

**Involvement and Loyalty in Recreation Swimming in Greece:
Investigating Relationships**

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Abstract

Present study tested the validity of involvement scale (Kyle et al., 2004), examined differences according demographic characteristics and investigated possible relationships between involvement and attitudinal loyalty in context of recreational swimming. Three hundred and forty nine participants (61.9% females) from a major swimming sport center in northern Greece, completed the three dimensional involvement model of Kyle's et al (2004), and Armitage & Conner's (1999) attitudinal loyalty's instrument. Demographics of the sample and frequency of participation were also recorded. The results indicated high differences ($p < .01$) between dimensions of involvement and the frequency of participation levels supporting the predictive validity of the scale. Female subgroup and married subgroup scored significantly higher in all involvement dimensions (attraction, centrality, self-expression) than males and singles respectively. Significant statistical differences existed also between involvement dimensions and age subgroups. Finally, involvement concept only partially (centrality, $\beta = .13$ and attraction, $\beta = .47$ dimensions) predicted swimmers loyalty ($p < .001$). Marketing implications are discussed toward the development of appropriate promotion strategies from sport managers toward overcoming swimmer's needs and broadening participants net.

Keywords: involvement; attitudinal loyalty; demographic characteristics; frequency of participation; recreational swimming

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Introduction

The construct of involvement have studied widely in leisure, recreation and sport tourism services (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003; Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003). Involvement has been defined as an “unobservable state of motivation arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product”. Leisure involvement reflects people's beliefs about their leisure participation including the importance of and interest in such participation, and symbolic values derived from it (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Kim, Scott, and Crompton (1997) connected also involvement with behavior outcomes such as the time spent on an activity or frequency of participation.

Research has repeatedly shown that one of the best marketing strategies is to maintain and increase participants' level of involvement and loyalty to the respective service. The importance of loyalty to recreation service providers has received considerable attention in the leisure literature over the past decade (Alexandris, Kouthouris, & Meligdis, 2006; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004). Building customer loyalty is an important task for recreation managers today since loyal customers bring multiple benefits to the organization, including revenue generation, development of positive word of mouth, networking and opportunities for developing relationship marketing. It is accepted widely today that it costs more money to attract new customers than to retain the existing ones (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2006).

Those who provide recreational services can benefit from having involved and loyal participants/clients since these participants or clients appear to play an essential role in achieving important organizational goals, such as revenue generation, developing a positive reputation, networking, community development, and promoting the quality of life (Backman & Crompton, 1991a; Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998).

Swimming as an indoor or outdoor recreation activity provides very valuable health benefits. Recreation swimming is one of the most popular sport leisure activities in Greece. A number of active adults prefer recreation swimming participation to develop their physical and mental skills. Public or private sport centers administration pursuit to understand and satisfy the needs of their potential participants.

Present study was conducted in the context of the Greek recreational swimming services, aiming to test the validity of the swimming involvement scale, examine involvement differences towards swimmers' demographic characteristics and investigate relationships between involvement and attitudinal loyalty.

Theoretical Background

Involvement Construct

Laurent and Kapferer (1985) developed the Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP), according to which involvement is a multi-dimensional construct, consisting of the following dimensions: importance, pleasure, sign, risk probability, and risk consequence. However, CIP has received much more attention due to its multidimensional structure (Broderic & Mueller, 1999). With regard to the measurement of involvement, Havitz and Dimanche (1990) proposed several propositions about involvement in the context of recreation and tourism. Among them, the first proposition addresses an important issue of involvement measurement: "Multidimensioned scales that portray the involvement construct as a profile of scores, rather than as a single score, are most appropriate for measuring involvement with recreational and tourist experience" (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990, p. 184).

