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Strategies to Attract and Retain Customers for U.S. Private Country Clubs

Lisa Marie Burnside
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Lisa Burnside

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Strategies to Attract and Retain Customers for U.S. Private Country Clubs

by

Lisa M. Burnside

MS, Walden University, 2003

BS, University of Minnesota, 1987

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

Abstract

The decline in the number of customers in the private country club (PCC) industry in the United States is causing a reduction of revenues, which inhibits the sustainability of the clubs. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore marketing innovation strategies (MIS) that Arizona PCC managers used to attract and retain customers successfully. Relationship marketing theory was the conceptual framework; key constructs of the theory include customer loyalty, service quality, experience satisfaction, trust, and communication. The study explored successful MIS that PCC managers have used to attract and retain customers to prevent closure. Participants consisted of 1 manager from 4 different PCCs in Arizona who used MIS successfully to attract and retain customers. Data were collected from semistructured, open-ended interviews and from marketing documents and website content. Data were analyzed using a 6-phase approach to thematic analysis. The 3 primary themes that emerged included broadening the marketing message to entice people to frequent the club; creating experiences that rated high in satisfaction by members, guests, and employees; and using a variety of communication media. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by helping PCCs to remain in operation, which could benefit local communities by providing employment opportunities at the clubs and venues for local charities to raise funds.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my best friend and husband, Bruce, who was the calm in my storms. This journey was made possible with the love, prayers, faith, and support of my family, friends, and peers. I know it takes more than one person to accomplish such a task, and I will not forget the support and sacrifices made to help me complete this dream.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The closing of many private country clubs (PCCs) in the United States has led to the loss of jobs, decreased property values and tax revenue, and the loss of social connectedness. Prior to 2006, the U.S. PCC industry experienced two decades of growth in the number of golf courses; however, since then, the number of closings has outweighed openings (National Golf Foundation [NGF], 2017a). The U.S. Census Bureau (2017) reported that the golf and country club industry employed an estimated 11,280 people in 2015. As PCCs throughout the country have closed, many people have lost their jobs, affecting local economies. In addition, communities have less tax revenue because of lower home values. Fraser and Allen (2016) found that the average property value of single-family dwellings increased 7.96% on active golf courses with appurtenant golf memberships (linked to ownership of real estate), which in turn increased tax revenue in the area. PCC closings lower the value of homes in the area and decrease tax dollars. The decline in the number of PCCs also adversely affects individuals' opportunities for social connections. Lorek et al. (2017) noted, for instance, that older adults strive to connect on a social level through organizations that provide leisure services. When clubs close, people lose the opportunity to connect and socialize. Thus, the loss of country clubs has adversely affected communities and their residents in several ways.

To keep PCCs open and positively impacting the local community, managers must position their businesses to attract and retain profitable members. Managers could use marketing innovation strategies (MIS) to address the interests of their target market to provide ongoing funding of PCCs. Randhawa, Kim, and Cichy (2017) asserted that the

demographics of the PCC target market is changing from an older generation interested in the club for sport and individual social activities to younger members who want activities to include the family in a less formal atmosphere. In reviewing the literature on this topic, I found that there is limited research specific to successful MIS implementation in PCCs to address the needs and wants of current and potential members. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the MIS that PCC managers use to attract and retain customers to prevent closure.

Background of the Problem

Despite a recovery in the economy, some PCCs in the United States have closed and memberships have declined. The U.S. Census Bureau (2017) reported that the number of golf courses and country clubs in the United States decreased by an additional 5% during the economic recovery period of 2010 to 2015. Memberships in country clubs have continued to decrease in number since their high in 2007 due to an increase in competition and a change in the lifestyles of the members (Ferreira & Gustafson, 2014b). Even though the overall U.S. economy improved, some PCC managers have struggled to maintain membership levels to continue operations. To remain in business, PCC managers must continue to attract and retain members.

PCC managers may benefit from research on MIS in their efforts to stem declining memberships. Randhawa et al. (2016) established that 45% of PCC executives have difficulty marketing to and establishing operations that satisfy multiple generations. There is limited research in the PCC industry regarding marketing, yet marketing strategies are a catalyst for attracting and retaining customers (Barrows, Early, Meyer, &

Rogoff, 2017). The purpose of this study was to provide PCC managers with MIS to attract and retain customers to prevent closure. Meeting the needs and wants of multiple generations within the membership through marketing efforts may help PCCs to remain in business.

Problem Statement

Due to changing demographics of members, 45% of PCC executives have difficulty attracting and retaining members to sustain a business (Randhawa et al., 2016). During the economic recovery of 2010 to 2015, the number of golf courses and country clubs in the United States decreased by an additional 5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The general business problem was that the decline in membership at PCCs leads to business closures. The specific business problem was that some PCC managers lack MIS to attract and retain customers to prevent closure.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the MIS that PCC managers used to attract and retain customers to prevent closure. The targeted population consisted of managers in four distinct PCCs in Arizona who had successfully used MIS to attract and retain customers. The implications for positive social change include the potential to employ local citizens, contribute income to local vendors, and increase property tax revenues to support government-provided services.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative method to explore MIS that some PCC managers used to attract and retain members to avoid closure. A quantitative researcher uses numerical

analysis to examine specific constructs to test hypotheses (Murshed & Zhang, 2016). Mixed-methods researchers incorporate elements from both qualitative and quantitative research (Fitzgerald, Rumrill, & Merchant, 2015). I explored the MIS used by PCC managers through open-ended questions to obtain deeper data regarding experiences, which is a qualitative technique (Barnham, 2015). A quantitative method was not appropriate because I did not examine constructs through numerical analysis or test hypotheses. A mixed-methods study was not suitable because I did not incorporate a quantitative component to address the research question.

I reviewed three qualitative designs: ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. A requirement for conducting an ethnography is that researchers observe a specific group of people in the field over a period of time (Torres, 2016). Ethnography was not applicable as the purpose of my study was to determine strategies PCC managers used rather than to observe the managers in the PCC over time. Phenomenology contains a humanistic view of the specific event rather than determining the strategies in the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I did not use phenomenology because strategy determination was the focus of the study and not individuals' perceptions of their lived experiences. A researcher uses case studies to explore elements of a situation with one or more participants (Yin, 2017). Based on the focus of case studies, I used a multiple case study to explore MIS used by managers in PCCs to attract and retain customers.

Research Question

What successful marketing innovation strategies do private country club managers use to attract and retain customers to prevent closure?

Interview Questions

1. What are the marketing innovation strategies you use to attract and retain customers?

2. How do you use marketing innovation strategies to offer any new products or services to your customers?

3. How do you use marketing innovation strategies to communicate your benefits of value in membership?

4. How do you use marketing innovation strategies to improve relationships with your customers?

5. How did your staff respond to your marketing innovation strategies?

6. How do your marketing innovation strategies align with your core business services?

7. How do you assess the effectiveness of your marketing innovation strategies?

8. What additional information can you supply to help me better understand the marketing innovation strategies that you use to attract and retain customers?

Conceptual Framework

Berry (2002) developed relationship marketing theory (RMT) in 1983. RMT involves constructs of core service, customization, augmentation, relationship pricing, and internal marketing to attract, maintain, and improve customer relationships (Berry, 2002). Two decades later, Berry updated the theory to include trust with less emphasis on augmentation and relationship pricing to build customer commitment. Maier and Prusty (2016) added that improved customer relationships enhance customer retention. Grönroos (2017) extended the theory by integrating three processes of customer value creation, communication, and interactive marketing. Aka, Kehinde, and Ogunnaike (2016) further

developed RMT in relation to customer satisfaction to include trust, commitment, communication, and service quality. RMT was applicable to my study because I sought to explore MIS that may improve customer relationships for attracting and retaining customers.

Operational Definitions

Following are definitions of terms and phrases used in this doctoral study. A basic understanding of the terms is necessary to understand the conceptual framework and the topic of study.

Appurtenant membership: Appurtenant membership is an automatic membership that is linked to the ownership of real estate (Fraser & Allen, 2016).

Customer loyalty: Customer loyalty is the behavior of making repeat purchases from an organization or recommending it to others (van der Aa, Bloemer, & Henseler, 2015).

Marketing innovations: Marketing innovations are new ways to promote, price, position, and package changes in services (Randhawa et al., 2016).

Private country club (PCC): A private country club is a place that consists of facilities for social gatherings, restaurants, golf courses, and other recreational services, which are restricted to an exclusive group through memberships (Barrows et al., 2017; Ferreira & Gustafson, 2014a; Hwang, Han, & Choo, 2015).

Relationship marketing: Relationship marketing refers to attracting and servicing existing customers (Berry, 2002) at a profit (Grönroos, 2017) through consideration of mutual objectives of the parties to strengthen the relationship (Aka et al., 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are things that a researcher understands to be true without any proof or verification (Ellis & Levy, 2009). In this study, I assumed that PCC managers would answer the questions honestly and provide up-to-date information that was accurate. Yanchar (2015) posited that participants provide truthful responses according to their perceptions of the situation. I also assumed that the PCC managers implemented MIS and that the strategies were catalysts for membership retention. Yin (2017) recommended that case-study research involve more than one type of data gathering such as interviews and document collection. I gathered supporting marketing materials to validate the statements of the participants regarding the MIS they implemented.

Limitations

Limitations exist due to my choice of conceptual framework and qualitative multiple case-study design. Limitations are restrictions on the research project due to the selected framework and chosen design (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Furthermore, I limited the cases to PCC managers in Arizona. Findings related to the four PCCs in the study may not be applicable to other PCCs in the United States. To address the limitation, I selected three PCCs that were typical golf and tennis clubs and one that was golf-only to garner depth of data. An additional limitation included my use of open-ended interview questions; participants might not have understood the questions, and I might not have interpreted their responses correctly. I addressed this limitation by using common

terminology according to PCC industry articles, as well as by asking for and providing

clarification during the interview and member checking processes.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study consisted of the type of clubs included for analysis

and their geographic setting, the participants who were selected, and the study design that

was used. Delimitations refer to the decisions a researcher makes about what factors will

and will not be included and, as such, narrow the scope of the study (Ellis & Levy, 2009).

Due to the accessibility of local PCCs, the focus of this study was PCCs within the state

of Arizona. The geographical region did not represent all PCCs in the United States.

Furthermore, the participants consisted of managers of private clubs. I did not invite

managers of semiprivate or public clubs nor did I obtain data from the customer

perspective. The findings from this investigation, therefore, are delimited by these

choices. Future researchers examining MIS in the club sector should conduct studies in

other geographical locations, include other club types, and consider other participants.

Another delimitation of this study stemmed from my collection of open-ended responses

rather than those obtained from a closed-ended Likert scale. I decided to ask open-ended

questions because I was not looking for measurable answers but exploring answers in-

depth.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

PCC managers may benefit from this study by identifying the effective MIS that

attract and retain customers. Berry (2002) proposed that leaders receive a better return on

investment by making efforts to retain current customers rather than focusing solely on

attracting new customers. Other PCC managers may use the findings to improve client relationships. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide employment to local citizens, income to local vendors, and increased property tax revenues to support government-provided services.

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings of this study may contribute to business practices by providing more insight about the use of MIS to improve relationships with customers. Sheets, Roach-Humphreys, and Johnston (2016) noted that the target market of the PCC is changing from the traditional male-dominated membership to family involvement with a change in view of service delivery. PCC managers need MIS to make changes to current services and marketing efforts to reach both the older generations and the younger generations to sustain memberships and remain solvent.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by helping PCCs to remain in operation, which would affect the communities where the PCCs are located. The Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) and Club Benchmarking (2016) report indicated that PCCs affect communities by employing residents, purchasing from local suppliers, and contributing to local taxation. Groch (2014) added that PCCs provide venues for local charities to raise funds. Operational PCCs, thus, have a positive effect on local communities through employment, philanthropic, and other endeavors. This study may provide insight about the strategies PCC managers need to attract and retain members to stay in business and positively affect society.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This section contains a review of the literature and resources regarding the research topic and conceptual framework. I obtained the literature through searches of online databases such as Business Source Complete, Communication and Mass Media, Hospitality and Tourism, ScienceDirect, and Taylor and Francis Online, which I accessed via Walden University Library and Google Scholar. The primary keywords consisted of *golf*, *innovation*, *marketing*, *membership*, *private country club*, *relationship marketing theory*, and *retention*. I used Ulrich's Periodicals Directory to verify the peer-review status of the journals. As indicated in Table 1, 92.9% of peer-reviewed journals included in the review were published within the past 5 years.

Table 1

Literature Review Sources

Literature review sources	Total #	# less than 5 years old at graduation date	% of total less than 5 years old at graduation date
Peer-reviewed journals	85	79	92.9%
Books	1	0	0
Other periodicals	8	7	87.5%
Total	94	86	91.5%

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the MIS that PCC managers used to attract and retain customers to prevent closure. Because PCC managers rely on memberships to support operations, the managers need MIS to attract

and retain members. I used RMT as the conceptual framework to explore MIS regarding

client attraction and retention. The review begins with an overview of RMT and

continues with a consideration of customer attraction and retention and marketing

innovations, followed by an overview of the private country club industry in the United

States and private country club membership.

Relationship Marketing Theory

RMT was the conceptual framework of my study. The theory includes marketing

initiatives with an emphasis on strengthening relationships with members of the

organization and the customers (Berry, 2002). Maier and Prusty (2016) stated that

stronger customer relationships improve customer retention. The PCC industry depends

on its current membership base to survive; therefore, retention of members is of greater

necessity than strictly focusing on attracting new members (Ferreira & Gustafson,

2014a). RMT extends the center of marketing beyond a product and service emphasis.

To understand relationship marketing further, I examined the basic transactional

marketing of products and services. The transactional marketing theory known as the 4Ps

consists of product, price, promotion, and place, which target marketing endeavors on

products or services (Harker & Egan, 2006). Randhawa et al. (2017) reasoned that it is

vital to differentiate a product or service from the competition to provide a competitive

advantage. Unlike RMT, 4P focuses on the product or service rather than differentiating

through relationships. Aka et al. (2016) explained that leaders use transactional marketing

efforts to attract new customers rather than focusing on existing relationships. The

emphasis is on individual customer transactions which end at the sale instead of the ongoing support of the customer for repeat and continued business.

Because PCC managers rely on continued membership for business sustainability, I examined other theories involving human relationships. Finch, O'Reilly, Hillenbrand, and Abeza (2015) created a conceptual model of relationship antecedents that develop relationship attitudes and result in relationship behaviors, having a direct impact on value creation. Jones et al. (2015) asserted that 61.2% of consumers had positive attitudes towards organizations that developed relationships. Managers who desire specific behaviors of members, such as providing personal information, could focus on deepening relationship constructs to affect member attitudes. Relationship consideration between members and managers is essential in understanding behavioral motivation of members.

