partner" who has a close relationship with the company. But it is not necessary to create such a deep relationship with each customer, thus marketers should consider the potential lifetime value of customers and decide which level of loyalty is appropriate.

In other words the sports marketers should focus on creation of such a relationship that would create the fully engaged customer who is considered to be the "advocate" who spends more money and actively does the marketing for company. This point of view offers a different and more open way how to look at and analyze the levels of customer loyalty (Timm, 2008).

Figure 1: The relationship marketing ladder of loyalty (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002, p. 48)

PROSPECT
Someone whom you believe may be persuaded to do business with you.

↓

PURCHASER
Someone who has done business just once with your organisation.

↓

CLIENT
Someone who has done business with you on a repeat basis but may be negative, or at best neutral, towards your organisation.

↓

SUPPORTER
Someone who likes your organisation, but only supports you passively.

↓

ADVOCATE
Someone who actively recommends you to others, who does your marketing for you.

↓

PARTNER
Someone who has the relationship of a partner with you

It is generally accepted that loyal customers are less likely to switch a competitor just because of the price effects, but their switching behaviour should also be measured in order to create an optimal marketing strategy. The customers are thought to tend to different levels of loyalty (Lancaster & Reynolds, 1998):

- Hard core loyal: buy every time the same brand;
- Soft core loyal: regularly buy from two or more brands

- Shifting loyal: buy one brand for certain time and then switch to another one
- Switchers : do not have any preference or loyalty to one particular brand

According to Oliver (1997, p. 397) the loyalty patterns that imply from recent research are based on a product or service basis. Although many companies seems to have some loyal segments, he said "consumers are not intrinsically loyal" they just find "a good brand and stick with it". The main reason for such results is that these loyal segments do so because of relative benefits of the product or service such as price, service, or quality.

Such behaviour reflects the behavioural loyalty of the customers, contrary to the attitudinal loyalty that reflects the perceptions and attitudes of the customer towards a particular product or service.

Hence behavioural loyalty could be understood as a function of a favourable repeat purchase pattern. This type of loyalty focuses on the long-term shares of purchase and purchasing frequency. Behavioural loyalty could become a quite painful challenge for marketers because it is almost impossible to find the difference between loyal and disloyal customers. Many of them could seem to be loyal, but they purchase only on a habitual basis or because of low prices. If the competitor offers a better price or discount, behavioural loyalty will cause the switch (Timm, 2008).

Attitudinal loyalty consists of a favourable attitude to the brand loyalty. This type of loyalty can be measured by preferences and is focused on willingness of brand recommendation, resistance to superior products and buying intention.

2.6 Customers

"Our customers are our organization's natural resources" (McNealy, 1994, p. ix).

Customers are the most important part of marketing. Every step in the designing of marketing strategy is connected with company's customers. Marketers should firstly understand who company's customers are, what they require, need or desire and then develop appropriate tools that could attract customers' attention. In the case of sports customers (participants) the discovering of customer's expectation and way how to satisfy them is even more important (Milne & McDonald, 1999). These expectations are continually changing with modern lifestyle, thus should be regularly monitored (McNealy, 1994; Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

Generally the customer is somebody for whom you satisfy wants or needs and who buys something from you (Cartwright & Green, 1997). Buying usually takes a form of money exchange, but in wider view it can be also an exchange of value (Timm, 2008).

2.7 Consumer Behaviour

In order to survive in the expanding sports industry companies have to develop a thorough understanding of consumer behaviour (Shank, 2005). Consumer behaviour can be defined as "the study of the process involved when people select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires" (Mooij, 2010, p. 93). But this behaviour does not end with purchase. Customers usually evaluate and post-evaluate repeatedly. Sports customers are not an exception. They are also seeking for sports activities that may satisfy their needs the most (Shank, 2005). The active participants who are using sports services several times a week have to choose the most suitable service provider before final creation of loyal relationship. Sport marketers should be thus very perceptive when discovering

customer's needs and wants. Their requirements could be influenced by various components of human behaviour that should be taken into account. Among them belong questions such as what people they are dealing with, what are their personalities, how they are thinking, learning or feeling and what motivates them (Mooij, 2010).

2.8   Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow developed a theory which states that human behaviour is directed by a system of gradual satisfaction of needs (Lancaster & Reynolds, 1998).

"The Pyramid of Needs" is based on presumption, that in the decision making process, some needs are more important than others (Milne & McDonald, 1999). Generally a person tends to satisfy basic (deficiency) needs, such as hunger, first and then continue with less important needs such as self-realization. This means that people try to satisfy primarily needs with the highest level of necessity (Mooij, 2010). Once basic needs are satisfied, the person could move up the hierarchy to focus on the next levels which are connected with emotional and physiological growth (Milne & McDonald, 1999).

As the Figure 2 shows The Pyramid of Needs starts with already mentioned basic physiological needs, continues through safety (protection, stability) and social (love, friends) needs, to esteem needs (self and external esteem, respect, prestige). The highest human need, the self-actualization, expresses a point in life where the person desires to be. This point includes the realization of individual potential (Cartwright & Green, 1997).
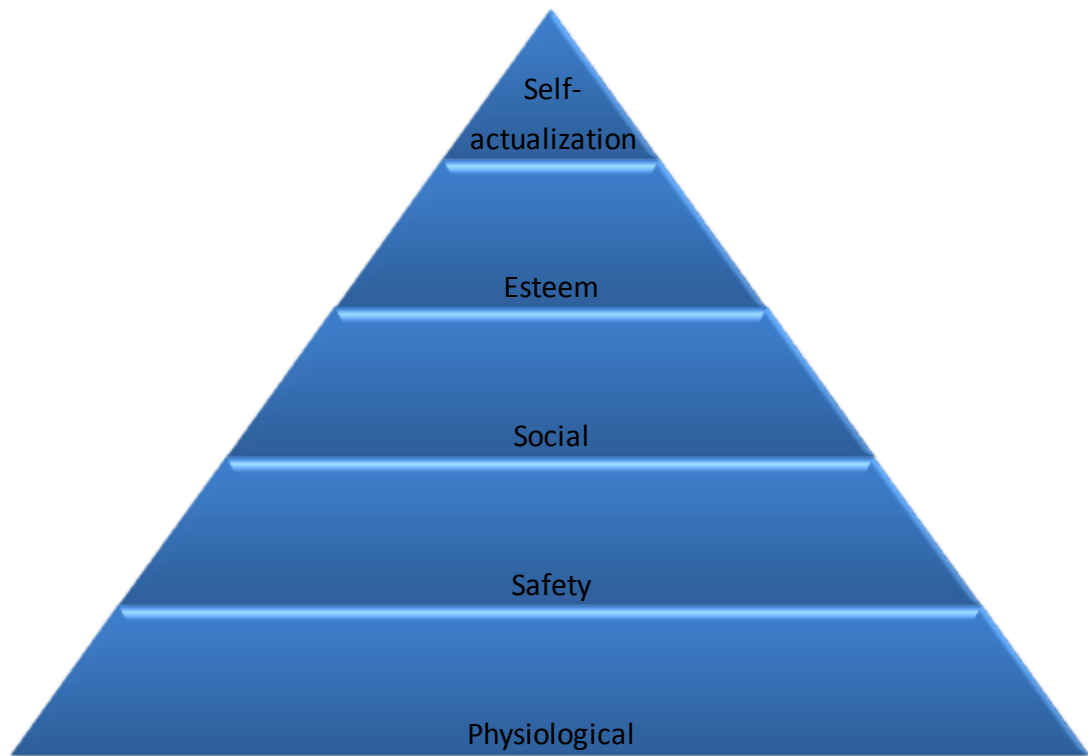
2.8.1   The Application of Maslow's Pyramid into the Sports Industry

Brown (1995) linked Maslow's pyramid into the sports customer decision process. The lowest level of the pyramid thus is the considering of product or services needed. The security level follows in the form of basic services associated with the main products or services. The belongingness equalizes the quality of relationships with provider and other customers. The esteem is expressed by provider's attempts to recognise customer's needs and develop consequent innovations and finally the self-actualisation is expressed by true partnership.

Figure 3: Stages of customer need in Maslow's hierarchy (Brown, 1995, p. 104)
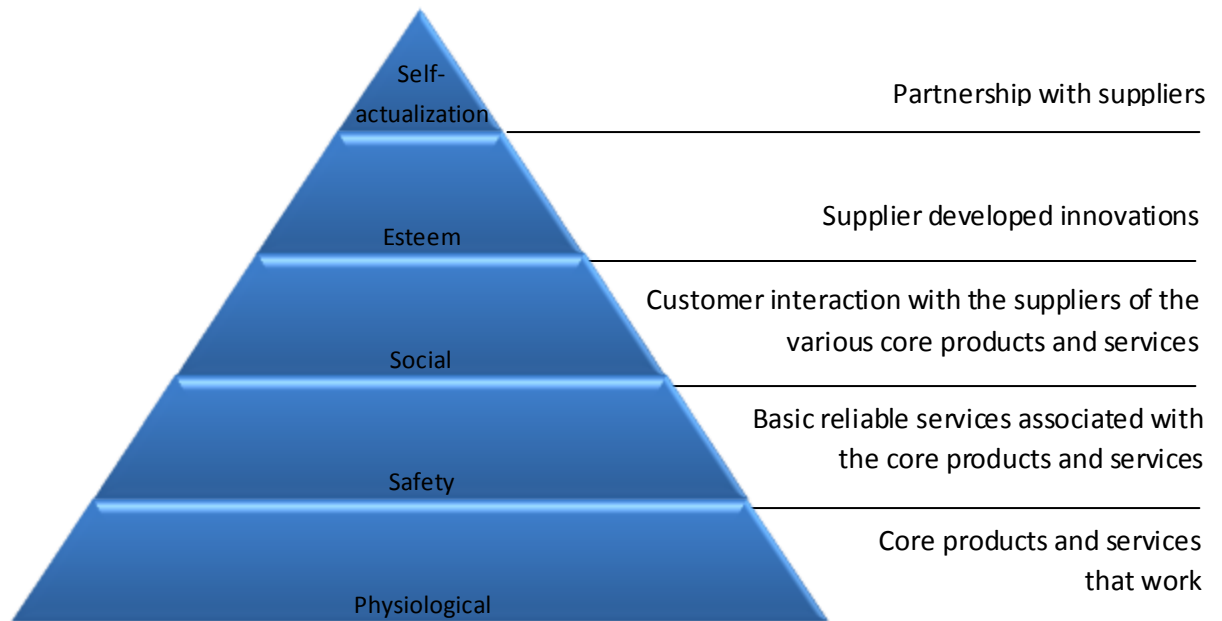
In sports literature all of these needs are described as motivating factors for sport participants. That is why Maslow's hierarchy of needs should be considered as an appropriate base upon which to build a sport marketing theory (Milne & McDonald, 1999).

2.9   Motivation

Motivation of sports participants is another important issue in designing the marketing campaign. In the last fifty years, a number of fitness centres developed slogans such as: "get ready for the swimsuit season", "summer is coming", "get in shape" or "become physically fit". All of these slogans have just one aim, to damage the customers' perception of themselves and thus motivate customers to visit them (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Even thought that customers' motives could vary, they always express customers' desires for some change or action. This supports for example Collins (2008, p. 137) when she stated that "Motivation refers to an internally generated drive to achieve a goal or follow a particular course of action".

On the other hand studies on motivation factors could help sport marketers to understand the expectations of customers and increase their participation. Milne & McDonald (1999, pp. 23-26) summarized the most frequent types of motivation from sport marketing literature.

- Physical fitness: one of the most evident reasons for physical activity. Nowadays many people have health and mobility problems that could be solved by physical fitness and healthy lifestyle

- Risk taking and Stress reduction: The human body works with a certain level of hormones. These levels could be easily stimulated by physical activity.

