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Users or Supporters? Understanding Motivations and Behaviors of Museum Members



ALIX SLATER

ABSTRACT Research into museum membership schemes and their members is limited and fragmented. This study presents an overview of existing research as a contextual framework for a study of the motivations and behavior of members of a British national museum. The paper examines factors such as members' motives for joining, their usage of benefits, the value they place on membership, and their feelings about the host organization. It concludes with advice as to how membership managers can more effectively manage their own membership organization.

INTRODUCTION

The first recorded British membership group dates from 1909 at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Heaton 1992). Nearly a century later, the number of membership organizations is unknown, as is the number of members in British museums or the wider heritage sector, although there is some evidence to suggest incremental growth since 1970 (Slater, forthcoming). In 2002, 300 membership groups subscribed to the umbrella organization, the British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM), set up to help and encourage members and volunteers of heritage organizations by providing advice and information. Within these 300 organizations are cumulatively 230,000 memberships, and there are at least another 150,000 members of national museums such as the British Museum, the National Maritime Museum, and the Natural History Museum. English Heritage, a quasi-governmental agency that manages 400 historic properties on behalf of the nation and advises clients on conservation and related issues, has an additional 470,000 members (Brabbs 2001). The National Trust, founded in 1895 to

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prevent loss of open space and to manage historic properties, countryside and coastline, has more than 3 million members (National Trust 2003). A conservative estimate of between 4 and 5 million memberships and probably 500 or so membership organizations in the UK would therefore not appear to be unreasonable.

Despite these numbers, which illustrate the vast extent of membership groups and members in the UK, the literature on museum membership is fragmented. The three main sources of information for membership managers in the UK are all more than a decade old: *Members Matter*, a practitioners' manual on how to set up a membership organization (Raymond 1992); Heaton's 1992 report on the state of membership organizations for the Museums and Galleries Commission; and Burns Sadek Research Ltd's 1992 study of member motivations across the museum and arts sectors. More recently, Hayes and Slater (2003) have attempted to address current research issues by characterizing three typologies of membership organization. Slater (forthcoming) has undertaken an audit of membership schemes across the heritage sector, updating Heaton's estimates of the number of memberships held in the UK. American sociologist Horton Smith (1991; 1993) has explored member benefit organizations in the wider not-for-profit sector. Knoke (1981) has studied commitment and detachment in voluntary associations. A report by Cress et al. (1997) has examined length of membership and participation, and another by Glynn et al. (1996) has observed members' perceptions of museum membership and use of benefits.

The purpose of this paper is to draw the literature together to provide a contextual framework against which to examine the findings of a study of members of a national museum in London, U.K. This group is known as the Friends of the Museum (in Britain the terms member and friend are often used interchangeably). This paper examines motivations for joining the membership organization, use of benefits, the value placed on membership, and the relationship members feel to the host organization. These factors have not previously been studied in an integrated way. It also provides advice as to how membership managers can more effectively manage their own membership organizations.

MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

Table 1 summarizes numerous studies on the nature of member-benefit organizations, how they operate, and the impact they may have on members.

In contrast, Hayes and Slater (2003) developed three typologies of membership organization, drawing on a study of large London museums and galleries (Slater 1999). If membership organizations were plotted on a continuum, at one end a group may comprise a handful of devoted individuals who run a small "social club" with no formal constitution. This has been defined as a Social Club Group. At the other end of the continuum, an Integrated Membership Scheme is managed by the core management team, and operates to fulfill the museum's strategic objectives. Between these two poles is a Public Members Scheme, a semi-professional organization that may be managed by a

Table 1. Summary of different types of membership organization

Author/date of study	Academic approach and key findings of the study
Knoke (1981)	Sociological perspective exploring the link between the social control system and membership commitment to and detachment from organizations in the voluntary sector. Concluded that commitment declined as membership organizations became larger.
Horton Smith (1993)	A sociological study of member-benefit organizations, i.e. organizations set up to serve members for mutual benefit (intra-beneficial). Found a tendency for extra-beneficial organizations (those that serve the public) to operate with paid staff, and intra-beneficial organizations to rely more on volunteers and fees. Found that "volume of members is important to member benefit groups and that some corners are cut on quality in attracting the numbers desired." (1993:64)
Heaton (1992)	Report for the museum sector on friends, membership organizations, societies, and associations. Identified tangible and intangible benefits of a membership organization for the host organization, e.g.: income; source of advocates; bridge to the local community; lobbying; expertise; and as a source of volunteers. Concluded that organizations are diverse in scale and activities.
Raymond (1992)	<p>Report for Arts Council of Great Britain. Identified two types of scheme:</p> <p>A <i>core attender</i> scheme is essentially a loyalty scheme, with the objective of increasing attendance by developing a core audience (led by marketing and audience development). However, people aren't necessarily moved up the pyramid of involvement, from awareness to interest and then to commitment.</p> <p>A <i>contributor</i> scheme is based on altruism; it generates income from membership fees and donations and "can be used to involve members with the host organization" (1992:6) via a pyramid of involvement in which members progress from awareness to interest to commitment that meets their emotional needs.</p>
Lansley (1996)	Study of the National Trust from a sociological perspective. Concluded that the size, degree of complexity, centralization, extent of ideological commitment, and constitutional and structural factors will influence a membership organization.
Gummesson (1999)	<p>Identified two types of membership:</p> <p><i>Commercial membership</i> based on transactions between member and host to increase loyalty; and:</p> <p><i>Genuine membership</i> where members have idealistic motivations. Affinity cards are a combination of the two approaches.</p>

separate body, or be part of the host organization. Characteristics of the three typologies are presented in [table 2](#) and are contrasted using eight criteria: membership profile; purpose/mission; benefits; recruitment methods; structure/governance; fundraising; promotional methods; and evaluation techniques.