Another theory I reviewed was stakeholder relationship theory. The theory includes an examination of two-way connections between the involved parties to create a competitive advantage (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Authors credited the beginnings of the theory to Freeman who first published the book in which stakeholder relationship theory is addressed in 1984 (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Finch et al., 2015; Tayebi, Bagheri, Matin, & Jandaghi, 2016). Finch et al. (2015) suggested that researchers should examine competitive angles between the stakeholders. Stakeholder relationship theory consists of the examination of the extent of the mutual benefits received between the parties.

Researchers used stakeholder relationship theory to connect values to the organization. Donaldson and Preston (1995) explored the theory from the aspects of

describing the organization, being instrumental in organizational performance, and

providing a normative basis considering ethical and social constructs. Miller, McAdam,

and McAdam (2014) used the theory as a lens to create a university business model,

considering the significance of relationships that exist both internally and externally to

the university. The authors concluded that the theory was useful in evaluating the

variations in stakeholder values to the organization. Stakeholder relationship theory

contains trade-offs between stakeholders, and, in my study, I explored only member

involvement; therefore, stakeholder relationship theory was not appropriate for the

conceptual framework.

Another theory recognized in marketing literature regarding human relationships

is the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Researchers have attributed the emergence of

the theory to Ajzen's (1991) study in which the author proposed predicting human

behavior based on attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and norms (Finch et al., 2015;

Steinmetz, Knappstein, Ajzen, Schmidt, & Kabst, 2016). Steinmetz et al. (2016) further

defined the theory as having a focus on behavioral intentions. The authors used TPB to

determine intentions as they result in actions. Cheung and To (2017) used TPB to

establish the relationship between trust and attitudes regarding in-app advertising of 480

young Chinese mobile users. The researchers revealed that the users' propensity to trust

had a positive effect on attitudes that lead to the intention to watch the in-app

advertisements. Han and Hwang (2014) noted that a limitation of TPB is the lack of

emotions associated with goal attainment before making decisions. Because the thrust of

the TPB theory is to determine intentions, the theory was not effective for a study of MIS.

Stakeholder relationships and member behaviors are essential to the creation of value for PCCs; however, the focus of my study was specific to customer attraction and retention for organization continuation. Therefore, a theory based on the direct connection between the firm and client relationships was an appropriate lens. Berry (2002) indicated that attracting customers is critical to the growth and survival of an organization; however, it is in maintaining current customers where the greatest impact exists. Storbacka, Strandvik, and Grönroos (1994) added that managers must consider the overlap between the client's needs and the organization's profitability by fulfilling promises. Additionally, Aka et al. (2016) further developed the theory by focusing on the mutual benefits provided through strengthening relationships. I identified five key elements of RMT which applied to my study. These were customer loyalty, service quality, experience satisfaction, trust, and communication to attract and retain customers.

Customer Attraction and Retention

Attracting and retaining customers is vital to the survival of an organization. Abtin and Pouramiri (2016) asserted that loyal customers are the basis for a firms' ability to stay in business through competitive engagement. As PCC managers encounter competition for the time, talents, and dollars of customers, managers must find ways to keep members engaged. Maier and Prusty (2016) also suggested that managers must target loyalty incentives unique to profitable customers for a long-term relationship. Kim, Cha, Cichy, Kim, and Tkach (2016) identified that one of the key roles performed by leaders of PCCs is to attract and retain members through promotion efforts. PCC managers rely on customers committed to retaining their membership and being active

within the organization for success through customer loyalty, service quality, experience satisfaction, trust, and communication.

Customer Loyalty. Customer loyalty is an ongoing relationship between the client and the firm. Researchers suggested that managers attempt to capture repeat business to their establishment through loyalty programs and to make their organization a more appealing choice than their competitors (Abtin & Pouramiri, 2016; Ha & Stoel, 2014; Pereira, Correia, & Schutz, 2015). Jones et al. (2015) contended that 38.8% of people do not respond to loyalty programs, but still do business for other relationship benefits supplied. Because customers have choices on how to spend their money and time, it is crucial for managers to address the needs and wants of the customer for repeat business.

Customer loyalty may affect the successful operations of the firm. Researchers posited that intention to repeat purchases correlates to loyalty to the organization (Pereira et al., 2015). Hwang et al. (2015) reasoned that PPCs presented with a luxurious image resulted in members and guests being highly loyal. However, some researchers argued that customers will remain loyal simply because switching costs are too high (Piha & Avlonitis, 2015; Ryu & Lee, 2017; Storbacka et al., 1994). PCC managers must determine the reasons that customers remain for the long-term as well as correlate the financial aspects of the relationship.

Managers should calculate the cost of doing business with the current customer base. Even though researchers have shown that it may cost more to obtain new customers than retain current ones (Bencito, 2014; Berry, 2002; Maier & Prusty, 2016), the cost to

keep certain customers may not be lucrative (Al-alak, 2014). Authors identified that

relationship costs and profitability are different constructs, and managers should measure

the actual revenue generated from the customer by paying attention to pricing and

patronage (Al-alak, 2014; Storbacka et al., 1994). PCC managers should create programs

that entice customers to provide more in revenue than the cost to provide service.

Calculating the cost of long-term relationships can determine profitability for business

sustainability.

Managers may make effective decisions regarding revenue generation by

evaluating the costs associated with long-term client relationships. Researchers have

shown that customer loyalty can lead to profitability by leveraging the long-term

relationship (Al-alak, 2014; Storbacka et al., 1994). However, Storbacka et al. (1994)

cautioned managers to consider underpricing and available competition when attracting

profitable repeat business. Managers need to price products and services according to

profitability and market conditions, not just longevity of the relationship. PCC managers

need to implement programs that encourage active members to patronize the organization

for additional revenue growth.

Managers create loyalty programs specific to the target market to entice

customers to remain with the organization. Beck, Chapman, and Palmatier (2015) found

that masculine cultures responded positively to status or prestige loyalty programs where

feminine cultures responded positively to marketing based on community constructs.

Leaders in the PCC industry used to market to the masculine culture, but now leaders are

marketing more to women; the change in audience requires a change in marketing

strategy (Danylchuk, Snelgrove, & Wood, 2015). PCC leaders operate with a changing

demographic and must create programs that resonate with the specific membership base.

The change in operations must meet the quality standards of the new demographic.

Service Quality. Though leaders set standards for service quality, it is up to the

perception of the consumer to determine the quality supplied. Researchers found that

leaders can increase the perception of quality through staff training, updated facilities,

innovative services, and personal attention (Heroux, 2017; Hsieh, Park, & Hitchcock,

2015; Sheehan & Bruni-Bossio, 2015). Though, Zopiatis, Theocharous, Constanti, and

Tjiapouras (2017) revealed that the most important aspect of service quality was the

extent of employee knowledge and professionalism. DeFranco and Schmidgall (2014)

contended that it is the responsibility of the club financial executives to align the services

offered according to customer perceptions and supply resources for the employees to

carry out the services in a high-quality manner. PCC managers need to set quality

standards that their staff can achieve, and customers perceive as wanted.

Customer involvement within the organization may not be a factor in determining

the increased perception of quality. Clem, Ravichandran, and Karpinski (2013) did not

find any improvement in perceived quality when the customer was involved in the action

of the service. Consumers who are an active part of the service conducted may not

consider the service as high quality. Though, Storbacka et al. (1994) noted a difference in

the importance of the service quality when customers are highly involved in either a

routine or critical incident. Routine incidents tended to have a lesser effect on the quality

of the service, where if a problem occurred during a critical incident, the customer was

more likely to discontinue business with the organization (Storbacka et al., 1994). Importance of the situation may affect customers' service quality perception. Member perception of quality service may also relate to the interactions of others.

Customers also base service quality on the perception of belonging. Researchers reported that when consumers feel an intense sense of connectedness, the service quality perception and organization commitment increase (Bunker, 2014; Hwang & Han, 2015). Members may perceive approval of the club due to an ingrained feeling in the club. Chang, Ko, and Leite (2016) identified that consumers who perceived the service as high quality and providing impressive social standings were more likely to engage in word of mouth advertising about the club. Although, Chuang and Tai (2016) suggested that if members were psychologically comfortable with the club, low service quality would not be a factor of defection. Members of clubs who feel content may stay with the organization regardless of poor service quality. Members who perceived service quality as high may retain their membership; which may generate a positive experience for the customer.

Experience Satisfaction. Another element of a consumer's choice to do business with an organization may be the perception of the level of satisfaction with the experience. Han and Hwang (2014) suggested that traditional golf course managers should tout the benefits that relate to consumer emotions through the positive benefits the consumer can anticipate receiving from the experience. Al-alak (2014) concurred with Han and Hwang's (2014) results since customers base the level of satisfaction on past experiences as well as how important the organization is to the client. Managers need to

focus on both past and future experiences through benefits provided by the organization. PCC leaders can increase satisfaction by providing experiences that are meaningful for the customer.

Another factor affecting club experiences is the behaviors of other customers. Theodorakis (2014) questioned 362 customers of private fitness centers who noted a positive experience when other customers exhibited suitable behaviors, had the appropriate physical appearance, and were somewhat like themselves. Findings in Hwang and Han's (2015) study of 294 amateur golfers, aligned with Theodorakis' (2014) conclusions, though the importance of each construct was different depending on demographics such as sex, age, and race. For PCC managers to create a positive experience, managers need to market to a specific class of individuals that are like-minded. Other people, such as customers and employees, affect the experience of club members.

Employee interactions also influence experience satisfaction. Researchers indicated that satisfaction was higher when the client perceived a committed relationship through individualized service with employees (Al-alak, 2014; Y. Lee, Choi, Kim, & Hyun, 2014; Ulicney, Ravichandran, & Karpinski, 2016). J. S. Lee, Kim, and Pan (2014) also found that customers who received special attention experienced satisfaction though it did not lead to organizational loyalty. Yet, researchers showed that a customer's satisfaction level with employee interactions had an affect on the intention to continue their membership, recommend the company, and repurchase (Clem et al., 2013; van der Aa et al., 2015; Zopiatis et al., 2017). Prier, Cromartie, and Butler (2017) found that 38%

of members with family memberships intended not to renew their golf memberships due to negative interactions with employees. Positive experiences with PCC employees enhance client retention. How employees carry out their tasks that involve customers, results in experience satisfaction.

Marketing and customer service are not the only departments that affect customer satisfaction. Authors stated that all departments are involved in the process of relationship marketing to provide customer satisfaction (Clem et al., 2013; Fulker, Timur, Dew, & Butler, 2016). Kitchens, Dobolyi, Li, and Abbasi (2018) suggested using integrated customer analytics from all departments to understand the actual level of customer satisfaction. Fulker et al. (2016) explained that Grey Oaks' business plan included people from different departments knowing what was happening in other departments, which provided a better experience for the customer. Members receive immediate information through an operational design that emphasizes experience satisfaction. Employees of each department should consider how their actions, decisions, and plans affect the members.

Trust. Consumers consider trust a significant factor when deciding to do business with companies. Researchers identified trust as a significant reason that individuals patronize an organization on a long-term basis (Chuang & Tai, 2016; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Srivastava & Rai, 2014). However, Mishra (2016) concluded that emotions and feelings of gratitude were the catalysts behind developing trust in relationships. Members rely on feelings to increase their trust resulting in retention. Managers need to market using internal reasons that establish trust in a relationship to engage customers.

Member involvement in the organization may come from a propensity to trust. Cheung and To (2017) found that people who have a natural tendency to trust will be more likely to have a positive attitude toward participating in the functions of the organization. Though Hammedi, Kandampully, Zhang, and Bouquiaux (2015) asserted that individual participation in social media communities leads to stronger trust and commitment, it is not a predictor of being proactive in club recommendations. Trusting members of PCCs will not only retain their memberships but may also spend time and money serving on boards, participating in events, and patronizing club facilities to keep the clubs viable. Members exhibit trust through on-going involvement and by expressing their opinions to current or potential members.

Customers consider the opinion of others when developing trust. Chang and Ko (2017) identified that users of luxury services place more trust in the organization when their friends are current members. Chuang and Tai (2016) also revealed that members are less likely to switch if trust and the social benefits received from the club are positive. Members will remain with a club where perceived value and a trusting relationship exists. Trusting relationships, whether developed internally or through the influence of others, may lead to membership retention.

Since customers have a choice to do business with an organization or not, it is essential for the staff to live up to promises made to attract and retain customers. Researchers contended that keeping commitments results in long-term, profitable, and fulfilling relationships (Aka et al., 2016; Grönroos, 2017). J. S. Lee et al. (2014) found that customers interacted more with organizations that provided explicit promises than

those that only implied promises. When experienced kept promises, members will remain

with the PCC. Keeping promises is vital in the company-customer relationship; however,

it is not as imperative when other factors are involved.

Even though customers desire to leave an organization due to unkept promises,

contractual obligations or switching costs may impede withdrawal. Sheth (2017) noted

that despite broken promises, contracts or switching issues might restrict customer

defection. Although, Srivastava and Rai (2014) asserted that switching costs were not a

significant factor in termination in situations involving long-term contracts. Membership

contracts may contain restrictions for termination of the relationship; however, clients

may base the decision to exit on promises broken by various members of the

organization. When employees break promises, it can lead to a reduction in trust which

may entice members to nonrenew their memberships.

Communication. Managers can leverage various forms of communication for

attracting and retaining members. Abtin and Pouramiri (2016) noted that personnel using

electronic commerce provided more accessibility for their customers, therefore allowing

their clients to select them over their competitors. Members can make informed decisions

regarding whom to do business with based on the information made available through

websites and social media. Danylchuk et al. (2015) indicated that an online presence is

helpful in disseminating information; though, when implementing changes, face-to-face

presentations are effective in influencing member perspectives in a positive direction.

Mishra (2016) reported results consistent with Danylchuk et al. (2015) regarding face-to-

face communications and added that the reason for the effectiveness is the ability to read

facial expressions. PCC managers need to use the type of communication medium that is most effective for the situation. Managers may ask specific questions to better understand members' requirements for retention and preferred methods of communication.

PCC managers may find what the customers need and want through surveys. Kim et al. (2016) identified that managers were more effective in meeting the needs of members when implementing surveys in the private club. Researchers also found that members feel more committed to the organization when allowed input into the processes and offerings (Fulker et al., 2016; Randhawa et al., 2016). Managers who use surveys allow members to express their desires, consequently feeling more connected to the club. PCC managers receive specific information from customers through surveys which allows them to be proactive in meeting the needs of members and improving interactions, thus increasing retention.

Leveraging technology as a form of communication may increase retention and interactions between the PCC managers, members, and guests. Researchers contend that managers gather vital information through data exchanges (Sheth, 2017; Ulicney et al., 2016). The use of technology allows managers to gather valuable data from stakeholders. However, a problem exists if customers do not adapt to the technology; thus, Kim, Kim, Moon, and Chang (2014) reasoned that customers would use self-service technology if it is easy, enjoyable, and beneficial. Managers can use technology to interact with members if the members find the apps and programs user-friendly. Lorek et al. (2017) also found that cohorts in the baby boomer generation may need time and assistance to accept programs that managers have changed to online-only. Technology is only effective if the

managers can get the customers to accept it and operate it. Communication through technology benefits PCCs and members and can lead to marketing innovations.