- Aggression: physical activity could in some cases reduce the levels of aggression

- Affiliation and social facilitation: people are seeking for socialization with others and meeting new friend with similar hobbies

- Self- esteem: participating in team sports could lead to positive attitude about one's self

- Competition: 53% of the general population agreed with: "I believe that one of the greatest values of physical activity is the thrill of competition"

- Achievement: people are trying to meet their desires

- Skill mastery: a number of people would like to excel in any activity

- Aesthetics: refers to the beauty, grace, or other artistic characteristics of sport

- Value development: sport teaches cultural values and builds character

- Self-actualization: people are trying to fill their perceptions of themselves

A lot of these motives could be found in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Milne & McDonald (1999, p. 23) stressed these relationships between sports participant's motivation and Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the following Table 2:

Table 2: Sport motivation construct positions within Maslow's need hierarchy (Milne & McDonald, 1999, p. 23)

Sport motivation constructs	Deficiency needs				Growth needs			
	Physiological		Social		Self-esteem		Actualised	
	Part.	Spec.	Part.	Spec.	Part.	Spec.	Part.	Spec.
Physical fitness	●				●			
Risk-taking	●	●			●	●		
Stress reduction	●	●			●	●		
Aggression	●	●						
Affiliation			●	●				
Social facilitation			●	●				
Self esteem					●	●		
Competition					●	●		
Achievement					●	●		
Skill mastery					●	●		
Aesthetics					●	●	●	●
Value development							●	●
Self-actualisation							●	●

2.10 Customers Satisfaction

In the sports market there are a number of products that could possibly satisfy given customers' needs. Customers are choosing a service provider according to their expectations of value and satisfaction of given service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). Every company that would like to keep its customers will have to "go beyond" theirs customer's expectations (McNealy, 1994, p. x).

Since the 1990s when the customer satisfaction became firstly considered as a "strategic weapon" for sports companies that strived for a customer or marketing orientation, the satisfaction was analysed by number of specialists (McNealy, 1994, p. ix). Due to the difficult quantification of satisfaction, these specialists developed several methods how to measure it (Shank, 2005). The most frequent way of assessment is splitting customers to the satisfaction levels via communicating and listening to their desires or by conducting marketing surveys (Shank, 2005).

Satisfaction levels depend on how the product or service meets the customer expectation. If the product meets expectations, customers are satisfied and vice versa. If the product exceeds the expectations, the company gains a relationship with delighted customer (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006).

According to satisfaction levels customers could be divided into three groups (McNealy, 1994, p. 34):

- "Dissatisfied" are those customers that are thinking about or are already resolved to leave the company and defect to competitors (McNealy, 1994). These customers could mean the threat of considerable loss, especially when competitors are willing to make the effort to create customer loyalty, but they could also become one of the most loyal customers as well (Barnes, Blodgett, & Wakefield, 1995).

- "Satisfied" are those customers who are only partially satisfied with company's products or services (McNealy, 1994). For instance, they could be satisfied just because of low or any competition in the area or simply satisfied because they did not have any negative experience. In that case the satisfaction is considered only as meeting the minimal expectations of customers (Woodruff & Gardial, 1996). This is a common trap when designing marketing research (McNealy, 1994). Marketers should properly specify the level of customer satisfaction in order to get appropriate results.

- "Delighted" are those customers who enjoy their experience with company. They are actually "a powerful weapon" for their company (McNealy, 1994, p. 35). These customers often share their positive experience with their friends and could be considered as the loyal ones (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). Delighted loyal customers are the dream of every manager, but the way to get such relationship is a rather difficult in the long run.

2.10.1 Relationship: Satisfaction X Loyalty

As was said before, lot of companies aimed on satisfaction as on the only possible solution how to maintain customer loyalty (Kumar & Werner, 2006). This behaviour is based on the presumption that developing more satisfying products and services will lead to higher customer retention (Kumar & Werner, 2006). However customer retention is usually unified with customer loyalty (Best, 2008) pointed out the difference between customer loyalty and retention. Contrary to customer loyalty retention can be bought because it includes both internal customer loyalty and external stimuli such as advertising, switching costs, customer care and the other factors.

Even thought that satisfaction is an evident factor causing customer loyalty and consequently greater profit, it is not the only one, for example: customers can be satisfied with company's products or services now, but this does not guarantee that they will be loyal to the same company in the future (Timm, 2008). Thus satisfaction is only an antecedent of customer loyalty.

This supported also Kumar & Werner (2006, p. 159) when they demonstrated that the link "between satisfaction and retention is asymmetric" and dissatisfaction thus "has a greater impact on retention than satisfaction". As the Figure 4 shows the satisfaction has an impact on retention only at extremes and the extensive part of the curve lies in the zone of indifference.

Figure 4: Satisfaction - Retention Link (Kumar & Werner, 2006, p. 159)
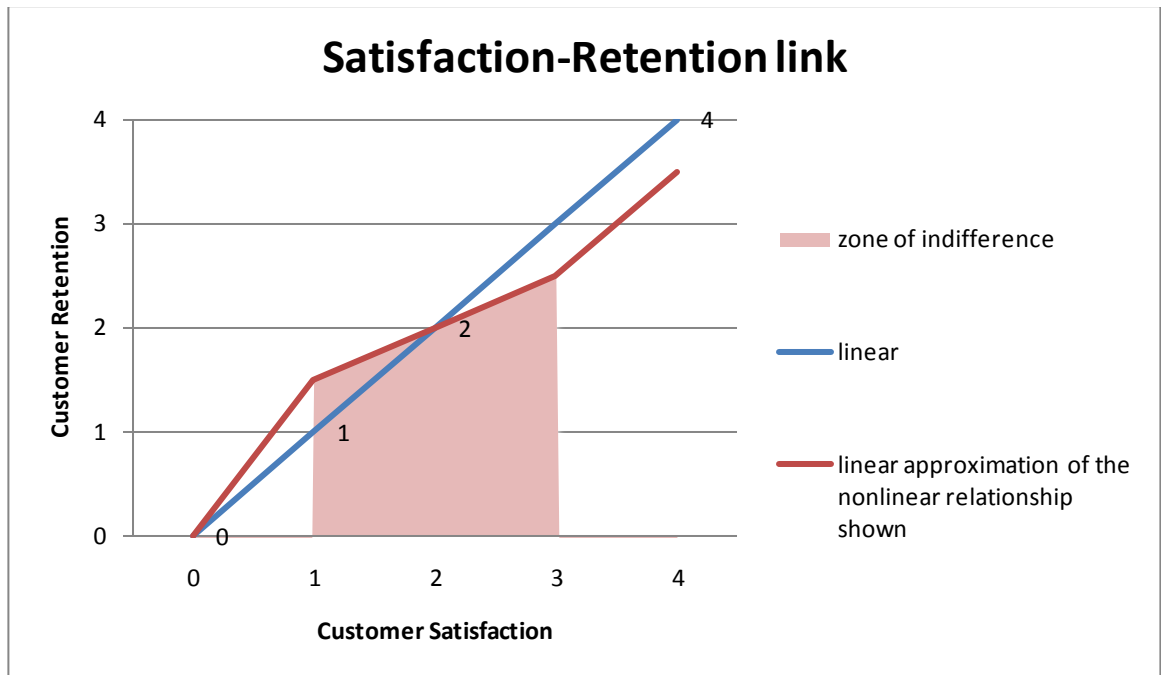
2.11   Market Segmentation

„Future market share will be won by the sport organisations that do a better job of identifying and targeting different market segments" Gray (1991, p. 318), cited by (Stotlar, 2001, p. 55).

The sports market consists of an enormous amount of consumers from children to active retirees. These different groups of people constitute individual market segments with specific demands and characteristics (Stotlar, 2001). The successful sport marketers should take into account mostly needs and desires of each segment when choosing the appropriate marketing strategy (Lancaster & Reynolds, 1998). This deliberation could help them to discover appropriate target market, that buys company's products the most, and to develop better tools of marketing mix, that will lead to adequate position strategies in this segment (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

To reach such results it is necessary to do marketing segmentation which is the process of consumer analysis, that studies a total market by dividing into smaller segments (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002; Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

Nowadays, changing lifestyle, better informed customers and increasing competition cause changes in demand for sports marketing products and services. That is why it is more and more important to use customer market analysis and segmentation in order to specialize in meeting needs of customers segments (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

Market segmentation could be done in several ways. Some strategies analyse the division of consumers according their behaviour, others identify consumers by a set of demographic characteristics or lifestyle (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Before that, it is necessary to set a criteria according which the market segment will be analysed. The most common criteria includes: accessibility, measurability and profitability (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002).

2.11.1 Types of Segmentation

- Geographic: customers could be segmented into urban, suburban or rural groups, or into regional, national and international segment for example by postcode. This could help to sport marketers decide in which area they should aim their business.
- Demographic: customers are divided according to hard-core data such as age, gender, nationality or income to identify which type of people buy a company's product or services.
- Physiographic: customers are analysed according to their lifestyle, attitude and personality which could address their purchase behaviour, brand preferences and customers loyalty

- Benefit and usage: customers are segmented into heavy users, medium users, occasional users and non-users of the product or service. Customers usually make their decision according to the types of benefits, that purchase provides them.

- Loyalty: customers are identified according to their loyalty to brand or products to find out the most useful combination of products and services in each target market

2.12 Marketing Mix

Borden defined the marketing mix, as a combination of twelve elements which could be manipulated into the most appropriate mix (Lancaster & Reynolds, 1998).The main objective of the marketing mix is to implement the positioning strategy developed according to the chosen target market to attract and provide satisfaction to the customers (Shank, 2005).

This approach has become widely accepted when all elements have been reduced into four categories, usually known as a 4 Ps: product, price, place and promotion (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002). The interplay between each of these elements is really important. Each has a significant interactive effect on the others (Stotlar, 2001).

2.12.1   Price

Pricing is nowadays one of the most sensitive issues in sport marketing. Pricing strategies reflects the image you want to portray about your product or service (Stotlar, 2001) and affects the product's success. (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002) This includes setting pricing objectives such as fair price and profit-making strategies of the company by choosing a pricing technique according to the costs of the company to produce and offer the product, governmental adjustments, the competitor's prices and customer's willingness to pay for your product or service, and finally making prices

adjustments and discounts over time that are based on continuous research of your customers needs and satisfaction (Shank, 2005; Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

2.12.2 Place

Place part of the marketing mix is not just where the product, service or event will be placed but also about how could companies distribute their product to the place where the target market could access it. Distribution requires knowledge about how best to get the product to the customers, or how to get the customers to the product (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

2.12.3 Promotion

Sport marketing is usually associated with promoting which is explained as advertising, but advertising is just one element of promotion mix. Successful sports marketers must consider integrating all aspects of the promotion mix (Shank, 2005).

All forms of promotion are based on communicating with your potential consumers to differentiate your products or services to meet buyer preferences (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002; Shank, 2005) .

Sports marketers communicate with the target market through promotional messages and strategies which contain information about a product or a business.
After collection of data from the target market and competition research, sport marketers have to create appropriate strategies and the promotional messages that best hit the target market. A marketer's messages should grab people's attention.
In other words the promotion means the process of raising awareness (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

2.12.4 Product

The product is usually marked as the centrepiece of a marketing mix.
That is why it is important to understand what the product exactly means to

the company. Pitts and Stotlar (2002) stated that the product should be understood as a concept and not simply as a singular item. In the sports industry "people, places, goods, services, and ideas with tangible or intangible attributes" are considered as a product (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002, p. 96).

However the differences between them must not be forgotten. Considering the sports service sector the unique characteristics of services (inseparability, intangibility, variability and perish-ability) implicate the consequent various marketing strategies (Beech & Chadwick, 2007; Baker & Hart, 2008, p. 36).

Kotler & Armstrong (2006), Lancaster & Reynolds (1998), Shank (2005) and Stotlar (2001) agreed that the product part of marketing mix consists of developing such product and service strategy that could identify the core consumer needs which the product or services would satisfy. This response to the growth of market size, changes of customers' preferences and technological development (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). That is why sport marketers have to continuously monitor the consumers' wants and needs.

