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Marketing Cultural Attractions: Understanding Non-Attendance and Visitation Barriers

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to draw together the previous academic and industry research on non-attendance of cultural attractions, followed by qualitative in-depth interviews to identify commonalities or gaps in the previous research on barriers, constraints and inhibitors, as well as to propose linkages between these.

Design/methodology/approach -A multi-method approach is used – where barriers, constraints and inhibitors are identified by means of thematic content analysis of the literature. A set of probing questions is developed based on these themes and is then examined in in-depth interviews with individuals that had not visited cultural attractions in the past two years, in an attempt to triangulate data, as well as to identify connections between barriers.

Findings - From the literature, eight interconnected barriers to visitation are identified - 1) physical access, 2) personal access, 3) cost, 4) time and timing, 5) product, 6) personal interest and peer group, 7) socialization and understanding, and 8) information. The in-depth interviews generally support these, although it is also identified that there are complex interrelationships between the issues.

Originality/Value –This paper addresses the neglected question of why people do not attend cultural attractions by triangulating thematic findings from the content analysis of diverse literature with in-depth interview responses from one non-visitor segment. This results in an interconnected model of barriers that can be used to assist managers to develop strategies addressing low visitation rates within targeted segments.

Keywords Arts, Perception, Marketing strategy, Tourism Development, Interviews

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Arts and cultural institutions around the world grapple with a complex mix of issues pertaining to attendance, visitation rates and audience development. Most academic and industry studies have focussed on arts and cultural participation by locals or tourists, with fewer studies exploring non-participation with cultural institutions. In the context of this study we define cultural participation by activities which commonly include museums and other heritage attractions, art galleries/exhibitions, performances of dance, music, theatre, opera, ballet, musicals, and festivals (e.g., Prentice *et al.*, 1997) and is often specific to the destination, institution or venue (OMRG, 2006). Whether focussing on cultural participation or non-participation, most studies have been destination- and even institution-specific as seen in Australia (e.g., Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998;

OMRG, 2006; Rentschler, 2006), museum and heritage attractions in Texas, USA (Tian, *et al.*, 1996), or museums and cultural attractions in Edinburgh, UK (Prentice *et al.*, 1997).

Many of these past studies have identified that cultural consumption (and by inference, non-consumption) is influenced by gender, age, education and socioeconomic status (e.g., Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000; Bourdieu 1980, 1984, 1997; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; DiMaggio and Useem, 1978; Gans, 1999). Other studies consider the role of additional personal characteristics such as ethnicity and ethnic orientation (e.g. Trienekens, 2002), household setting and time restrictions (Kraaykamp *et al.*, 2008), and social networks such as spousal influences (Upright, 2004).

The decision to visit (or not visit) cultural attractions is also complex as it largely remains a subjective one, but often involves an interplay between driving motivations as well as constraining or inhibiting barriers (Kirchberg, 1998). In other words, it is ultimately the significance of subjective assessments of objective characteristics and features that determines the decision to go or not to go. This study aims to assist the marketing of cultural attractions by understanding why people do not attend these institutions. In doing so it differs from other studies by focusing on the non-visitors and exploring their subjective perceptions of the barriers, constraints and inhibitors drawn from previous academic and industry research. These new findings from this study enable a better understanding of the existing and emergent categories. Additionally, it proposes linkages between barriers that must be addressed in a holistic fashion if non-visitation is to be effectively addressed through marketing by cultural institutions. These linkages will be briefly considered later in this paper.

Within the past literature, studies within each area have tended to focus on factors that might inhibit existing users from participating more regularly or exploring why those attending believe non-attendees do not attend. There is less integrated research exploring actual non-attending consumers, primarily because non-attendees are more difficult to identify compared to those attending cultural institutions. The studies that do focus on non-attendees (e.g., Bennett, 1994; Milner *et al.*, 2004), generally focus on developing demographic profiles on non-attendees and their reasons for not attending, rather than exploring the barriers that make them non-attenders.

It has been identified that there are a range of benefits associated with increasing visitation to cultural institutions (ACA, 1999; Rentschler, 2006). The high degree of public financial support for these institutions also places increased pressure on these institutions to ensure they are servicing a diverse cross-section of society. Low visitation is a problem for several reasons: 1) these institutions are publically funded so there is a desire to ensure that they provide 'value' to the widest segments of the community (Brooks, 2001, 2003; Kim *et al.*, 2007; Lewis and Brooks, 2005), 2) cultural attractions are designed to enhance community engagement and as such increased attendance will develop broader social capital (Hill, 2004; Howard, 2001; Upright, 2004), and 3) cultural industries are important sectors of the economy and without visitor support these sectors will not develop (Madden, 2001, Stoddard *et al.*, 2006). The problem of low visitation or

non-attendance by some market segments affects cultural institutions globally. It has been suggested that there is no simple answer as to why citizens (locally born or migrants) do not more actively attend these institutions (Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997).

The objective of this research is to explore the previous academic and industry research on non-attendance and draw together the common themes and issues identified on barriers, constraints and inhibitors across disciplines, and then to explore these with a set of non-visitors of Australian cultural institutions. Drawing issues together is complex as research on non-visitation of cultural institutions is covered in a range of disciplines, including arts and cultural studies, leisure studies, marketing, tourism and even events. In addition, it has been suggested that visitation and non-visitation may be institution-specific (OMRG, 2006), which means that context may be important in developing strategies to address low visitation. The synthesis presented in this paper will therefore seek to draw on a cross section of studies, but the above limitations need to be acknowledged. We then explore these issues in qualitative in-depth interviews with a cross section of non-visitors to determine if there are other issues that have not been identified, as well as to propose a model that links barriers together. Through this method, these non-consumers explore the reasons they did not attend cultural institutions in their own words, rather than force them to respond to closed-ended questionnaires that constrain their expression. Given that people may have deeply embedded or unconscious rationales for not visiting cultural institutions, probing of issues, using the barriers identified in the literature is sometimes required.