Kyle et al. (2003; 2004) utilized a tri-dimensional approach, including the dimensions of attraction, centrality and self-expression, which have consistently been shown to be applicable and reliably measured within leisure settings (Wiley, Shaw, & Havitz, 2000). Attraction refers to the perceived importance that an activity holds for an individual, and the pleasure that derives from participation in the specific activity (McIntyre & Pigram, 1992). Centrality has a social content, expressed by the importance of the activity for an individual's friends and significant others. Furthermore, it refers to the role that an activity has on an individual's overall life (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). Finally, self-expression refers to the "self-representation or the impression of the self that individuals wish to convey to others through their participation in the activity" (Kyle & Chick, 2004, p. 245).

Frequency of Participation and Involvement

In regards of frequency of participation, Havitz, Dimanche and Bogle (1994) found that fitness participants classified as 'Knowledgeable Involvement' members and

'Conformist Purchasers' had the highest rates of participation among six identified market segments. 'Knowledgeable Involvement' participants had higher than average attraction, sign, and risk probability factors. 'Conformist Purchasers' had higher than average scores on sign, risk probability and risk consequence. It should be noted that those two segments were the only markets (of six total) which had above average scores on at least three of the four involvement dimensions examined in that study. Schuett (1993) reported that frequency of participation or the number of days kayaking showed that as the number of days kayaking increased, enduring involvement increased.

Park (1996) found that adult fitness participants' levels of involvement positively influenced both intensity of participation and frequency of participation, but that length of participation was not related to level of involvement. Kerstetter and Kovich (1997) reported that attraction scores were positively related to length of participation and numbers of games attended among women's basketball spectators, whereas sign was linked positively only with number of games attended. Havitz and Dimanche (1990, p. 189) proposed, "an individual's involvement profile with a recreational activity, tourist destination, or related equipment is positively related to frequency of participation, travel or purchase".

Demographic Characteristics and Involvement

Sex Differences

Havitz and Dimanche (1999) supported that only limited research existed between involvement and demographic variables. Schuett (1993) suggested that female kayakers experience more enduring involvement than male kayakers. More recently the study of Wiley et al., (2000) examined and compared the leisure involvement profiles of female and male participants in "conforming" (gender-appropriate) and "nonconforming" (gender-inappropriate) activities. Specifically, the study involved a survey of general sports involvement and specific activity involvement among adult recreational hockey players (51 men and 76 women) and figure skaters (24 men and 54 women). Results showed that male hockey players had higher centrality scores compared with the other groups. The results, however, also showed that women had higher activity-attraction scores, the female figure skaters reported the highest activity self-expression, and the female hockey players had the highest attraction for sports in general.

Age Groups Differences

In terms of age, some researchers suggest that age and involvement interact (Madrigal et al., 1992), while others support the opposite (Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997; Schuett, 1993). Particularly, a number of studies indicated dissimilar results as far as concerned with the relationship between age and involvement. Frederick, Havitz, and Shaw (1994), as Siegenthaler and Lam (1992) supported the relationship between age and involvement while Park (1996) didn't. On another study concerning age and involvement, Backman and Veldkamp (1995) found that older participants tend to show higher levels of loyalty, involvement, or both in recreational activities.

Marital Status Differences

As far as marital status is concerned, Madrigal, Havitz and Howard (1992) examined married couple's involvement with family vacations. They were able to identify only two strong factors: pleasure/importance and sign dimensions. Their study reported positive relationships between pleasure/importance dimension and gender role and education and a negative relationship between pleasure/importance and parental status. The relationship between sign dimension and parental status was negative, but the relationship between age and sign dimension was positive.

Attitudinal Loyalty

Loyalty has earned considerable attention not only in the field of business consumer behavior but also in leisure research (Backman & Crompton, 1991a; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998). Pritchard, Havitz and Howard (1999) suggested loyalty is the steadfast allegiance to a person or cause. According to other researchers, loyalty reflects people's attitude and behavior toward a brand of service and repeat patronage in the use of the brand (Backman & Crompton, 1991b; Park, 1996).