Because of the fact that the customers are looking for functions and benefits, the sport marketers have to make many critical decisions concerning the sports company's products (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

After that sport marketers have to track the sales of each product to determine if sales are increasing, maintaining, or decreasing. An analysis will provide the sport marketers with the knowledge to make adjustments to specific products as potential product extension or small changes of an existing product or to terminate the product production. If the marketers successfully reach this designing stadium, they can

continue with practical application of their marketing concept (Lancaster & Reynolds, 1998; Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

2.13 Customers Relationship

Customer relationship could be considered as a new name for customers orientation that was popular in the 1980's (Storbacka & Lehtinen, 2002). According to this theory the loyal customers are a key factor that holds company in a business, thus the most important feature of marketing is implementing suitable relationship activities in dealing with the customers (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2008). Storbacka & Lehtinen (2002) stressed the necessity of a return to the roots in the process of creating profitable customer relationships. In a foretime every tradesman knew his customers personally and was able to deliver to them desired products or services, so this means that marketers firstly have to understand what customers need and what they want. Then they have to attract new customers by offering the best quality service and finally maintain current customers by continuous care about their satisfaction (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006).

This supports also numbers definitions describing relationship marketing such as: "consistent application of up-to-date knowledge of individual customers to product and services design which is communicated interactively, in order to develop a continuous and long term relationship, which is mutually beneficial" (Cram, 1994, p. 19)

Nowadays there are a number of characteristics enlarging this previous point of view. As the Figure 5 shows the first of them stress the emphasis on lifetime value of customers. The second is the necessity of a deeper relationship between companies and target market or "stakeholders" in order to achieve long-term success in the final marketplace. Finally, there is the change of marketing department from being solely responsible to becoming "pan-company and cross-functional" (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002, p. 5). In other words the belief of marketing should be realised

across the whole business. This usually requires "an organisational change that fosters cross-functional working and develops the mindset that everyone within the business serves a customer" (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002, p. 6).

Figure 5: The transition to relationship marketing (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002, p. 4)

Emphasis on all market domains and customer retention		Relationship marketing
Emphasis on customer acquisition	Transactional marketing	
	Functionally-based marketing	Cross-functionally-based marketing
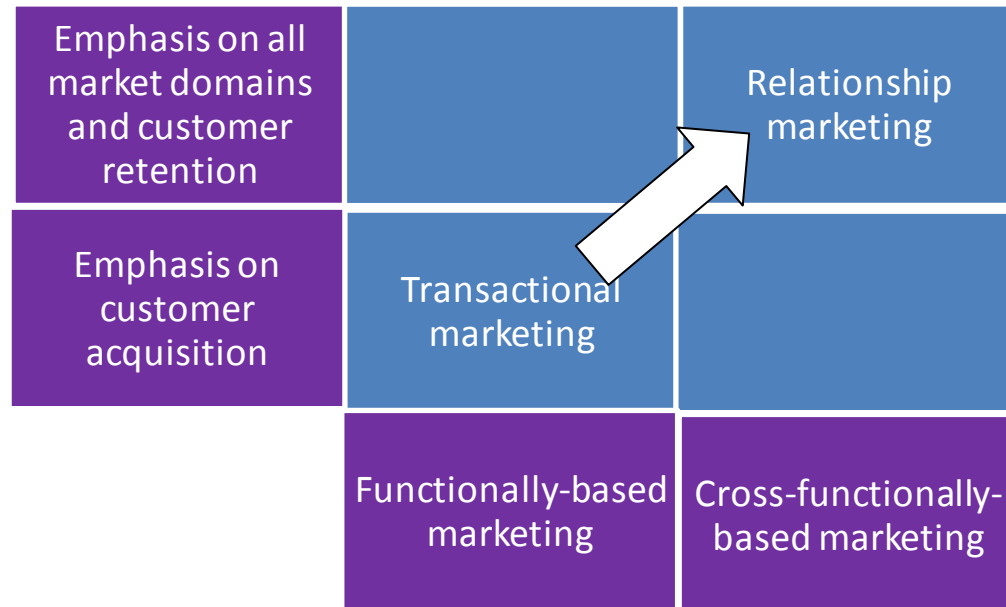
In practice this means that organisations should align marketing, quality and customer service strategies more closely as Figure 6 shows (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002). By implication of this attitude marketers can better understand the customer, tailor the offer to meet their specific needs, and create a deeper customer relationship through providing a higher level of customer service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006).

This customer service deals mainly with the quality of service provided by customer-facing staff. Service marketers should be more experienced than others in managing this type of relationship (Baker & Hart, 2008). Providing of excellent customer service is said to be one of the most potent weapons in marketing armoury for retaining customers, because it helps to cement the exchange relationship. By the exchange relationship is generally meant the process of paying for the benefits that customers receive. In marketing view the exchange marketing reflects loyalty, that is given by customers in exchange for meeting their expectation (Christopher, Payne, &

Ballantyne, 2002). Creating this kind of relationship takes work, but can develop a rich and fulfilling partnership and provide a number of benefits such as better profit or product development (Timm, 2008).

Figure 6: The relationship marketing orientation: bringing together customer service, quality and marketing (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002, p. 9)
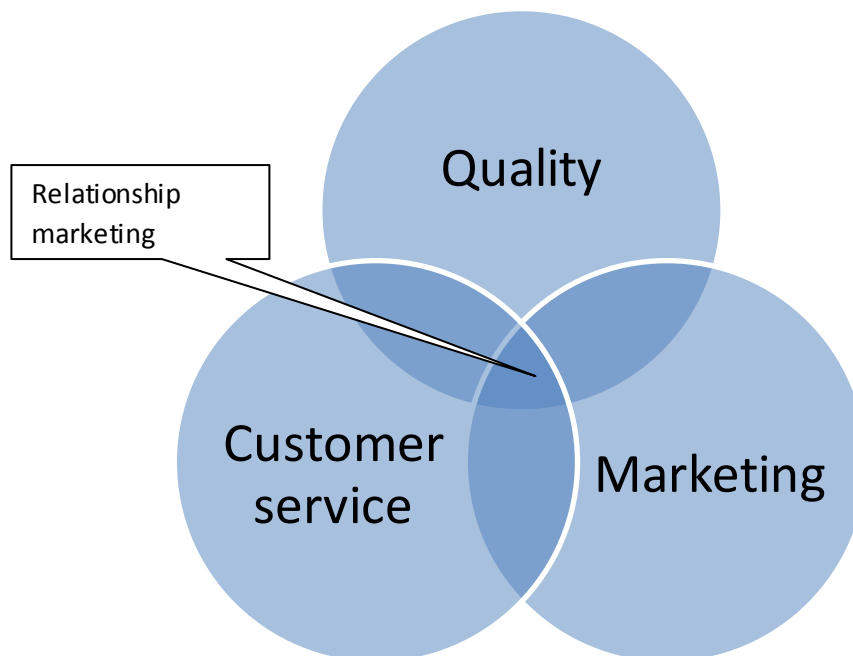
2.14 Causes of loyalty

With the continuous decrease of customer loyalty within the service industry many authors tried to identify factors which could reverse the course of the decline. Shank (2005) and Kotler & Armstrong (2006) suggest that for service providers the excellence in customer service is the best way how to keep customers. Customer service doesn't include only a wide range of services but also the quality of delivering them.

This supports also Cram (1994) when he stressed the importance of well qualified and loyal staffs. According to him a loyal staffs are the first step in achieving customer loyalty. The following step is to increase the staff's communication skills. He pointed out that any long-term relationship cannot work well without a proper understanding of all communication techniques.

On the other hand many authors advocate the view that any relationship cannot be developed without the creation of an emotional connection with the customers (Timm, 2008; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996).

Another proposed method which could increase the customer loyalty is meeting and exceeding customer expectations (Shaw & Ivens, 2002). However Timm (2008) summarised that all of these methods describe treating the customers and thus only more elaborated parts of the customer service. Hence he developed a guideline for service providers that could support the building of a true relationship with customers and possibly even increase their loyalty.

Customer clubs and loyalty or frequency reward programs are other widely discussed methods of increasing of customer loyalty (Kumar & Werner, 2006). During the last decade many companies implemented forms of this marketing strategy that are connected with generating rewards to customers according to their repeat purchasing (Kumar & Werner, 2006). But many authors conversely stress that loyalty programs in this form only force customers to buy unwished products or services (Uncles, Dowling, & Hammond, 2003). Even through others still trust that correctly managed loyalty programs could be useful for achieving a long-term profitable relationship (Bolton, Kannan, & Bramlett, 2000).

3   METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the rationale for the methodology used in this paper. Firstly the choice of a used strategic method approach will be explained. Secondly will be closely described the exact methods that were used to primary data collection for the purpose of addressing the following research objectives:

1. To identify the current level of participation by middle-aged women in the sports industry
2. To find out those factors which evoke customer loyalty and to examine which of these factors are the most influential in determining the loyalty of middle-aged women in the sports industry
3. To discover which areas of marketing strategy might be useful in enhancing thecustomer loyalty of middle-aged women

 The third part of this chapter will explain how validity, reliability and practicality were involved during the research and stress the importance of ethical issues. Finally will be emphasized the relevant limitation of this paper.

3.1   The Research Strategy:

In order to develop valuable research, it is necessary to choose an appropriate research strategy before its realization. Even though that a wrongly chosen strategy could cause the failure of the research there is no universal rule which strategy is better than another.

Nash (2003) explained that every research starts with the decision of which type of research approach should be used. He stressed mainly two types of approaches: quantitative and qualitative research.

- Quantitative research is used to investigate the relationship between two or more variables. This research requires a certain amount of data with specific characteristics (Nash, 2003). These data should be easily quantified to help answer a research question. The disadvantage of quantitative research is that data have to be analysed and interpreted before use (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003). Towards getting dependable statistical results the amount of gathered data have to be high enough to meet statistical criteria (Nash, 2003). The most popular way of quantitative research are questionnaires, interviews and mathematical models that are used mainly to verify given hypothesis.

- Qualitative research is a research approach that helps researchers to understand "why" and "how" questions. Qualitative research describes the researched phenomenon by developing different categories that are not simply quantitatively measurable (Nash, 2003). The most common way of gathering qualitative data are collective or individual discussion (Nash, 2003). Toward getting verifiable conclusions the data collection have to be done in a systematic and well planned manner (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003). Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2003, p. 379) stated "there is not a standardised approach to the analysis of quantitative data". This means that data that should be able to figure the fullness of research cannot be gathered in a standardised way. The method of their collection thus has a significant implication on their analysis and final results (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003).

Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2003) explained that any of research approaches usually cannot exist in isolation, thus for purposes of this study will be used the multi-methods approach that is thought to provide the most appropriate and clear results without implications caused by inappropriate choice of research method . The advantages of implication of the multi-methods approach are better implication of each type of strategy to follow different purposes of the study and triangulation that ensures that gathered data express exactly what they should in order to meet research

objectives, for example "the semi-structured group interviews may be a valuable way of triangulating data collected by other means such as a questionnaire" (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003, p. 99). To ensure the credibility and correct use of multi-method approach the validity, reliability and practicality of research should also be considered.

There are several methods such as experiment, case study, survey etc. that could be used to gather required data for each of these approaches. But the survey seems to be the most appropriate in delivering the data for multi-methods research (Sekaran, 2003). The survey includes methods that are able to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. The most popular methods of survey are questionnaires, structured observations and structured interviews (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003).

 "The choice of data collection methods depends on the facilities available, the degree of accuracy required, the expertise of the researcher, the time spend of the study , and other costs and resources associated with and available for gathering" (Sekaran, 2003, p. 224).

Within this point of view it is useful to sum up already mentioned methods briefly. Interviews are more flexible in term of adapting questions, but the interviewing takes a considerable amount of time. Questionnaires are on the other hand able to gather data in a shorter period of time, but they are not efficient enough in terms of answering "why" and "how" questions (Sekaran, 2003). Observations are not suitable to this research because they take the greater amount of time and are useless in terms of given research questions (Kozak & Stankova, 2006). Customer loyalty cannot be observed.

Also could be considered computer methods of data collection. "Computer assisted surveys, which help both interviewing as well as preparing and administering questionnaires electronically" could be useful, but concerning the fact that this dissertation is done by an international student in a foreign country, the computer survey cannot ensure that target group of middle-age women and the necessary amount of data will be achieved (Sekaran, 2003, p. 224). Similar problems could happen with telephone surveys. This dissertation is financially limited and also the level of spoken English should be higher during telephone conversation.