Marketing Innovations

PCC managers need current marketing strategies to attract and retain customers. Marketing used to be a company-only process of telling the public about a company's product or services; however, it now focuses on developing long-term relationships (Möller & Halinen, 2000; O'Malley, 2014). There has been a shift in marketing for attraction and retention to strategies that result in lasting relationships. Managers need to market where the target audience is, such as Netflix's use of food trucks purposely placed in affluent areas to promote a series and attract stable subscribers (DeCarvalho & Martínez-Carrillo, 2018). MIS used in proximity to the target market can attract and retain customers. Kim et al. (2016) added that PCC leaders who work with existing members to gain additional recruits are more successful in their marketing efforts. Properly done, MIS will attract the right target market and retain profitable clients.

In developing relationships within the marketing innovation process, PCC managers must look at the operations of the organization to determine what changes to incorporate to provide quality services. Sok and O'Cass (2015) found that by incorporating both exploration and exploitation service innovations, employee empowerment ensued to respond to individual customer needs, which increased service quality. Martovoy and Mention (2016) analyzed the process of service development in banking and found that not all innovation projects were open to external input, though much consideration in all projects aligned with an analysis of the business operations.

Though, Narayanan (2015) stated that successful innovation required a shift in the
mindset of the leaders from strictly operations to marketing which focuses on developing
according to customer needs and input. Some successful innovation projects incorporate
input from the involvement of customers; though, all changes need to consider
improvements in service or operations of the business.

Managers may incorporate customers into the innovation process. Kim et al.
(2016) proposed that because PCCs have board members or leaders that are also
members of the organization, their involvement provided motivation and commitment to
achieve aligned goals in the innovation process. Randhawa et al. (2016) noted that club
managers found success in innovations through member focus groups. Kim et al. (2014)
asserted that when customers are co-creators of innovative technology, acceptance and
continued use ensue. Payne and Frow (2017) added that customer co-creation of value
solidified relationships. Involving customers in the innovation process may allow for
better use and commitment of the innovation. However, Estrin (2009) noted that if
leaders do not ask the right questions of the clients, ineffective and unprofitable
innovations may result. PCC managers that desire innovations would benefit from the
input of customers, though only if customers understand the inquiry and it aligned with
the purpose of the process. The proper tools allow managers to innovate with members.

To innovate effectively, managers may use the tools that customers use to make
decisions. Morosan and DeFranco (2014b) asserted that the PCC industry was slow in
adapting to interactive technologies to engage with members. Even though members used
interactive technology for other purposes, the PCC industry was not using it in the initial

stages. Ulicney et al. (2016) found that members wanted the technological capabilities, though personnel issues resulted in lack of technology implementation. PCCs have limited employee capabilities, which has delayed use of technologies desired by members. Members are leading the industry toward the comprehensive use of technology applications, which allows managers to target the services the client desires (Morosan & DeFranco, 2014b). Ramírez-Hurtado and Berbel-Pineda (2015) noted that over 50% of golf tourists prefer to use the internet for reservations and payment options. Therefore, PCC managers need to provide interaction and a way to conduct business with the customers online. Customers will do business and remain with companies that allow them to use preferred mediums.

Another innovative tool used to connect with customers is the use of mobile devices. Managers use mobile devices to collect member-specific data and to provide immediate services to members (Morosan & DeFranco, 2014a). Morosan and DeFranco (2014a) expressed that PCC managers can customize the offerings through mobile devices which increases the member's desire to use the device for making reservations and communications, though the extent of the use of the devices differed according to geographic regions and the age of the user. Managers need to consider the region and demographics of their members to exploit mobile technology effectively. Omana (2016) indicated that managers must address the generational differences in the acceptance of mobile device usage. PCC managers can make access to services and information available through mobile devices to connect with some customers. PCC managers are

marketing to many members through mobile devices and expanding that action to include outside influences.

Managers have changed marketing mediums to include community connectedness. Brand affiliation is not enough to attract customers; people want to connect with brand communities using social media (Hammedi et al., 2015). Successful marketing managers use social media communities to attract customers to their organization. Researchers contend that using social media is effective in membership recruitment and retention (Abtin & Pouramiri, 2016; Barrows et al., 2017; Nobre & Silva, 2014). The Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) increased success in personalizing the game of golf to stakeholders using social media such as Twitter (Morse, 2015). Nobre and Silva (2014) established that members connected through Facebook are more loyal to the organization and feel more informed. PCC managers need to learn to use social media as a tool to reach prospective and current members. A marketing innovation strategy effectively used by PCC managers is social media, which allows for information exchange and connectedness through communities.

There are multiple communities within the PCC industry, and managers need to address each segment with targeted marketing efforts. Barrows et al. (2017) noted that because of changing demographics, managers are putting more resources into marketing efforts that effectively attract new members and retain current members. Researchers asserted that PCC managers have multiple markets to serve and thus must design various marketing strategies to reach the specific consumer groups (Hwang et al., 2015; Maier & Prusty, 2016; McKnight, Paugh, McKnight, Zuccaro, & Tornabene, 2014). One

marketing strategy is no longer effective in reaching the entire client base of PCCs; therefore, managers need to use a combination of strategies or find MIS that will resonate with multiple segments. PCC managers need to determine what strategies effectively align with their various clients and market accordingly.

Another marketing tactic is to offer bonuses or discounts for new or renewing memberships. Byun and Jang (2015) surveyed members and nonmembers of tourist attractions concluding that people were more inclined to purchase new subscriptions if offered bonuses; however, those renewing for the initial term preferred discounts. Neither offering had a significant effect on renewal intention of members with established memberships (Byun & Jang, 2015). Ramírez-Hurtado and Berbel-Pineda (2015) found that special promotions and discounts entice young golfers. A target market of a young demographic would positively respond to specialty offerings. PCC managers need to offer promotional programs that are attractive to the target market to gain customers.

Some organizations use loyalty programs to entice customers to patronize the business. Ha and Stoel (2014) found that effective loyalty programs were those that offered something different from other organizations and aligned with the values of customers. As such, men and women preferred distinct types of rewards (Ha & Stoel, 2014). Rehnen, Bartsch, Kull, and Meyer (2017) revealed that loyalty program members increased their participation when rewarded for engaging the organization through social media. Ulicney et al. (2016) asserted that PCC managers who use database marketing software successfully could target loyalty programs to the desires of individual members for an increase in repeat business. To be effective, PCC managers must create reward

programs that are distinctive and meaningful to their specific client segment. When members find the programs rewarding, participating and recommending the organization to others may occur.

Another marketing channel is via word of mouth (WOM). Chang and Ko (2017) reasoned that PCC managers attract and retain customers by addressing marketing efforts specific to creating a favorable recommendation from noncustomers. Conversely, Chang et al. (2016) opined that specific messages that feed the ego from current customers have a greater effect on successful attraction. Sundermann (2018) established that WOM was effective with ethical rewards used by nonprofit organizations. Nobre and Silva (2014) stated that customers who creatively interact through social media are more likely to engage in positive WOM. Researchers concur that WOM has an effect on the decisions made by customers, though may not agree as to the best source of WOM advertising. PCC managers may use testimonies and encourage members to talk up the club to entice prospects and members to attend the club.

Another MIS implemented by PCC managers to increase member and guest attendance is to make the golf courses easier to play. Hwang et al. (2015) revealed that organizational prominence increased where country club environments improved pace of play. Researchers indicated that improved playability of the course was a factor in membership retention and participation (Sheehan & Bruni-Bossio, 2015; Whitt, 2015). However, Tiger, Trent, and Haney (2015) found that even though clubs could generate more revenue from additional participation, the rules of golf would have to change to make significant changes to the pace of play such as the closest person putting out first. If

PCC managers make the courses easier to play, more people would be willing to participate and maintain their memberships. Managers need to market the benefits of the course playability to combat some competition.

Managers of traditional golf courses may need to counteract the advertising put out by competitors for people's leisure time. Han, Baek, Lee, & Huh (2014) advised screen golf organizations to promote the damaging effect on the environment and the elitist atmosphere of traditional golf courses. Hwang and Han (2015) suggested that managers of golf courses advertise the physical and visual benefits achieved by playing golf outdoors over playing indoor screen golf. It is essential for managers to find the beneficial elements of participating in the organization to decrease the negative advertising put out by competitors to remain in business. A marketing initiative addressed by the LPGA has been getting the public interested in attending golf events rather than other ways to spend their time and money (Morse, 2015). Advertising initiatives by golf industry associations may help more people become or remain interested in the game of golf as a preferred choice of leisure activities. PCC managers need to make golf an attractive sport to encourage people to participate in club membership.

Marketing managers in the golf industry have been implementing innovative programs to entice both active golfers and fans to keep people interested in the sport instead of moving to other options. To address the interest of more female golfers, the LPGA partnered with corporate sponsors to add apparel, licensing, golf simulators, and merchandising that appeal to women (Morse, 2015). The inclusion of golf in the 2016 Summer Olympics was a significant catalyst for exposure and acceptance of the game of

golf (Morse, 2015; Sheets et al., 2016). Some club programs included beginner clinics and proper equipment fitting events to help boost participation of new golfers (Danylchuk et al., 2015). PCC managers have created programs to introduce the game of golf to the new golfer and address the interests of the female population to increase interest in the sport.

Another marketing tactic used in the PCC industry has been to use differentiation pricing. Prier et al. (2017) examined the effects on age-based pricing membership structures with intentions to participate and renew. Members under a certain age, such as 45, receive discounted initiation fees and annual dues. The researchers found that individuals under the pricing plan found higher service satisfaction and intention to renew than those within this structure under a family membership (Prier et al., 2017). Conversely, van der Aa et al. (2015) stated that pricing promotions are not as effective in client retention as relationship-focused endeavors. Even though PCC managers have offered different pricing structures, it does not correlate with a member's intention to retain their membership.

Managers also offer innovative programs and services with additional uses of the buildings. Tompson, Koutroumanis, Brownlee, and Hoke (2014) noted that The Tampa Club implemented additional services such as a providing a wedding coordinator, renting personal wine lockers, offering networking opportunities, organizing club events, and presenting access to premium seating at local events to the members. Hwang et al. (2015) asserted that the shops in PCCs exemplify top-end mall experiences and the atmosphere of the restaurants create an upscale ambiance. Because the buildings can be a large asset

and a prominent visible part of the PCC, managers need to consider innovative ways to use the space to provide services that entice members to use the club. The club buildings need to contain an image that is desired by the members to continue their memberships in the PCC.

Overview of Private Country Club Industry

The country club industry consists of a variety of entity configurations. Country clubs are organizations that provide specific services, charge initiation, and membership fees, and target a demographic that meets exclusive qualifications (Barrows et al., 2017; Chuang & Tai, 2016). PCCs restrict participation and funding to qualified members and their guests (Clem et al., 2013; Ferreira & Gustafson, 2014b). Ownership of clubs consists of members, corporations, developers, family units, or other entity configurations (Kim et al., 2016). Boards consisting of members govern most clubs, though hired professionals manage operations (Barrows et al., 2017). Some clubs include amenities such as golf, fitness programs, and food and beverage operations (Hwang et al., 2015; Schmidgall & DeFranco, 2016a). Because of the limitation of membership, the PCC is more restrictive than the other types of clubs. PCC managers must attract and retain members to financially sustain the business.

The financial structure of PCCs varies from for-profit to not-for-profit. According to Barrows et al. (2017), most of the research on country clubs involves not-for-profit clubs, which is possibly due to the membership structure in club associations that supply much of the research data. According to Groch (2014), most golf clubs are nonprofits.

The financial structure of the club has an impact on how the leaders allocate money to support the operations of the organization.

The income generated in PCCs comes from the participation of members and their guests. PCCs generate revenues through membership dues, food and beverage, and other operations such as golf fees or shops (Schmidgall & DeFranco, 2016a). As such, it is necessary for PCCs to attract and retain members to fund on-going operations (Cha, Kim, & Cichy, 2018). The CMAA and Club Benchmarking (2016) reported that membership dues make up 50% of the PCC revenue. Ferreira and Gustafson (2014a) reported that country clubs lost 16% of their memberships during the 2008 to 2010 recession which negatively affected revenue generation. As memberships decline, PCCs' revenues decline. However, Ferreira and Gustafson (2014b) reported that during the 2008 to 2010 decline, most exclusive PCCs maintained not only full membership levels but also the number of candidates on the wait lists. Because memberships generate financial support, managers need to maintain a base membership level. Membership levels and member involvement in the PCC affect revenue.

Besides funding PCCs from membership dues and assessments, participation levels in affiliated sports and activities impact revenue. A significant percentage of country club revenues come from the recreational offerings such as golf, which causes a decline in income when golf participation decreases (Barrows et al., 2017). The National Golf Foundation (NGF, 2017b) report indicated that traditional golf course participation decreased by 1.2% in 2016 from 2015. With the importance of ancillary activities on the rise within country clubs, Groch (2014) explained that leaders who only pay attention to

the financial results of the club without considering lifestyle changes would be unsuccessful. Recreational activities provided by the PCC generate revenue and incur expenses to support the offerings for the members.

PCCs incur an elevated level of fixed expenses. Labor and golf course maintenance are two of the highest expenses in clubs (Duval, Kerna, Frisvold, Ulmeda, & Li, 2016). Schmidgall and DeFranco (2016a) reported that labor costs typically account for 50% of a club's expenses. Cha et al. (2018) asserted that even though sustainable business practices can help a PCC save money and the environment in the long term, initiating and maintaining the programs requires funding. Huang and O'Brien (2015) found that club managers perceive industry on-going expenses to climb while expecting a possible reduction in revenues. PCC managers must make sure the revenue generated will cover the expenses to operate the club. Members generate the funding to cover the expenses of the PCC.

Consumers consider PCC membership and recreational spending as luxury items, requiring funding from businesses or disposable income. Researchers revealed that the funding for memberships was from business accounts or discretionary income (Schmidgall & DeFranco, 2016b). When the laws changed regarding the ability of companies to write off memberships as a business expense, many organizations quit funding the memberships (Schmidgall & DeFranco, 2016b). Tompson et al. (2014) found that most of the membership cancellations at The Tampa Club were primarily due to the cessation of businesses funding the memberships. During recessions, people do not have the level of discretionary income that it takes to maintain a membership; thus defecting

from country clubs (Ferreira & Gustafson, 2014a). When businesses stop expensing memberships or people no longer have expendable income, memberships decrease. Maintaining memberships requires available funding and the willingness to spend on items viewed as nonessential.

Decisions to maintain memberships may relate to perceptions regarding luxury spending. Hwang and Han (2015) contended that members who consider the club luxurious, spend more money and patronize the club more often when sensing community within the club. Also, Chang and Ko (2017) found that consumers place less importance on the luxury item itself and more importance on the image it affords them. PCC managers need to make sure the image provided by the club creates enough of a value proposition to the members for membership retention. Memberships in PCCs provide the members with both internal and external positive affiliations.