Methodology

A multi-method approach was used to explore the issue of non-visitation of cultural attractions. First, a deductive approach was adopted where broad issues or factors that might inhibit people from attending cultural attractions (i.e., barriers to visitation) were identified by means of thematic content analysis of the literature. Based on these themes, a set of interview questions was developed to be explored through primary data collected by in-depth interviews with individuals that had not visited cultural attractions in the past two years. Eleven in-depth interviews with English-speaking residents were then undertaken and the data collected in these interviews were analyzed using the pattern-matching approach (Spiggle, 1994; Trochim, 1989; Yin, 2003). Each of these methods is explained in detail below.

Thematic content analysis of literature

The systematic review of the literature can be undertaken in a variety of ways. On the one extreme, researchers can undertake a meta-analysis that “synthesises work in a given area by comparing outcomes of studies in terms of significance levels” (Stuhmacher and Gillespie, 2005, p.68) in an attempt to identify the generalisability of findings across studies (Farley *et al.*, 1995). On the other extreme, is a more integrative approach that systematically explores the literature and has been referred to as a qualitative meta-analysis or meta-synthesis where one seeks to interpret the themes across the literature (Park and Gretzel, 2007). While Peterson *et al.* (2001) suggest that qualitative meta-

analysis is different to a critical literature review, their suggestion that it can be used to draw together themes across diverse literatures makes it consistent with the more general type of thematic analysis proposed by Churchill (1979) and others (i.e., Gabbott, 2004; Hart, 1998; Steward, 2004).

The thematic content analysis related to non-visitation undertaken in this paper, follows this broader process (Churchill, 1979; Gabbott, 2004) whereby the researchers identified the different themes explored in the literature until saturation point was achieved (Morse, 1994). These different themes were then grouped into broad areas, similar to that undertaken by Cornwell and Maignan (1998). Each of the eight barriers is discussed within its own section. Implications of this review are then provided for exploring the topic in more detail.

Development of the interview protocol

The interview protocol was developed based on the themes identified from the literature, namely, physical access, time and timing, personal access, cost, product, personal interest and peer group, socialisation and understanding, and information. The areas explored are presented in Table 1 in accordance to the themes to which they correspond. Additional questions were formulated to gather the respondents' views on removing the barriers of attending cultural attractions, and their participation in any other arts or cultural activities that were not covered in previous questions.

Table 1. Interview questions corresponding to themes identified

Theme(s)	Corresponding interview question(s)
Physical access; Time and timing	Do you find these attractions difficult to get to, and if so, what are the difficulties that prevent you from going?
Personal access	Are there personal reasons or feelings that prevent you from going?
Cost	Do the costs prevent you from going? How much do you think it costs to go?
Product	What do you think you would experience? What do you think they provide?
Personal interest	Does a lack of interest prevent you from going? Do you think the content presented would be of interest to you?
Understanding and socialisation	Do you think you would understand these attractions if you were to visit them? Do you think the content would be presented in a way that you would enjoy? Do you think you would be uncomfortable at these attractions if you were to visit them? If yes, why?
Peer group	What would your friends and family think about you going to these cultural attractions?
Information	Do you have enough information about these attractions? Do you know where to find information about them?
Follow-up questions: themes not yet mentioned; respondents' suggestions on removal of barriers	Are there any other reasons preventing you from going? What could be changed or improved to address the barriers encountered so that you would be able to go to these cultural attractions?

Participation in any other arts or cultural activities	Did you attend other cultural attractions that are not in the list in the past two years? If yes, what, how often and why did you go? Who did you go with?
	Did you participate in any arts or cultural activities in the past two years? If yes, what, how often and why did you do them?
	Did family or friends participate with you?

In-depth interviews

A semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interview protocol was developed to ensure that the key issues identified in the syntheses of the literature review were covered. Given interviewees were being asked to discuss reasons for not participating in an activity, probing was often required. In some instances, respondents did relate back to much earlier experiences, which they used to frame their reasons for more recent non-visitation.

Eleven interviews were conducted in 2007 by three trained and experienced interviewers with respondents recruited via an advertisement in the local newspaper and an email sent to all employees of an Australian University in the same local area. Eligible individuals were: 1) aged 18 or above, 2) spoke English at home¹ and 3) had not attended the city's major cultural attractions (art galleries, museums and performing arts centres) in the past two years. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees and the duration ranged between fourteen and seventy minutes, with an average of thirty minutes. It is acknowledged that getting people interested in discussing something they do not do (often because they were not interested) is a difficult task and this further accounts for the short length of some interviews. It might also be argued that the recruitment process, relying on self-selection by the eleven respondents who fulfilled the eligibility criteria, could introduce bias in the results. It is argued here that bias is not an issue as the research explores attitudes and perceptions of one segment of non-visitors (i.e. English-speaking visitors) and these respondents represent this segment. The triangulation of the respondent data with the literature review further reduces any potential bias by ensuring the full spectrum of non-visitor barriers is explored. Furthermore, given that part of the rationale of the research was to validate the past research across disciplines, the two data sources (a diverse body of literature and in-depth interviews with one non-visitor segment) used to triangulate issues serve as a basis for validating the results.

Among the eleven respondents recruited, six were female (F), five male (M); two were aged between 18 and 25 (A1), four between 26 and 44 (A2), and five were 45 or above (A3). The majority were born in Australia (9 of 11); resided in the local area (7 of 11) where the respondent recruitment occurred which has a generally lower socio-economic profile to the wider state and national averages; and worked full-time (8 of 11). All had tertiary educational qualifications with most at the higher education level (6 post-graduate and 3 under-graduate) or vocational education (2). Combined household income

¹Following this phase of the research, the next stage will extend to residents with non-English speaking background.

levels ranged from less than \$20,000 (2 respondents) to more than \$100,000 (4 respondents).

Data analysis

In preparation for data analysis, the interview recordings were professionally transcribed and were then 'cleaned' by going back to the original audio recording to check for accuracy. The transcripts were then coded to identify "more discrete passages of text or other data items that, in some sense, exemplify the same theoretical or descriptive data" (Gibbs, 2002, p.57). Two researchers (co-authors of this paper) coded the data and discussed interpretations to ensure consistency. The ongoing exchange of ideas helped the researchers to explore the richness of the data and enhanced the reliability of the analysis.