3.1.1 Focus Group

Focus groups are a form of qualitative research based on discussion between eight to ten members and a moderator who leads the discussion (Kozak & Stankova, 2006; Sekaran, 2003). The focus group is usually characterized by homogeneity of participants but they have to be also diverse enough to allow for contrasting opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The moderator is not directly involved in the discussion, but he plays a vital role in introducing the topic, observing, taking notes and steering the discussion to obtain all the relevant information (Sekaran, 2003). The aim of this method is to collect data that are of interest to the researcher in the form of spontaneous responses about people's feelings, impressions, perceptions and opinion about specific topic across several groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Although focus group's members are chosen according to their involvement, knowledge or experiences about the topic their opinions cannot be considered as a truly representative (Kozak & Stankova, 2006). Nevertheless the focus groups can "provide fairly dependable data within a short period of time" (Sekaran, 2003, p. 220). They also offer the opportunity to cover the same problem from a number of different angles (Langford & McDonagh, 2003). That is why they are often used as the groundwork for further survey research.

The findings gathered by the focus groups could for example help to identify the most appropriate language and wording for the questionnaire etc (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The data analysis in qualitative research could be characterised as a process of bringing order and structure to the collected data by recombining the evidence, to address the initial proposition of a study (Yin, 1994, p. 99). This process is usually messy and time consuming, but it can bring the general statements about relationships among categories of data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Thus the intent of qualitative analysis is to provide the practical, systematic and verifiable results (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

3.1.2   Structured "Face-To-Face" Interview Via a Questionnaire:

There are three types of interviews – structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003). The questionnaire is a pre-formulated written set of questions that are recorded by the interviewer on the basis of each respondent's answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives" (Sekaran, 2003, p. 236).

According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2003) it is always better to link questionnaires with some other methods of research. They also explained that structured interviews could be identified with questionnaires that are conducted face-to-face.

A face-to-face interview is the method based on a direct meeting between interviewer and interviewee. These interviews are recently one of the most used ways of data collection in qualitative research (Kozak & Stankova, 2006). They are usually conducted in order to verify beforehand information needed (Sekaran, 2003).

The design of the research also affects the reliability and validity of research.
The principles of wording and appropriate language style, type, form and number and

principle of measurement of questions has been considered in order to provide
a clearness of understanding.

3.2 The Research Structure

To continue in multi-method approach the following methods were chosen to analyse research objectives the best.

1. This dissertation began with interviews of managers of fitness centres that are situated in Huddersfield in order to find out what are the most burning issues of the local sports industry.

2. Focus groups with five to ten women members of fitness centres representing different age groups. This was to establish the most important factors supporting women loyalty in Huddersfield's sports industry.

3. A structured interview that was done by questionnaire form with women on streets of Huddersfield in order to verify the opinions gathered by focus groups.

3.2.1 Focus group

During this research the homogeneity was assured by specification on women of different age. There were two focus groups consisting of women between 30-50 and 70-80 years representing women attending sports centres regularly for a long period of time. Both groups were steered to answer questions enclosed in Appendix 1 and asked to add some another ideas that could support customers loyalty in the sports industry. The research is based on field notes that provide fast running of the focus group sessions, but without the help of an assistant that would continuously take proper notes or record the session is not clarify-able by return (Krueger & Casey,

2000). That is why the focus group findings have to be further verified by questionnaire.

The focus groups will be analysed by the "long-table" approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 132). This classical strategy is useful mainly in sorting the general themes into the specific topic that could be afterwards more easily compared (Krueger & Casey, 2000). This system breaks research into small parts which help the reader to clearly understand the process of analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

3.2.2   Structured "Face-To-Face" Interview Via a Questionnaire:

Concerning specification on women in the middle-age in the Huddersfield area, it will be more practical to conduct research personally. This presumption supported for example Sekaran (2003) when she said that if the research is made in a local area it is more practical to gain data personally. Face-to-face interviews via questionnaire form combine the benefits of both the questionnaire and interview. They combine the clear standardised questions with a chance to explain questions properly and thus avoid the threat of any misunderstanding (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003). The advantage of face-to-face interviews via questionnaire is the short period of time that is necessary to get the required amount of data, clearness of questions for respondents that provide correct and doubtless data for researcher. The biggest advantage is the high number of finished and returned questionnaires (Sekaran, 2003).

The questionnaire has been designed in order to ensure that the data collection will help to examine research objectives. The dichotomous and category scales are used to identify the first objective. The likert scales are used mainly to find out the preferences of middle-aged women about the factors that have been identified by the focus group method. The first part of the questionnaire will be expressed by percentage ratio. The second part will be analysed by classical likert scale summating of responses. After that each factor will be evaluated by a number of points according to the chosen answers. The factors will be divided into marketing

areas and the arithmetic mean will be done for each factor and area as a whole. The areas and factors will be than compared in order to find out the most preferred area and factors.

3.2.3   Sampling:

The sampling strategy for this research has been chosen in accordance with the research objectives. During the focus group research the sample consisted of women currently participating at sports centres in order to identify the most accurate data for further research.

The questionnaire part of the research has been done on streets of Huddersfield. Theresearcher has chosen the respondents randomly according to her perception of women in middle-age. The data collection took about two weeks and after that the analyses were conducted. During the analysis the second sample was split into two further samples. One of them included the responses of all respondents the second one included the responses only from middle-aged women. These samples are roughly similar but only the sample consisting of middle-aged women could provide accurate results. The differences between results of these two samples are also affected by participation of younger or older women and could provide interesting information about behavioural changes of middle-aged women.

3.2.4   Pilot study

A small pilot study was conducted in order to verify whether the questions are clearly understandable prior to the study. The first draft of the questionnaire that was based on information gathered during the focus groups and discussion with the project supervisor was tested on the researcher's female family members via Skype. After this preliminary study some questions were modified or removed. Further minor

corrections were done also after discussion with a native English speaker, to obviate all language discrepancies.

3.3   Validity, Reliability, Practicality

The validity of the research has been ensured by the appropriate tools used during the research. All of them were easy to use for all participants. The focus group research was done in local sports centres and the questionnaire was designed to meet all the criteria of clear use and understanding. On the other hand, the researcher cannot ever be sure that the respondents are telling the truth.

Accuracy of answers was checked through pilot testing and also by repeating of the focus groups findings by questionnaire. The results of the focus groups showed slightly different preferences that are connected with different age groups. The questionnaires could be considered as reliable because research was carried out during one week at different times during the day. The respondents were instructed during the questionnaire whenever they weren't sure. In addition, the questionnaires booklet was provided also with clear instructions.

The pilot testing was conducted in timing advance to ensure that all necessary changes could be done. The questionnaires were done personally only with the notepad in order to reduce the research costs.

3.4   The Research Ethics

Carrigan, Marinova, & Szmigin (2005) in their book described one of the longest discussions in the marketing industry. This discussion is about whether marketing research should be ethical or not. According to them, some marketers hold and opinion, that marketing research is "an ethically neutral system" (Beardshaw & Palfreman, 1990). On the other hand others such as "Baumhart (1961) and Tsalikis &

Fritzsche (1989) suggested that the moral issues in marketing are particularly important" (Carrigan, Marinova, & Szmigin, 2005, p. 6), mainly because of the extensive types of contact with the public (Malhotra, 1996).

Nowadays, marketing research is considered to be the biggest ethical challenge in marketing, because of the fact that a lot of people perceive marketing only as unethical practices (Alsmadi, 2008). In order to improve these perceptions of marketing, to support public confidence of marketing research and to protect human rights, the variety of ethical codes has been developed. Instead of all of them, only The Code of Marketing Research Standards (2007) and ICC/ESOMAR International Code of Marketing and Social Research Practice (1995) should be named. These codes describe the general rules for marketing research, which are dependent on public confidence that they are made ethically, honestly and objectively, without infringement of rights and privacy of the respondents.

Malhotra (1996, p. 823) stressed primarily four groups of stakeholders which are involved in the exchange process of marketing research: "the public at large, the actual respondents used in a study, the client, and the researcher". According to him the respondent has the biggest legitimate rights in marketing research. The most important rights are: the right to be informed about the purpose of the research, identity of the researcher, method of use of his data and research results; the right to privacy and confidentiality respondents have to be asked for a permission to use the recording device and their records must be destroyed at if required; the right to deception and harm; the right to respect and the right to withdraw partially or completely from the research process at any time (Alsmadi, 2008). But there also are some responsibilities. The most important of them expressed Dillon, Madden, & Firtle (1994) when they said that the respondents should answer honestly and truthfully.

3.5   The Limitation of the Study

Before considering the results of this research, there are a number of limitations, which should be taken into account.

The data gathered during the focus group research could express only the subjective opinion of respondents and not women in the middle-age as a whole. Moreover the representatives of the 50-70 age group were not present. Further misleading could be caused by the incomplete notes taken by the moderator without the help of an assistant.

The next limitation expresses the error of the researcher. The researcher's perception of middle-age women could cause significant errors in analysis of the results. The researched sample thus can represent only the women in some specific age mainly because of the fact that women were randomly selected instead of precisely selected sample.

Even thought that the researcher has personal contact with the respondents, theparticipation was voluntary, so some answers haven't been filled completely. Some respondents were filling the questionnaire in hurry so some of their answers could not have to be understood clearly or filled in honestly.

4 THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter is going to describe the data gathered during the research. The first part of this chapter presents the results of the focus group method; the second part specifies the results gathered by questionnaires. The questionnaire research was conducted on the streets of Huddersfield in the UK and was based on findings of focus groups gathered in two local sports centres. The women considered by researcher as middle-aged were chosen randomly in order to gain relevant results.

4.1 Focus Group Findings

The results of the focus groups are divided into four paragraphs according to the discussed topics. Firstly there is explained the layout of the researched objects into the groups, after that the customer behaviour of all participants and rationale for attending their current sports centre are discussed. Finally the participants' ideas about increasing the customer loyalty in the sports industry will be mentioned.

4.1.1 Participant Profiles:

All participants are women attending sports centres regularly for a long period of time. All participants also live within 20 miles of the chosen sports centres. The first group was done in women only sports centre with seven British women participants between 70-80 years. All members of this group are currently retired and usually take care about their grandchildren. All members are also long-time friends. They have known each other from their primary school. The second group consists of five women between 30 – 50 years and was conducted in a standard sports centre. One of these women is Indian, one is Polish and the rest of the group are native British. Only one woman does not have children, the others have at least one. Four of these women are currently working, one is already retired. Three members of this group don't know each other but there are two friends from secondary school.

4.1.2 Participant Custom:

Participants were probed for their perceptions and feelings regarding their customer behaviour in the sports industry in order to discover their customer loyalty.

All participants stated that they are using the services of sports centres. The first group tends to be more loyal than the second group. One participant from the first group even said:"We are extremely loyal I think". The others supported her statement enthusiastically. The second group on the other hand generally agreed that they would like to be a loyal customer, but they do not resist trying new things. They explained it would be unreasonable to assume that they might not try the services of a new sports centre if only to avoid a "boring life without the change". There was a general agreement among the group that it is logical to gather information about a new service provider in order to find one who will suits them the best.

4.1.3 Current Sports Centre:

All focus group participants were asked to answer why they chose their current sports centre and what could force them to change provider. The first group indicated mainly the distance, services only for women and the pleasant look of sports centre as a whole. The oldest member of this group stated: "It is JUST not an ordinary "GYM"." The second women added: "It's true. We feel pleasantly here. You can feel a friendly atmosphere all around. We can sit here, have a break, chat and nobody is trying to force us to do something." Even through that they enjoy exercising they stress also the centre's empathy with their health and age problems. The participants noted the presence of friendly, willing and helpful staff as well. Contrary to the first focus group the second group prefer the standards of services provided.