It is important for PCCs to remain open, positively affecting society. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), Arizona golf courses and country clubs employed 11,149 people and generated $601,000,000 in revenue in 2012. Researchers estimated the golf industry in Arizona put $3.9 billion into the economy through all sources of operations in 2014 (Duval et al., 2016). CMAA and Club Benchmarking (2016) stated that most of the fiscal impact from clubs remains local, due to hiring personnel from the community, affecting property taxes, and spending on club needs. PCCs provide economic benefits through sales and employment. The economic benefits extend into home prices and additional taxes collected by the local and state governments.

PCCs and memberships affect local real estate markets and tax basis. Fraser and Allen (2016) established that homes with an appurtenant golf membership sold at a higher value than comparable homes. Appurtenant golf memberships have an increased economic affect due to some areas establishing the tax rate to include the membership (Fraser & Allen, 2016). Ferreira and Gustafson (2014a) noted that when the economy is down, people are unable to afford their additional homes in areas such as Arizona, which reduces the number of appurtenant golf memberships. Many PCC memberships connected to real estate transactions influence home values and tax revenue. PCCs need to remain viable to support the local community.

Another affect that PCCs have on society is through responsible land usage and charitable contributions. Groch (2014) explained that golf course operations contribute to the community through environmental responsibility and philanthropic endeavors. Cha et al. (2018) also noted that PCCs which include sustainable business practices positively affect the economy and environment of the local communities. Some researchers disagreed and asserted that country clubs with golf courses damage the local natural resources (Han et al., 2014). Vargas-Sánchez and Riquel-Ligero (2015) found that people are more accepting of golf course operations which respect the natural habitat by implementing programs that meet or exceed government regulations for sustainability. It is up to the management of PCCs to follow responsible environmental practices and to give back to the communities to remain in operation.

Many PCCs have facilities to hold charitable golf tournaments and host other events that contribute to giving outside of the club. CMAA and Club Benchmarking

(2016) estimated that clubs spent $150 million in charitable giving and hosted 16,000 charity golf tournaments in 2016. Club charters usually include participation in giving outside of the club (CMAA & Club Benchmarking, 2016). Kim et al. (2016) explained that philanthropic events conducted by club participants improved community support which provides potential club members. The involvement in charitable organizations outside of the club by related stakeholders can allow the PCC to have a favorable perception by prospective members. PCC managers put resources into charitable events to benefit the organizations financially and to provide the club with goodwill in the community to remain viable.

PCCs also affect society in the ability of members to be healthy contributors. Lorek et al. (2017) found that a healthy lifestyle and being a vital part of society is a concern of older adults; whereas, being a part of a club can meet those needs through community engagement and leisure activities. Hwang and Han (2015) noted that a benefit of traditional golf over screen golf is the ability of players to get actual exercise while on the course and participate in a social environment. Sotiriadou, Wicker, and Quick (2014) attributed successful attraction and retention of their cycle club members to the social and physical aspects of the sport. Members who partake of activities offered at PCCs can improve their health. Healthy members can be productive contributors to society.

Despite the positive contributions to society, various problems have befallen the PCC industry. Barrows et al. (2017) noted that recessions and a meaningful change in member demographics negatively affect the country club industry. Economic recessions and a declining interest in golf, fine dining, and spending time away from the family have

caused managers of country clubs to reassess marketing and membership efforts (Hwang et al., 2015; Sheehan & Bruni-Bossio, 2015). Tompson et al. (2014) also suggested that the decline in membership and revenues was due to economic recessions, a change in member demographics, and an increase in competition for substitute services. For members to continue their memberships in the clubs, PCC managers need to prepare the club for recessions, increase family-friendly activities, and address competitor marketing efforts. The issues facing the PCC industry are both internal stakeholder effects as well as the impact of the overall golf industry.

Another problem relates to the decline in participation on the golf course and competition from the virtual or screen golf businesses. Sheets et al. (2016) noted that the decline in golf course participation stems from an aging population and a change in consumer behavior to wanting activities that take less time than a full round of traditional golf. NGF (2017b) noted that the number of golf participants increased in 2015 and 2016 due to partaking of off-course venues, while on-course play decreased. Han et al. (2014) specified that social responsibility was a driver behind the preference to play screen golf over real golf. PCC managers face the problem of consumers wanting to play a shorter game and an alternative sports option outside of the PCC that provides similar stimulus benefits that may be more socially acceptable. Constructs that members use to decide whether to participate in the game of golf consist of personal time and the affect time away has on the family.

Part of the decline in PCC participation comes from the influence of family time on the member. People do not want to be away from their families for the time it takes to

complete a full round of golf (Ferreira & Gustafson, 2014b; MacIntosh & Law, 2015).

DeLuca (2016) noted that swim club members were more interested in renewing their

memberships if the club provided quality family participation allowing for time spent

with their family. Members with families are putting family time as more important than

individual participation in the clubs. PCC managers need to offer family-friendly

activities and events to entice the members to keep their memberships for clubs to remain

open.

An additional problem causing closure of PCCs has been the over-building of golf

courses. The decrease in demand for rounds of traditional golf with the oversaturation of

the building of golf courses within the United States has created excess supply in the

industry (Sheets et al., 2016). Assessors value homes on a golf course or in a golfing

community at a premium, thus providing an incentive to developers to create courses

(Fraser & Allen, 2016). There is a financial motivation for developers to include golf

courses in the design of the developments to help increase the price of the homes.

Developers have built an excess supply of golf courses that created competition for

memberships.

Private Country Club Membership

There are several types of memberships in PCCs tied to the location and structure

of the organization. One type of membership is the appurtenant golf memberships linked

to real estate. Fraser and Allen (2016) noted that potential home buyers must be able to

afford the home as well as maintain the membership, which decreases the number of

possible purchasers. Some more exclusive club contracts require voting in the members

or recommended by a current member (Ferreira & Gustafson, 2014b). Other clubs simply include members that can afford the fees, and thus become owners of the PCC (Kim et al., 2016). Depending on the organization of the PCC, members may qualify for different membership types. Within the structure of memberships, the PCCs may offer a variety of membership levels.

There are layers of memberships within many PCCs. Full membership includes access to all amenities, social memberships do not include sports, and some PCCs have restricted memberships which allow for limited access to amenities (Clem et al., 2013). Some memberships may be based on age restrictions, such as junior executive golf memberships which require the members to be under 45 years old (Prier et al., 2017). Some PCCs have various levels of memberships which are either restricted to services or are determined by age ranges. The memberships are available to the proper demographic according to their interest in club services.

PCC memberships and golfer demographics follow similar patterns. Researchers identified the typical demographics for PCCs are men who make over $100,000 per year; are Caucasian; are over 35 years old; are professionals; are college, or higher, educated; and live or work near the club (Bencito, 2014; Deluca, 2016; Jackson, Barrows, & Ferreira, 2015). Most regular golfers fit the same characteristics (Bencito, 2014). However, a trend in both golf participation and involvement in the PCC is an increase in female participants and family members (CMAA & Club Benchmarking, 2016). The membership demographics have shifted from primarily older males to include women

and children. PCC managers must change their membership efforts from men only, to address the interests of the family unit.

There has been a meaningful change in PCC member demographics which requires managers to change target markets to include family members. Researchers identified a shift from adults-only to family involvement (Ferreira & Gustafson, 2014b; CMAA & Club Benchmarking, 2016). The people that used to patronize the facilities were primarily adults; however, the current members include their children. According to Vespa (2017), 33% of young adults (18- to 34-year olds) were still living with their parents in 2015. Therefore, the definition of families that qualify for family memberships may need to change to include some adult children. PCC managers must create an atmosphere that is accommodating to families.

Another change is the spread of multiple generations in the membership base. Though there are no exact dates accepted for each generation, researchers indicated that similar characteristics exist between the groups (Omana, 2016; Vespa, 2017). Omana (2016) defined the generations as: traditionals, born before 1946; baby boomers, born between 1946-1960; generation X, born between 1961-1979; generation Y, born between 1980-1995, and generation Z, born after 1995. Other researchers defined the baby boomers as born between 1946 and 1964, and alternatively call generation Y the millennials with birth dates between 1982 and 1998 (Vespa, 2017). There are currently five generations to consider in the membership base. PCC managers need to understand and market to the generational mix that makes up their membership.

Each generation has different life experiences, reasons for participating, and wants from the clubs. Lorek et al. (2017) noted that cohorts in the baby boomer generation seek activities that can help to keep them physically and mentally healthy by being involved in community leisure activities with people that are similar in age and desires. Omana (2016) asserted that the generation X individuals are less structured than the baby boomers and desire immediate gratification. Zopiatis et al. (2017) identified the generation Y members as individuals that desire innovative services and satisfactory employee interactions. Members of the different generations focus on various aspects of the PCC industry to determine their level of satisfaction with the organization. To continue participation and membership renewals, PCC managers must recognize the different desires and financial capabilities of the multiple generational members.

The economic situation of younger generations will have an effect on the support of PCCs. The attitudes regarding finances of the millennial generation are increased debt, putting off supporting their household until a later age, and spending for current experiences rather than saving for the future (Vespa, 2017). However, the report showed that 1.7% of young adults (age 25 to 30) were earning $100,000 or more in 1975, and the percentage increased to 5.4% in 2016 (Vespa, 2017). Therefore, there is a larger percentage of eligible young members that fit the standard PCC demographic of making over $100,000 per year. Though, as Tompson et al. (2014) noted, the members of the millennial generation enjoy eating out frequently, but unlike the baby boomers, millennials prefer smaller dishes and fast food rather than formal fine dining experiences. There is a significant difference in the generations regarding spending money in the

clubs. Even though the members in generations younger than the baby boomers appear to afford the services of PCCs, traditional services may not meet current needs.

Cohorts in each generation look to join organizations to be a part of a group. Bunker (2014) reported that when people feel connected communally, it enhances their commitment to the company. Bencito (2014) found that the most common reason to join a PCC was due to friends being members. DeLuca (2016) and Ferreira and Gustafson (2014b) suggested that other people impact membership decisions; and added that when members grew up in families that used the membership, there was more inclination to obtain a membership in adulthood as an expectation of tradition or status. Members consider the club as providing the opportunity to be a part of a group dynamic from either personal or social standards. PCC managers can use the connectedness people gain from being a member to attract other potential members.

A characteristic of country clubs is the exclusive membership base of individuals that can afford the fees. In the study of 294 amateur golfers in the United States, Hwang and Han (2015) reported that when members perceived the organization as prestigious, members and guests used the facilities frequently leading to continued funding. Chuang and Tai (2016) added that members perceive exclusive membership as an elevation of social status. To keep the membership base selective, leaders of PCCs set membership dues at an elevated level to attract a specific class of individuals that can afford the fees (Chuang & Tai, 2016). Jackson et al. (2015) noted that the defining demographics that affected the affordability of full membership status were household incomes over $100,000 per year; homes in the area valued at $300,000 or higher; and people that lived

or worked within 10 miles of the PCC. There is a specific demographic of individuals that make up the membership according to financial standards. The target market of PCCs consists of people that meet certain standards and perceive specific advantages.

People also obtain memberships for perceived benefits of value. DeLuca (2016) identified that even though the cost of the membership was higher than other available services, the members preferred the lack of crowds, the freedom of use at any time, and the health benefits provided by the club. McKnight et al. (2014) found that customers are more likely to become members of clubs based on a psychological comfort level rather than on specific products or services offered. Kim et al. (2016) asserted that services provided a link to membership retention, both individual and social. Members will remain with an organization when there are perceived benefits to the membership. Members may choose to cancel membership if benefits do not meet needs.

There are various reasons that people cancel their memberships. MacIntosh and Law (2015) studied individuals with fitness memberships and found that 50% of members nonrenewed after the first year due to financial decisions, time constraints, and family influences. However, Chuang and Tai (2016) revealed that even though members experienced poor service, soaring prices, or had alternative service options, it was the psychological and social benefits that significantly affected the intention to switch providers or nonrenew memberships. Cancel intention of members is attributable to financial and time constraints, though the actual act of defection may not happen if the members feel a greater loss to their social standings.

A gap in the literature

The literature provides information on the need to attract and retain members in the PCC industry to retain viable operations. However, a gap exists on MIS currently used in the PCC industry to increase attraction and retention of members to prevent closure (Barrows et al., 2017). This study contributed to the research on marketing in PCCs. The results may guide PCC managers to better market to current and prospective members, thus increasing memberships to keep the clubs operational.

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Transition

</div>

Section 1 contained the basis for this study. The background of the problem addressed the fact that PCCs in the United States are continuing to close and that memberships are declining. This section included the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and justification of the qualitative multiple case study as an effective research method and design to answer the research question. I included a list of interview questions to explore MIS used by PCC managers. The conceptual framework used in the study was the relationship marketing theory. This section also included the significance of the study to business practice and the implications for social change. The literature review included a comprehensive review of prior research relating to relationship marketing theory, marketing, the PCC industry, and PCC membership.

Sections 2 and 3 include details regarding how I conducted the research and the results of the research. Section 2 specifically includes information regarding the researcher; participants; research method and design; and the collection, handling, and validating of the data. Section 3 includes the findings based on relationship marketing

theory, the application to professional practice, implications for social change,

recommendations for action, suggested further research to help attract and retain

customers, and personal reflections and biases regarding the study.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 contains the rationale for the research process and an overview of key procedures I used in conducting my investigation. The section begins with a restatement of the purpose of the qualitative multiple case study. The subsections that follow contain specific information regarding the role of the researcher in the data collection process in addition to a description of the participants, justification for using a qualitative multiple-case study design, consideration of ethical issues, an overview of the data collection and analysis process, and discussion of how I addressed reliability and validity in the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the MIS that PCC managers used to attract and retain customers to prevent closure. The targeted population consisted of managers in four distinct PCCs in Arizona who had successfully used MIS to attract and retain customers. The implications for positive social change include the potential to employ local citizens, contribute income to local vendors, and increase property tax revenues to support government-provided services.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher has personal involvement in the data collection process. Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava Fomani, Shoghi, and Ali Cheraghi (2014) explained that a researcher is an integral part of a qualitative study because he or she serves as the primary data collection instrument. Since I collected and interpreted the qualitative data, I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. A researcher's responsibility in the data collection process is to observe the phenomenon of interest ethically and unbiasedly,

interpret the data, and secure the collected data (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017; Sanjari et al., 2014; Yates & Leggett, 2016). My tasks were to establish trust with the participants, actively listen, accurately record the data, and clarify my understanding of participant responses by performing member checking. The involvement that I had with the topic was as a member of a PCC in Arizona. I had no relationship with any of the study participants as I did not interview any managers of the PCC where I was a member. Researcher involvement can affect data collection; therefore, an understanding of ethical considerations is necessary for the researcher to effectively conduct the research.

Another role of the researcher is to be ethical in interacting with participants. I completed the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research training regarding protecting participants. The training contained information on The Belmont Report, which includes guidelines for ethically selecting and protecting human subjects in research (U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The participants in my study did not fall under the protected classes of the protocol; however, I took measures to protect the data supplied and used ethical means to obtain the involvement of the participants.