All data were entered into the software NVivo 7.0 data management and analytical tool which is designed to help researchers to handle a wide variety of qualitative data (e.g. field notes, transcripts and literature in text or multimedia format). The software also allows researchers to record growing understanding in summaries, annotations, memos (e.g. research journals) or field notes (Richards, 2002). These tools are helpful in creating a database of cases and maintaining a chain of evidence and can illustrate the relationships among selected concepts in tabular or graphical formats. A tree node structure was used which can be considered a conceptual schema. The building of such schema can be concept-driven and/or data-driven. If it is the former, the construction of nodes is done without reference to the data collected. The categories or concepts represented by the nodes may come from the literature, previous studies and so on. If it is the latter, the nodes are constructed through close reading of the text (i.e. the data). The researcher approaches the data with an open mind, with no preconceptions of any analytical framework (Gibbs, 2002). For this study, the initial tree node structure was based on a synthesis of the literature, the research objectives and the interview questions, (i.e. concept-driven). During data analysis the initial tree node structure evolved as the building of the conceptual schema became data-driven. Again, using 'factors' to illustrate, analysis confirmed that indeed the eight factors did influence respondents' decision-making in whether or not to visit a cultural attraction.

Findings

From the thematic content analysis of the literature a range of real and perceived barriers covering eight broad themes were identified (as summarised in Table 2): 1) Physical Access, 2) Personal Access, 3) Cost, 4) Time and Timing, 5) Product, 6) Personal Interest, 7) Understanding and Socialisation, and 8) Information. It is clear that non-visitors view the experience as including a broad set of activities and interactions, all of which need to be considered when seeking to increase visitation.

Table 2. Summary of themes related to barriers to visitation

Barrier	Broad sub-issues/themes	Authors suggesting these
Physical access	1. Physically difficult to get to	ACA, 1999; OMRG, 2006; Prentice <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Tian <i>et al.</i> , 1996
	2. Public transport access difficulties	Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; Prentice <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Rentschler, 2006
	3. Other, e.g. unwilling to travel/use public transport; too difficult to organise a visit or travel	Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; Prentice <i>et al.</i> , 1997
Personal access	1. Personal feeling perceptions of the experience being uncomfortable, not entertaining, not fun; too challenging; depressing; boring; physically uncomfortable, cold, on one's feet all the time	ACA, 1999; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; OMRG, 2006; Susie Fisher Group, 1990 cited in Hooper-Greenhill, 1995
	2. Personal factors precluding attendance, e.g. family circumstances, disabilities or health issues	ACA, 1999; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Henderson <i>et al.</i> , 1988; Milner <i>et al.</i> , 2004; Prentice <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997
	3. Other, e.g. personal perceptions that opening hours were not suitable with when visitor could attend; too much planning required; no one to go with and could not go alone	ACA, 1999; Bennett 1994; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; OMRG, 2006; Rentschler, 2006; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997
Cost	1. Perceptions that could not attend due to limited incomes or lack of concession pricing	ACA, 1999; Henderson <i>et al.</i> , 1988; Kirchberg, 1998; OMRG, 2006; Prentice <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Rentschler, 2006; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997; Tian <i>et al.</i> , 1996
	2. Cost of the overall encounter and supplementary costs	Davies and Prentice, 1995; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; Rentschler, 2006
	3. Value for money	Tian, <i>et al.</i> , 1996
	4. Other, e.g. too expensive; overestimated cost of attendance	ACA, 1999; OMRG, 2006; Prentice <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Tian <i>et al.</i> , 1996
Time and timing	Time poor consumers lack time to attend; no pressing need to attend; attend when on holidays; inconvenience of opening hours and activity schedules	ACA, 1999; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Geissler <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Henderson <i>et al.</i> , 1988; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; Milner <i>et al.</i> , 2004; Rentschler, 2006; Tian <i>et al.</i> , 1996; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997
Product	Poor quality offerings; represents class distinction that is “not for me”; too serious, too confronting and too intellectual; overall atmosphere of ‘keep off’; no need to re-visit; service staff were not friendly or welcoming and were unable to assist the experience	ACA 1999; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Geissler <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; OMRG, 2006; Susie Fisher Group, 1990 cited in Hooper-Greenhill, 1995; Tian <i>et al.</i> , 1996
Personal interest and peer group	Products not relevant or of interest; have different interests; does not reflect self identity or perceptions; “too virtuous”; ‘do-gooders’ were the sort of people who went there; a luxury; other things are more important; peer group would not attend or think it the “thing to do”	ACA, 1999; Bennett, 1994; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Henderson <i>et al.</i> , 1988; Milner <i>et al.</i> , 2004; Prentice <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Rentschler, 2006; Susie Fisher Group, 1990 cited in Hooper-Greenhill, 1995; Swanson and Davis, 2006; Tian <i>et al.</i> , 1996
Socialisation and under-	Perception that cultural institutions are not for them, consumers do not understand them, engagement is too hard, unfamiliar,	ACA, 1999; Bennett, 1994; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Prentice <i>et al.</i> , 1997; Tian <i>et al.</i> , 1996;

standing	lack of past engagement, poor past experience, lack of socialisation with cultural institutions	
Informat- ion	Lack of knowledge, awareness and information about the cultural attractions; information not accessible to non-English speakers; staff unable to provide information in other languages or unable to assist in explaining exhibitions	Anderson, 1997 cited in Davies 2001; ACA, 1999; Bennett, 1994; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Davies, 1995 cited in Davies 2001; Henderson <i>et al.</i> , 1988; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; OMRG, 2006; Rentschler, 2006

The barriers suggested by the respondents generally match the themes identified in the literature prior to data collection. The in-depth responses provide greater insights into the non-visitation phenomenon as well as deeper meanings into the themes identified. Overall there was no one dominant factor deterring people from attending cultural attractions, with most barriers commonly identified across respondents, although those related to personal access were more individualistic. The research supports the idea that non-visitation is a complex phenomenon as connections or related barriers were identified that will be discussed later in the paper.