They expressed mainly wide range and quality of services. There was also a strong opinion expressed about the condition of equipment. One woman proclaimed: "I hate when it's unclean, sweaty or smelly." The others passionately agreed. The second focus group didn't bring up the idea of a women only service itself, but they happily discussed this topic after the researcher's guidance. One woman stated: "It's just awful how they stare at me. It's like it's not normal to be a women in a sports centre and

sometimes I really don't feel comfortable here." Both groups agreed that they will change the provider if the current one changes the quality of services provided.

The first focus group largely discussed the allowing membership for men, changes in sports centre appearance such as stronger light or uncomfortable relaxing area and higher prices of services. The second group mentioned changes in services as well, but they meant the lower quality of lectures, intensity of exercise and changes in staff. Similarly this group indicated that better equipment and additional services such as healthy lifestyle education, refreshment, washing or providing of towels could increase their customer loyalty.

4.1.4 *Benefits Supporting Loyalty:*

During the last phase the researcher attempted to identify the desired benefits for the participants. There were significant differences between both groups. The first group tended to prefer hard benefits, the second group the soft ones. The women in the first group were particularly surprised at the high volume of literature regarding raising loyalty by soft benefits for example in the form of trips organised by the sports centre. On the other hand the second group generally agreed with soft benefits in the form or private opening hours or "experience" vouchers. One woman from second group stated: "The prices are the same everywhere; I will be loyal to the one who can offer me something more." Contrary to this statement both groups identified that they don't like the discount based marketing campaigns that are aimed only at new customers. There was a preferred opinion that new customers are getting better deals or benefits than the current ones. Moreover one woman from the second group said: "I can't see the point of it, they always have better discounts!".

The key to solve this situation may be better developed loyalty programs that were keenly supported by both groups. The first group preferred priority opening hours that could ensure them more private exercising and improved discounts for current customers, the second group mentioned mainly not repeated benefits and also the

priority opening hours that could ensure that they would have time to exercise during their children school hours.

4.2   Questionnaire Findings

The results of the questionnaire data collection are separated into two sections. The first section introduces a general overview about respondents' participation and their customer behaviour in the Sports industry. The second section provides the specific preferences regarding the enhancing of customer loyalty. There were 85 responses in total and 67 responses made by middle-aged women. Each question is supplemented with two charts in order to compare the results of both of these groups.

4.2.1   Participant Profile

Age of participants is one of the most important features of this research. The sample of respondents consisted of different age groups. Between all respondents there was in each group at least one response. The major age group consisted of women from 40 to 49 years. This age group made up 51,76% of all respondents and also 65,67% of middle-age sample.

Figure 7: Question 1 - middle   Figure 8: Question 1 - all
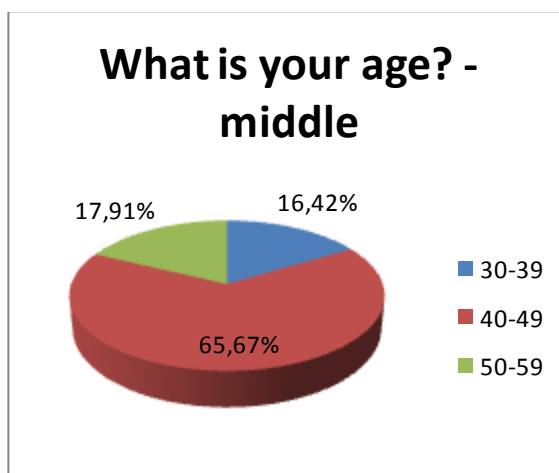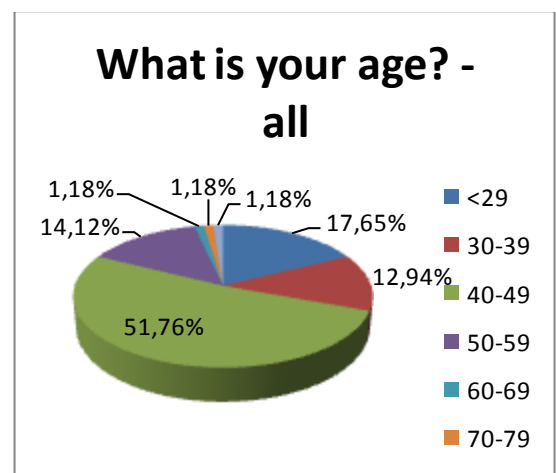
Although about 10% of researched women are not using services of sports or leisure centres there is a quite positive number of women who identified themselves as a user. In the whole sample this percentage was 38,82%, but in the middle-age sample it was 32,84% what means a small decline. The highest percentage of both groups uses sports or leisure centres sometimes.

Figure 9: Question 2 - all
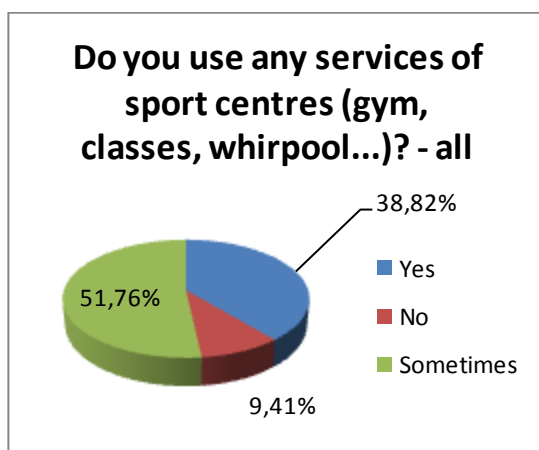
Figure 10: Question 2 - middle

Do you use any services of sport centres (gym, classes, whirpool...)? - all

38,82%
51,76%
9,41%

■ Yes
■ No
■ Sometimes

Do you use any services of sport centres (gym, classes, whirpool...)? - middle

32,84%
56,72%
10,45%

■ Yes
■ No
■ Sometimes
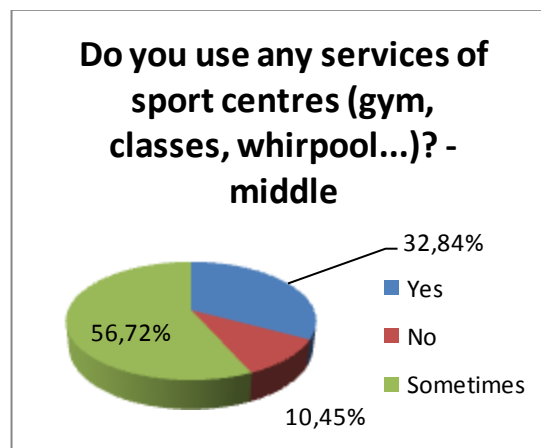
As the figures 11 and 12 show the major part of women in both groups consider themselves as loyal. There could be seen that percentage in the middle-aged group is little bit higher than in the general sample.

Figure 11: Question 3 - all
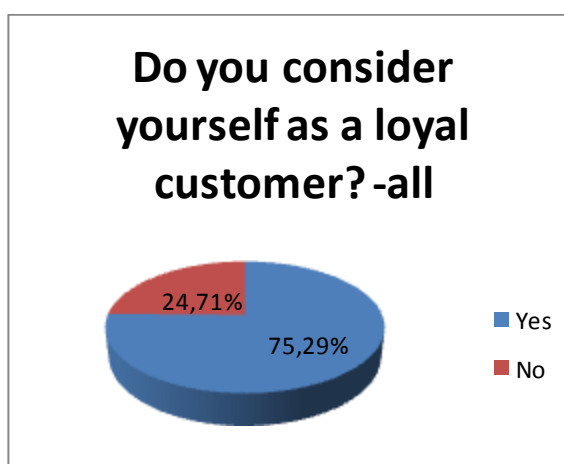
Figure 12: Question 3 - middle

Do you consider yourself as a loyal customer? - all

24,71%
75,29%

■ Yes
■ No

Do you consider yourself as a loyal customer? - middle

23,88%
76,12%

■ 51
■ 16
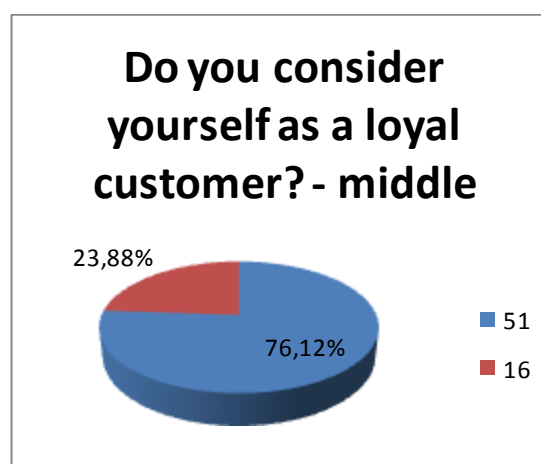
The majority of the women also stopped using the services of sports or leisure centres because they were not satisfied. This percentage was about 74% in both groups.
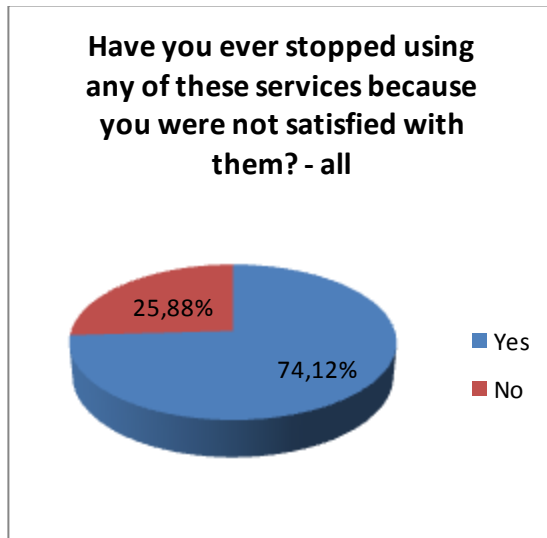
Figure 14: Question 4 -middle

Have you ever stopped using any of these services because you were not satisfied with them? - all

25,88%

74,12%

■ Yes
■ No

Have you ever stopped using any of these services because you were not satisfied with them? - middle

25,37%

74,63%

■ Yes
■ No
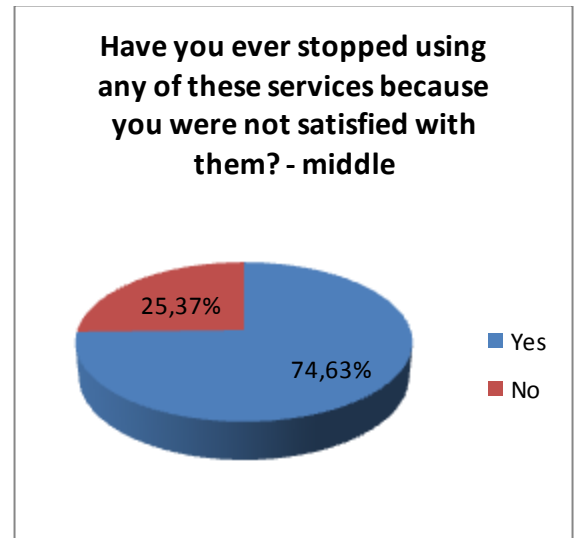
The research also shows that women in both groups are likely to switch to providers of similar services. The switchers create about 50% of both groups and another 40% will consider this option as well. Only less than 10% of women showed real loyalty. This percentage was slightly higher in the middle-aged group than in the overall sample.

