

## **Fitness industry: The influence of service attributes in membership renewal**

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Background: Nowadays there are several scientific researches about factors that encourage intention to renew and consequently promote retention. Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis & Grouios (2004) consider expectations and the influence of satisfaction in retention with Murray and Howat (2002). Green (2005) focuses on motivation for the participation and commitment in physical activity. Bodet (2006) mentions that the quality is related to the member perception of results. Although the service attributes don't have the same value and consequently don't have the same influence in satisfaction (Bodet, 2006), it is necessary to understand the more significant attributes.

Studying retention by perception of service attributes seems to be a possible explanation. This perception depends on one or more service attributes that the member considers more important to renew the membership. Tharrett and Peterson (2006) mention that it is possible to understand the reasons why members join the club: specialized human resources, friendly staff and proper space. MacIntosh and Doherty (2005) have argued that Gyms and Health Clubs (GHC) should transmit the members kindness, trust, integrity, fitness, positive attitude, performance, passion, innovation, development and communication. Green (2005) adds variables associated to join the club: social interaction, skills development, enjoyment, relation with the staff and achievement of the desired goals of health and wellbeing. GHC have been trying to understand their consumers in order to keep them in the clubs (Green, 2005). If a member does not recognize the key points of the option, retention may not be effective (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders & Wong, 2002).

Objectives: Considering the dimension of the fitness marketing in Portugal [in 2005 there were 1100 GHC for 480 000 members, with 4,8% average of participation (European Market Report, 2005)], the present study aims to find out to what extent the perception that the members have from GHC contributes to the intention to renew, through specific variables of positioning.

Methods: The sample is formed by 2520 members from 8 clubs of the group Solinca Health & Fitness Clubs (Portuguese network). The questionnaire was applied to the members when they joined the club. The sample shows an error band of  $p=0,05$  (Tagliacarne, 1976). The questionnaire is formed by: independent variables (age, gender, qualifications and income); dimensions of positioning (resources, accessibility, service and image) with 5 specific items each one, the respondents were asked to indicate their agreement using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 "does not apply" to 5 "applies completely"; specific variables (motivation for the practice, constant/inconstant motivation, frequency, activities attended and monthly spending) and finally with 3 questions about the intention to repurchase and influence other to

join the club. To analyze the reliability of the questionnaire we used a technique that estimates the internal consistency, namely the coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ ) of Cronbach, and obtained the value 0.941 for the 34 variables, representing a value ( $\alpha$ ) of reliability, excellent. The data was analysed with the descriptive statistics, the discriminant analysis and the factor analysis (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 1998) with principal components extraction, to summarize the factors (attributes) which explain most of the variability of the purchase intention.

Results: The data shows that the majority of the sample is relatively young, with some familiar and financial availability for physical activity. The questionnaire has been proven to make relevant factor analysis, resulting in new factors with good internal consistency ( $\alpha$ ): "Facilities and equipment", "Human resources service" (HR's), "Innovation and speed" and "Accessibility space/time". For the factors "Facilities and equipment", "HR's service" and "Accessibility spatial/temporal", the perception of members indicates that these factors are perceived as relevant to continue practicing. For the factor "Innovation and speed," the perception of members indicates that the attributes apply well, except the attribute affordable prices that most in the category referred to as fairly.

Discussion and conclusion: The price appears without importance in the decision making process like in the research of Ferrand, Robinson and Valette-Florence (2010). The female members, with higher qualifications, have an average perception of the club's image, which can favour the dropout. Green (2005) refers to that, for members to continue in the organisation, they need to find value in the participation. The members showing the improvement of the physical condition as main motivation consider the GHC as specialized and intend to visit the club frequently. Both in the research of Tharrett and Peterson (2006) it seems that people need the practice in order to feel improvement in their wellbeing and health. This means that the relationship between practice and research needs constant understanding of consumers in general and members of GHC in particular, in order to repurchase their membership.

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