

# Consumer behavior

## Case study of a fitness club on frequency of use in satisfaction and retention

GONÇALVES, C.<sup>1,3,4</sup> (CELINAG@IPB.PT), MEIRELES, P.<sup>2</sup> (PEDRO16.AM@HOTMAIL.COM), CARVALHO, M. J.<sup>2,4</sup> (MJC@FADE.UP.PT)

1 POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE OF BRAGANÇA, PORTUGAL; 2 FACULTY OF SPORT, UNIVERSITY OF PORTO, PORTUGAL (FADEUP),  
3 RESEARCH CENTRE CIDESD, PORTUGAL; 4 RESEARCH CENTRE CIFI2D, PORTUGAL

### Introduction

Frequency of use, satisfaction and retention of members in a fitness Club in Oporto. Understanding the consumers' behavior in fitness industry is important, in order to act accordingly to their needs and, consequently, increase the fitness clubs yield, keeping more and better members (Ferrand, Robinson, & Valette, 2010; Gonçalves, Biscaia, Correia, & Diniz, 2014). This is particularly crucial when the activity reports show a decreasing number of permanent members. Talley (2008) refers to the frequency of use among a set of variables directly linked to increased adherence, while Ferrand et al. (2010) refer that regular frequency of the fitness club is vital to members' retention and impacts positively on the clubs' profitability. Similarly, Gonçalves et al. (2014) studied a set of variables that influence retention but only mentioned the frequency of use as a key variable for future studies of members' retention in fitness and MacIntosh and Doherty (2005) support that the frequency of use is relevant to understand the decision to remain at a fitness club. Moreover, the authors add that the frequency that the member goes to the club is synonym of his satisfaction at the club (Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsozbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2004) and, consequently, his decision to remain there.

### Method

The surveys were distributed by an experienced interviewer in a club located in Oporto. Members were asked to participate in the study when arriving at the club, and the surveys were self-administered. Data was collected in 2014, with a sample of 146 members. The instrument was constituted by the sample characterization and questions to understand the behaviour of fitness consumers: frequency of use, satisfaction and retention. The frequency of use variable was suggested in literature (Ferrand et al., 2010) and by fitness managers (Talley, 2008). Satisfaction at the club was measured using 5 items based on Diener et al. (1997) scale and general satisfaction was measured using a single item based on Alexandris et al. (2004). Retention was measured using 5 items [e.g. recommendation (Alexandris et al. (2004)) based on literature. All items were measured with a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, to 7=strongly agree). The statistical analysis was performed with SPSS. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the satisfaction and retention items ( $\alpha=0.933$ ).

### Results

In this study the percentage of the members going three or more times to the club is significant (64.0%;  $n=96$ ). The results show high overall satisfaction levels. Also, the different items of cognitive assessment of satisfaction at the club are highly assessed, especially when referring to the positive experience at the club (91.1%), the level of satisfaction (90.3%) and considering themselves happy at their club (87.0%). Regarding retention, almost all the items show that the members are retained, as the majority intends to remain at the club. Most say that if they were to subscribe now, they would make the same decision of choosing that club (87.0%) and intend to recommend the club to family and friends (84,2%). However, a lesser percentage plans to buy more club services' (44.5%) indicating that this item can't be valuable in assessing retention. Moreover, regarding for the comparative study, the results show no significant relationship between the frequency of visits to the club with the overall satisfaction, satisfaction with the club and with the retention.

### Discussion and implications

These results are in accordance with the study of Gonçalves et al. (2014), which also didn't indicate any significant relationships between variables and against the study of Ferrand et al. (2010) and some practice references (Talley, 2008), which state that managers consider the frequency of use as a predictor of satisfaction and a determinant factor of members' retention. Thus, these results suggest better research and analysis in this and other clubs, since generalized conclusions to fitness can't be drawn. However, although not mentioned in this study, it appears to be important that managers make an effort to encourage customers to attend the club more often so that its profitability remains positive. Yet, it is suggested that the clubs' context and characteristics deserve a continuous study of the satisfaction and retention comparing to the frequency of visits to the club. The results indicate that the fitness club managers must act to keep those who are less likely to remain, those with less frequent use, and those who have a lower satisfaction and, consequently, lower retention.

### Keywords

Fitness Management, Managers, Members, Retention, Training frequency

### References

- Alexandris, K., Zahariadis, P., Tsozbatzoudis, C., & Grouios, G. (2004). An empirical investigation of the relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction and psychological commitment in a health club context. *European Sport management Quarterly*, 4(1), 36-52.
- Ferrand, A., Robinson, L., & Valette, P. (2010). The intention-to-repurchase paradox: A case of the health and fitness industry. *Journal of Sport Management*, 24, 83-105.
- Gonçalves C, Biscaia R, Correia A, Diniz A. (2014). An examination of members' intentions to recommend fitness centres. *Motriz. Journal of Physical Education*, 20, 384-391.
- MacIntosh E, Doherty A. (2005). Leader Intentions and employee perceptions of organizational culture in a private fitness corporation. *Sport Management Quarterly*, 5, 1-22.
- Talley, M. (2008). Customer retention: a manager's perspective. In B. Oakley & M. Rhys (Eds.), *The Sport and Fitness Sector: An Introduction* (pp. 231 – 250). New York: Routledge.