Figure 15: Question 5 - all

In a case, that any competitor will offer you the same or similar services with better price, would you consider switching the providers? - all

44,71% 48,24%

7,06%

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
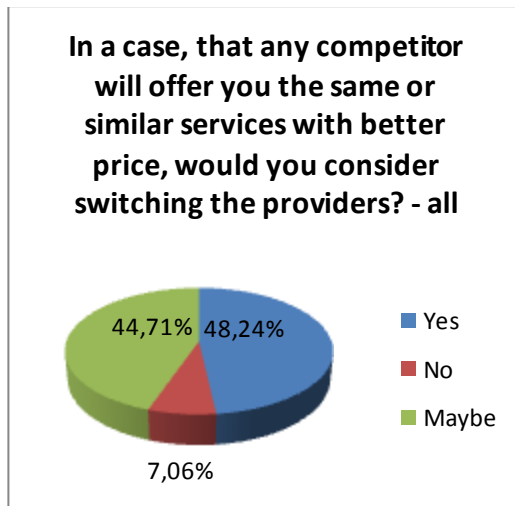
Figure 16: Question 5 - middle

In a case, that any competitor will offer you the same or similar services with better price, would you consider switching the providers? - middle

44,78% 47,76%

7,46%

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
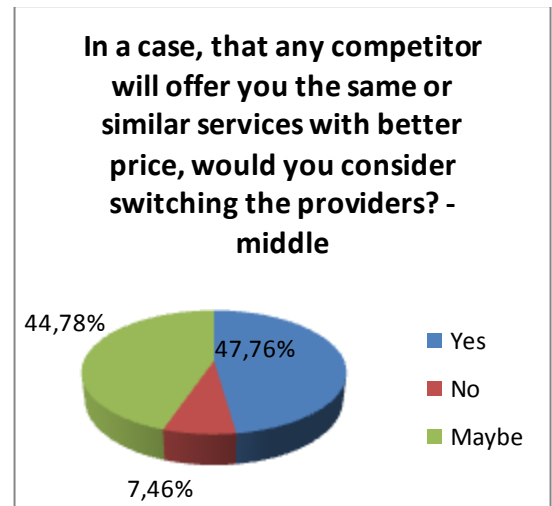
There is a predominating opinion about the marketing campaigns aimed only at new customers instead of current ones. More than 70% in both groups indicated that they do not like this behaviour. The 17,91% of women in the middle-age even indicated that it really bother them. There is slight difference between responses of the overall sample and that of the middle-age women. The middle-age group tends to be more bothered than the overall sample.

How do you feel, when the marketing campaign of your sport/ leisure centre is aimed only to new customers instead of the current ones? - all

16,47%
8,24% 4,71%
15,29%
55,29%

- It really bothers me
- It bothers me
- I don't care about it
- I don't mind

How do you feel, when the marketing campaign of your sport/ leisure centre is aimed only to new customers instead of the current ones? - middle

8,96%
14,93% 2,99%
17,91%
55,22%

- It really bothers me
- It bothers me
- I don't care about it
- I don't mind

Contrary to men, the women are more likely willing to gather information about the providers and prices before purchase. In both groups about 55% of women admit that they are doing it and 30% even do it regularly. Both groups have equable table results, thus is not possible to identify which group is more suspicious or active.

Figure 19: Question 7 - all

Do you identify yourself with this statement: "I'm usually gathering information about providers and prices before purchase". - all

3,53% 0,00%
7,06%
32,94%
56,47%

- I strongly agree
- I agree
- I don't know
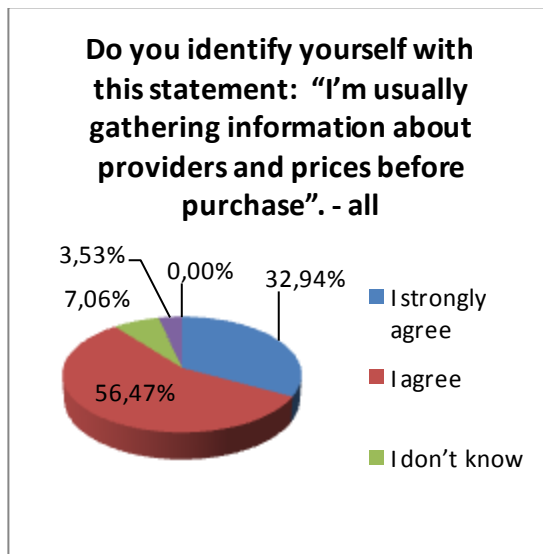
Figure 20: Question 7 -middle

Do you identify yourself with this statement: "I'm usually gathering information about providers and prices before purchase". - middle

4,48%
5,97% 0,00%
34,33%
55,22%

- I strongly agree
- I agree
- I don't know
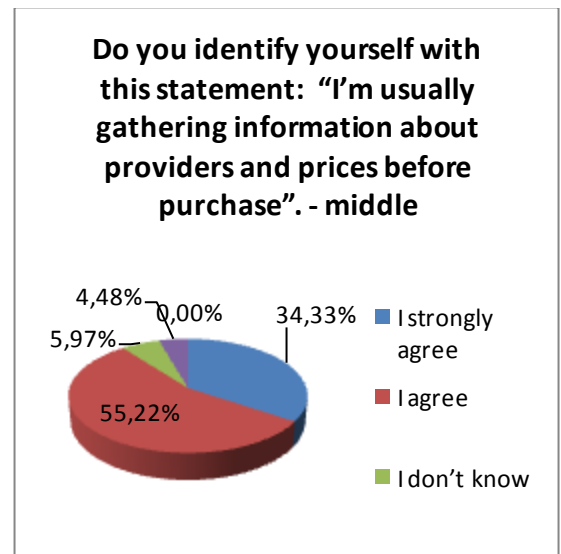
Participants were asked to identify how much each factor generated by focus group will involve them to increase their customer loyalty to a chosen provider. The most influential factor should be marked by 5 point, the least one by 1 point.

The question 8 that was aimed to identify the factors increasing customer loyalty was split into four areas according to those that were mentioned during the focus group research. The first area includes all services that should increase customer loyalty. The second area outlines the preferable characteristics of equipment. The third area aims to draw a conclusion about preferences in customer service and the last area show the differences between benefits.

The results of this question are similar for both groups (see appendix 3). The most influential factor in the service area is "Quality of products and services". This factor received 4,32 points that creates 10,05%. The "Price" follows with 4,26 points and 9,91%. The least interesting factor for all respondents is healthy life-style education with charge, even through that this service free of charge was on the fifth rank.

Figure 21: Service Preferences
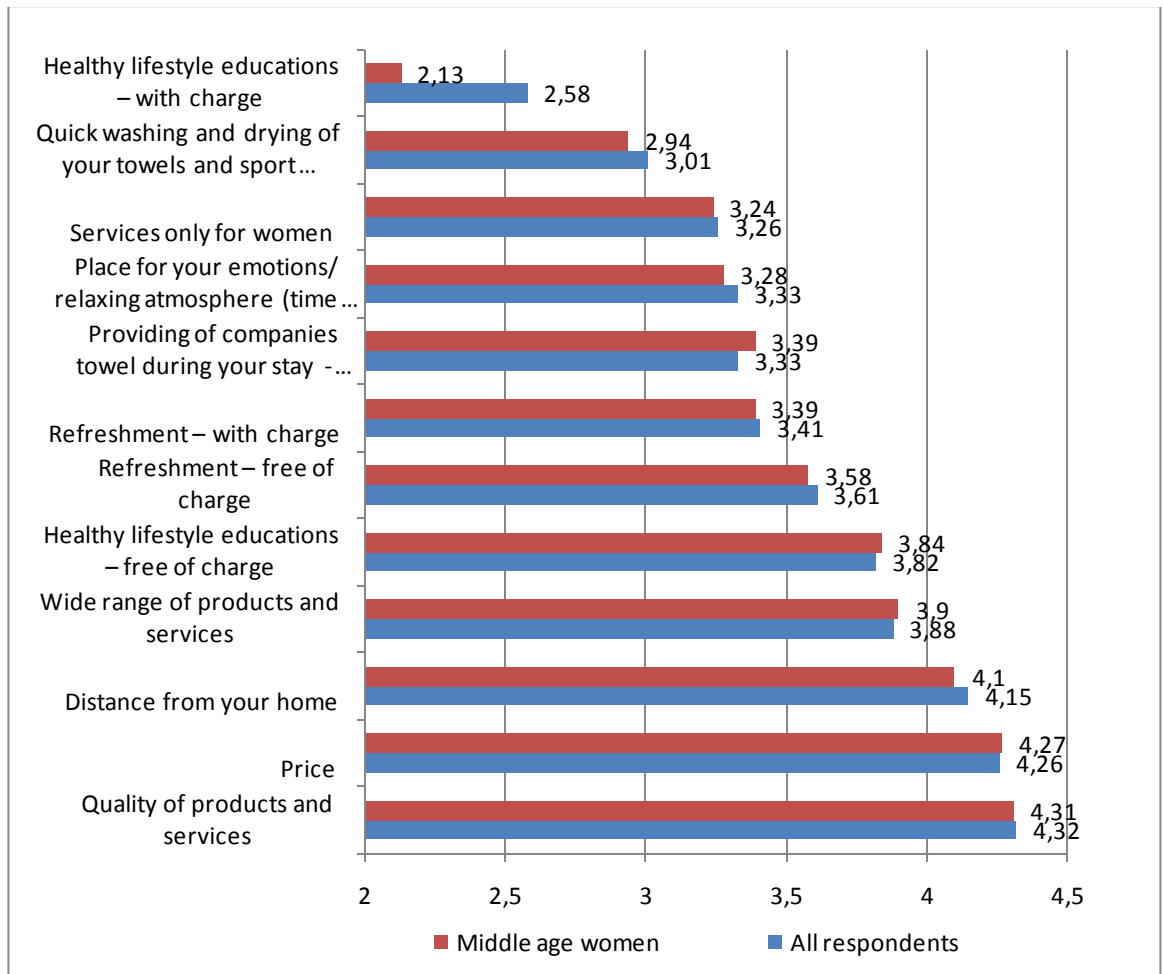
Even though that results of equipment are again quite similar, there could be clearly seen the slightly higher preferences of each factor in the group with all respondents. The most influential factors are "non-smelling, well-kept and clean equipment" that get about 4,5 points for each of these factors. The "non-smelling equipment" creates 14,15%. The percentage for middle-age women is little bit lower with 14,03%. The least important factor is the "strong light".

Figure 22: Equipment Preferences
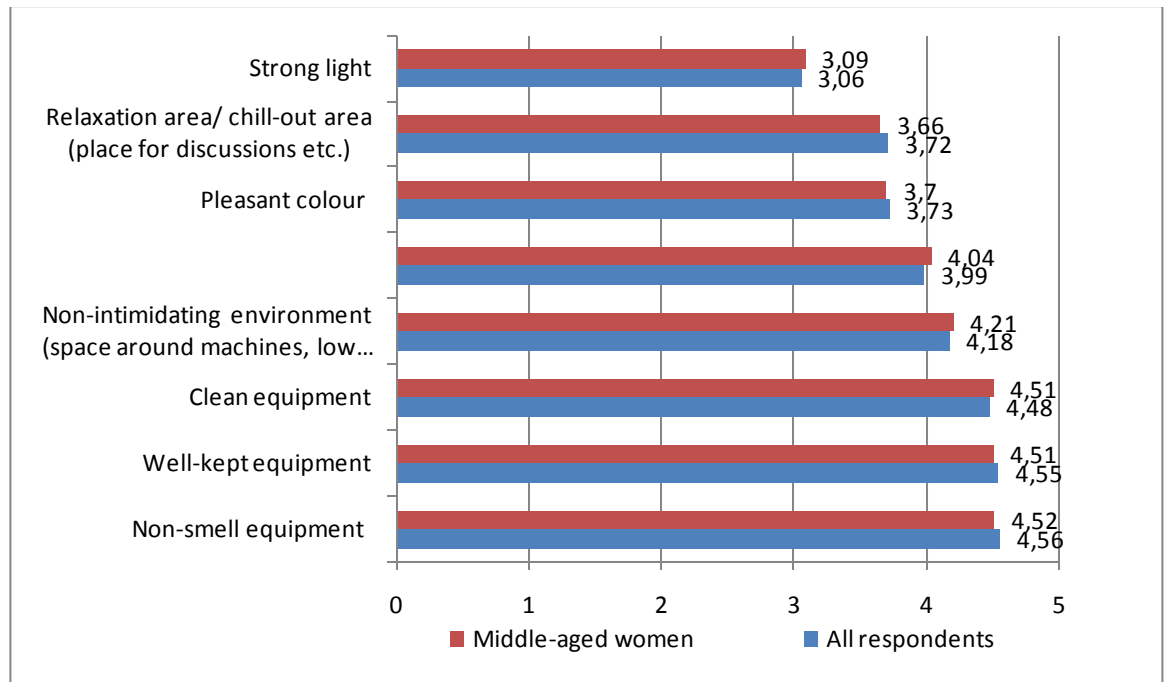
The highest preference in customer service was "Qualified staff". This factor was evaluated with 4,36 points by the whole sample and 4,37 points by the middle-aged women. Both of these numbers express around 20,90%. The lowest factor is "Personal approach to customer" with 3,85 points for the whole sample and 3,91 points for the middle-aged women. This amount expresses 18,47% and 18,66%, thus all factors in the customer service area could be considered as similarly influential.