In the UK there are essentially four levels of membership in a cultural organization: subscriber; season ticket holder; member or friend; higher level member or patron. Subscription is essentially an advance sales tool to increase attendance. An individual pays to receive information about events, discounts, and early booking privileges. Subscription is most often found at performing arts organizations. A season ticket (also known as a season pass) is the museum equivalent of subscription and can be compared to a “bus pass,” it allows the holder to attend an organization any number of times for a specified period and a fixed fee. Organizations often calculate the annual price at the cost of 2.5 visits, although this will (and should) depend on visitation patterns. In the UK, season tickets are offered at museums, heritage sites, theme parks, and leisure attractions. Sometimes season ticket holders will also receive ad hoc mailings to encourage repeat visits and discounts in shops and the café. The motivation for the organization is to increase admissions and revenue; for the holder it is value for money.

Membership organizations are a further step above a season ticket or subscription. In the UK they are also known as “friends” groups, societies and associations (Heaton 1992; Carbins 1996) and are normally packaged as a “product consisting of a range of benefits that are sold for a fee” (Raymond 1992, 5). Benefits normally include free admission, and a selection of the following: regular information mailings; private viewings; discounts in the restaurant or shop; privileged treatment; reciprocal free admission at other museums or heritage sites; social activities; and the use of a Friends Room (Slater 2003). Higher-level membership is based on commitment; the underlying motivation is to give a donation to the organization. The fee that is paid does not relate to the packaging or use of benefits but is priced according to the level of donation an individual wishes to make. A key difference between the UK and USA is that American friends groups are essentially what Hayes and Slater (2003) term a Social Club Group; essentially support groups that are separate from the management of the organization. In the UK, the terms member and friend are used interchangeably.

MEMBER MOTIVATIONS

While research exists about the factors that influence museum visiting (Merriman 1991; Davies 1992; DiMaggio 1996; Krackman 1996; Verdaasdonk 1996; Van Eijck 1997; Trienekens 2002), there is an absence of an integrated understanding of individuals’ motivations for joining, using, and retaining membership (Glynn et al. 1996; Cress et al. 1997). This has implications for the management of the membership organization and host. Burns Sadek Research Ltd.’s 1992 report on membership ([table 3](#)) appears to be the key study on member motivations. It was based, however, on twenty-nine respondents in four focus groups, comprised of a diverse sample of members, friends and sub-

Table 2. Typologies of membership organizations at museums, galleries, and heritage sites (Hayes and Slater 2003)

Social Club Group —emergent, voluntary and informal	Public Members Scheme —established, semi-professional organization	Integrated Membership Scheme —re-invented, professional function/department
<p>Active belongers and enthusiasts.</p> <p>Local membership.</p> <p>Small membership base, possibly declining.</p> <p>One membership category.</p> <p>Narrow range of motivations, typically intrinsically driven.</p> <p>Affluent members with wide sphere of influence.</p> <p>Recognition of members' professional expertise.</p> <p>Individual members value opportunity to influence the organization.</p>	<p>MEMBERSHIP</p> <p>Diverse membership base, e.g., motivations, demographic profile, and behavior.</p> <p>Wider geographic spread, possibly with overseas members.</p> <p>A focus on increasing membership base.</p> <p>Stratified membership categories.</p>	<p>Growth and consolidation of membership base.</p> <p>Recognition of diverse motivations, demographic profiles, and behavior.</p> <p>Increasing stratification of membership categories or discrete brands to match market segments.</p> <p>Wide geographical extent, possibly with an active overseas branch.</p> <p>Corporate members will be recognized and developed, linking to other fundraising activities such as sponsorship.</p> <p>Sense of community / belonging fostered through programming and communications.</p> <p>Emphasis is on longitudinal management and maximization of relationships.</p>

PURPOSE / MISSION

<p>Originally adopted an advocacy role. Formalization of social network to further own social interests together with altruistic motivations towards the host organization. Driven by core of members with personal agendas. Key milestones in the development of the organization, e.g. acquisitions, and funding of specific projects.</p>	<p>The mission has diversified to include fundraising and income generation. Organized volunteerism among members and identification of opportunities for involvement. While the membership base will have grown, advocacy will remain the pre-eminence of key stakeholders and small sub-groups. Social networking confined to specific sub-groups. Mission formalized and reflected in constitution. Not an audience development tool.</p>	<p>Focus has shifted away from volunteerism and advocacy towards fundraising and development potential. Relationship-focused. Audience development function emerging and strategies developed to exploit this potential.</p>
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BENEFITS

<p>Intrinsic motivations important. “Soft” rather than “hard” benefits accrue to members.</p>	<p>“Hard” tangible membership benefits will have been introduced. Sub-groups will be motivated by a range of intrinsic and fiscal factors. Greater balance of “hard” and “soft” benefits offered. Reciprocal relationships with other organizations.</p>	<p>Membership brands established with different values and personalities attached, e.g. membership costs, benefits, nomenclature will be tailored. “Hard” and “soft” benefits in equilibrium but tailored to specific sub-sectors. Higher value members recognized, added value offered and personalization or relationship encouraged. Social networking encouraged among sub-groups.</p>
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(continues)

Table 2. (continued) Typologies of membership organizations at museums, galleries, and heritage sites (Hayes and Slater 2003)

Social Club Group —emergent, voluntary and informal	Public Members Scheme —established, semi-professional organization	Integrated Membership Scheme —re-invented, professional function/department
<p>Selective recruitment policy. Membership likely to be expanded through social network or invitation. Self-perpetuating/snowball approach. Recruitment is not a priority, as it would detract from social club experience.</p>	<p>Multiple routes to membership. Open invitation to prospective members in organizational literature. Membership is marketed and hard sell strategies employed to increase volume.</p>	<p>Multiple and new routes to membership through affiliations. Profiling of high value members to identify acquisition targets and successful approaches. Strong emphasis on retention.</p>
RECRUITMENT		
STRUCTURE/GOVERNANCE		
<p>Ownership and autonomy of organization a key characteristic. Charitable status possible. Formal mechanisms of governance and roles develop quickly, e.g. secretary, treasurer, chairman.</p>	<p>Autonomous management. Democratic processes introduced. Increasing formalization of structures and possibly paid employees to undertake administration and management. Host organization seeking opportunity to have greater control of activities. Likely to have charitable status. May have representative on the organization's board.</p>	<p>Integration gives host a high degree of control and involvement. Integrated into one of the organization's departments, e.g. marketing, development. Part of the organization's strategic planning and policies. Formalized planning. Professional management, dedicated staff team. May have board representation or be included in the senior management team.</p>