Researchers need to take additional measures to understand and mitigate personal biases. Qualitative researchers bring their personal perspectives to the analysis and interpretation of the central phenomenon (Yanchar, 2015; Yates & Leggett, 2016). I had the perspective of a PCC member whose PCC had experienced a decline in membership numbers and who had witnessed the monetary impact this decline had on the remaining members since the 2008 recession. To mitigate my personal biases, I posed the same

open-ended questions to each participant and recorded the experiences exactly as
described by the participants. As Yates and Leggett (2016) noted, researchers use open-
ended questions to mitigate preconceived notions about the collected data. A researcher
uses a reflexive journal to become aware of biases in the research process, including the
member checking (participant validation) and data triangulation (multiple data source
validation) procedures (Morse, 2015; Thomas, 2017). I mitigated research bias by asking
participants the same interview questions, incorporating member checks, using data
triangulation, and conducting reflexive journaling.

Another role of the researcher is to use an established protocol for collecting data
to enhance reliability. A researcher follows an interview protocol to establish a reliable
method of data collection that is objective and trustworthy and results in increased data
quality (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). I used
an interview protocol (see Appendix) to ensure that I asked participants the same
questions in a systematic format to enhance data quality. I treated each participant in the
same manner, asked interview questions in the same order, recorded the responses, and
conducted member checking to ensure the accurate description of participants'
experiences.

Participants

I selected participants who were PCC managers who had used MIS to attract and
retain customers to prevent closure. Researchers select participants based on the
respondent's involvement in the case and ability to answer the central research question
(Abrams, 2010; Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016; Yin, 2017). Participants were over 18

years old, in a management capacity in a PCC, and located in Arizona. I sought

participants who had successfully attracted and retained members by using MIS.

My strategy for gaining access to the participants was to contact the general

manager of the PCCs. I used the Internet to search for contact information of general

managers of PCCs within Arizona. Researchers gain access to participants through

affiliations and may need to interact with gatekeepers (Drew, 2014; Maramwidze-

Merrison, 2016; Singh, 2014). The general managers of PCCs are gatekeepers, and one

referred me to a marketing manager to obtain the desired data. None of the participants

required site permission. After obtaining the contact information, I called the potential

participants to discuss the study and determine their interest in participating.

My strategy for building a working relationship with the PCC managers and

gaining their consent to participate in the study was to identify my background and

purpose for conducting the study. Researchers build rapport with respondents by being

transparent about their study background and purpose (Cronin, 2014; Harvey, 2015; Park

& Lunt, 2015). Therefore, I provided a consent form to the participants and assured them

that the information was confidential and would only be used for the study. Participants

are more apt to provide open and honest data in a comfortable environment (Drew, 2014).

The participants selected the location for the interviews. I conducted the data collection at

each of the PCC locations per respondents' preferences.

Research Method and Design

To explore the MIS used in PCCs to attract and retain customers to avoid closure,

I used a qualitative research methodology with a multiple case-study design. Three

methods commonly used in research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Barnham, 2015; Chan, 2015; Yates & Leggett, 2016). After considering the processes involved in each of the three research methods, I determined that the qualitative method was best suited to explore MIS used to attract and retain customers. Three primary designs used in qualitative research are case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Johnston, Wallis, Oprescu, & Gray, 2017; Sanjari et al., 2014; Yates & Leggett, 2016). After considering the three designs, I selected case study as the most appropriate one for my study.

Research Method

I used qualitative as the research method for my study. A researcher interested in gathering data by using a narrative data collection technique rather than a structured numeric technique uses a qualitative method (Barnham, 2015; Sanjari et al., 2014; Yates & Leggett, 2016). A qualitative method was appropriate to gather data regarding the experiences of PCC managers who implemented MIS to attract and retain customers. Researchers use a quantitative method to examine the phenomenon via statistics, and if using a survey, the researchers assume that participants will similarly interpret the scales (Barnham, 2015; Sanjari et al., 2014; Yates & Leggett, 2016). If I had wanted to determine the change in membership numbers, the effect on profit, or the change in demographics, a quantitative method would have been appropriate because I would have been able to compute the affects. However, I wanted to know what MIS strategies PCC managers used, which ones were effective for client attraction and retention, and how the employees responded to the strategies. The output I desired was not numerically

quantifiable as I aspired to gather a deeper understanding of the strategies that managers used. A researcher using a mixed-methods design uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the research question (Chan, 2015). If I had wanted to compare the strategies used and the change in demographic data or membership numbers, a mixed-methods design would have been suitable. Because I sought to explore the experiences of PCC managers and provide a description of the MIS the managers used, a qualitative method involving the recording of narrative data was the most appropriate research method.

Research Design

The purpose of my study was to explore MIS used in PCCs to attract and retain customers to avoid closure. Exploration of strategies is best accomplished through a descriptive design (Randhawa et al., 2016). Researchers use a case study design to conduct an exchange to understand or describe a situation that has occurred or is currently happening (Yin, 2017). I used a multiple case study design to inquire of managers from different PCCs to describe the managers' experiences with MIS. To understand the experiences of the managers and gather data on the strategies that were successful in attracting and retaining customers, a case study design was appropriate.

Other research designs considered were ethnography and phenomenology. Researchers observing a group of people in their habitat over time is ethnography (Torres, 2016). Ethnography requires a researcher ingrain in the culture of the people and live the experience explored (Sanjari et al., 2014). The research purpose was to understand multiple strategies used and not to explore the culture of PCCs; therefore,

ethnography was not an appropriate design for the study. Phenomenology is a personalized view of an experience or a happening (Gill, 2014; Johnston et al., 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Though researchers use phenomenology design to gather data on an experience, it does not provide an in-depth exploration of strategies, thus was not suitable for this study. I rejected the ethnographic and phenomenological research designs and selected a case study design to allow for multiple perspectives of MIS used.

My strategy for reaching data saturation was to evaluate data through interviews, document reviews, and data analysis until acquiring more data would no longer add new information to answer the research question. Case study researchers achieve data saturation when the obtained data begins to repeat, or no additional topics develop (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). I interviewed and gathered documents from participants until the data supplied became repetitive and no new themes arose. I collected data from knowledgeable participants to reach data saturation.

Population and Sampling

I obtained a sample population of knowledgeable participants through purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling, researchers set specific criteria that participants must meet based on relevance and knowledge of the phenomenon explored and include or exclude people from the population accordingly (Abrams, 2010; Gentles & Vilches, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I used purposeful sampling to select the population for this study to acquire knowledge from a subset of Arizona PCC managers that used MIS to attract and retain customers. Singh (2014) contended that gathering data from three organizations that met specific criteria was effective in a multiple case study of

nonprofits to provide depth to the inquiry and analysis. The sample size of this study included 1 manager from 4 different PCCs in Arizona. From the participants in the sample, I recorded the experiences, observed behaviors, and gathered documentation regarding the use of MIS.

To ensure data saturation, I selected a sample size that resulted in depth of data. Marshall et al. (2013) opined that it is imperative to obtain a sample size that will reach redundancy in results. McQuarrie and McIntyre (2014) expressed that small sample size is appropriate for people in similar situations who have analogous viewpoints. The quality and number of participants obtained through the sampling method can affect data saturation. Data saturation is determined by repetition of information and redundancy of coding to the point that no additional information is emerging from the data gathered (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall et al., 2013). I used a purposeful sampling method, conducted interviews, analyzed transcripts, and performed methodological triangulation to ensure data saturation in my study. To reach saturation, I interviewed participants until data became repetitive and no new information emerged.

The purpose of my study determined the criteria I used to choose the participants. Researchers purport that to obtain rich data, researchers must select participants who are involved in, have experience with, and have access to documents regarding the phenomenon studied (Abrams, 2010; Dasgupta, 2015; Yin, 2017). I used an Internet search of PCC managers in Arizona to select participants. I telephoned participants to determine whether they met the criteria of being a manager in a PCC who used MIS to attract and retain customers. Researchers asserted that interviews conducted on the site of

the case studied allowed for observation of the participant in their environment (Levitt,

Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017; Yin, 2017). I conducted three interviews

on premises at the PCCs for convenience to the participant, observation, and ability to

obtain data that was on site. One interviewee participated via an online interview using

join.me and emailed the supporting marketing documentation.

Ethical Research

A Walden University doctoral student must conduct research according to ethical

standards, particularly through the informed consent process. Researchers must protect

participants by informing them of the responsibilities and potential harm that could come

to them through their participation (Dixon & Quirke, 2017; Sanjari et al., 2014). I began

the informed consent process by the potential participant receiving a consent form via

email. The form included the purpose, an outline of responsibilities of participating,

information to allow the participant to withdraw at any time, and a statement of

confidentiality. The recipients returned a statement of consent via email or in person

before participating in the interviews.

The participants could withdraw from the study at any time. The withdrawing

participant could contact me via email, phone, or verbally during the interview to indicate

a desire to discontinue participation. I would have returned any prior documentation

received from the withdrawing participant and erased any digital data. There were not

any monetary incentives for participating in the study, but I sent a thank you letter with a

summary of the final research study to each participant.

I protected the participants throughout the research process. Ethical protection of participants involves obtaining informed consent before commencing data collection, securing data, and coding identifiable information (Khan, 2014; Sanjari et al., 2014; Singh, 2014). The measures I took to assure the ethical protection of the participants involved following an ethical protocol. The ethical protocol included informed consent, securing data, protecting participant identification, coding information to protect identification, and securely disposing of data. To protect names of individuals and the organizations, I used coding in the final report instead of actual names to keep the participants and organizations confidential. I stored the coding key on a USB drive in a secured fireproof box. I did not use participants, nor any data related to the participants or the organizations without prior written consent. The signed copies of the consent form, the audio recording of the interviews, collected documentation, and all data involved in the study were stored in a secured fireproof box and will be kept for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of the participants. After 5 years, the data gathered, the participant information, and audio tapes will be shredded and discarded via a certified shredding company. Walden University IRB approval number is 05-06-18-0093507 and expires on May 6, 2019.

Data Collection Instruments

There are multiple data collection instruments in case study research. Sanjari et al. (2014) and Yin (2017) proposed that a researcher is a data collection instrument because of the ability to observe and interpret the responses. As the study researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument. Case study researchers use semistructured interviews

to allow the participants to describe their own experiences and the researcher to make observations regarding the participants' behaviors in the process (Drew, 2014; McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Yates & Leggett, 2016). I conducted semistructured interviews to explore MIS the participants used in PCCs to attract and retain customers. Cronin (2014) used documentation to gather additional data regarding nursing students learning in various workplace environments to bring further context of the phenomenon. I gathered marketing documentation from the participants and PCC websites to explore the MIS used. The data collection instruments in my study included myself as the researcher, semistructured interviews, observations, and relevant documentation.

The process of data gathering consisted of following an interview protocol as shown in the appendix. Castillo-Montoya (2016) noted that a researcher follows a systematic interview protocol to obtain reliable and valid depth of data. The interview protocol consisted of obtaining participant consent, asking each participant the same open-ended questions in the same order, making observations for nonverbal cues, obtaining marketing materials, and conducting member checking for proper interpretation of data. To collect in-depth and reliable data, I followed an interview protocol to explore the MIS used in PCCs to attract and retain customers.

I used various techniques to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments. I conducted a field test using 2 PCC managers to validate the interview questions before conducting the interviews. Researchers use member checking to confirm the proper interpretation of participant responses and allow for corrections (Harvey, 2015; Morse, 2015; Thomas, 2017). I conducted member checking by

synthesizing the participant responses to each question, emailing a copy of the interpretation, and asking the participants to verify, clarify, or add to the information. Researchers perform triangulation between two or more data collection methods to enhance reliability in qualitative research (Cronin, 2014; Morse, 2015; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Fusch & Ness (2015) contended that methodological triangulation (correlating multiple data collection methods) provides a basis for data saturation through the ability to gain in-depth data from different perspectives. I conducted methodological triangulation between the data transcribed from the semistructured interviews and the documentation collected from each manager and the corresponding websites. To validate the instruments used in the study, I consulted industry experts, conducted member checking, and administered methodological triangulation.

Data Collection Technique

I collected data regarding MIS used to attract and retain members from PCC managers using face-to-face semistructured interviews containing eight questions, marketing documentation, personal observations, and website content. Researchers explained that it is common to conduct interviews, record observations, and obtain archival information in case study research (Cronin, 2014; Sanjari et al., 2014; Singh, 2014). The interview protocol began with obtaining prior written consent from the participants. When the manager agreed to participate in the study, I requested a convenient date, time, and place to conduct the interview. I then downloaded public website content, excluding employment and contact pages, from each official club website to prepare for the interviews and to use as supporting documentation.

Three participants engaged in the interview process in person on the premises of the corresponding PCC. The fourth interviewee participated via video chat using join.me. The interview protocol (see Appendix) ensured that I asked all participants the same questions in the same order. I used a Sony cassette recorder to create an audio record of the interview for later transcription. During the interview, I observed the participant to see if the question was understood and asked for further explanations. The interviews averaged 40 minutes. After each interview, the participants provided marketing documentation such as marketing packets, event information, and newsletters, then three participants provided a brief tour of the club. Upon completion of the interview, I thanked the individual for their participation and requested scheduling of a telephone member checking interview.

There are both advantages and disadvantages of using a face-to-face semistructured interview. McIntosh and Morse (2015) noted that the advantages of face-to-face semistructured interviews include enhanced verbal and nonverbal communication. Sanjari et al. (2014) identified an advantage of immediate interpretation and the ability to ask for clarification of anything not understood. Human interaction is essential when exploring successful strategies. Therefore, I prefer the face-to-face semistructured interview process. Maramwidze-Merrison (2016) presented a potential problem of gaining access to the desired participant and their willingness to take the time to interview. McIntosh and Morse (2015) added that researcher time and money could also be disadvantages of the interview process. To address the disadvantages, I structured the interviews to take the minimal amount of time to gather the information needed from the

participants, restricted the distance I traveled to conduct the interviews, and did not spend money on the interviewing process. After IRB approval, I conducted a field test with 2 PCC managers who were not study participants. Because of the field test, I had clear interview questions and a structure to assure the interviews would not exceed one hour.

Upon completion of the initial interview process, I transcribed the recordings into Word documents and synthesized the participant answers for each question to conduct member checking. A researcher uses member checking to verify correct interpretation of the data and to gain further knowledge based on other participant responses (Morse, 2015). Though Thomas (2017) posited that member checks do not enhance the research, it does provide the opportunity for participants to clarify and correct researcher interpretations before study conclusions. I summarized my interpretations, then emailed the transcript and summation to the participants for member checking. Over extended periods of time, member checking becomes less effective (Harvey, 2015; Thomas, 2017). I requested to schedule a time within the week to call the participants to discuss corrections or additions. One participant responded via email with no corrections or additions. Another participant responded via email with a couple of corrections and no additions. I called the remaining two participants to gain further clarification on three items based on information supplied by the second and third interviewees.