Figure 23: Customer Service Preferences

Personal approach to customers — Middle-aged women 3,91 — All respondents 3,85
Proper demonstration of products and services — Middle-aged women 4,16 — All respondents 4,18
Friendly approach to customers — Middle-aged women 4,22 — All respondents 4,21
Professional staff — Middle-aged women 4,28 — All respondents 4,22
Qualified staff — Middle-aged women 4,37 — All respondents 4,36

■ Middle-aged women ■ All respondents

The last area is benefits. The highest number of points reached "Hard benefits" with 4,06 points =27,34% for all respondents and 4,07 points = 27,27% for the middle-aged women. The soft benefits has 3,82 points. This means 25,75% for all respondents and 25,57% in the middle-age sample. The priority opening hours are more desired by middle-age women, but trips are preferred by all respondents sample.

Figure 24: Benefits Preferences

Trips and events organised by your provider — Middle-aged women 3,28 — All respondents 3,27
Priority opening hours only for loyal customers (access 24/7, unlimited …) — Middle-aged women 3,76 — All respondents 3,69
Soft benefits (non-financial benefits such as membership programs,…) — Middle-aged women 3,82 — All respondents 3,82
Hard benefits (discounts and rebates in form of price reduction) — Middle-aged women 4,07 — All respondents 4,06

■ Middle-aged women ■ All respondents

To summarize all previous charts there are only tiny differences between
the developed areas. Each of the areas received around 25%. The most influential area
in both groups is customer service. This factor was a little bit more important for
the women in the middle-age than for sample with all respondents. The second area is
the equipment that was contrary to customer service was more important for
the sample with all respondents. After that follows the benefits and on the last rank
are services provided.

Figure 25: Final Chart - all
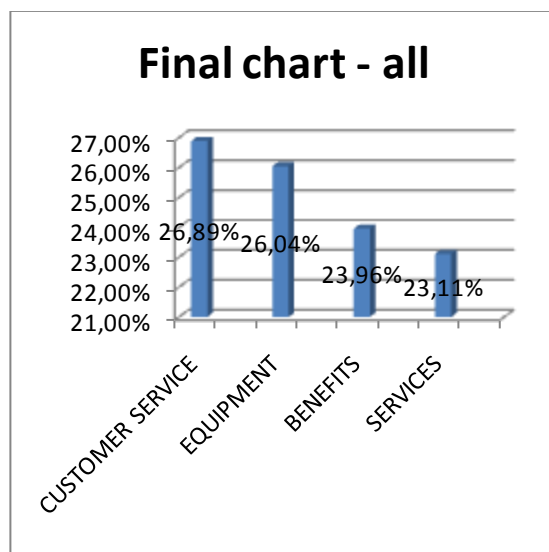
Figure 26: Final Chart - middle
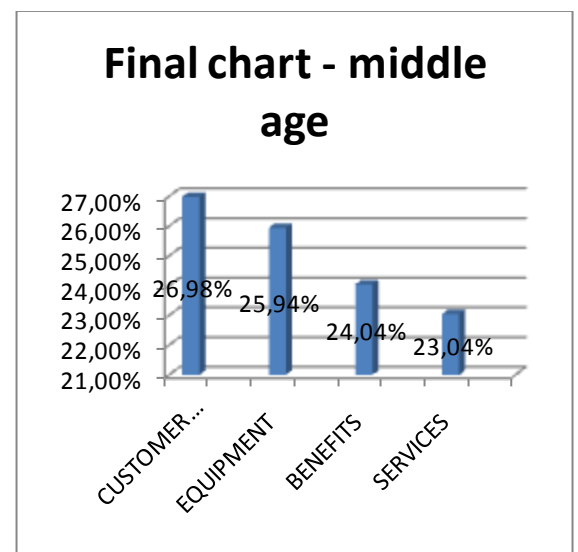
The further ideas that were mentioned as possible improvements for increasing
customer loyalty are mainly "Home babysitting" services or "Children playground".
The most of the women also stressed that staff that would take care about their
children have to be qualified enough and used to work with children. The next
repeatedly mentioned options are "Listening to music according to customer choice"
and "Parking area".

5   DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the comparison of the results gathered during both research methods and discusses the research findings with previous research in order to answer the research objectives.

5.1   OBJECTIVE 1: To identify the current level of participation by middle-aged women in the sports industry

In order to identify a clear overview of adult participation in sports the annual General Household Survey included a number of standardised questions concerning the sports industry (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Since 1987 this previous research shows the strong decline in male participation contrary to a slow but constant increase in participation of females (Aldridge & NIACE, 2002).The participation of both genders is still high. In 1996 more than 81% of adults in Britain were doing some kind of sports or physical activity (Aldridge & NIACE, 2002). In 2001 the NIACE survey published that 35% of adults were participating in sports such as exercising in sports, fitness or leisure clubs (Aldridge & NIACE, 2002). Those participants included 44% of women. This percentage is similar to 38.82% of the researched overall sample. This number could be also affected by geographical location. In 2004 the Sport England Research revealed that adults living in the South West of England are more likely to participate in sporting activities than the other regions (SPORT ENGLAND, 2009).

Concerning the 32,84% of women in the middle-age who identified themselves as current participants in the questionnaire research and another 56,72% who participate occasionally, it seems, that sports and leisure centres are nowadays widely attended by middle-aged women. This presumption is supported by General Household Survey. However there could be found a clear decline of participation in sports by aging people, since 1987 the women over 60 have increased their participation in sports by nearly a third. On the other hand there are also studies which show that participation of females declines with the age more than the males' one and

stress overall aging of the population caused by the Baby Boom after the Second World War (Whitbourne & Willis, 2006; Houlihan, 2003).

The aging women and especially those who belong to the after-war Baby Boom Generation are generally assumed to cling to a deeper relationship to the others because of the pre-existing friendships among their age group. Whitbourne & Willis (2006) developed a theory based on the presumption that with stronger relationships across the middle-age group, the women are more likely to be loyal.

According to the results of this dissertation the clear majority of middle-aged women consider themselves as loyal customers, but more than half of them are willing to change providers if their current one changes the quality of services provided, or if the new provider can offer them the same or similar service at a better price. Both research methods show that this behaviour is usually motivated by a desire for new experiences or by fear of a stereotypical and boring life. Another very popular reason is also their reasonable economical thinking. Quite an extensive number of the researched women have already changed provider because they were not satisfied with their previous one. All of these findings are generally considered as switching forces in customer behaviour literature (Roos, 1999; Bianchi, 1998; Kotler & Armstrong, 2006).

Only a small minority of the researched middle-aged women show true loyalty which is in conflict with the theory of Baby Boom loyalists.

5.2 OBJECTIVE2: To find out those factors which evoke customer loyalty and to examine which of these factors are the most influential in determining the loyalty of middle-aged women in the sports industry

In recent years, a number of conceptual papers have studied customer loyalty from many different angles. Traditional presumption based on the standardised Marketing has allowed developing theories about equality of loyalty with satisfaction, product quality or meeting customer expectations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006; Timm, 2008; McNealy, 1994; Javadein, Khanlari, & Estiri, 2008). But the most of these theories were latterly disproved by other studies which hold the view of these factors only as antecedents of loyalty (Kumar & Werner, 2006; Shaw & Ivens, 2002; Bodet, 2008). While the study of customer loyalty has received considerable attention, research examining the factors which could really evoke customer loyalty has been scant. Only a few authors for example Brown (1995) or Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon (2004) have really studied them and examined what customers value the most. Even smaller amount of authors specified these factors for participants of the sports industry.

In order to find out those factors which evoke customer loyalty of middle-aged women in the sports industry, the focus group research has been conducted. The focus groups' participants have identified the factors which could possibly evoke customer loyalty. All of these factors have been easily separated into four specific areas.

According to the analysis of the questionnaire's findings the most important area is customer service which contains such factors as "Professional" and "Qualified" staff with a "Friendly approach to customers". The second important area is the equipment which includes the condition of the exercising machines and other equipment of the sports or leisure centre. On the following ranks are benefits and services provided, including factors such as "quality", "price", "distance" and other additional services.

Even though the differences between areas were not huge, this order does not correspond with the results of focus group research. Although the first group stated as the most important factors those that are included in customer service, the second group preferred the standards of services provided and the condition of the equipment. Because of this fact it was necessary to split factors to one basic group and analyse them separately.

According to this further analysis the most influential factors for middle-aged women are those connected with condition of the equipment. These factors are followed by a majority of factors from the customer service area mixed with some factors from services provided such as already mentioned "quality", "price" and "distance". Very important factor is also a non-intimidating environment in the form of space around the machines, women only services and low number of people in one room. On the next positions there are hard benefits followed by the soft ones. The least important factors seems to be those connected with the appearance of the sports or leisure centre and additional services such as healthy lifestyle education, refreshment and washing or providing of towels. This second analysis fits with the focus group findings more accurately. Hence the inaccuracy of the previous analysis has thus been caused by a wide range of research factors in each area.

These results are consistent with the result of research that has been done by Fitness Energie in September 2009. According to this research the current female participants of this fitness centre desire the most a feeling of engagement with the sports centre and like the absence of males in a form of non-intimidating environment and machines developed specially for female needs (Anonymous, 2011). There is the difference between both researches in perception of appearance of sports centres though. The results of Fitness Energie's research shows that women require more pleasant appearance of sports centre than the women researched during the research intended

for the purposes of this dissertation. The influence of characteristics of the place where the sport is run on meeting customer satisfaction and expectation stressed also (Williams & Vaske, 2003).

On the other hand the dissertation results are consistent also with results from previous studies conducted in different settings such as the skiing industry etc, but all of these researches have been done at different samples of population (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Alexandris, Kouthouris, & Meligdis, 2006).

5.3   OBJECTIVE 3: To discover which areas of marketing strategy might be useful in enhancing the customer loyalty of middle-aged women

As results from the previous paragraph it could be a little difficult to decide which area of marketing strategy might be the most useful in enhancing the customer loyalty of middle-aged women. Instead of the areas might be useful to aim rather at the specific factors mentioned above or divide the process of loyal customer creation into small steps as suggested (Cram, 1994; Timm, 2008)

Considering the results of this research and the necessity of understanding the customer needs and desires suggested by authors such as Kotler & Armstrong (2006) and Storbacka & Lehtinen (2002) in overall marketing the focusing on customers could be advised as a useful strategy. The applicability of the customer relationship marketing to the sports industry is verified also by the research of Pitts & Stotlar (2002). This strategy offers provider the opportunity to aim at customer service through better recognising its customers and providing better condition of equipment as well. Both of these areas could be also easily connected in any form of loyalty programs that were supported by both methods and are positively assessed by a number of other authors.

Kumar & Werner (2006) explained that there is nothing more nurturing for deepening customer relationship than the loyalty program. Bolton, Kannan, & Bramlett (2000) found out that members of loyalty programs are moreover generally less sensitive to the changes in the service quality and higher prices of their provider than the other customers. The loyalty programs are usually based on the range of benefits received after the entering the membership. These benefits are usually divided into monetary and non-monetary groups (Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2009).

Barlow (1996) called them the hard and the soft benefits. The hard benefits are supposed to create customer loyalty by offering tangible rewards such as discounts or price reductions in return for purchase (Barlow, 1996). The soft benefits are on the other hand based on intangible rewards such as priority opening hours (Barlow, 1996). There is an old saying that true customer loyalty cannot be purchased by any discount (Timm, 2008). A "soft-benefits" approach is aimed at the emotional level to improve loyalty by making the customer feel they are special and that they have special access and offers unique to them (Barlow, 2000). That is a reason why the hard and the soft benefits should be combined together.