The development of loyalty construct has evolved within the framework of behavioral, attitudinal, and composite concepts in the field of marketing. Behavioral loyalty is comprised of several components, including duration (long-term length of participation, patronage, or use), frequency (number of purchases, uses, or participation over a specified time-period; for example, a week, month, season, or year), intensity (hours per week or days per month devoted to purchase, use, or participation), sequence (purchase patterns within or between brands), proportion (the percentage of brand loyalty), and probability of brand use over time (its intent being to predict future

behavioral loyalty; Havitz & Howard, 1995; Park, 1996). Attitudinal loyalty reflects an individual's attitudes toward a product/service brand and repeat patronage in the use of the brand (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). According to composite concept of loyalty, a number of researchers supported that loyalty measures should combine both behavioral and attitudinal components (Kim et al., 1997). In the present study, involvement was considered as attitudinal concept.

Demographic Characteristics and Loyalty

Previous research showed mixed results in terms of the relationship between loyalty and demographics (Snyder, 1991). Exter (1986) found little difference in demographics between customers who were loyal and those who were not. Concerning age, a number of studies found that age may influence consumer loyalty (Hsu, 2000; Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997), others stated that older customers (> 50 years old) tended to show higher loyalty than the younger ones (< 50 years old) (Hsu, 2003; Pritchard & Howard, 1997).

In a study concerning loyalty in municipal recreation programs, respondents 51 years and older demonstrated significantly higher levels of loyalty to municipal agency programs than the two younger groups (19-34, 35-50 years old). No significant differences in loyalty were observed across family income categories. Although statistically nonsignificant loyalty mean scores increased with increases in income. No consistent relationship was observed between years of education and loyalty to municipal agency programs (Selin, Howard, Udd, & Cable, 1988).

Chia-Ming, Kuan-Chung and Flanagan (2009) explored differences among the taekwondo training hall members' demographic variables as they related to loyalty. A member's gender, age, family income, and time spent learning taekwondo indicated statistically significant differences on his or her loyalty. Results indicated that females reported higher levels of loyalty than males. Members 19 years or older scored higher on loyalty than members 9 to 18 years old. Members with family incomes of NT 80,001 scored higher on loyalty than members with family incomes of 80,000.

Chi, Gursoy and Qu (2009) examined the potential differences in loyalty formation process across different demographic groups. A multiple-groups analysis was conducted and the findings revealed that: a) travelers in different age and income segments exhibited no significant difference in levels of loyalty; b) travelers in different gender and education segments formed comparable level of loyalty across groups.

Petrick (2005) study on a sample of cruise travelers, found that females reported higher scores on loyalty than males. This finding is consistent with past research (Petrick & Backman, 2001) and suggests that females are more likely to be loyal to a leisure experience than males. Moreover, post hoc analysis revealed that the segments of disillusioned and possible loyal were significantly younger than low loyalty, spurious loyalty, latent loyalty and high loyalty. Results revealed no differences between different segments of loyalty and their years of education.

Involvement and Attitudinal Loyalty Relationships

Scholars have examined the notion of loyalty in the contexts of sport, leisure and recreation management (Funk & James, 2006; Kolbe & James, 2002) and began examining the processes leading to the formation of recreationist loyalty (Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998). Lee and Graefe (2002) examined the relationship between involvement and loyalty. Results suggest that involvement has both a direct and an indirect effect on loyalty and suggest the strong influence of involvement on loyalty. Results also showed that involvement is an important predictor of loyalty. The findings of that study emphasized the importance of involvement to explain the strength of loyalty, as a strong linkage between them was supported. Therefore, it is important for managers to focus on providing interesting and enjoyable programs to members, which increase repatronage by the members.