Physical access barriers

The research has identified that the physical location of institutions may result in access being difficult or inconvenient. This theme was explored by a number of researchers and included three broad issues. First, there was the idea that cultural institutions are physically difficult to get to (ACA, 1999; OMRG, 2006; Prentice *et al.*, 1997; Tian *et al.*, 1996). Second was an issue related to public transportation (Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; Prentice *et al.*, 1997; Rentschler, 2006). Some identified that institutions were not readily accessible by public transportation (Rentschler, 2006), which may be problematic, especially if non-attendees have financial constraints and cannot afford automobiles. There were also other issues related to physical barriers. For example, it was suggested that it was too difficult to organise a visit or travel (Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998) or some respondents were unwilling to travel/use public transportation (Prentice *et al.*, 1997).

These barriers were also encountered by some of this study's interview respondents. From characteristic comments (Appendix: Physical Access Barriers), it can be seen that attending events in the city and/or at night, gives rise to issues of either expensive parking in the city or reliance on infrequent public transport services in the evening. Physical comfort is another factor some respondents considered as a physical barrier. One commented about the crowdedness of some big events and the absence of seats in some outdoor venues.

Personal access barriers

These issues focused on the individual and there were two broad themes. Firstly, individuals did not feel comfortable attending (ACA, 1999; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998), were not entertained (OMRG, 2006), or felt it would not be fun (ACA, 1999; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998). These issues all appear to broadly relate to personal perceptions of the experience. In the context of non-attendees,

it is unclear as to how these perceptions were developed (Higgs *et al.*, 2005). In the case of those who have attended in the past, it might be that a bad past experience negatively affected their perceptions (Davies and Prentice, 1995).

The second issue in this area related to personal factors that precluded attendance such as family circumstances (Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Henderson *et al.*, 1988; Milner *et al.*, 2004; Prentice *et al.*, 1997) or the individual's disabilities or health issues (ACA, 1999; Milner *et al.*, 2004; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997). Other research found that activities were not scheduled when the potential visitors were able to attend (Bennett, 1994; Rentschler, 2006) or people felt they needed too much planning to organise a visit (ACA, 1999; OMRG, 2006). Other components of this personal issue were that some people felt they could not attend alone and did not have family or friends with whom they could go (ACA, 1999; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Rentschler, 2006; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997). These issues for the most part focus on the perceptions that cultural institutions are not seen to be inclusive or accessible to the widest community.

Not surprisingly, this is the part of the in-depth interview data where a high degree of individuality in the responses was observed. Each respondent had his or her own, different personal access barrier (for some characteristic comments see Appendix: Personal Access Barriers). Interesting remarks that emerged from this data were about an experience not having to be enjoyable, but more importantly, thought-provoking. In other words, the perception of an experience being uncomfortable or not enjoyable is not necessarily a barrier as the literature suggests:

“... it doesn't have to be really enjoyable as long as it's thought provoking. I don't know if that's the right word, enjoyable ... It can be confronting but still worthwhile going. The main concept ... can be challenging ... enjoyable doesn't have to be the main criterion.” [F, A3]

Another interesting insight was the influence of one's upbringing. One respondent pointed out that his choice of cultural attraction or activity was related to what he grew up with:

“I'm generally not going to go to a theatre. It depends [on] what you're used to and what you've grown up with.” [M, A2]

Another respondent commented that her decision on whether or not to spend money on attending cultural attractions or activities was influenced by her childhood:

“I think you can put down a bit of guilt, too. Because we were brought up very economically, everything had to be spread to seven [members in the household] ... I'm trying to economize and I'm not very good when it comes to shouting myself out something that would be considered extravagant.” [F, A2]

Cost barriers

The issue of financial costs was raised in three ways. Firstly, many studies identified that individuals and families had limited incomes and so felt they could not attend (ACA, 1999; Henderson *et al.*, 1988; Milner *et al.*, 2004; OMRG, 2006; Prentice *et al.*, 1997; Rentschler, 2006; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997; Tian *et al.*, 1996). Such views are important as they identify that equity access might not be occurring. This view was also

supported by the Open Mind Research Group (2006), who found that a lack of concession pricing (discounts for the elderly, unemployed, or low incomes) inhibit some potential Australian visitors to cultural institutions. The costs of the overall encounter were also identified as being an important problem whereby supplementary costs such as babysitting (Rentschler, 2006), food (Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; Rentschler, 2006), and transportation and parking (Davies and Prentice, 1995; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998), were too high. Consumers are thus considering the full range of costs associated with the experience when evaluating attendance and non-attendance, not just the entrance fee. Several studies also highlight concerns with the issue of whether an experience is value for money (Tian *et al.*, 1996). Others found that there was a view that the institutions were simply too expensive (ACA, 1999; Prentice *et al.*, 1997; Tian *et al.*, 1996), which indirectly suggests that the benefits are not justified by the costs. However, there is also research that suggests that consumers overestimate the cost of attendance (OMRG, 2006) and thus non-attendees may have incorrect information/perceptions about the institutions.

Many of these cost barriers were encountered by some of the interview respondents as seen by characteristic comments (Appendix: Cost Barriers). Additionally, some respondents had little knowledge about the cost of admission to the selected venues and doubts about the quality of product being offered. As a result, they were uncertain if attending would be value for money.

“I guess you don’t know what’s in there until you go and look. I don’t know what the price range would be, you would think ‘oh, is that really going to be worth \$15?’” [M, A2]

Time and timing barriers

Most researchers identified that visitors and non-visitors viewed time constraints a critical visitation barrier, with consumers and potential consumers reporting that they were time poor (ACA, 1999; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Henderson *et al.*, 1988; Milner *et al.*, 2004; Rentschler, 2006; Tian *et al.*, 1996). A lack of time is generally a concern for consumers and has resulted in convenience being increasingly important to consumption in the arts and other areas (Geissler *et al.*, 2006). The theme of inconvenience was also identified in regards to limited opening hours or schedules (Davies and Prentice, 1995; Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998; Rentschler, 2006; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997). Davies and Prentice (1995) also identified some consumers felt that there was not a pressing time need to attend institutions and some consumers felt they could attend when they were on holidays. There was also a view that attending cultural institutions was a low priority, that is, people had better things to do with their limited time (Davies and Prentice, 1995; Tian *et al.*, 1996). This latter point could also be associated to the value proposition. If attendance is not seen as valuable, then visitations might be perceived as ‘wasted time’. More generally, time might also be related to costs of visitation, which is related to the broader discussion of time poverty and convenience identified above. This may be more of a problem in large cities where there are many competing demands for leisure time. For characteristic comments by the interview respondents on many of these time and timing barriers see Appendix.