This is also in accordance with the results of questionnaire method. The researched women suggested that the loyalty program should be targeted firstly at the hard benefits and after that at the soft benefits. The soft benefits were keenly supported by younger element of the research sample thus with the upcoming years could be the differences between hard and soft benefits reduced. There is however a high risk connected with this step. The providers should not focus only on the potential customers instead of the current ones. This presumption maintain also Keiningham, Aksoy, Cooil, & Andreassen (2008). Moreover the absolute majority of questionnaire respondents and also both focus groups indicated that such behaviour really bother them. To support the customers loyalty it is also important to develop new and original benefits and do not repeat the old ones.

As an additional service which fits the requirement of loyalty program and which received quite high rank would be the priority opening hours. The priority opening hours were supported by both questionnaire and focus group research. Other desired additional services are "Healthy life style education-free of charge", "Babysitting" and "Listening to music according to customer's choice".

6   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This dissertation was designed to investigate the customer loyalty of middle-aged women in the sports service sector in Huddersfield by identifying the most influential factors of marketing strategy affecting customer loyalty.

The customer loyalty is nowadays considered to be the key source of competitive strategy and the only way how to survive in the current service industry (Reichheld, 2001). The sports companies have to continuously work on creation of relationship with their customers that will lead to their retention and consequent loyalty.
On the other hand managers have to carefully consider which customers to serve because not every customer is suitable for deeper relationship. The managers have to focus on customers who are already committed to the company instead of attracting new ones (Keiningham, Aksoy, Cooil, & Andreassen, 2008).

Concerning the situation of middle-aged women in the sports industry, it is possible to say that middle-age women are the appropriate target market to serve. The growing popularity of their participation in sports has been clearly seen during the whole research. Moreover according to the reviewed literature the middle-aged women tend to be more loyal participants than males. This presumption has been verified also by this dissertation research.

According to a number of authors a long term relationship could be built only after the careful research of customers' needs and expectations (Best, 2008). In order to identify the marketing strategy that will fits to the preferences of middle-aged women the focus group research has been conducted. The proposed factors that could evoke customer loyalty have been verified by face to face questionnaire research in Huddersfield.

The results of this dissertation revealed that the most important factors are those connected with customer service and condition of equipment. Other important factors were connected with women's feeling. The middle-aged women showed the clear preference of women only sports centres or at least the non-intimidating environment. On the other hand the results also showed that factors cannot be divided into specific marketing areas but should be implemented separately according to the highest preferences of each factor by dividing the process of loyal customer creation into small steps (Cram, 1994; Timm, 2008).

That is why it is almost impossible to advise the appropriate marketing area that will ensure the customer loyalty of female sports participants. The sport marketers thus should implement the traditional marketing focus on customers and develop an interactive process which will allow the company learn from its experiences (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006; Storbacka & Lehtinen, 2002; Cram, 1994).

The creation of customer relationship marketing as proposed by a number of authors such as Storbacka & Lehtinen (2002) and Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne (2002) provides the opportunity to aim at better recognising its customers, improving the condition of equipment and excellence in customer service. The customer services can include also the emotional connection and communication mastery that has been proposed in previous research, but not verified by this dissertation. On the other hand the researched women preferred the implementation of loyalty programs that will be developed according to their needs. The manager of sports and leisure centres thus should firstly conduct a proper research regarding the wishes of their customers and after that developed the loyalty program.

Customer relationship marketing strategy thus fits to the unique requirement of both the sports and service industry (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002).

7   APPENDICES

7.1   Appendix 1 – Focus Group Table

QUESTION	GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Does the loyalty mean the same for them as for this research?	Yes	Yes
Do they consider themselves as loyal customers?	Yes - extremely	Sometimes
What do they like about their current sport centre?	Women only services Not ordinary "GYM" – pleasant area and friendly atmosphere where to spend leisure time Understanding to/ Sympathy with health and age problem Distance	Services (wide range, quality,) Equipment (clean, non-smell, well-kept)
What other services could increase their loyalty?	Nothing – they are the most loyal as they can be	Better equipment Additional services (healthy lifestyle education, refreshment, washing and drying , towels for free) Opening hours Priority lockers
What kind of benefits would they like to have?	Hard	Soft
What will force them to stop using this sport centre?	Strong light Man Higher prices	Change in staff Wrong services
How do they feel about the benefits only for new customers?	Not fair –better deals and benefits	Can't see the point of it
Will they appreciate any loyalty program?	Yes – privacy, discounts	Yes –private opening hours, "experience" vouchers , not repeated benefits

7.2   Appendix 2 - Questionnaire

Dear Sir or Madame,

My name is Miroslava Solarova and I am a third year student of a bachelor degree programme at Huddersfield University - Business school. I would like to ask you about cooperating with me on my dissertation.

The aim of this questionnaire is to identify factors that could increase customer loyalty in the sports and leisure industry. I would like to aim mainly to middle aged women. Your answers will still be more than useful even if you do not sport regularly.

I would be very grateful if you could spare 10 minutes in order to complete this questionnaire. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, 100% anonymous and you can terminate it at any time. The results will be confidentially used only for the purposes of my dissertation.

Thank you for your help. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,
Miroslava Solárová
ms.solarova@gmail.com

PS: If you are interested in the research results, please visit my webpage at www.nawaweb.webnode.cz in the mid of June.

1. What is your age?

☐ <29

☐ 30-39

☐ 40-49

☐ 50-59

☐ 60-69

☐ 70-79

☐ 80<

2. Do you use any services of sport centres (gym, classes, whirpool...)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. Do you consider yourself as a loyal customer?

☐ Yes

☐ No

4. Have you ever stopped using any of these services because you were not satisfied with them?

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. In a case, that any competitor will offer you the same or similar services with better price, would you consider switching the providers?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

6. **How do you feel, when the marketing campaign of your sport/ leisure centre is aimed only to new customers instead of the current ones?**

☐ It really bothers me.

☐ It bothers me.

☐ I don't care about it.

☐ I don't mind.

☐ I don't mind at all.

7. **Do you identify yourself with this statement: "I'm usually gathering information about providers and prices before purchase".**

☐ I strongly agree

☐ I agree

☐ I don't know

☐ I disagree

☐ I strongly disagree

8. **Please mark how much will each factor influence you to increase your loyalty to a chosen provider?**

☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

☐ 5 : This factor will influence me the most to be more loyal customer

☐ 1 : This factor will not influence me at all to be more loyal

Listed data were chosen according to discussions with focus groups in different sport and leisure centres.

Services:

Wide range of products and services	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1
Quality of products and services	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1

Price	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1

Price ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Distance from your home ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Services only for women ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Healthy lifestyle educations – with charge ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Healthy lifestyle educations – free of charge ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Refreshment – with charge ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Refreshment – free of charge ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Quick washing and drying of your towels and sport dress by your provider during your stay

☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Providing of companies towel during your stay - free of charge ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Place for your emotions/ relaxing atmosphere (time for friends, chatting)

☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Equipment:

Non-intimidating environment (space around machines, low number of people in one room)

☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Pleasant colour ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Strong light ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Clean equipment ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Non-smell equipment ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Well-kept equipment ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Relaxation area/ chill-out area (place for discussions etc.)

☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Priority lockers for loyal customers (lockers, where you could leave your stuff/belongings during your membership) ☐ 5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Customer service:

Personal approach to customers   ☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Friendly approach to customers   ☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Qualified staff   ☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Professional staff   ☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Proper demonstration of products and services ☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Benefits:

Hard benefits (discounts and rebates in form of price reduction)

☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Soft benefits (non-financial benefits such as membership programs, priority services etc...)

☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Priority opening hours only for loyal customers (access 24/7, unlimited stay)

☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

Trips and events organised by your provider

☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2 ☐ 1

9. **Do you have any ideas that could support our loyalty to chosen provider?**

7.3 Appendix 3 - Analysis

7.3.1 Services

Table 3: Services

Answer	All respondents						Middle age women					
	5 P	4 P	3 P	2 P	1 P	Score	5 P	4 P	3 P	2 P	1 P	Score
Quality of products and services	37	42	3	2	1	4,32	28	34	3	2	0	4,31
Price	38	36	6	5	0	4,26	29	30	5	3	0	4,27
Distance from your home	28	47	5	5	0	4,15	19	40	4	4	0	4,10
Wide range of products and services	13	58	7	5	2	3,88	11	45	5	5	1	3,90
Healthy lifestyle educations – free of charge	16	45	17	7	0	3,82	12	37	13	5	0	3,84
Refreshment – free of charge	17	34	22	8	4	3,61	11	29	18	6	3	3,58
Refreshment – with charge	7	40	22	13	3	3,41	12	22	15	16	2	3,39
Providing of companies towel during your stay - free of charge	10	35	20	13	7	3,33	4	32	19	10	2	3,39
Place for your emotions/ relaxing atmosphere (time for friends, chatting)	11	29	26	15	4	3,33	9	21	21	12	4	3,28
Services only for women	12	27	21	21	4	3,26	8	26	15	10	8	3,24
Quick washing and drying of your towels and sport dress by your provider during your stay	8	23	24	22	8	3,01	7	17	16	19	8	2,94
Healthy lifestyle educations – with charge	7	14	28	29	7	2,58	5	13	22	22	5	2,13

7.3.2 Equipment

Table 4: Equipment

Answer	All respondents						Middle age women					
	5 P	4 P	3 P	2 P	1 P	Score	5 P	4 P	3 P	2 P	1 P	Score
Non-smell equipment	55	26	2	1	1	4,56	42	21	2	1	1	4,52
Well-kept equipment	52	30	2	0	1	4,55	38	26	2	1	0	4,51
Clean equipment	48	33	2	1	1	4,48	39	25	2	0	1	4,51
Non-intimidating environment (space around machines, low number of people in one room)	27	50	5	2	1	4,18	22	39	4	2	0	4,21
Priority lockers for loyal customers (lockers, where you could leave your stuff/belongings during your membership)	29	36	11	8	1	3,99	26	26	8	6	1	4,04
Pleasant colour	13	43	22	7	0	3,73	10	34	16	7	0	3,70
Relaxation area/ chill-out area (place for discussions etc.)	14	47	13	8	3	3,72	10	38	8	8	3	3,66
Strong light	8	22	27	23	5	3,06	5	21	21	15	5	3,09

7.3.3 Customer Service

Table 5: Customer Service

	All respondents						Middle age women					
Answer	5 P	4 P	3 P	2 P	1 P	Score	5 P	4 P	3 P	2 P	1 P	Score
Qualified staff	40	40	3	0	2	4,36	31	32	3	0	1	4,37
Professional staff	32	43	8	1	1	4,22	27	34	5	0	1	4,28
Friendly approach to customers	29	48	6	1	1	4,21	24	36	6	0	1	4,22
Proper demonstration of products and services	29	46	8	0	2	4,18	22	38	5	0	2	4,16
Personal approach to customers	18	46	14	4	3	3,85	15	37	11	2	2	3,91

7.3.4 Benefits

Table 6: Benefits

	All respondents						Middle age women					
Answer	5 P	4 P	3 P	2 P	1 P	Score	5 P	4 P	3 P	2 P	1 P	Score
Hard benefits (discounts and rebates in form of price reduction)	27	42	11	4	1	4,06	21	34	8	4	0	4,07
Soft benefits (non-financial benefits such as membership programs, priority services etc...)	19	38	22	6	0	3,82	14	31	18	4	0	3,82
Priority opening hours only for loyal customers (access 24/7, unlimited stay)	15	40	20	9	1	3,69	15	30	14	7	1	3,76
Trips and events organised by your provider	9	32	25	11	8	3,27	8	25	18	10	6	3,28

7.3.5 Final Chart of Preferences

Table 7: Total chart of preferences

Area	All respondents		Middle age women	
	Score	%	Score	%
CUSTOMER SERVICE	354	26,89%	280,80	26,98%
EQUIPMENT	342,875	26,04%	270,00	25,94%
BENEFITS	315,5	23,96%	250,25	24,04%
SERVICES	304,3333	23,11%	239,75	23,04%

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