Park (1996) confirmed the conclusion that involvement and attitudinal loyalty are distinct but highly intercorrelated. Results indicated that attitudinal loyalty and involvement contribute independently to the prediction of different measures of behavioral loyalty. More recently, another study found a strong relationship between involvement and loyalty regarding internet leisure participation (Hong, 2002). Alexandris, Kouthouris, Funk, and Chatzigianni (2008) aimed at identifying the main constraints that limit recreational skiers' participation in skiing activities, and examined the relationships among leisure constraints, skiing involvement and skiing loyalty. Results showed that constraints significantly influenced both involvement and loyalty. In addition, the involvement dimensions of centrality and attraction significantly influenced skiing loyalty.

The sector of recreation swimming in Greece

Public pools in Greece are often situated as parts of leisure sport centers or recreational activities complex halls. Usually cities have one or more supervised

swimming facilities consisting of one pool, such as an indoor heated pool, an outdoor unheated pool, a shallower children's pool, and a paddling pool for toddlers and infants. Swimming pools are open from Monday to Saturday from 08:00 a.m. to 23:00 p.m. Staff are qualified, highly trained, and in some cases have excellent teaching skills. Swimming services include a) special programs for toddlers and infants which provide an introduction to the aquatic environment, b) programs for children according to their age and swimming level (beginners' advanced and professional swimmers), c) adult programs and finally d) therapeutic programs for restitution of disabled and people with kinetics problems. Swimming pools are also used for special events such as synchronized swimming, water polo, aqua-aerobics as well as for teaching scuba-diving and lifesaving techniques.

The objectives of the present study were:

- a) To test the validity of involvement scale in the context of recreational swimming.
- b) To investigate recreational swimmers involvement issues toward specific different demographic characteristics (sex, marital status and age groups).
- c) To confirm the predictive ability of the involvement construct toward attitudinal loyalty to recreational swimming.

Methodology

Sample

Three hundred and forty nine (N=349) adult recreational swimmers participated in this study. Data was collected in a major swimming pool in northern Greece. Prior to the data collection permission was granted by the management of the swimming facility. A team of three researchers, familiar with the swimming facility, collected the data. Four hundred questionnaires were distributed and three hundred and forty nine were returned, achieving a response rate of 87.3%. In terms of the demographic characteristics of the sample, 61.9 % were female and 53.3 % were married individuals. In terms of the age subgroups, 34.2% were 30 years old and younger, 39% were between 31 and 40 years old, and 26.8% were 41 years old and older. The younger and the older respondents were 19 and 55 years old, respectively. Finally, in terms of education, 35.8% were educated at the secondary level, 35% were educated at the college level, and 29.2% were educated at the university level. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Sample.

Gender	Marital status	Age groups in years	Educational level	Frequency of participation
Males: 133 (38.1%)	Married: 186 (53.3%)	1 st group (19-30): 93 (34.2%)	Secondary education: 125 (35.8%)	'Infrequent': 90 (25.8%)
Females: 216 (61.9%)	Single: 163 (46.7%)	2 nd group(31-40): 106 (39%)	College education: 122 (35%)	'Moderately frequent': 119 (34.1%)
		3 rd group (41-55): 73 (26.8%)	University education: 102 (29.2%)	'Frequent': 140 (40.1%)

Questionnaire

Involvement was measured with Kyle et al.'s (2004) scale. The tri-dimensional instrument reliability and validity has been tested successfully in a variety of leisure studies in Greece and internationally (Alexandris et al., 2008; Kyle & Chick, 2004; Kyle, Theodorakis, Karageorgiou, & Lafazani, 2010). Centrality was measured with three items; self-expression was measured with four items; and attraction was measured with five items. Internal consistency of centrality and self-expression dimensions were successfully (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$ & $.83$ respectively). The alpha value for attraction ($\alpha = .62$) appeared low, but is considered as relatively acceptable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) (Table 2). Involvement dimensions were measured using seven-point Likert-type scale (from 1=Totally Disagree, to 7=Totally Agree).

Frequency of Participation. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they participated in recreational swimming activity. They were then classified according to their level of participation as 'infrequent' (less than once a month), 'moderately frequent' (two to three times a month) and 'frequent' (at least once a week). 25.8% of the swimmers were classified as 'infrequent', 34.1% were classified as 'moderately frequent', and 40.1% were classified as 'frequent' swimmers.