FUNDRAISING

<p>Ad hoc, driven by members for projects they deem to be of value.</p> <p>Unsophisticated methods, particularly those with a social dimension, e.g. galas.</p> <p>Likely that key individuals will make large donations and receive recognition (e.g. influence, position, status).</p>	<p>Greater emphasis on flagship fundraising projects.</p> <p>Fundraising becomes an ongoing activity and could be managed by a sub-committee or professional appointee.</p> <p>Wider range of methods employed.</p> <p>Methods selected for their fitness for purpose rather than social benefits.</p>	<p>Increasingly sophisticated techniques and more ambitious targets employed.</p> <p>Emphasis on encouraging regular giving, and on-going commitment.</p> <p>The value of scheme and database is recognized and sold on to third parties.</p>
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PROMOTION

<p>Membership organization is not formally promoted.</p> <p>Word of mouth dominates.</p> <p>Organizational literature may acknowledge the contribution of the group and key individuals.</p>	<p>Scheme actively promoted to prospective members.</p> <p>Likely to produce own literature.</p> <p>The scheme may have a clearly defined identity.</p> <p>Web site presence.</p>	<p>Web site presence.</p> <p>Professional management adopting proven marketing and fundraising strategic approaches using a diverse range of marketing communications tools.</p> <p>Proven relationship-marketing techniques.</p> <p>Brand positioning and differentiation communicated through strategic marketing.</p> <p>Literature uses organizational house style.</p>
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EVALUATION

<p>No formal evaluation of scheme is undertaken.</p> <p>High degree of self-congratulation occurs.</p> <p>Members may have an inflated sense of worth to the organization.</p>	<p>Some ad-hoc, summative evaluation.</p> <p>Simple criteria (e.g. profiling) are used for evaluation and unlikely to be comparable or integrated with research undertaken by the host.</p> <p>May or may not be shared with host.</p>	<p>Evaluation, audience, and market research undertaken and used to inform planning on a holistic basis.</p> <p>Lifetime values of members calculated.</p> <p>Cost of servicing members calculated and “expensive” members discouraged.</p>
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Table 3. Key findings of studies on member motivations and characteristics

Author/date of study	Characteristics and motivations of subgroups of members
Burns Sadek Research Limited (1992)	<p>Concluded that the triggers to membership are invariably rational, economic and tangible, and that membership will be pursued if benefits persist and emotional and psychological needs are fulfilled, e.g., the need for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> activity, a hobby and an occupation; social interaction, friendship and affiliation; social, local and area prominence; attainment and educational development. <p>Needs are fulfilled by factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attachment to a particular location, its ambience and its facilities; status attachment to a prestige organization – social interaction, friendship, affiliation, and prominence; wish to attain and develop artistic knowledge and awareness; need for activity—for attainment and educational development; economic benefits, e.g., free admission.
Raymond (1992)	<p>Focused on explaining how to set up membership schemes. Concluded that despite sub-groups of members, there are many similarities, since they are often recruited from: existing regular attenders; personal contacts; friends of existing members; the staff of corporate sponsors; attenders at open days; and members of other cultural organizations.</p>
Lansley (1996)	<p>Study of the National Trust. Lansley suggests that people are influenced by a combination of ideological commitment and perceived gains that accrue from membership, and that the motivation that prompts the initial membership is replaced by more altruistic motivations that lead them to retain membership in the longer term. Some people may become more committed, as they learn more about the values of the organization; others may lose interest, yet retain their membership out of inertia, or because they are life members.</p>
Glynn et al. (1996)	<p>A study of membership at an American art gallery. Glynn et al. summarizes that "it appears that membership does not directly translate into active participation in museum experiences, in terms of either regularly visiting the museum or attending 'members-only' special events. Thus it seems that art museum membership is complex and multi-dimensional and not entirely economic based" (1996: 261). Members may join to enhance their personal identities and self esteem through participation; those art museum members who perceive their membership to be a source of high prestige will tend to partake of museum benefits more often.</p>

Table 3. Key findings of studies on member motivations and characteristics

Author/date of study	Characteristics and motivations of subgroups of members
Cress et al. (1997)	Participation and persistence are inversely related whether participation lies in the demands of the organization or characteristics of the individual. The most active participants have shorter membership due to biographical (life-stage) commitments; those who have longer memberships are less active. This may be because the highly active members move across organizations.
Bhattacharya (1998)	Literature such as social identity theory is used to gain understanding of how membership characteristics relate to lapsing behavior using a hazard rate model on archival data pertaining to 7,798 members of an art museum. Members who receive their membership as a gift are more likely to lapse than those who bought it themselves, as are those who “downgrade” their membership. Members with a professional interest, those that are members of a related interest group, and those who donate have a lower hazard of lapsing. The hazard of lapsing also declines, at a diminishing rate over time.
Kotler and Kotler (1998)	Highlighted three typologies of members based on their participation: <i>high actives</i> who contribute the most time, energy and money (a relatively small group); <i>moderate actives</i> who participate frequently but do not get highly involved; <i>inactives</i> who participate infrequently but maintain membership.
Smith (1999)	Identified motivations of volunteers who were also members of literary heritage sites: those who use membership to actively volunteer; to express political/self interest; to obtain discounts; to exercise special interest; and to network.

scribers of an orchestra, concert venue, theaters, and a visual arts organization. Kotler and Kotler's (1998) sub-groups appear to be based on observation. Lansley's (1996) study focused on the internal politics of the National Trust. In Glynn et al. (1996), work is based on a larger sample (n=306), and although narrow in focus, is helpful in that it explores motivations and behavior. Bhattacharya, one of the authors of the previous paper, has also written about how members' characteristics relate to lapsing behavior in paid membership contexts (1998). Likewise, the Cress et al. (1997) study has been useful in this research as it explored the relationship between membership length and participation.