Product barriers

Several issues associated with the cultural products provided were identified as inhibiting visitation. Some of these directly related to the personal interest barrier. Researchers identified concerns regarding the quality of the cultural institutions. Tian *et al.*, (1996) found a perception that offerings were of poor quality and also suggested that potential visitors felt some cultural institutions were too serious, too confronting, and too intellectual. The idea that cultural products represented a class distinction, that is, they are “not for me” was also raised by Davies and Prentice (1995) and Australia Council for the Arts (1999). This would appear to be inconsistent with the stated goal of most public institutions to bring cultural activities to as wide an audience as possible.

Several studies also suggested that some respondents felt that once they had visited the cultural institution there was no need to re-visit (OMRG, 2006; Tian *et al.*, 1996) or that materials were recycled and thus there was no need to revisit (ACA, 1999). However a more traditional service view was also provided, that a previous encounter was not satisfactory and thus individuals would not re-visit in the future (Davies and Prentice, 1995). The broader service perspective also related to comments that staff were not friendly, welcoming and were unable to assist in the experience (Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998). This would support the idea that the product is not simply viewed as ‘art on display’, but is seen as a broader experience (Geissler *et al.*, 2006, Higgs *et al.*, 2005). This point was identified in regards to views on costs as well, whereby these costs did not simply relate to admission prices, but to a full range of costs associated with the experience.

Perceptions of product quality and content suitability played a large part in the interview respondents’ decision-making in whether or not to visit a cultural attraction as seen by characteristic comments in Appendix: Product Barriers. Consumers would not want to waste time and money on something they do not think they would enjoy. Apart from the core product, the quality of the supporting service is also important.

Personal interest and peer group barriers

A majority of the research identified that people did not feel cultural institutions offered products that were relevant or of interest to them (ACA, 1999; Bennett, 1994; Prentice *et al.*, 1997; Tian *et al.*, 1996). This related to people indicating that they had different interests (ACA, 1999; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Milner *et al.*, 2004; Rentschler, 2006) or feel that attendance does not reflect their identity (Bennett, 1994; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Swanson and Davis, 2006). Individual’s perception of self is also related to how they perceive attending cultural institutions would be seen by their peers. There was a strong view in several studies and interviews that people within the respondent’s peer group would not attend (ACA, 1999; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Henderson *et al.*, 1988; Prentice *et al.*, 1997) or would not think it is “the in thing to do” (Tian *et al.*, 1996).

Interest in the cultural attractions is a primary factor for consideration for most of the interview respondents when deciding whether or not to visit a venue as seen by characteristic comments in Appendix: Personal Interest and Peer Group Barriers. Given that in some cases the respondents had never attended these institutions, it is unclear how perceptions were developed (Higgs *et al.*, 2005). However, these factors may be very individualistic (i.e. in regards to visitors and non-visitors) and might also vary by specific institution or exhibition. The factors also would appear to be closely related to other issues such as personal access barriers, where it was felt that institutions were too challenging to attend (Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998), as well as related to the understanding barrier discussed later in this study.

Some unexpected findings relating to peer influence were that one's peer group could also be a facilitator rather than a barrier. Some respondents indicated they would visit an attraction because their friends were going, or they consider the visit as a social outing:

"I went to one of the art centres because I went with one of my friends ...If they want to go, I would go." [M, A1]

"I think there is a bit of a perception that if you go to one of these things once, you have kind of been there done that ... why people are motivated to go sightseeing in their own city is if they have someone from overseas or interstate." [F, A2]

None of the interviewees believed their peer or family would have a negative reaction to their intention to visit an attraction but one mentioned if her family was to have a reaction, it would probably be along the lines of "that's a bit of a waste of money" because the family was not into cultural activities.

Socialisation and understanding barriers

This barrier focuses on people perceiving that cultural institutions are not for them and/or they do not understand them (Bennett, 1994; Davies and Prentice, 1995; Prentice *et al.*, 1997; Tian *et al.*, 1996), which are closely related to personal barriers, that is, engaging with cultural institutions is 'too hard' or unfamiliar. It was suggested that a lack of past engagement (ACA, 1999), a poor past experience (Davies and Prentice, 1995) or lack of socialisation with cultural institutions (ACA, 1999; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Davies and Prentice, 1995) makes future engagement more difficult. Thus getting people to visit for the first time and having an enjoyable first experience may have significant flow-on effects in regards to future visitation (Higgs *et al.*, 2005). Most interviewees experienced this type of barrier as seen in the characteristic comments, Appendix: Socialisation and Understanding Barriers. Some respondents felt they would be uncomfortable attending the attraction because they would not be able to understand the abstract nature of the art or that they would be bored because they were not interested in art.

Information barriers

A lack of information about cultural institutions was identified as a visitation barrier by a number of authors and participants. This related to not having information on the attractions such as: when the exhibit is on, what it comprises, etcetera (ACA, 1999; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Henderson *et al.*, 1988; OMRG, 2006; Rentschler, 2006).

This needs to be in a language with which visitors are comfortable (Migliorino and Cultural Perspectives, 1998) and that institutions' staff should be able to assist in explaining exhibitions (Bennett, 1994).

Information barriers were commonly encountered by the interview respondents. Some noted a lack of promotion of attractions or events failing to create awareness among the general public, and low quality or lack of information prior to attendance. The more interview participants learnt in regards to a product, the more likely they were to attend. Respondents also suggested interpretative support was required to enhance their level of enjoyment. In other words, the lack of interpretive information can be a barrier to an enjoyable experience (see Appendix, Information Barriers, characteristic comments).