Attitudinal Loyalty was measured based on participants' intention to continue swimming; it was measured with three items: "how determined are you to continue swimming?", "how committed are you to continue swimming?", "how difficult would it be for you to stop swimming?" (Armitage & Conner, 1999). Similar items have been used for

measuring loyalty in previous studies (Alexandris & Stodolska, 2004). The alpha value for the loyalty scale was considered as acceptable (.85). Five-point Likert type scales were used, ranging from “Very Much” (5) to “Not at All” (1).

Demographic information. In the last part of the instrument, respondents were asked to provide demographic information regarding their gender, marital status (single, married), age, and educational level.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of the Study's Variables

On the basis of the mean scores computed for each involvement dimensions (Table 2), attraction achieved the highest mean score (5.32), followed by self-expression dimension (M=4.88), and finally, centrality achieved the lowest mean score (3.53) of the three dimensions.

On the basis of descriptive rates toward attitudinal loyalty, the computed mean score, from the three items, was nearly high (M=3.94 and SD=.74).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Scores of Study's Variables.

	N-items	MIN	MAX	M	SD	Cronbach's a
Attraction	5	2.2	7	5.32	.93	.62
Centrality	3	1	7	3.53	1.31	.74
Self-expression	4	1.25	7	4.88	1.28	.83
Attitudinal Loyalty	3	1.5	5	3.94	0.74	.85

Predictive Validity of Involvement Scale

An analysis of variance was conducted aiming to test the validity of involvement scale. During the ANOVA analysis, ‘behavioral loyalty’ variable, expressed by the ‘different frequency levels of participation’ was set as the independent variable and the ‘involvement’ variable as the dependent one respectively. The analysis revealed significant effects for the dimension of attraction ($F_{(2,346)} = 34.3, p < .001$), centrality ($F_{(2,346)} = 10.7, p < .001$), and self-expression ($F_{(2,346)} = 9.6, p < .001$). Post-hoc tests (Sheffe's) revealed that frequent participants scored significantly higher than the moderately frequent and the infrequent participants in all the above dimensions. In addition, the moderately frequent group scored significantly higher than the infrequent

group in all dimensions. The mean scores for the three subgroups are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Predictive Validity of Involvement Scale.

Frequency of Participation	Attraction M (\pm SD)	Centrality M (\pm SD)	Self-expression M (\pm SD)
Infrequent (a)	4.68 (\pm 1.08)	3.01 (\pm 1.29)	4.43 (\pm 1.28)
Moderate (b)	5.53 (\pm .77)	3.64 (\pm 1.27)	4.90 (\pm 1.22)
Frequent (c)	5.55 (\pm .75)	3.78 (\pm 1.27)	5.17 (\pm 1.24)
	F 34.3**	10.7**	9.6**
	a-b, c*	a-b, c*	a-b, c*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Demographic Differences

Gender and Involvement Dimensions

The mean scores of male and female in the involvement dimensions were calculated, and the significance of the differences found was evaluated through an independent sample t test. Table 4 indicated the mean scores and the standard deviations of the two groups in each of the involvement dimensions, and the significance levels.

In terms of the three dimensions, statistically significant differences were found in all three dimensions, attraction $t_{(347)} = -2.128$, $p < .05$, centrality $t_{(347)} = -3.016$, $p < .05$ and self-expression $t_{(347)} = -3.679$, $p < .001$. In all these three dimensions, female participants scored significantly higher than male participants.