With the exception of Lansley (1996), Cress et al. (1997), and Bhattacharya (1998), these studies of members also fail to recognize that members' motivations and behaviors may change over time. Marketers (Raymond 1992; Payne et al. 1995; Arts About Manchester 1999; English Heritage 2000) have used ladders and pyramids to describe customers, of which members are one group. For example, English Heritage assumes that loyalty will increase as individuals move up the ladder: from a first time visitor, to an attender, repeat visitor, friend, ambassador, donor, and sponsors (English Heritage 2000). Organizations often reward involvement by providing additional privileges, offering recognition and inviting participation. The problem is that relationships are complex, influenced by a range of factors, and progression is not always sequential or linear. Members may move up or down the pyramid depending on life-stage and structural factors such as residence, income, and discretionary time. Studies on donor giving have recognized this, and there is now some skepticism about using the donor pyramid (Stoddard 1997).

Factors such as the pricing policy at an organization, the location, availability of other cultural organizations, the nature of the permanent collection, special exhibition programs, and special events programs will also influence the gender, age and life-stage profile of both the general audience and the membership base. If a museum is free, including the special exhibitions program, then the key fiscal benefit is removed, and it is likely that motivations will be less fiscally driven; members either want to become more involved, or are ideologically committed.

HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this study is to explore members' motivations, behavior, and perceptions regarding their membership and the host organization, as well as the values they place on benefits in a Public Members Scheme (Hayes and Slater 2003) or what Raymond (1992) would term a "contributor scheme." Five hypotheses were developed for testing.

1. Individuals become members because they wish to support the host organization. The first hypothesis challenges the literature (Burns Sadek Research Ltd. 1992; Heaton 1992; Glynn et al. 1996; Lansley 1996) as to why individuals join membership organizations. Despite the logical appearance of this first hypothesis, there is limited evidence or understanding of why members join, and whether membership is translated into support for an organization, for example, by volunteering or making a donation beyond the membership fee.
2. Members' behavior is influenced by geo-demographic factors and life-stage. The second hypothesis is built around members' behavior (usage of benefits/ participation). Glynn et al. (1996: 260) identified the "paradox of buying membership and then not using its participation privileges." Knoke (1981) observed that, as organizations get larger, some members become detached and therefore less

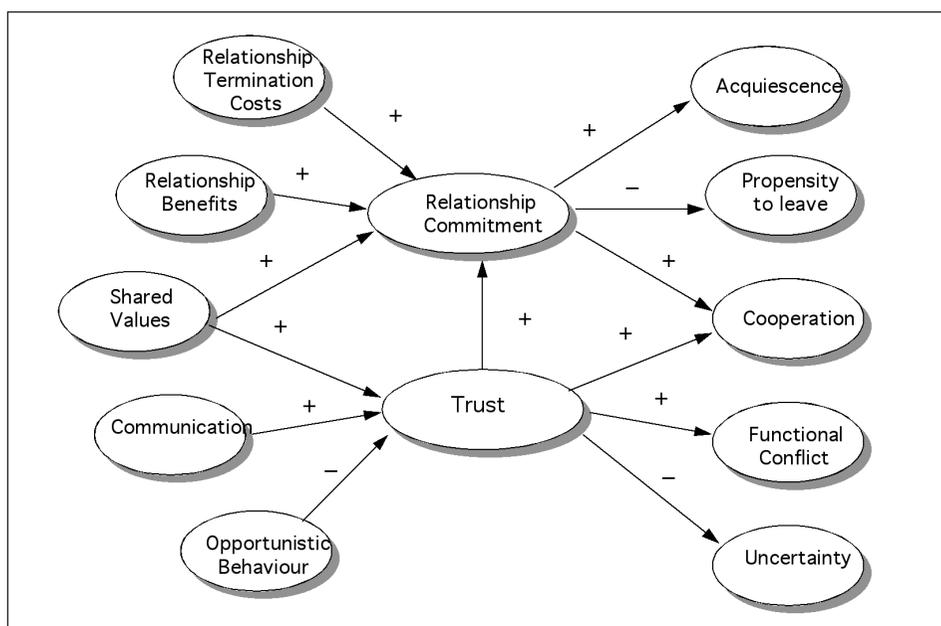


Figure 1. The KMV Model of Relationship Marketing.

committed, as opposed to the conventional model presented in the Social Club Group (Hayes and Slater 2003). Lansley (1996) discusses two polar alternatives: that some members may experience increased altruism over time, while others may retain membership due to inertia. Bhattacharya's study (1998) supports this by suggesting that the likelihood of lapsing declines over time. Cress et al. (1997) went further and recognized that the supposedly positive correlation between membership length and participation was in fact a negative. Hypothesis 2 examines the association between age, residence, life-stage, and behavior, while Hypothesis 3 tests Cress et al. (1997) findings.