Discussion and contribution

The interview data gathered is generally congruent with the themes identified from the literature, although some barriers were interpreted slightly differently or given a wider meaning by the respondents thereby adding to the understanding of non-attendance and the barriers to attending cultural institutions. For example, the scope of physical access is not limited to the means or the resources required to reach an attraction, but also includes the physical comfort in attending (e.g. crowdedness and seating).

Complexity and interrelationships among barriers were also observed. For instance, one respondent talked about her decision on whether or not to spend money on attending cultural attractions was influenced by her childhood, which is a personal access barrier. In this respondent's case, visitation was seen as an extravagance and she would feel guilty spending money on it. Thus, her decision to attend was also subject to the perception of worthiness and cost barriers.

Drawing together the themes from the literature and interviews allows a conceptual model (Figure 1) to be proposed that captures the interrelationships among factors and allows a more systematic approach to the study of the causal relationships or associations among the barriers. The eight barriers are categorised into three groups based on shared commonalities and whether some aspects of the barriers are outside of managers' control or not: (1) external/situational – factors that attraction managers and individual consumers have little or no control over; they include physical barriers, cost, time and timing; (2) product-specific factors that can be influenced by managers, including physical barriers, cost and product; and (3) personal factors associated to individual consumers, where personal access, personal interest, socialisation and understanding belong.

Some factors such as physical barriers and cost, may be considered to belong to multiple areas. Additionally, when considering managerial control over costs, for example, managers have limited control over parking and contracted catering but can vary admission costs.

The proposed model suggests that barriers are not mutually exclusive, as non-attendance can be a result of a combination of factors. For example the childhood of a respondent

(personal access) shaped her perception of worthiness of attending an attraction. Coupled with cost, the two factors influenced her decision to attend a cultural attraction. Thus barriers may not only co-exist but may be inter-related with one another. In Figure 1, arrows 1 to 3 indicate that external/situational factors, product-specific factors, and personal factors all have a direct impact on decision-making. Arrow 4 shows that factors in the external environment impact on personal factors. This is possible because, for example, no personal interest is stimulated because consumers are not provided with any product information. Arrow 5 refers to the impact of factors in the external environment on product-specific factors – the lack of provision of public transport makes the location of the museum a barrier to visit, for instance. Finally, arrow 6 shows the impact of product-specific factors on personal factors; for example, uninteresting product content has led to low personal interest. Thus, when developing strategies for non-attendance, managers should not single out a certain factor but consider the impact that others may bring.

“Take in Figure 1 here”

While the results identify complex relationships amongst barriers they also provide some suggestions to addressing these as well. The area of information was the most extensively commented factor by the interview respondents and entailed three aspects: 1) promotion of attractions or events in order to create awareness, 2) provision of in-depth information about an event before it is held, and 3) provision of in-depth and/or interpretive information on site. The multidimensionality of this one issue illustrates the complex nature of the non-visitation phenomenon.

The lack of information or awareness about an attraction or event may not be the most significant barrier to visitation, however some people do actively seek information and therefore promotional efforts can be used to improve attendance. Respondents believed that promotion is required to generate greater awareness about attractions and events. There is a myriad of alternatives available, many of which may be low cost and could be used to target specific segments of non-visitors, for example the use of podcasts or targeted SMS messaging.

“... podcasts is something I listen to on a regular basis ... every night I download the latest podcast ... so if the Art Centre, instead of having a monthly brochure had a monthly podcast of what was on, maybe I would listen to it.” [F, A3]

Mass media marketing, or television advertising in particular, is deemed a very effective means of promotion, although this may be restricted to larger institutions:

“... it would be better if there was an ad on TV telling me Archibald’s coming to this and that. TV’s best for me because I can listen and if I know about Ben Cousins I can know about anything ... for convenience I wouldn’t mind some advertising and marketing” [F, A3]

Other traditional promotional tools such as celebrities and endorsers may also be valuable, so that an unknown attraction or event may appear more relevant to the general public:

“The Mayor’s everywhere ... he talks about ‘Come to Docklands, we’ve got Docklands’, so why can’t he say ‘Come to Museum Victoria, come to Ian Potter Centre’ ...” [F, A3]

Respondents also suggest the provision of in-depth information about an event before it is held is required. This would appeal to information-thirsty consumers or those who see attending a cultural event as a learning opportunity. An interviewee used the Book Show as an example, where she found herself buying more books after listening to the show because the show had generated more interest. In other words, the information motivated one to consume. The same may apply to cultural attractions and events. The more a person knows what to expect, the less the perceived risk of investing time and money to participate. The intangible and unknown experience may become more tangible. The provision of information can be in the form of a seminar or mass media broadcast:

“I used to love going to pre-concert talks ... if there were information talks, some information about various venues or events ... I might go along ... or even when I listen to podcasts on the ABC, even something more frequent on the radio.” [F, A3]

Better use of institution websites was also identified and applies across cultural institutions, as respondents found that in past experiences there had been insufficient information about exhibits in advance making it harder to enjoy the encounter.

“... sometimes it’s a bit sparse. A lot of the permanent exhibition has the name of the painting and the painter and a date ... I certainly don’t remember everything in the National Gallery of Victoria having that type of [support text]. Even when they do, it’s not normally extensive.” [F, A3]

One new finding from the interview data of the study is that some barriers are also deemed as facilitating rather than hindering. For example, the literature suggests that one can be influenced by a peer group which would not think visiting cultural attractions as the “thing to do”. Respondents felt that peer group, in fact, was a facilitator to attendance as some respondents decide to visit an attraction because their friends were going, or they consider the visit as a social outing. Another factor that could be a facilitator was personal access. One interviewee pointed out that appreciating art is a very personal journey. To her, the perception of an experience being uncomfortable or confronting was not a barrier as she valued the thought-provoking nature of the art.