Age Groups and Involvement Dimensions

An analysis of variance was conducted aiming to test for differences in the involvement dimensions between the three subgroups. The analysis revealed significant effects for the dimensions of attraction ($F_{(2,269)} = 7.98$, $p < .001$), centrality ($F_{(2,269)} = 4.6$, $p < .001$), and self-expression ($F_{(2,269)} = 9.04$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc tests (Sheffe's) revealed that the 3rd age subgroup (>41 years old) and the 2nd age subgroup (31-40 years old) scored significantly higher than the 1st age (<30 years old) in all the above dimensions. In addition, the 3rd age subgroup (>41 years old) scored significantly higher than the 2nd age subgroup (31-40 years old), in centrality and self-expression dimensions, apart from

attraction dimension where 2nd age subgroup (31-40 years old) scored significantly higher than the 3rd age subgroup (>41 years old). The mean scores for the three subgroups are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA for the Involvement Dimensions by Age Subgroups.

Subgroups	Attraction	Centrality	Self-expression
1 st group (<30)	4.98 (±.87)	3.18 (±1.26)	4.43 (±1.17)
2 nd group (31-40)	5.50 (±1.04)	3.65 (±1.32)	5.04 (±1.32)
3 rd group (>41)	5.33 (±.82)	3.73 (±1.38)	5.20 (±1.31)
	F 7.97**	4.6*	9.04**
	1 st -2 nd *	1 st -2 nd , 3 rd *	1 st -2 nd , 3 rd *

Note. *p < .05, **p < .001

Marital Status and Involvement Dimensions

The mean scores of the two groups in the involvement dimensions were calculated, and the significance of the differences found was evaluated through an independent sample *t* test. Table 5 indicated the mean scores and the standard deviations of the two groups in each of the involvement dimensions, and the significance levels.

In terms of the three dimensions, statistically significant differences were found in all three dimensions, attraction $t_{(347)} = -2.172$, $p < .05$, centrality $t_{(347)} = -4.701$, $p < .001$ and self-expression $t_{(347)} = -3.869$, $p < .001$. In all these three dimensions, married participants scored significantly higher than single participants.

Table 5. Results of *t* Tests for the Involvement Dimensions by Gender and Marital Status.

	Male	Female	Married	Single
	M (±SD)	M (±SD)	M (±SD)	M (±SD)
Attraction	5.19 (±.89)*	5.40 (±.95)*	5.42 (±.92)*	5.21 (±.93)*
Centrality	3.27 (±1.22)*	3.7 (±1.34)*	3.83 (±1.34)*	3.19(±1.19)*
Self-expression	4.57 (±1.24)***	5.08 (±1.26)***	5.13 (±1.26)***	4.6 (±1.25)***
Attitudinal Loyalty	3.8 (±.747)**	4.03 (±.72)**	3.92 (±.79)	3.96 (±.67)

Note. *p < .05, **p < .001, ***p < .01

Attitudinal Loyalty's Prediction from Involvement Construct

A regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between involvement dimensions and participants' attitudinal loyalty. During the regression analysis, attitudinal loyalty was set as the dependent variable, and the three involvement dimensions were set as the independent variables. The regression model was significant ($F = 57.9, p < .001$), predicting 34% of the variance in loyalty. Attraction explained the most variance ($t = 7.63, p < .001, \beta = .47$), followed by centrality ($t = 2.14, p < .05, \beta = .13$). The self-expression dimension was non-significant (Table 6).

Table 6. Regression Analysis for the Prediction of Attitudinal Loyalty from Involvement Dimensions.

Dimensions	B	β	t	P
Attraction	.37	.47	7.63	.001
Centrality	.07	.13	2.14	.05
Self-expression	.01	.02	.40	n.s.

Note. $F = 57.9, p < 0.001, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.33$

Discussion and Conclusion

According to results of this study all the research objectives were totally or partially supported. The involvement construct as a behavioral issue concentrated high scores for all three dimensions respectively, attraction ($M=5.32$), self-expression ($M=4.88$), and centrality ($M=3.53$) mean scores.

Concerning the first research objective of the present study, results indicated high differences ($p < .01$) between the three dimensions of involvement and the three frequency of participation levels, proving the predictive validity of the scale. Particularly the group of 'frequent participants' in recreational swimming activity reported higher scores at all the involvement dimensions (centrality, attraction and self-expression) compared with the other two groups of 'moderately frequent' and 'infrequent' participants.