3. Participation declines with membership length.
4. Members value the benefits they use most. The fourth hypothesis examines the association between the importance members put on membership benefits and the frequency with which they use them.
5. Longer serving members are more likely to have a relationship with the museum. Hypothesis 5 challenges the assumption that members feel more committed and attached to an organization over time. This hypothesis is built around Knoke's ideas of commitment and detachment (1981); Burns Sadek Research Ltd.'s (1992) conclusion that some members retain membership due to attachment to a location, ambience, and facilities; and Cress et al. (1997) findings that participation declines over time. It also draws on Morgan and Hunt's KMV model (1994) that argues trust will lead to relationship commitment (figure 1). Their model

assumes that: 1). Relationship termination costs and relationship benefits directly influence commitment (desire to maintain a relationship). 2). Shared values directly influence relationship commitment and trust (confidence one partner has in another). 3). Communication and opportunistic behavior directly influence trust, and indirectly influence commitment through trust. Relationship commitment and trust are both parts of the relationship development process (variables and mediators) and outcomes. Five outcomes are shown on the right that result from commitment, trust, or both.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The research site was an eminent national museum in London, U.K. The museum had a membership base of nearly 5,000 at the time of the study, with eight categories of membership: junior; single adult; joint adult; family; concessionary; life; benefactor; and a “higher level” membership. It is a membership organization (known as the Friends of ...) with the following objectives: to generate income for the museum; to use the Friends as advocates; and to create a pool of volunteers. It has characteristics of Raymond’s “contributor” membership organization and was classified as a Public Members Scheme in an earlier study where each membership organization was scored against 11 criteria, including: degree of autonomy; brand identity; fundraising and promotional methods; level of business planning; and application of evaluation. This membership organization scored 21 out of a maximum of 33 points (1 was low and 3 high). The range for the Public Membership Scheme category was 19 to 26, thus it was at the lower end of the threshold (Hayes and Slater 2003). (In the original study it was coded as organization F.) In the USA it may well be perceived as a Friends association, as it is an independent charity managed by a paid director and volunteers, and separate from the host organization, although there is mutual cooperation and support. Benefits of membership at the time of the research included: free admission for the member and a guest at special exhibitions; reciprocal free admission at other sites; discounts in the shops and restaurants; free parking on weekends; a Friends room; information mailings; previews; events; and the opportunity to be involved in the museum through volunteering and to participate in activities in a sociable learning environment. At the time of the study the organization also offered a season pass providing free admission. The pass was sold by museum staff at the cash register as a season ticket, although the revenue went to the Friends organization. Season ticket holders became Friends for all intents and purposes, since they were on the same database and received the same benefits as members. This has now changed: The organization has removed the admission charge to the main collection, a variant that will be discussed in the conclusion.

A postal questionnaire was sent to 4828 people, the membership base; 1440 valid questionnaires were returned, a 30 percent response rate, the same as in the Glynn et al. (1996) study. Family, single adult and life memberships were slightly over-represented compared to the membership base, but by no more than 5 percent. Anecdotal evi-

dence suggested that longer serving members were more likely to participate in the research.

MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES

Respondents were asked to indicate what originally motivated them to join the membership organization. Using a categorical scale, they could indicate a main, second and third reason. The options included: benefits of membership; support of the organization financially; personal interest in the museum; and research facilities. Categorical scales were also used to indicate: membership category; length of membership; residence; age; retirement status; children living in the household; and if they had, or would like to, volunteer. Usage of benefits was measured using a 7-point Likert scale, anchored by (1) indicating "more than once a week," (6) "less than once a year" and (7) "never." The importance members placed on benefits was measured using a 4-point Likert scale, (1) indicating "of very great importance," and (4) "of no importance." A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure willingness to volunteer or donate, with (1) "very willing," (4) "not willing at all" and (5) "don't know." Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about their membership, once again using a 5-point Likert scale. These were developed from the relationship marketing theory and based on Morgan and Hunt's (1994) KMV model. A 5-point Likert scale was used: (1) "agree" (2) "mostly agree" (3) "partly agree" (4) "disagree" and (5) "strongly disagree."

The research was originally undertaken to assist with future planning for the membership organization. Consequently many categories were used to obtain detailed information and resulted in cells with values of less than 5. Some categories were combined for the analysis that is presented in this paper. Length of membership was originally recorded in 5 categories; these were regrouped into 3, and usage of benefits condensed from 7 to 4 groups. For example: "more than once a week" and "once a week" became "more than once a month," "once a month" and "once every 3 months" became "1 to 3 months," and "once a year" and "less than once a year" became "once a year or less." The category "never" was not altered.

RESULTS AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The subject matter of the museum, and benefits offered by the membership organization, encourage an aging (59 percent over 55 years and 41 percent over 65 years), male (67 percent) membership that wants to retain links with "like minded people" and people with a specialist interest in the collections. In the sample, 47 percent lived in Greater London (London Boroughs), 30 percent in the Southeast (Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Dorset, Hampshire, Essex), 19 percent in the rest of the UK, and 3 percent overseas. Half of all respondents had held their membership for more than 6 years; while this may

indicate loyalty it also reflects the aging membership base. In contrast, 40 percent of the family members in the sample had become members during the last two years. The share of respondents who were classified (by occupation and income) as A or B⁴ was 57 percent, three times higher than the general population, but consistent with recent research in which 56 percent of ABs, who are in nonmanual occupations, were found to be regular museum or gallery users compared to 23 percent of DEs, in manual or non-earning occupations (Museums and Galleries Commission 1999). Three quarters (n=1065) of respondents stated their household income, of which £70,000 or more (approx. \$110,000 US) was the most frequently cited category. Nearly half of the individuals in the sample were members of the National Trust and a third were members of English Heritage.

TESTS OF HYPOTHESES

1. Individuals become members because they wish to support the host organization—

The three most-cited reasons for becoming a member were: personal interest (28 percent), free admission (25 percent), and financial support for the museum (14 percent). Reciprocal free admission, events, and research facilities were secondary and far less significant motivations. Motivation for joining was cross tabulated with membership category, residence, age, retirement status, and whether children were in the household, the latter two indicating life-stage. All the dependent variables were significant. There is a moderate association (Blaikie 2003) between reasons for membership and life-stage, and a weaker association between age, residence, and membership category (tables 4 and 5).

Table 5 illustrates that the relative differences between groups can be up to 36 percent, although the associations are weak or moderate. “Hard benefits” such as free admission are more important for households with children, those holding family memberships, and Londoners; this group is less likely to join to “support the museum financially.” There is some overlap between these groups: for example, 59 percent of family members live in Greater London and 57 percent are households with children. In contrast, retired members are more likely to be motivated by personal interest. The associations may be weak because of the diverse motivations of individuals and the number of categories that respondents could choose from, although within the data there are clear differences between groups.