Practical implications

As with all marketing activities, understanding the specific issues (i.e. barriers) for each segment is a critical first step, as it is likely that each segment will view visitation and therefore non-visitation, differently. Institutions seeking to address multiple visitor groups will therefore need to consider different sets of views, including predispositions for or against a particular exhibition and cultural institution, when designing and implementing strategies to increase visitation. The research suggests that barriers to visitation are interrelated, which will relate to the background or upbringing of an individual and will potentially be segment-specific. Factors have multiple meaning and were interpreted differently by segments of respondents, for example, the scope of physical access is not limited to the means or resources required to visit an attraction, but also the physical comfort as well. This identifies the need for managers to ensure they understand the specific needs of the segments being targeted; otherwise they may not appropriately deal with all barriers and/or relationships between barriers. This of course assumes that cultural institutions will have the financial and managerial resources to undertake such segmented strategies aimed at various segments of non-visitors. As such,

institutions may need to focus on the largest group of non-visitors, although they may rather select to target those whose barriers can more easily be addressed. For example, an institution might decide to target a specific cultural group who lives near the institution, even though they may not necessarily be that large. The research suggests that the concept of “barriers” should be approached neutrally, as in some cases a ‘barrier’ may in fact be a facilitator as well. Peer group influence, for example, was more often a facilitating factor than a barrier; and the perception of an experience being uncomfortable (a personal access issue) is not necessarily a deterrent.

Research implications

The interrelationship between barriers and factors leading to non-attendance presented in Figure 1, advances understanding of non-visitation and is a springboard to further empirical research. Further qualitative research with non-visitors is needed in regards to specific cultural attractions as well as for other segments of non-visitors for the development of specific strategies. Understanding the importance of barriers for specific segments of non-consumers for each cultural institution is recommended as there may in fact be differences between institutions and segments (OMRG, 2006). Future research can also explore different cultural backgrounds, family structures and different age categories, to identify if these characteristics affect perceived barriers. Of course some segments may be more important to institutions or their funding bodies. For example, governments may wish to see greater cultural inclusion, thereby being more supportive of programs targeting migrant communities (Hill, 2004). Thus future research needs to explore different segments bearing in mind the priorities of institutions and funding bodies. Further research can then be undertaken to explore specific programs that have been implemented, that is, how effective various interventions are in dealing with specific barriers for targeted segments of non-visitors.

Conclusions

This review of the literature and in-depth interviews has identified that non-visitation is extremely complex. While there are eight broad barriers affecting individuals’ visitation of cultural institutions, there also appear to be linkages or relationships between these barriers. Addressing the complex interconnected sets of potential barriers means that those seeking to increase attendance have a difficult task, as strategies may have to be targeted to different market segments, and for different exhibitions and cultural institutions.

It is essential that organisations address the issue of non-visitation, as getting initial trial (i.e., visitation) appears to be essential in facilitating re-visitation. There may need to be some significant changes in the mindset of non-visitors, as some may have not been socialised to consider attendance of cultural institutions as activities in which they can participate. As such, different types of information may be critical in addressing many non-visitation barriers. However, promotion needs to focus not simply on information or persuasion about the products and services, but needs to address consumer perceptions of visitation as well, for example, that there are benefits to all people. Thus promotion may

need to be informative, but also take on a social marketing type of role where behaviour modification is sought.

The research has found that there are clear linkages between barriers. For example, transportation barriers might be related to cost and time issues, as the lack of transportation means it takes more time and/or is more expensive, thus restricting visitation. The interconnected nature of barriers, is extremely important as any strategies developed to increase visitation need to be multi-pronged allowing all pertinent barriers to be addressed. In the example related to transportation, this might mean bundling transportation and attendance together. As such, non-visitors could purchase one ticket for both (transportation and the institution), usually at a discounted price, thereby possibly reducing the impact of barriers simultaneously. Integrated solutions such as these, require cultural institutions to coordinate their marketing actions with other organisations, as the cultural institutions cannot address non-visitation barriers alone. In this way organisations are managing overall experiences and becoming partners in the overall consumer experience. Thus, the experience being managed is not simply going to the cultural institution, it incorporates getting there and home as well. In this example, transportation providers become part of the experience, in addition to being a marketing and distribution network for cultural institutions (i.e. promoting and selling integrated packages).

Better understanding barriers related to each segment of non-visitors will enable institutions to potentially re-evaluate their activities in regards to the segments they wish to target. As such these eight barriers and the interconnections between them will direct institutional research into targeted audience development programs. The need to address multiple barriers, which the institutions frequently do not directly control, will require cultural institutions to not only provide creative experiences for new audiences, but draw on creative strategies to overcome visitation barriers.

Note

1. Following this phase of the research, the next stage will extend to residents with non-English speaking background

Appendix Quotes from respondents related to the summary of themes to barriers to visitation

Barrier	Broad sub-issues/themes	Characteristic Comments ^a
Physical Access	1. Physically difficult to get to	“I don’t like going into the city. I tend to drive. I’m not very good at catching public transport so for me it’s like a big thing to make a decision to go into the city so yes Museum Victoria Carlton is not so bad but definitely some of the Art Centre I absolutely dislike driving anywhere near the Art Centre so yes that is a factor too.” [F, A2]
	2. Public transport access difficulties	“It’s more the transport. I mean if it was in the city there’s not much parking and you would normally have to walk from a carpark. Adding a taxi to it would cost more, so I’d be unlikely to do that and I would never catch public transport late at night by myself.” [F, A3]
	3. Other, e.g. unwilling to travel/use public transport; too difficult to organise a visit or travel	<p>“I’m not claustrophobic, but I really don’t like lots of people. I’d never go to the MCG or one of those big venues, ever ... I’d feel uncomfortable.” [F, A3]</p> <p>“[At] the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, you’ve got to sit on the grass, so if the grass is wet I’m not going to sit on it. I don’t like sitting on grass, I prefer to have seats.” [M, A3]</p>
Personal Access	1. Personal feeling perceptions of the experience being uncomfortable, not entertaining, not fun; too challenging	A high degree of individuality in the responses was observed in this part of the in-depth interview data. Each respondent had his or her own, different personal access barrier.
		<p>“No if it is too crowded. Even things like going to the movies I tend to go through the day wherever we can because you just generally, a sign of the times but the more people you get around the more likely it is going to be that somebody is inconsiderate to the other people around them and they’ll have their mobile phone on and be talking and all that sort of thing and that just really detracts from the experience.” [M, A2]</p> <p>“I think if I didn’t understand it, I would. And if it was something that you needed to know a lot of background about or a lot of history about I would feel uncomfortable because everyone else would know what was going on and I wouldn’t.” [F, A1]</p>
	2. Personal factors precluding attendance, e.g. family circumstances, disabilities or health issues	“Yes, if I were young, I would have gone. I am very old now, I am 70 years old. I am not in good health, so I spend my time doing something necessary.” [M, A3]