The results also confirmed the value of the involvement construct, as proposed by Kyle et al. (2004) in explaining recreational behavior. Present study's findings are in line with Kyle, Kerstetter and Guadagnolo's (2002) findings who studied involvement in sport participation at a 10K road race in Pittsburgh, with both studies highlighting involvement value as a market segmentation tool. Future studies should aim at

measuring the involvement levels of different segments since involvement can help in predicting attitudinal loyalty and develop appropriate marketing and communication strategies.

Concerning the second research objective of the present study, previous studies indicate that there is a gap and limited knowledge regarding relationships between involvement and demographics variables (Havitz & Dimanche, 1999; Wiley, Shaw, & Havitz, 2000). Present study comes to add more knowledge in the gap between involvement and demographics variables. As results revealed significant differences in involvement dimensions between female and male participant subgroups, with females reporting higher scores in all the three involvement dimensions attraction, centrality and self-expression than males. These findings are in line with the study of Wiley et al., (2000) who also reported that, it was the women rather than the men who reported higher scores in involvement dimensions. A possible explanation for this might be that female in recreation and sports in general tend to place more emphasis on enjoyment and fun (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1994).

Regarding marital status differences in involvement, married swimmers reported higher involvement scores than single individuals. A possible explanation for this might be that swimming by itself doesn't require from people a lot of time in order to participate as 45 minutes to an hour is enough for people to participate and get all the benefits (recreational, physical and psychological) that this activity offers. On the other hand, married people don't have the privilege of free time due to family obligations. Taking this into consideration is well understood that married people don't have enough time to spend on recreational activities that require lot of time in order to participate. Subsequently, married people might regard swimming as an excellent activity to get involved, because it provides all the benefits without having to spend a lot of time to participate, as for married people time is quite valuable.

Findings concerning age subgroups are in line with previous research (Backman & Veldkamp, 1995) found that older participants tend to show higher levels of involvement in recreational activities. A possible explanation for this might be that elderly spend their leisure time consciously exercising much more than the young ones, while younger people might spend their free time in all kinds of activity.

Concerning the third research objective of the present study, the regression model tested the predictive ability of recreational swimmers involvement dimensions toward attitudinal loyalty construct. It should be noted that the F test was significant ($p <$

.001), indicating that the selected variables were significant contributors in predicting attitudinal loyalty. These results are in line with previous studies suggesting that, involvement is an equally important predictor of loyalty (Alexandris et al., 2008; Lee & Graefe, 2002).

Findings illustrated the value of the three-dimensional involvement model (Kyle et al., 2004) in predicting swimming attitudinal loyalty. The dimensions of “attraction” and “centrality” offered significant predictions of swimming attitudinal loyalty, while the “self-expression” one did not. The results come in accordance with Alexandris et al. (2008) findings, who also reported that the attraction and centrality dimensions were significant predictors of skiing loyalty.

As mentioned before in the present study self-expression refers to the “self-representation or the impression of the self that individuals wish to convey to others through their participation in the activity” (Kyle & Chick, 2004, p. 245). An explanation of why self-expression variable was not found to be significant predictor of loyalty might be that individuals of the specific sample might be people with different images who are seeking to convey very different messages about themselves to outside observers or to significant others. Not founding self-expression variable to be significant predictor of loyalty, might means that more attention needs to be directed towards the issue of self-expression and towards assessment of the validity of the indicators for this dimension of involvement as previously mentioned by Wiley et al. (2000), too. Further examination of the self-expression construct should be considered to test its value in predicting attitudinal loyalty.