The hypothesis was also tested by cross-tabulating reasons for joining and members’ willingness to donate, past volunteerism and willingness to volunteer. Of those who answered the question on willingness to give (n=1136), 4 percent were very willing to give, 28 percent quite willing, 31 percent not very willing, 16 percent not willing at all and 21 percent were not sure. From a base of 1055 respondents, 31 were current volunteers, and 57 past volunteers. A further 151 indicated they would be willing to volunteer. Motivation for becoming a member was cross-tabulated against these variables. The statistical significance of the findings varied and for all the variables there was a

Table 4. Association between reason for becoming a member, membership category, residence, age, and life-stage

	n	x²	df	V	P
Membership category	1175	210.452	50	.190	.000
Residence	1188	160.347	30	.208	.000
Age	1189	284.130	40	.240	.000
Retired	1143	131.612	10	.330	.000
Children	1175	168.478	10	.381	.000

Table 5: Comparison between groups and main reason for originally becoming a member.

Motivation for joining	Free admission	Support the museum financially	Personal interest
Children in household (n=317)	57 percent	12 percent	20 percent
No children in household (n=858)	21 percent	20 percent	38 percent
Retired (n=526)	17 percent	20 percent	38 percent
Not retired (n=617)	42 percent	14 percent	29 percent
Family membership (n=299)	58 percent	12 percent	18 percent
Concessionary membership (n=233)	19 percent	18 percent	36 percent
21 to 39 years (n=120)	58 percent	13 percent	19 percent
65-plus years (n=468)	14 percent	22 percent	39 percent
Live in Greater London (n=567)	41 percent	14 percent	28 percent
Live in rest of UK (n=222)	15 percent	22 percent	36 percent

Table 6. Association between motivation for becoming a member and willingness to support the organization

	n	x²	df	V	p
Willingness to donate	1136	59.398	40	.113	.033
Willingness to volunteer	978	22.257	10	.133	.066
Have volunteered	1055	41.505	20	.145	.001

weak association (table 6). However, those very or quite willing to give were more likely to have cited “personal interest” or “to support the museum financially” and were less likely to cite “free admission.” Past volunteers were more willing to support the organization and less driven by free admission than current volunteers, or the remainder of the sample.

There are negligible associations between residence, retirement, age, and willingness to give; and a weak association with children in the household. Membership category and length of membership are not statistically significant. Hypothesis 1 is therefore rejected; members do not universally join because they wish to support the organization.

2. and 3. Members' behavior is influenced by geo-demographic factors and life-stage, and participation declines with membership length—Members were asked how often they used their membership benefits, or participated in events. Free admission was the most used benefit, with 50 percent of members visiting at least every three months, and a handful who are visiting at least once a week. Approximately a quarter of members also use the following benefits at least once every three months: publications (32 percent), the Friends Room (28 percent), and free parking at the museum (25 percent). Guest passes (20 percent), discounts (19 percent), and reciprocal free admission (18 percent) are used slightly less. The same benefits are used by a further 38 percent to 50 percent of members at least once a year. In contrast, a smaller share of members attends private views, Friends events, and holidays created by the membership organization overall, and on a less frequent basis.

Use of the most popular benefits was cross-tabulated with residence, age, and life-stage (retirement status and children in household) and length of membership. Virtually all the findings are significant and $p \geq 0.001$ with the exception of those variables indicated in [table 8](#). The strongest associations are between residence and free admission ($\chi^2 = 0.380$), free parking ($\chi^2 = 0.287$), the Friends Room ($\chi^2 = 0.250$) and discounts in the shop and café ($\chi^2 = 0.240$). Weak associations (0.10 – 0.29) (Blaikie 2003) exist between many of the other variables, for example: residence and reciprocal free admission, guest passes, and attendance at events; age and free admission, reciprocal free admission, parking, guest passes and discounts; children and free admission, reciprocal free admission, parking, discounts and events; and retirement and free admission, reciprocal free admission, parking, guest passes, discounts and events.

There is a moderate association between length of membership and free admission ($\chi^2 = 0.240$), and weak associations with the other variables ([table 8](#)). Free admission is used by 70 percent of members who joined during the last two years compared to 47 percent of members who have held their membership for six years or longer. Those who say they never use free admission or discounts do not seem to be influenced by length of membership. Use of other tangible benefits, where there is an economic return (for example, reciprocal free admission, guest passes, and the Friends Room) decline over time; they are used much more frequently (at least once every 3 months) by new members (those who have joined in the last 2 years) compared to members of 6 years or longer. Usage of publications and parking is more complex. Hypotheses 2 and 3 are therefore partly accepted.

4. Members value the benefits they use most—Hypothesis 4 was accepted. The association between usage of benefits and their importance (value) to members ranges from moderate (0.23 – 0.59) to very strong (0.75–0.99) ([table 9](#)) (Blaikie 2003). All the find-

Table 7. Association between willingness to give and residence, age, life-stage, length of membership and membership category

	n	x ²	df	C6	V	p
Residence	1352	19.880	8	.121	.087	.001
Age	1351	29.332	16	.147	.074	.019
Children	1338	18.194	4	.110	.111	.002
Retired	1305	10.333	4	.088	.089	.037
Length of membership	1339	10.045	8	.085	.061	.275
Membership category	1328	29.254	20	.147	.075	.078

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ings were significant at $p \geq .000$. Respondents who cited a benefit of “very great” or “great importance” tended to use it at least once every three months, and those cited “of some importance” were used once a year. Free admission does not rank higher among the benefits, since respondents have a range of visiting patterns; for some of the other variables, usage and the value of the benefit is more bipolar (used frequently or not at all), once again indicating the complexity of usage of benefits and motivations for joining.