	3. Other, e.g. no one to go with and could not go alone	“I also think if there was someone interested in going to these things with me, so if my friends had an interest I’d be more inclined to go. To motivate myself to actually go is too much sort of thing, I’d like to go to that and then you sort of think oh I’m not going to do this, I’m going to do that, but if you had someone else who was interested there might be a bit more reason to go or want to go.” [F, A2]
Cost	Perceptions that could not attend due to limited incomes or lack of concession pricing	“And also the cost, the cost of some of these things can be expensive so just sort of think well you know I could spend \$100 on one night somewhere but then I could spend that \$100 somewhere else on bills or those sorts of things so yes that’s perhaps another reason.”[F, A2]
	2. Cost of the overall encounter and supplementary costs	“Parking is really expensive, like Federation Square and Flinders St. Once I went there and I parked for two hours and it was \$29.” [F, A3]
	3. Value for money	When evaluating the value of a product, some interviewees consider the opportunity cost or the relative cost of another product: “The only reason I don’t go to the opera is, for \$100, what could I do [with] \$100? I could probably go to the zoo a hundred times.” [F, A3]
	4. Other, e.g. too expensive; overestimated cost of attendance	“Yes, and whilst a lot of the attractions are reasonable, when you go to say, a ballet or something like that, or even an opera, because I do like that sort of thing, the tickets are \$100-200 and at this time, it’s outside my price range.” [M, A3]
Time and Timing	Time poor consumers lack time to attend; no pressing need to attend; attend when on holidays; inconvenience of opening hours and activity schedules	“There’re lots of other things to do in Melbourne. It’s possibly a large reason why a lot of people don’t go to these things. I went to things in Canberra last year because there was nothing better to do.” [M, A2]
		“The weekend is fairly precious. Do I want to waste, do I want to spend time on the weekend going to something?” [F, A3]
		“When I retire, I’ll be going more often.” [M, A3]
Product	Poor quality offerings; represents class distinction that is “not for me”; too serious, too confronting and too intellectual; no need to re-visit; service staff were not friendly or welcoming and were unable to assist the	One interviewee found it inconvenient having to purchase tickets over the phone during work hours: “I was trying to get tickets during work hours, which is not really convenient because they put you on hold and this, that and the other, and you want to be able to see where the seats are [which is not possible when purchasing over the phone].” [F, A2]
		Another respondent was a long-time subscriber to Melbourne Symphony but one bad experience had her not returning to any Melbourne Symphony performance for good: “The other main reason I don’t go to the Concert Hall [performances] is that I had a major falling out with

	experience	Melbourne Symphony. I was a subscriber for twenty-odd years and they refused to renew my subscription. They called me some very, very unpleasant names and I said fine, forget it, give me my money back. So I've never been back since." [F, A3]
Personal Interest and Peer Group	Products not relevant or of interest; have different interests; does not reflect self identity or perceptions; peer group would not attend or think it the "thing to do"	"I walk past especially Fed Square and I walk past a lot of them a lot of the time like to go to work and stuff. But they've never actually had anything in there I guess that's interested me or they've never – I see especially in the Ian Potter Centre I always see the titles of the displays they have there and it's never really caught my attention I guess, just kind of walk past and think oh no, okay." [F, A1]
Socialisation and Understanding	Perception that cultural institutions are not for them, consumers do not understand them, engagement is too hard, unfamiliar, lack of past engagement, poor past experience, lack of socialisation with cultural institutions	Respondents who were knowledgeable about arts or high in cultural capital, too, experienced these barriers. They were, however, more adventurous and would make an attempt to interpret the less intuitive art, sometimes by seeking additional information: "I get more enjoyment out of the museums ... than National Gallery. I mean I do enjoy looking at some paintings, but there's an awful lot of painters that I don't particularly like their style or I don't admire or understand enough about it to understand why it's even classified as great art ... you often read reviews about painters or paintings and it will give you an analysis of what the painter was trying to achieve ... I find that extremely illuminating ..." [F, A3]
Information	Lack of information about the cultural attractions; information not accessible to non-English speakers; staff unable to provide information in other languages or unable to assist in explaining exhibitions	"There're often signs that you can read that are next to the exhibits which explain the history of something or the process of whatever – I just like knowing those sorts of things. It's sort of trivia in a way to me, but I just find that sort of stuff really interesting." [F, A3]

^a respondent's gender and age group level (A1 18-25, A2 26-44, and A3 45 and above) are in parentheses following each verbatim

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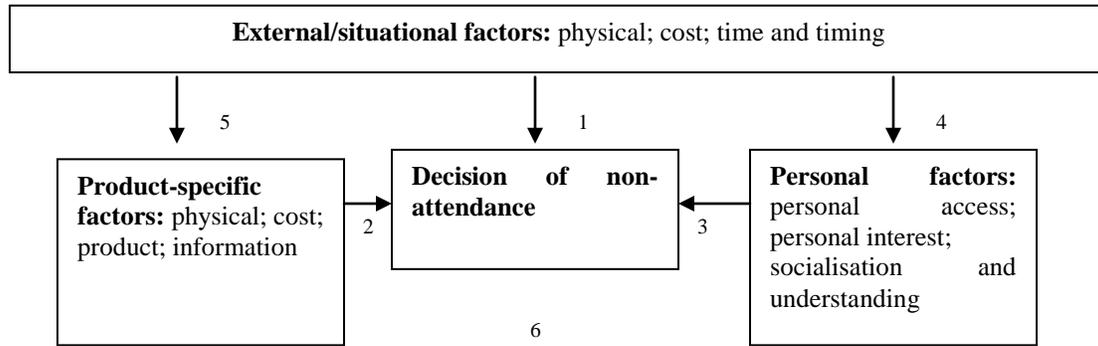


Figure 1. Interrelationships of factors leading to non-attendance

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