Data Organization Technique

I used Microsoft Office programs to track and synthesize the data collected. To be effective, researchers must organize all collected data including researcher notes (Theron, 2015; Yin, 2017). Singh (2014) used a case study database to track data among the

various data gathering techniques. I used Excel and OneNote to create a database. My organization system consisted of audio recording each interview; transcribing the interviews into individual Word documents; cataloging each file using OneNote; and keeping a reflective journal in OneNote. The labeling system used consisted of the following syntax: item (i.e., interview); identifier code (i.e., 1, 2, 3); and date. A password protected document contained the coding of participant identifier information. I used color coding within the documents to represent themes and tracked the themes in an Excel file. I kept my research log in an Excel file. I kept all digital raw data and personally identifiable information on a USB drive, and all physical documentation including notes in a locked fireproof box for 5 years. After 5 years from the completion of the study, I will destroy the raw data by physical and digital shredding.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data gathered through interviews, observation notes, and relevant documentation in this multiple case study. To conduct the data analysis, I used Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase approach to thematic analysis. The phases include: a) becoming familiar with the data; b) creating initial codes from the conceptual framework, research question, and text; c) discovering patterns to develop themes; d) evaluating the themes against the data set and research question; e) clarifying the themes; and f) creating the story that answers the research question. Because I am Microsoft Office User Specialist Master Certified, I used Word and Excel to prepare, analyze, and interpret the data. Due to my proficiency with Excel, I used this software instead of NVivo or another data analysis program. Researchers asserted that transcriptions of participant responses

must exactly replicate what the respondent stated (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Theron, 2015; Yin, 2017). To prepare the data for analysis, I transcribed the audio files and observation notes word-for-word into Word documents. To protect identification, I coded all references to participant or company names in the transcribed files. I created a master file in Excel to track the codes used throughout the study.

Once data was prepared, I then performed thematic analysis. To familiarize myself with the data, I conducted multiple readings of the interview transcripts, marketing documentation, observation notes, and web pages. To begin the initial coding process, I read each participant's responses to the questions and highlighted significant words and phrases. Dasgupta (2015) noted that researchers use a priori codes to search and organize text. I created initial codes using the conceptual framework and expanded the list of codes from common concepts and repetitive statements found throughout the text. Researchers explained that text coding is not merely a count of repetitive words, rather it is a grouping of like terms and concepts (Dasgupta, 2015; Sotiriadou et al., 2014; Theron, 2015). I listed the frequently-used words and phrases in Excel to find similarities and patterns. I copied and pasted the text of the interview answers and observation notes into wordcount.com to obtain a list of repetitive words and pasted the results into the Excel file. I copied and pasted the text of the web pages into wordcount.com and put the results into the Excel file. I grouped the words from the interviews and websites into a matrix to find similar terms and phrases to create categories, then assigned specific color codes to the groupings. Color coding in the physical documents consisted of using colored markers to represent the same categories. Themes began to develop by grouping

the categories through the lens of the conceptual framework and the terms in the research question. After identifying the initial themes, I grouped them into main and subthemes. Three main themes developed, each consisting of three or four subthemes. I organized the main themes from the broadest topic to the narrowest topic to answer the research question.

Methodological triangulation consisted of comparing the interview transcripts with the marketing documentation and company websites. One participant had a disconnect between a statement during the interview of not marketing to families and the content on the website, which showed a high frequency count of the word family. That participant also supplied a marketing packet that had pricing and other information that did not align with the information obtained from the website. All other participants' documentation examined, supported the statements in the interview transcripts.

The last step in the data analysis process was interpreting the data. Researchers synthesize the findings of the research by putting the themes and codes into a matrix format (Dasgupta, 2015). Yates and Leggett (2016) defined interpretation as a process in which a researcher assigns meaning to the data. By organizing the themes and categories into a matrix format, a visual display of the connection between the themes and concepts developed. Based on the emergent patterns, I assigned interpretations of the findings to explain the managers' experiences with MIS to attract and retain customers. I compared the results with current literature and presented the findings in Section 3.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Because findings in qualitative research incorporate researcher interpretations, I used measures to ensure reliability. It is important to be systematic to ensure reliability in qualitative research due to human interactions (Sarma, 2015). Morse (2015) defined reliability as duplicated results in repeating the study. Singh (2014) contended that research is reliable when the procedures, database, and evidence used allow other researchers to duplicate or attain comparable results. I identified and used consistent processes and procedures in this study so that other researchers may be able to obtain comparable results.

I addressed reliability through consistency in procedures and verifications of interpretations for dependability of results. For the findings of a qualitative study to be dependable, the data analysis methods and coding must be consistent (Morse, 2015; Sarma, 2015; Theron, 2015). I addressed dependability by conducting a field test of the interview questions with 2 industry experts to ascertain the questions were understandable and appropriate to relate to the research question. I followed an interview protocol (see Appendix) to be uniform in gathering data. The next step in the protocol involved member checking to ensure researcher interpretations correctly represented the participants' responses. I used data coding that was meaningful and truthfully represented the participants' responses. I kept a journal to track each step and decisions for future study replication.

Validity

I established validity by accurately describing the participants' experiences with MIS through credible means. Authors asserted that researchers achieve validity in qualitative research studies through accuracy and objectivity to create credibility (Theron, 2015; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Member checking is a method for a researcher to validate the accuracy of interpretations with the intentions of the participants (Harvey, 2015; Thomas, 2017; Yates & Leggett, 2016). I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of interpretations of the interview answers before data analysis. Methodological triangulation conducted with interview transcripts, researcher observations, and supplemental documentation can enhance validity by providing different points of view to answer the same questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2015; Yates & Leggett, 2016). I used methodological triangulation to gain additional understanding of the participants' answers with the documentation to develop accurate interpretations of data. Morse (2015) noted that systematic coding enhances validity in the study. I kept a list of all the codes used to interpret the data in Excel and kept revisiting the data to make sure the coding system used was consistent for each document analyzed. To describe participant experiences accurately and objectively, I used member checking, methodological triangulation, and consistent coding, thus establishing credibility.

Though findings in case study research may be difficult to translate to other populations, I provided detailed explanations of the results to allow for potential transferability. Researchers indicated that although case studies with a small number of participants may not be generalizable with other industries or operations, the research

provides value in the findings for managers in similar situations (Heroux, 2017; Levitt et al., 2017; Morse, 2015; Sarma, 2015). The results of my study may be transferable to other managers of PCCs faced with membership decline. The findings may inspire researchers to conduct future research into the amount of membership effect using specific MIS.

I addressed validity by creating a descriptive chain of evidence and using methodological triangulation to develop confirmability and ensure data saturation. Sarma (2015) asserted that researchers establish confirmability through triangulation, detailed methodological description, and audit trails. Cronin (2014) stated that researchers must log, track, and store all data to create a chain of evidence. In this section, I provided a detailed description of the process followed to track how findings developed directly from the data collected to establish confirmability. Researchers ensure data saturation through the identification of repetitive themes to the point of nothing new produced during the research process (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall et al., 2013). I concluded data collection when no new themes nor categories developed, and when the data analysis process did not benefit from acquiring additional data to answer the research question.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included specific details of the research project. The section included the purpose of the study, role of the researcher, justification of the research method and design, participant population and sampling, considerations in ethical research, details on the collection and organization of data, data analysis techniques, and reliability and validity of the study. Section 3 includes the findings of the study relative to the

relationship marketing theory, application to professional practice, implications for social

change, recommendations for action, and additional future research in attracting and

retaining PCC customers. Section 3 also includes personal reflections, personal biases

regarding the research, and conclusions drawn from the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the MIS that PCC managers used to attract and retain customers to prevent closure. I conducted four semistructured interviews with managers from four different PCCs in Arizona who used MIS to attract and retain customers. I collected data from interviews, company documentation, personal observations, and the websites of the PCCs. I followed the data collection and analysis protocols as described in Section 2.

The central themes regarding MIS used to attract and retain customers that emerged from data analysis were frequent patronage, enhanced experiences, and expanded communication. I conducted text analysis of the interview transcripts, observation notes, company documentation, and website content to extract common phrases and to triangulate the data. The findings indicated that managers wanting to effectively use MIS should (a) broaden the marketing message to entice people to frequent the club; (b) create experiences that rate high in satisfaction by members, guests, and employees; and (c) use a variety of communication mediums to attract and retain customers in PCCs. The following section includes a presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, personal reflections, and a conclusion.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was, What successful MIS do PCC managers use to attract and retain customers to prevent closure? Participants in this study provided

relevant documents and responded to interview questions based on their experience using MIS to attract and retain customers. In addition, I downloaded website content from each PCC for further data analysis. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis: Managers should (a) broaden the marketing message to entice people to frequent the club; (b) create experiences that rate high in satisfaction by members, guests, and employees; and (c) use a variety of communication mediums. To present my findings, I refer to the study participants as follows:

- PC1 for Club 1, which is a member-owned PCC with nonappurtenant membership, and P1 for the participant interviewed;

- PC2 for Club 2, which is a member-owned PCC with nonappurtenant membership, and P2 for the participant interviewed;

- PC3 for Club 3, which is a homeowners' association (HOA)-owned PCC with appurtenant membership, and P3 for the participant interviewed; and

- PC4 for Club 4, which is a corporate-owned PCC, and P4 for the participant interviewed.

Theme 1: Broaden the Marketing Message to Entice People to Frequent the Club

To entice people to frequent the clubs, leaders must change the marketing message from considering the PCC only as a sports club to one that encompasses more offerings to fit into a lifestyle desired by the target market. Ferreira and Gustafson (2014b) indicated that successful clubs emphasized their fit with the lifestyles of their members. P2 explained,

> We are a family club, so that lifestyle is really important to people. Internally
>
> from a marketing standpoint we use a number of different venues, we've actually
>
> focused more on technology and retaining them and getting our members to use
>
> the club.

Similarly, P1 stated, "But, the fewer times they pull the door open, the more apt they are

to leave." The participants noted that merely attracting memberships was not the goal;

instead, it was to have both new and current members frequent the clubs for a variety of

activities.

Three subthemes emerged that relate to the use of MIS to entice people to

frequent clubs. The first was changing advertising venues from those that were specific to

a single sport to venues that were encompassing of an array of lifestyles. The second was

realizing the importance of changing facilities and amenities to reflect the change in the

desired atmosphere with an emphasis on health, fitness, and family. The third was

focusing on events that would bring similar people together.

Advertising. Tax structure, articles of organization, and corporate bylaws restrict

advertising by PCCs. Barrows et al. (2017) indicated that the nonprofit status of PCCs

restricts their leaders' marketing efforts. In addition, articles of organization can restrict

such efforts; as P3 noted, "Because we are an HOA, we fall under some restrictions and

guidelines for advertising." Two potential participants declined to participate in the study

because of restrictions in their marketing efforts due to legal and operational guidelines.

During the consent process, the participants referred to their membership qualifications

excluding most of the population, thus not able to offer services to other than their target market.

According to the analysis of study data, the target market for membership in PCCs consisted of people who could afford the membership and were a fit with the PCC culture. Fraser and Allen (2016) explained that in PCCs with appurtenant memberships, members must afford both their home and their membership; such members were a subset of the population, the authors noted. In addition, Lorek et al. (2017) indicated that the members of the Baby Boomer generation were interested in a healthy lifestyle; thus, PCC leaders should market accordingly. P2 explained, "Really what prospective club members are looking for is a lifestyle experience." Similarly, P3 stated,

> We need to have the amenities, you know, fitness wellness as you likely know is a big thing now in addition to golf, in addition to tennis. If we didn't have that, and we weren't up to speed, would be a huge issue for our client.

PC3's website and member packet included the statement, "Club Life, It isn't just about where you live, it's about how you live." P2 said,

> So, you have to, if you are trying to sell a brand, you have to understand the culture and we really focus on it from a prospective member standpoint, it is not if you have to have the money to join the club, it is that you fit into our culture.

The participants also targeted people who would fit within the club culture. To address the target markets, the PCC managers used advertising venues that catered to wealthy clients seeking a healthy and active lifestyle.

The types of advertising successful in attracting the target markets consisted of those that focused on upscale and healthy lifestyles. P2 revealed,

So, we've found that directly linking with some of the lifestyle type magazines or lifestyle offerings and directly link with them and that's how we have really gained popularity. So, it's not again, it's not going on the golf channel on the weekend and having a 30 second commercial on the club, it's more lifestyle oriented.

P1 stated,

So, there are people that believe that you should never be on television, you look desperate, that's not really good for your brand. We work hard at purchasing editorials because they tell our story and try to capitalize on that lifestyle.

The participants spent advertising dollars on venues that attracted wealthy individuals seeking a healthy lifestyle rather than a broad audience of golf enthusiasts.

According to my analysis of data, venues that allowed the managers to illustrate the experience of being part of the club or affiliating with the club selected as "best of" were effective. P2 said, "We have worked with Arizona Foothills The Best Of, and so we've been voted best of Phoenix in a number of different areas." The PC3 website contained, "Since 2012, PC3 has been recognized as one of America's Healthiest Clubs! This distinction is awarded to a small percentage of Private Clubs who achieve an established Health Score based on industry standards." Study participants reported creating positive branding through external awards.

To add to the positive brand image, the participants reported the importance of websites being truthful. P3 stated,

> People have to see it and feel it, you know. That's why it is important, that I think the website reflect what's here. And, I have actually had people say that to me, "Wow, your place actually looks like your website."

The advertising efforts must truthfully reflect the reality of the actual club experience through stories and pictures.

Another effective means was positive WOM advertising, whether from a prospect or current member. Chang and Ko (2017) revealed that when customers of luxury services recommend those same services to friends and family, customer loyalty and retention increased. PC3's website had the following testimony,

> OUR MEMBERS SAY "This is what we wanted, a private club with complete facilities. Most importantly, we've found very good friends here. PC3 draws a diverse membership of people from all parts of the world. The clubhouse has an ambiance and style that would be hard to duplicate. It really is something special."

P4 used incentives to enhance member WOM advertising, "Offer incentives to existing members to bring new members in, works the best." Participants indicated that they made efforts to entice customers to recommend the club to others. Most participants had customer testimonies on the websites and in marketing materials.

Another avenue of WOM advertising is Internet review sites. P2 and P4 have employees whose job is to monitor and encourage feedback on various review sites. P4

stated, "And then there is the push with, you know, the review sites like Google, etc."

According to an Internet search, all participant clubs had reviews on public review sites

such as Google and Yelp. The clubs that encouraged reviews had the most reviews on

Facebook and Google. P4 stated they focused more on golf rather than on social events,

which reflected in PC4 being reviewed heavily on golf sites with few reviews on general

advising sites such as Yelp.

Facilities and Amenities. Getting the customers to use the clubs frequently was

another subtheme that emerged. Membership income is not enough to sustain clubs. The

leaders must provide other opportunities for the members and guests to patronize the

club. Most participants made changes to the facilities, amenities, and club rules to

encourage additional patronage by current members and to attract new members.