5. Longer serving members are more likely to have a relationship with the museum—*G* was used to measure the strength of association between length of membership and how members feel about their membership and relationship with the museum; $p \geq .001$ other than where stated. The association is negative; the longer respondents had been members, the more likely they were to agree with the statement. The strongest association was between loyalty and length of membership; this was moderate. The remaining associations were weak, negligible, or not statistically significant (table 10). Hypothesis 5 was therefore rejected.

DISCUSSION

The research was undertaken to explore members’ motivations for joining, their behavior, the value they place on benefits, and their perceptions of their membership and the host organization.

Hypothesis 1 stated that individuals become members because they wish to support the host organization. This was rejected on the basis that a quarter of respondents joined for free admission, and only 14 percent joined “to support the host organization financially.” A third of respondents were very (4 percent) or quite willing (28 percent) to give beyond their membership fee and less than 100 respondents had, or were current volunteers. The research indicates that households with children, those holding family memberships and Londoners are more likely to be driven by tangible benefits such as free admission; they are using their membership like a season ticket. In contrast,

Table 8. Association between usage of benefits and socio-demographic and life-stage factors

Free Admission	n	x2 (7)	df	C	V	P8
Residence	1264	226.339	9	.380	.237	
Age	1260	63.356	1	.219	.129	
Children	1255	30.576	3	.145	.146	
Retired	1218	27.084	3	.147	.148	
Length of membership	1252	58.966	6	.289	.151	

Reciprocal Free Admission	n	x2	df	C	V	p
Residence	1221	66.102	9		.132	
Age	1217	70.916	12		.145	
Children	1214	21.978	3		.136	
Retired	1180	26.334	3		.148	
Length of membership	1208	87.109	6		.196	

Parking	n	x2	df	C	V	p
Residence	1238	120.472	9	.173	.287	
Age	1234	52.636	12		.116	
Children	1228	40.457	3	.181	.184	
Retired	1193	17.415	3	.119	.12	
Length of membership	1226	37.622	6	.168	.120	

Friends Room	n	x2	df	C	V	p
Residence	1223	86.576	9	.250	.149	
Age	1219	21.992	12	.135	.078	.032
Children	1212	11.304	3	.094	.095	.01
Retired	1182	8.124	3	.083	.083	.044
Length of membership	1209	57.060	6	.215	.156	

Guest Passes	n	x2	df	C	V	p
Residence	1209	122.657	9		.177	
Age	1204	63.519	12		.139	
Children	1200	8.252	3		.079	.058
Retired	1164	21.860	3		.132	
Length of membership	1197	48.260	6		.143	

Table 8. (continued) Association between usage of benefits and socio-demographic and life-stage factors

Discounts in Shop and Café	n	x²	df	C	V	p
Residence	1227	82.870	9	.240	.143	
Age	1222	48.8	12		.115	
Children	1217	15.757	3	.113	.114	
Retired	1184	12.094	3	.100	.101	.007
Length of membership	1213	33.781	6	.166	.119	

Events	n	x²	df	C	V	p
Residence	1256	48.824	9		.106	
Age	1251	24.320	12		.078	.029
Children	1245	25.425	3		.143	
Retired	1210	15.57	3		.113	
Length of membership	1240	13.323	6		.071	.053

Publications	n	x²	df	C	V	p
Residence	1084	10.989	9	.103	.060	.237
Age	1083	17.981	12	.138	.081	.048
Children	1077	7.728	3	.083	.083	.059
Retired	1049	6.380	3	.077	.078	.097
Length of membership	1072	18.410	6	.128	.091	.006

Table 9. Association between value members put on benefits and their usage

	n	G	Strength of association	Tau-b9
Events	1180	.853	{very strong	.604
Free parking at weekend	1198	.836	{	.677
Private views	1151	.792	{	.534
Guest passes	1139	.787	{	.583
Friends Room	1149	.738	{strong	.533
Reciprocal free admission	1160	.729	{	.512
Discounts in shop/café	1164	.613	{	.414
Free admission	1218	.584	{moderate	.382
Publications	1019	.549	{	.372

Table 10. Strength of association between length of membership and members' perceptions about their membership and the museum

	n	G	P
I feel I am part of the museum	1247	-.068	.063
I feel I am loyal to the museum	1253	-.236	
I feel involved in the museum	1221	-.125	
I feel I have a voice at the museum	1183	-.074	.044
I value my Friends membership	1291	-.086	.047
I feel the museum values my membership	1221	-.004	.914
I feel I am committed to the museum	1215	-.124	
I trust the museum	1198	-.035	.370
I feel I have a relationship with the museum	1221	-.138	
I am satisfied with my membership	1331	-.043	.289

households without children, retired members, those 65-years or older, who hold concessionary membership and live in "the rest of the UK" are more likely to support the host organization and join out of personal interest. Some are obviously living too far away to visit very often. Unprompted comments on the questionnaires suggested that some members see retention of their membership as "payback" for the enjoyable visits they had when they lived in the area. However, these are weak associations, making the task for membership managers very complex when they are seeking donations or volunteers and attempting to upgrade members to higher-level membership categories. Discrete sub-groups of members do exist with the same motivations but cannot easily be segmented by geo-demographic or life-stage factors. Bhattacharya (1998) draws similar conclusions: that membership length significantly diminishes lapsing time and that motivations may vary across different membership categories.

Hypothesis 2, that members' behavior is influenced by geo-demographic factors and life-stage, is partly accepted. There are moderate associations between residence and attendance, use of the Friends Room, discounts in the shop and café, and free parking on weekends. This is not entirely surprising; those who live closest use the fiscal benefits most. A large share is likely to have children in the household or hold family membership, as discussed previously.

Hypothesis 3, that participation declines with membership length, is accepted in relation to free admission, and partly accepted for the other membership benefits. These findings support both the Cress et al. (1997) study that participation and membership length are not necessarily positively related, and the Glynn et al. (1996) observation that there is a paradox in buying membership and then not using the privileges it offers. Members who have joined during the last two years are more likely to use these benefits (particularly free admission) than those who have been members for six years or longer.