Also, future studies should aim at identifying constraints that inhibit participation and try to give solution in order for those constraints to be eliminated or restrained, so people would be more involved in recreation activities. Managers should provide services and opportunities for eliminating or reducing constraints associated with swimming participation in order to increase individuals' involvement. For example, if family obligations are found to be a major constraint for recreational swimmers, perhaps managers should focus on the creation of a more family-friendly environment surrounding their programs and events. This may include programs that parents are allowed to take their children and swim together, or being able to participate in family swimming events or include special prices for enrollment as a family.

As a final note, it should be stressed that this study was based on a sample of recreational swimmers from a swimming pool in Greece. While the results are useful in

the context of the specific facility, they should be further validated with samples of other swimming facilities in order to have confidence in generalizing them.

The study provides support for the use of involvement construct for studying participants' swimming attitudinal loyalty. First, it establishes the relationships between the attraction and centrality dimensions of involvement and attitudinal loyalty. Swimming facility managers should examine strategies that enhance the development of these dimensions. Further research should also investigate the role of the self-expression facet of involvement for developing participants' attitudinal loyalty, due to its widespread use in the literature (Kyle et al., 2004).

As previously discussed, research findings indicate that individuals with high levels of involvement and attitudinal loyalty are more likely to continue participation and that may have greater return on investment than attracting individuals with low involvement and loyalty. Marketers should try attracting and retaining swimmers with high involvement. In order to achieve that marketing efforts targeting swimmers with high involvement, should provide them with as much information about the swimming activity, facility programs and events as possible. This could be achieved via media sources, including articles in newspapers, brochures, magazine advertisements, etc. An excellent method of providing continual information is to create a Web site specifically for the swimming facility and programs that take place in there. Above suggestions do not mean that individuals with low levels of involvement aren't worthy of targeting. In that case more aggressive marketing efforts (e.g., give motives) need to be practiced.

The study provides support for the use of involvement construct for studying participants' swimming attitudinal loyalty. First, it establishes the relationships between the attraction and centrality dimensions of involvement and attitudinal loyalty. Swimming facility managers should examine strategies that enhance the development of these dimensions. Further research should also investigate the role of the self-expression facet of involvement for developing participants' attitudinal loyalty, due to its widespread use in the literature (Kyle et al., 2004).

As previously discussed, research findings indicate that individuals with high levels of involvement and attitudinal loyalty are more likely to continue participation and that may have greater return on investment than attracting individuals with low involvement and loyalty. Marketers should try attracting and retaining swimmers with high involvement. In order to achieve that marketing efforts targeting swimmers with high involvement, should provide them with as much information about the swimming activity,

facility programs and events as possible. This could be achieved via media sources, including articles in newspapers, brochures, magazine advertisements, etc. An excellent method of providing continual information is to create a Web site specifically for the swimming facility and programs that take place in there. Above suggestions do not mean that individuals with low levels of involvement aren't worthy of targeting. In that case more aggressive marketing efforts (e.g., give motives) need to be practiced.

Managerial Implications

The results of the present study could be targeted by swimming centre marketers with the following strategies:

1. Demographic regarding involvement can contribute to successful market segmentation. Segmentation helps marketers to provide better services (i.e. programs, quality of trainers) in order to get individuals more involved with recreational swimming activity. Segmentation process can also help in establishing more appropriate promotional strategies to attract individuals in recreational swimming.

2. Results confirmed the value of the involvement construct, as proposed by Kyle et al. (2004) in explaining recreational behavior. As previously discussed, involvement is a key variable for marketers, since it is closely associated with increased loyalty (Kyle et al., 2004). Marketers need to focus to influence and manipulate involvement profiles to achieve greater loyalty.

3. Findings highlight the role of attraction and centrality in developing swimming attitudinal loyalty. If attitudinal loyalty is to be developed, swimming facilities managers should develop strategies designed to facilitate attraction and centrality dimensions. Managers should organize events and celebrations in order to provide pleasure and fun experiences to participants, as a way to increase involvement and thus attitudinal loyalty. Managers should also give motives to participants to bring their friends along, because having friends with similar interests near them can help participants to develop centrality dimension.

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