The upgrades made to the facilities involved expanding or changing areas to

accommodate women and children, and to provide improved spaces for fitness and casual

dining. P2 explained,

> As we were going through the sale of this project we had pictures of what it
>
> looked like and felt like and so when we went to the voting membership, they
>
> voted approval of 90% so we knew that they were on board. That's right on the
>
> heels of an expansion a couple of years ago that was 2 years ago that was
>
> $5,000,000. So, you know they are more and more and more they love to see the
>
> club continue to enhance the offerings here.

PC2 passed two upgrade assessments within two years of each other, while PC1 took two

years to pass one assessment. P1 said, "We dropped about 16 members and we were able

to back fill those through that trial membership." Memberships reduced during the initial process of the upgrades, but later gained new members and had an increase in interest from prospective members.

The upgrade in facilities included a change in atmosphere. P4 stated, "We went from a more formal space and a more formal menu to more casual dining, because that's the way, you know people went." Each club provided casual dining spaces, though retained a smaller space for an upscale dining experience. As I observed through the club tours, some club projects included installing beer and wine taps. Additional changes involved creating spaces that were resort or spa-like to attract families.

To accommodate more people, the managers enhanced the amenities in a manner that allowed the customers to spend less time and made the sports easier to play. P3 stated,

> We are building pickle ball courts, because to my earlier comment, 5 years ago very few prospects asked me about pickleball. It just wasn't, you know, in our realm of tennis. However, in the last two years I got more and more buyers who would say, "Do you have pickleball?" I would say, "No, we don't."

A common enhancement to the tennis programs was the implementation of pickleball or other short-court games.

The managers redesigned the golf courses for faster pace of play and to accommodate a broader spectrum of golfer abilities. P1 noted, "If you have a bad golf course, one that people don't like to play, it's too difficult, takes too long, you can market until the end of time, and you're not going to have a successful business offering." PC2's

marketing documents contained the following statement, "Modest enhancements to the golf course, including enhancements to speed the pace of play for high handicappers." The managers changed the layout of the golf courses and added closer tee boxes, which allowed the amateur golfer to play in less time and made the courses easier to play. P1 talked about the importance of being able to walk the course, "We talk about what we have which is a fun, playable golf course that is easy to walk, because a lot of people like to do that." The managers made changes to attract people who desired taking less time and included more people with less golf or tennis proficiencies.

To accommodate the desires of customers, the managers amended club rules regarding the dress code. The rule was to relax the dress code in most areas of the clubs to include denim. However, proper PCC attire remained. PC2's dress code contains,

"Proper" attire for gentlemen of all ages, including children, includes shirts with collars (including mock collars), which, if designed for and tailored appropriately, may be worn 'un-tucked', and dress sweaters. Golf shorts, dress shorts (mid-thigh or below) and dress denim are permissible. Proper "Country Club" attire for ladies of all ages, including children, includes dresses, skirts, slacks, mid-length shorts, tailored sleeveless shirts, blouses and golf/tennis clothing specifically designed and marketed as such unless specifically prohibited per the following: Proper "Country Club" attire in the Clubhouse for either gender does not include t-shirts, spaghetti strap tank-tops, razorback tops, strapless tops, halter tops, mesh shirts, sweatpants, swimwear, short shorts/skirts, athletic shorts, yoga pants, or jeans with holes or tears in them.

According to the marketing materials and websites, most participants' dress codes included a statement regarding the permissible wearing or required removal of hats in certain parts of the club and during specified hours of the day. PC3's marketing brochure included, "Never too formal, never too casual, the Clubhouse defines the relaxed ambience of simply feeling welcomed." Feeling welcomed was a common phrase used in each participants' marketing documentation.

The participants expressed that having a quality product was imperative to attracting and retaining members. Being an appurtenant membership club, PC3's product included not only the club and amenities, but also the homes in the community. To entice people to purchase the older homes, PC3's leaders implemented the Residential Remodel Program. P3 explained, "For an approved investor/builder, the club will waive the $75,000 membership fee, we waive that fee, the builder comes in, buys a house, and basically it is a PC3 flipping program." P3 further clarified,

> They don't want to remodel their own house. They tell us this all the time, been there done that. And, it is not a question of money. Whether they can buy the house from us, they don't care. They've got the money, they are going up the street, paying them in cash for something that is updated. So, that's been a very successful, very successful program.

The club leaders need to address meeting the needs of customers through quality products and offerings.

Events. The third subtheme involved events that facilitated bringing similar people together and accommodated families. With facilities that were available for

functions, the leaders needed to create events that would entice prospects, existing members, and guests to use the clubs. P3 said, "You know, tastes change, we do something each season called chef's gone wild." Each participant's marketing materials provided a list of the many events that were occurring within the clubs. The events included things such as wine dinners, junior golf clinics, summer camps, and fitness programs. Every department was involved in creating event experiences that would satisfy the desires of the customers.

One purpose of the events was to bring similar people together. P3 stated, "So, having members to also to interact with is a big thing." P3 disclosed,

Probably what I have done more recently though is sometimes I will put a staff person, a golf professional, one of our golf pros out there. I do that in a case where, especially if I don't have a couple that's playing, and we just have the gentleman who's playing and he's a really good golfer. Because none of my really good golfers aren't available as much during the day, they are working. So, I have worked that out with my director of golf where he can get me a pro to go out on the course. We really only started that a couple seasons, this is our second season. And I think that's worked out well.

P2 stated, "And the neat thing to see here is that we have people that actually like each other. So, when they are here they are hanging out together and when they are not here they are traveling together." Each participant in my study had programs that involved matching either a current member or a staff professional with a guest or prospect to create a positive experience.

Another focus of the events within the clubs was on bringing family members to the clubs. The websites and documents of the clubs in my study included information regarding junior golf programs, summer camps, pool parties, holiday parties, and other such events designed to bring family members to the club. According to the marketing documents, PC2's second renovation project incorporated facilities and events for teens and children. The members patronized the club with their family members due to the availability of family-geared events.

Most of the events focused on healthy and fun options as desired by the customers. P3 said, "We started a few years ago, you know our pastry chef started doing more, like the tea dessert for the table. Because people weren't eating, or everyone was splitting everything." According to the websites and marketing documents, all the clubs had a variety of fitness classes and specialty food events available to the members and guests. After the interview, P2 showed me the app used to allow customers to choose which events fit within their lifestyle. P3 used a website program, "It's called Concierge Connect…It's a way for the members to connect." P3 also noted that members can make their own groups through the program, "Where we may not have the staff, we may not have enough interest for staff to devote or the club house space, but members themselves can utilize that." The participants allowed the customers to customize the experiences according to preferences.

Theme 2: Create Experiences That Rate High in Customer Satisfaction

The second main theme that emerged was the importance of creating experiences that rate high in satisfaction with prospects, customers, and employees. P3 related, "It's a

new era, you know. You have the 50 somethings and the 70 somethings and making both of them happy." The participants in my study contended that leaders must understand the desires of the customers to deliver experiences that will make them want to participate with the organization repeatedly. The four subthemes that developed regarding experience satisfaction were: (a) use technology to collect data, (b) use surveys, (c) be proactive, and (d) offer various pricing structures.

Use technology to collect data. The participants used programs such as customer relationship management systems, website analytics, Foretees, and Internet reviewer sites to gather data related to customer desires. To deliver products or services that attract and retain customers, managers must first understand the wants and needs of the customers. Kitchens, et al. (2018) proposed that managers must gather customer data from all departments and available systems. P2 shared,

> So, we have an outline for each member that kind of says what their likes and
> dislikes are and also any allergies they may have. So, we know in advance that
> Mrs. Smith, if she has a gluten intolerance, that we are asking that instead of
> waiting for them to tell us about it. So, we are being much more proactive in our
> approach to our members.

Each participant used Foretees, an industry web-based program that contains reservation management, food and product sales, valet requests, websites, push notifications, and emailing. Managers used technology to collect data on customers and prospects through both internal and external data entry.

Surveys. Most participants used surveys on a regular basis. Three participants had regularly scheduled survey times to request information from a portion of the customers. P2 said, "We try and get away from the large all-encompassing survey, we try and do more targeted surveys throughout the year." P2 added, "Our members are at over a 90% satisfaction rate here at the club, that is good, but that's not good enough." All surveying participants created very targeted surveys to not inundate their customers with questions, particularly on the parts of the club the customers did not patronize. P1 noted, "So, the point of sale system (POS) identifies the ticket opened in golf. Twenty percent of them will receive an email, but they only get one a month. So, they are not inundated with surveys." P2 also used a POS,

> When we present your check to you we have the HUM system which is a short
> survey that is to the point and that it keeps people giving us feedback on all of our
> offerings, but it is not one of those surveys that takes you an hour to do. Because
> people are not going to do that. So, we found a lot of success there.

The participants stated that short, targeted surveys were the most effective.

Be proactive. The participants discussed the importance of setting up services to make the members and guests feel special and important. P2 explained,

> We are further looking to personalize the experience with our members and
> prospective members. So, the more that we know about them and their families,
> the better we can serve them. So, our goal is to create that never question
> experience, so that we know our members so well they never have to ask for a
> thing.

The participants used systems to connect with the customers. P3 stated, "I have had, we have had people become members and say afterwards that the reason they joined was the interaction of the staff here." The participants felt it was important that the staff interacted proactively with customers.

The participants set expectations with their employees to carry out the services as directed. P1 said, "It's just expecting the staff to do things the way it is supposed to be, period." P2 stated, "We make sure that the culture and the expectation is set from day one and so we are looking more for personality than talent, than you know actual talent." Most participants noted that clear expectations of service were set with employees from initial orientation. P3 set expectations by telling the staff, "When you go through the gate, think of it as though you are a realtor previewing or you're a realtor bringing buyers, or you're a buyer who's never ever been here before." The participants relayed the importance of setting expectations at the onset with staff to create a quality experience for the prospects and customers.

Another way to relate the expectations of service were through staff meetings. P2 noted, "We go into service for the day, we have our meetings down stairs each morning at 9:00 before service gets going. We know what to expect in various areas." P3 said,

So, there is you know I will annually at one of our staff meetings just give my little PowerPoint to my colleagues and just remind them about our brand and what and how that's important. Because, you know, they think about growing the grass, and they think about, you know, what they think about. So, that's really a critical piece of it.

All participants used staff meetings with people from all departments to attain goals and execute services to meet the preferences of members and guests.

Pricing structures. Each PCC had a variety of memberships from which the members could qualify, except PC3. Because PC3 is owned by the HOA, only one membership category, full membership, was available. According to the websites and marketing documentation of the other clubs, some memberships were based on age, while others were based on access to amenities. According to the marketing documentation of each club, full golf memberships included access to all amenities and were based on the target market of an age bracket starting at age 40 or 46. Three clubs had discounted junior executive memberships, for members 21 years old up to the qualifying age for the full membership. PC4 and PC2 had seasonal sports memberships with limited access to the golf courses. PC1, PC2, and PC4 had a combination fitness and clubhouse membership excluding or limiting golf to summer only. PC4 had a clubhouse only access membership. All clubs had a limit on the number of memberships available at each level.

The PCC leaders designed the pricing structure of the memberships to correspond with the members' potential to use the amenities. According to the marketing documentation, the memberships with the least access to amenities were the lowest priced and the most access to amenities had the highest price. The theory behind the different pricing between the full and junior memberships was the potential of the older members to have more time to use the amenities than the younger members. All memberships consisted of an initiation fee, monthly dues, and a food and beverage minimum.

Most memberships had a family or single membership option. All participants'
marketing documentation included a definition of family to include the member, spouse,
and unmarried children living at home. However, the maximum qualifying age of the
children ranged from 21 to 25. PC1's website and marketing documentation contained
the following:

> Membership privileges extend to the Member, their spouse or designated partner
> and unmarried children. An unmarried child, not yet 26, may play golf without
> paying guest fees if they attend a college or university, are a member of the
> Armed Forces, or are single and living at home.

The memberships included access by extended family, married children, or children over
the maximum qualifying age for a guest rate.

Theme 3: Use a Variety of Communication Mediums

There were multiple ways to communicate with both new and existing customers.
P2 explained, "Our newsletter is available both hard copy, but we email it to everyone.
So, we just have found that being as diverse as possible in our marketing to our members
has been the most successful." The participants indicated that they experienced successful
results by communicating through multiple mediums and letting the customers choose the
preferred venue. The participants implemented online programs that allowed prospects
and customers to communicate and obtain information; however, they also gave the
option to obtain some information via printed material. The three subthemes that emerged
relating to communication were: (a) customer interaction; (b) multiple communication
mediums; and (c) use audio and video.

Customer interaction. The participants all implemented technology to provide ways for customers to interact with club staff and operations. Participants interacted with customers and prospects through Foretees, member-only sections of the websites, and social media.

All participants used the Foretees program for member-initiated tee time reservations and automatic emailing. P2 and P3 used the program to notify staff in other departments of members coming to the club to personalize service. P2 described the process,

> If you want and you are sitting in here dining and you want to have your car at the valet in 5 minutes, they can do that from their phone right here. If you are sitting at home and you want to have your clubs on the cart, and valet on the practice range, they can do that from their phone as well.

P2 and P3 also enabled food ordering, golf shop inventory and ordering, and valet services. P2 further explained,

> We know when our members are on property. So, it has beacon technology whereby if they are on the 1st hole or they drive past us …, we can send them a push notification saying "hey, join us tonight for dinner at the club".

P2 used the club app portion of the system, to get customers to come to the club more often. Foretees was a program that contained member self-serve and club communication automation.

According to the websites analyzed, all participants had member only sections of the websites. The member only sections contained access to member billing information,

Foretees system, and other club specific information. P4 declared, "Ours is pretty interactive where all of the calendars and events are put on and the members can see what's happening at the club in any given month…But, they mainly use it to view their billings." The websites of PC2 and PC3 also included videos and ways to order food to go. The websites contained options for the members to control the experience.

The participants also used technology to allow the members to interact with each other. P3 described the system,

> It's called Concierge Connect. And, that's where our own members can basically go in there and say I am interested in, I don't know, whatever. Some, you know, it could be more obscure event, let's say the club itself doesn't, you know a non-golf, non-tennis. We have alumni groups that can form themselves on there.

The customers had more control over their interests and events through the automated systems, which also freed up time from the staff.

Most participants had a presence on social media sites. All four study participant clubs had Facebook pages, though only PC2 and PC4 had current posts, pictures, and videos. PC2 and PC4 had links on the websites to the social media sites. PC2 and PC4 also had active Twitter sites. PC2 had a Blogspot that was updated once a month, and both Google + and Instagram that had current posts from club staff and followers. P4 said they used Blogspot periodically; however, only the members had access to that section. P4 stated, "I think that probably, obviously your email, website, Facebook, you know all of that current social, what do you call it, e-commerce type things is how you attract." Though later, P4 clarified that very few new members came from the use of social media,

and it was more effective for retention. P2 revealed that they use social media to allow members to stay connected rather than to attract new members. The leaders used social media to expand a marketing presence.