Hypothesis 4, that members value the benefits they use most, is accepted. The association between usage of benefits and their importance (value) to members ranged from $G=0.549$ for publications to $G=0.853$ for events. Respondents who identified a benefit as being of “very great” or “great importance” tended to use it at least once every three months; those who identified it as of “some importance” used it once a year. The data also supported the conclusion of Glynn et al. (1996: 261) that “museum membership is complex and multidimensional and not entirely economic based.”

Despite the logic of hypothesis 5, that longer serving members are more likely to have a relationship with the museum, it was rejected. Associations between length of membership and the feelings members had about their membership and the host organization were weak or negligible, with the exception of loyalty, which not surprisingly increased with time. Members may feel less committed and more detached over time because the membership organization has grown (as Knoke 1981 suggested); because they have moved away but retain membership (Burns Sadek Research Ltd. 1992); and because participation declines over time (Cress et al. 1997). The findings also contradict Morgan and Hunt’s model (1994). Further research is required to explore this.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study reflect the diverse and complex motivations and behavior of members who are being serviced as a homogeneous group by this Friends organization. There is a group of Friends who value their membership for the intrinsic benefits they get from it, for example, belonging: having the opportunity to participate and to learn more and meet people. This group is more likely to be retired or adult. Another group, those holding family membership, households with children, and those living in London and the Southeast, value their membership for the fiscal benefits they receive, such as free admission, free parking and discounts in shops and cafes. Despite the large sample size, and generally strong statistical significance of the findings, associations between variables were rarely strong, although an examination of the data showed clear links, for example, between motivation and geo-demographic and life-stage factors. This is probably due to the number of categorical variables.

Since the study, the museum has implemented free admission, as have many national museums in the UK as a result of government policy to increase access to museums and galleries. Not surprisingly, members who originally joined as season ticket holders and other members who were motivated by the benefit of free admission have not renewed their membership. The Friends have therefore been forced into rethinking their membership package. This is a potential problem for all membership organizations that sell memberships on the basis that they are good value for money. Individuals make a calculated decision based on the number of times they visit, as to whether to join, and to retain membership. For the museum in this study, the loss of these members is not necessarily a negative. Nobody knew how many times they were visiting, whether there was secondary spend in shops and cafes, or the cost of servicing them. By focusing on

members who wish to become more involved and support the organization, the membership may well be using its resources more effectively and efficiently.

This case study is useful for other membership managers who are reevaluating their membership organization. The size, purpose, and management of the scheme may well have altered as issues of access have moved up organizational agendas. Managers need to consider what the organization wishes to achieve. Is the primary purpose of the organization to increase visitor numbers, to raise income, to develop new or specific audience groups, to involve audiences, or a combination of these? If the focus is on increasing visitor numbers, or a large number of members are motivated by free admission, then economically a season ticket is the more logical option.

Managers need to calculate the cost based on the number of average visits, and the point at which a season ticket would start to increase visits without losing existing income. Groups that will be attracted to this type of offer are local residents, particularly those who have children and are price sensitive. This is also a safe and low-risk option for developing new audience groups who are unlikely to become members, either because they are unaware of the organization, or because price is a barrier. The organization may wish to use events to target specific groups, ultimately trying to build up loyalty, and possibly converting them to members in the future. The evidence from this research suggests that this is not likely to be a large group, and the organization will need to carefully consider the costs and return in taking this latter approach.

Organizations should also be aware that the “take up” on a season ticket might be considerable. Additionally, there are management implications in servicing this group. In some instances it may be viable to run season tickets alongside different levels of membership. A business plan is essential for both.

By separating out individuals who are motivated by fiscal benefits, and servicing them as season ticket holders in a cost-effective way, the organization can then focus on individuals who are joining because they wish to become more involved. Research can elicit information about prices members are willing to pay for events, willingness to donate and volunteer. Membership categories and benefits can be priced to generate maximum income and recognize groups that wish to become involved. They can also serve to support the organization, and retain links. Members who may not be able to visit due to structural factors such as moving away, personal mobility, and life-stage (for example, having small children) may be offered “country memberships” at a reduced rate or memberships that focus on providing information, but recognize low levels of visitation.

This research has highlighted the problems of servicing such a diverse group of members. There are unique difficulties inherent in the way the organization has been managed in the past. Since the research was completed, the museum has addressed some of these factors, recruited a young person to encourage younger members, and is striving to enhance the offering to members, focusing on the support members are giving to the museum. There is obviously a need for further research in this area, to understand motivations for originally joining, retaining, and upgrading membership, and to understand how time affects the usage and meaning of membership to members.

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NOTES

1. In the UK, the Market Research Society classification system grades the occupation of the “chief income earner” or the head of the household, using a 6–point scale: A, B, C1, C2, D and E. A, B and C1 represent nonmanual occupations, C2 and D manual, and E household nonearners, for example those receiving state benefits, or the basic state pension. Approximately 3 per cent of the population is classified as A, 14 percent B, 26 percent C1, 25 percent C2, 19 percent D and 13 percent E (MRS 1991).
2. Likelihood ratio has been used as a substitute for Chi-Square, since the criteria for the number of cells with values less than 5 could not always be met. Although the contingency coefficient was higher than Cramer’s V, it has not been shown, since the size of tables differed, and the author did not want readers to make comparisons between values for each variable.
3. C is not significant as χ^2 does not reach the critical value.
4. Likelihood ratio has been used for all variables for consistency, since the data didn’t always meet the criteria for its use. Where χ^2 was not valid it has not been included.
5. $p \geq 0.001$ unless otherwise stated.
6. Kendall’s tau-b is shown as an alternative to G as the variables are presented in square tables. It is normally more conservative than G but illustrates the strong association between usage of benefits and their importance to respondents.