Multiple communication mediums. All participants noted that they used multiple communication mediums to explain the same message, based on preferences of prospects and customers. Some individuals preferred email, others text messages, some face-to-face, and yet others responded to direct mailers. P3 explained,

> We started sending to our members targeted emails. You know the problem with that is, I am not going to read an entire email that might be, you know, yeah long, if I just want to know about golf, if I just want to know about the wine dinners, or if I what have you. So, we, like a lot of folks, started targeting emails a couple of years ago. I think that has been very successful.

The participants explained that they did not send general emails to customers, the most successful emails were very targeted to those that already had a membership type that allowed them to use that amenity. Other participants tracked email group preferences and only sent messages to those in the group to increase patronage. The participants were beginning to use text messaging along with targeted emailing. The customers and prospects could choose which communication medium they preferred.

Use audio and video. Not all participants used both audio and video; however, all participants used some form of video to advertise current and upcoming events and to disseminate information on operations or potential changes to the clubs. As I observed, the clubs had at least one electronic display board in the clubhouse to advertise current

and upcoming events. Most clubs had multiple boards throughout the clubhouses. The participants used PowerPoint programs during meetings to add a visual effect to presentations. P1 rented additional high-resolution monitors during the town hall meetings to show customers the renderings of the proposed clubhouse renovations and financial information. All participants used visual mediums to provided effective messages to prospects and customers.

Two participants used videos on a regular basis to communicate with prospects and members. PC2's and PC3's websites contained many video messages. P3 used professional services to create the videos displayed on the website. P3 opinioned, "And, you likely know, people are used to video these days, they get their information via video. And, it's relatively easy." The managers made some videos public while restricting others to member only access. Videos were an effective way to get information to prospects and customers.

Literature Comparison

The data analysis indicated that PCC managers made changes to entice new and existing customers to frequent the clubs. My research aligned with the study of McKnight et al. (2014) that PCC managers should target a marketing mix that addressed the lifestyles of the high income/high education population over individual service offerings. The participants also made changes to facilities and amenities to provide benefits desired by the customers. Previous studies have shown that upgrading facilities and amenities to provide services for improved health, fitness, and improved pace of play were catalysts in attracting and retaining customers (Ferreira & Gustafson, 2014b; Hwang et al., 2015;

MacIntosh & Law, 2015). This result confirmed that for these participants, changing the services and perception of the PCC to include more than a single sport venue was effective in attracting and retaining members. The PCC managers developed the changes based on understanding the desires of the customers.

Another finding of this study was that managers collected data on prospects and members to proactively provide desired services. The participants revealed that all departments gathered data through surveys and usage statistics, which provided the information used to design services desired by the customers. Similarly, researchers suggested that managers should use surveys and other means of data collection to determine customer needs (Kim et al., 2016; Kitchens et al., 2018; Sheth, 2017). This finding aligned with previous research, indicating that managers should improve services based on data collected from customers. To advertise the new services to prospects and customers, managers used various communication mediums.

Additionally, the findings showed that the participants used multiple communication mediums, which allowed prospects and customers to select the method preferred for interaction. Like this study, researchers suggested that different forms of communication are necessary depending on the situation (Danylchuk et al., 2015; Mishra, 2016). Unlike other research, the participants in this study found that the use of social media was not as effective for membership attraction (Abtin & Pouramiri, 2016; Barrows et al., 2017; Nobre & Silva, 2014). This study's finding regarding communication mediums aligned with other researcher's conclusions, though did not commensurate on the success of social media in membership attraction.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study is the RMT. Berry (2002) contended that marketing efforts should consist of strengthening relationships between the members of the organization and the customers, and not simply focus on attracting new customers. The purpose of this study was to explore MIS to attract and retain customers; therefore, I gathered data regarding both attraction and retention. The findings of this study connect to RMT through the concepts of customer loyalty, service quality, experience satisfaction, trust, and communication.

Broadening marketing efforts to entice people to use the clubs frequently related to RMT through the constructs of customer loyalty and service quality. The MIS PCC leaders used to strengthen the connection with customers were through advertising the club as part of a lifestyle, updated facilities that provided the atmosphere desired by the customer, and events that gave customers a sense of connectedness. P2 noted, "We are doing this next expansion here at the club, not to sell new memberships, but to retain and further enhance the experience for our current members." Customer loyalty and high service quality were important traits that PCC leaders used to develop MIS to attract and retain customers.

Within the RMT, are the constructs of experience satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty, which relate to creating experiences that satisfy. Researchers suggested that customers base experience satisfaction on how ingrained they were with the organization (Al-alak, 2014; Han & Hwang, 2014). All participants expressed an opinion that high quality experiences were catalysts to membership attraction and retention. J.S. Lee et al.

(2014) asserted that customers increased patronage with companies where explicit promises were the norm. To deliver on promises and increase trust, the participants all stated that expectations were set and carried out by the club staff members.

Researchers also showed that improving relationships is possible when organizations survey their customers to understand desires and needs (Kim et al., 2016). Three participants in my study used targeted surveys to obtain information specific to the preferences of their members. Prier et al. (2017) presented that differentiation pricing was effective for patronage and membership renewals. Most of the participants had various pricing structures to attract the target market according to the amenities desired. PCCs that had experiences that satisfied customers, resulted in attracting and retaining customers.

Marketing through a variety of communication mediums related to RMT through the construct of communication to enhance relationships with customers and prospects. Abtin and Pouramiri (2016) contended that staff members should implement commerce that promotes client interactions. The PCCs in my study all had interactive websites in which the members could self-serve and conduct business. Members make the decision of which organization to do business with when examining websites and through social media (Danylchuk et al., 2015). All participants noted that prospects go to the club website first and then make the decision to contact a member of the club to inquire about membership or amenities. Grönroos (2017) posited that internal and external communication is essential in RMT to solidify relationships with customers. The participants in my study used multiple communication mediums to strengthen the

relationship with customers and prospects to increase the ability to attract and retain customers.

Effective Business Practices

The results of this study confirmed that satisfied and loyal customers are necessary for PCCs to remain in business. Unlike previous studies on customer loyalty, this research did not include information regarding the use of loyalty incentive programs (Abtin & Pouramiri, 2016; Maier & Prusty, 2016; Pereira et al., 2015). However, the participants in this study noted that an effective business practice was to measure the income received from repeat business generated through specific services, and to make changes accordingly. This finding aligned with previous research regarding appropriate pricing and tracking of operational patronage (Al-alak, 2014; Storbacka et al., 1994). A business practice implemented by participants of this study, which aligned with other research, was to increase the quality of service through staff training, updated facilities, innovative services, and individualized attention (Heroux, 2017; Hsieh et al., 2015; Sheehan & Bruni-Bossio, 2015). The findings indicated an alignment with effective business practices to enhance services, resulting in customer loyalty.

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Applications to Professional Practice

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The findings of this study indicate that to attract and retain customers, PCC leaders must create experiences and use advertising methods that target wealthy individuals who seek a healthy lifestyle. Randhawa et al. (2017) revealed that the target market in PCCs has expanded to include families that want more social activities in a less formal atmosphere. Leaders of PCCs could improve their clubs by implementing

programs that provide for social experiences. To combat the competition from screen golf organizations, PCC leaders must improve the playability of the golf courses, reduce the negative environmental impact, and create a welcoming environment (Han et al., 2014). All participants noted that an essential business practice was to create events and provide an atmosphere that met the needs of members and prospects.

PCC leaders may apply the strategies with respect to the professional practice of business to improve relationships with prospects and customers. Grönroos (2017) contended that involving the customer in the marketing process resulted in improved customer retention. PCC leaders must gather data from customers and prospects to understand how to deliver the products and services desired. Hwang et al. (2015) asserted that customers of PCCs require high-quality courses and amenities due to the high cost of memberships. As noted in this study, PCC leaders could improve the perceived quality of the golf courses and other amenities by implementing changes according to customer preferences.

PCC leaders could use the strategies shared by participants to attract and retain customers successfully. Kim et al. (2014) asserted that customers appreciated self-service technology when benefits were evident. An effective business practice is to use electronic commerce, allowing customers to make an informed decision to do business with the organization and to have control on elements of service (Abtin & Pouramiri, 2016). PCC leaders could implement websites and apps such as those shared by this study's participants to improve member attraction and retention.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study could also positively affect society by sustainable PCCs using local vendors, providing revenue in the local ecomony, and creating jobs. By implementing MIS that attract and retain customers, PCCs may be able to remain a viable part of the local communities. The participants in this study staffed the facilities with many residents and used contractors to update facilities, causing a direct impact to the local economy. Besides offering employment opportunities, PCCs contain facilities where people can participate in events for improved physical health, mental well-being, social connectedness, and charitable opportunities.

To get people to attend events, PCC leaders must use MIS to create events of interest and to advertise the events. Like Heroux (2017), this study's findings indicated that improved health was a concern for customers, and with the desired atmosphere, people would attend the clubs that provided the activities and social connectedness desired. Groch (2014) noted that PCCs affect charitable organizations by providing a venue for events. Most participants in this study held multiple charitable events, and some contributed funds directly to charities. Society benefits from PCCs remaining in business through local involvement.

Recommendations for Action

The findings of this study may help organizations to remain viable by taking specific actions. The recommendations for actions that PCC leaders use MIS to attract and retain customers consist of: (a) obtaining customer input, (b) enhancing amenities to improve the customer experience, and (c) using technology. All participants noted that

the product marketed must be of high quality. Therefore, incorporating these three steps can assist PCC leaders in attracting and retaining customers.

Customer input can help PCC leaders understand the wants and desires of the target market. Two fundamental ways to obtain customer input is through surveys and face-to-face meetings. The surveys would provide information for the PCC leaders to understand the desires of the customers. Face-to-face meetings should then follow to discuss the findings, to ensure proper interpretation of the findings, and to plan enhancements to the club.

The second recommendation is to enhance amenities to improve the customer experience. Based on the input from the customers and sound business practices, the PCC leaders should make the necessary changes to the club products and services. The changes may entail making the golf courses easier to play, implementing new sports facilities, carrying specific products in the pro shop, or providing events of interest. Other changes may involve further employee training to enhance the service experience. Making improvements to the customer experience should be an ongoing process.

The third recommended step is to use technology. Programs and apps exist that allow the customers more control over the experience, resulting in increased customer satisfaction. Implemented programs also aid the staff in executing tasks, which would result in employee satisfaction. Using technology to coordinate events, order food and services, and notify customers and staff of happenings promptly would improve the commitment of people to the organization. Technology, correctly used, can make

people's jobs more manageable, and incorporate more control on the services desired by the customers.

PCC managers could receive the results of this study through conferences, lectures, workshops, and education sessions. Participants could obtain specific information on sample surveys and results from other PCC leaders at conferences and workshops. Lecturers could disseminate the results at industry events or universities. It would benefit managers and employees to receive the information at education sessions to learn more about leveraging technology.

<p align="center">**Recommendations for Further Research**</p>

Research exists regarding the need to attract and retain members in PCCs; however, there is limited research on successful MIS to address the problem. The literature indicated that economic recessions, preference changes, lifestyle changes, and increased competition caused PCCs to lose members, and some PCCs closed. To address the problem, I conducted this study to determine what MIS PCC managers used to attract and retain customers successfully. The following are recommendations for further research into understanding successful MIS that may apply in other business situations.

One limitation of this study was that participation consisted of four PCC managers. The industry consists of semi-private and public clubs that may incur a similar problem. To gain a broader perspective, researchers could conduct studies on the specific phenomenon as it may exist in semi-private or public clubs. Another recommendation is to study the situation from the customer's perspective to understand which strategies had

the most positive effect on the decision to become or remain a member. Researchers may also expand the number of participants to gain further insight.

Another limitation was the geographic location limited to PCCs in one area of Arizona. Researchers could expand the region to determine the different strategies used in other parts of Arizona or throughout the United States. Another recommendation is to consider the effect of membership where most members live near the club full-time versus part-time or second home.

An additional limitation was the research method and design. This study consisted of a qualitative multiple case study design with open-ended interview questions. Researchers may use other research methods or designs to gather demographics, membership numbers, the effect on wait lists, and a weighted scale for interpretation of answers. Future studies could expand on this research to assist PCC managers in determining the MIS used to attract and retain members successfully to prevent business closure.

Reflections

Throughout the study, I noted personal biases, reactions to participants, and new information gleaned from the research process. At the beginning of the study, the only connection I had with the topic was as a member of a PCC that was making changes. After conducting the research, I realized that the changes in the club were necessary to help increase membership attraction and retention. This study helped me explain to our members what potential effect the improvements could have on our membership experience.

A predisposition I had regarding the participants was that the general managers would know about the entire operation. However, after conducting the research, I learned that some general managers relied on department staff to understand and execute new technologies and communication methods. The attitudes of the staff and customers that I observed at each location reflected the perceived personality and beliefs of the people interviewed. The PCCs where the interviewees had a directive, individualistic personality, had a difficult time implementing changes and had complaining customers. I observed smiling and friendly employees and customers at the PCCs where the interviewees focused on fun and friendliness.

Another item experienced in the process was regarding the challenge to control the process. Even though I had an interview protocol, specific steps, and questions to follow, not all participants wanted to perform in the same manner. As approved during the IRB process, the participants could provide consent acceptance through multiple modes of communication. Two participants sent the consents via return emails, one participant sent an email attachment, and one completed the form in person. During the interviews, one participant allowed two interruptions that were not related to the interview. The interview protocol included to schedule the member checking interview at the end of the original interview; however, none of the participants wanted to set a date or time for member checking then. It was necessary to assume control by asking the questions while providing some flexibility for interviewee interaction preferences.

Conclusion

The continued operation of PCCs has an impact on the surrounding communities. Previous research indicated that clubs closed when memberships declined due to recessions, a change in personal preferences, and an increase in competition. To keep clubs open, PCC leaders must address the problems by implementing MIS to attract and retain members. The findings of this study indicated that innovative strategies included broadening the marketing message to entice people to frequent the club; (b) creating experiences that rated high in satisfaction by members, guests, and employees; and (c) using a variety of communication mediums for the customers to feel connected and informed. To remain viable, PCC managers must make changes to the clubs to satisfy current and future customers, employ local citizens, and positively affect society.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

- Arrive at predetermined location and meet participant.

- Discuss with participant that approximately 10 minutes are needed to set up recording device and prepare paperwork prior to beginning interview.

- Confirm completion of participant consent form.

- Briefly explain the interview process, noting that I will be audio recording the entire interview and that they may withdraw from the study at any time.

- Answer any questions they may have.

- Commence interview with the semistructured interview instrument, asking follow-up or clarification questions for more depth.

- Take observation notes during the interview of the participant, watching for nonverbal cues.

- After completing the interview questions, ask the participant if there is anything else they would like to add that is important for me to know or understand.

- Request pertinent documentation from the participant.

- Stop the recording device and thank the participant for the interview and documentation.

- Remind the participant about the member checking process and attempt to schedule an appointed time to conduct it. Verify the phone number participant would like used.

- Answer any questions they may have, confirm the member checking appointment, and thank them for participating.