

# The relationship among service experience, perceived value and behavioural intentions of customers in a group fitness class

Manuel Jesús Baena-Arroyo\*, Pablo Gálvez-Ruiz\*\*, Antonio Jesús Sánchez-Oliver\* and Aina Bernal-García\*\*\*

*THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG SERVICE EXPERIENCE, PERCEIVED VALUE AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS OF CUSTOMERS IN A GROUP FITNESS CLASS*

**KEYWORDS:** Service experience, Perceived value, Behavioural intentions, Fitness centres, Group fitness class, Virtual fitness class.

**ABSTRACT:** Understanding the importance of the customer perception during the experience in the fitness centre is fundamental to comprehend behavioural intentions for fitness centre managers. This study attempts to understand how important and necessary is consumer's assessment of service experience, perceived value, and behavioural intention, and the relationships among these variables into group fitness class (GFC), and Virtual fitness class (VFC). Data was collected from 1.943 customers. The confirmatory factor analysis indicated an adequate goodness-of-fit-indexes for the model obtained. Structural equation modeling analysis revealed the positive and significant effect of service experience on customers' perceived value and behavioural intention, but results show that perceived value has poor fit on behavioural intentions. The overall customer's perception of GFC and VFC can be a focus for fitness centre's managers aiming to improve fitness service supply related to new technologies in the fitness industry to increase intentions to repurchase.

The service has been always analysed as a general factor, however one of the activities that seems to increase the popularity is the group fitness class (GFC). According to the last IHRSA Member Retention Report in 2014, concluded 88% of group exercise members retained their membership compared to 82% of gym-only members. The risk of cancellation was 56% higher in gym-only members compared to group fitness exercisers (International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association, 2014). The marketing and service literature, Theodorakis, Howat, Ko and Avaourdiadou (2014), asseverate the necessity to clarify the role of key drivers that explain customer loyalty, and specifically, the application to sport and fitness context.

In this work, Group fitness class (GFC) is under study because GFC may form the core business into the current reality in sport and fitness centres (International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association, 2014). In fact, Rasmus Ingerslev, recently new IHRSA chair, declared that fitness industry must evolve and Virtual fitness class (VFC) is adapted to consumer's demands. VFC is another group service in fitness centres, where no instructor manages the class and a virtual fitness device runs the activity (Baena-Arroyo, García-Fernández, Bernal-García, Lara-Bocanegra y Galvez-Ruiz, in press).

Edvardsson, Gustaffson and Roos (2005) describe service experience as a service process that creates cognitive, behavioural and emotions' customer response, where the response is produced

during the service encounter. Berry, Carbone and Haeckel (2002) suggested three groups of clues that compensate a service experience: functional clues, mechanic clues, and human clues. Researchers have shown that service experience operate such as antecedent from behavioural intentions (Kim and Choi, 2013; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010), even Ostrom, Bitner, Burkhard, Goul, Smith-Daniels et al. (2010) have developed a considerable effort to understand the relation to "enhancing the service experience through co-creation, and measuring and optimizing the value of service" (Ostrom et al., 2010, p.2). Therefore, service experience result an interesting variable to consider how these relationships occur and are not necessarily linear, rather dynamic (Klaus and Maklan, 2012).

Finally, on the case of fitness centers Garcia and Sañudo (2013) proposed a survey and linked service experience as a key driver of behavioural intentions.

Perceived value has a strong presence throughout marketing literacy. As Martin, Gremler, Washburn and Cepeda (2010) have suggested, that value is typically seen as a tradeoff between what consumers receive versus what they give back. Also, it is suggested that value is defined by and co-created with the customer rather than embedded in the output, considering the customer in the hub of the process. Unidimensional approach describes perceived value using single-item measure (Bolton and Drew, 1991; McDougall and Levesque, 2000). In sports and

Correspondencia: Manuel Jesús Baena-Arroyo. Departamento de Educación Física y Deporte, Facultad de Educación, Universidad de Sevilla. c/ Pirotecnia s/n (Sevilla). España. E-mail. mbaenal@us.es

\* Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación. Universidad de Sevilla

\*\* Facultad de Educación. Universidad Internacional de La Rioja

\*\*\*Centro Universitario San Isidoro

Esta investigación fue financiada por el grupo de investigación "Gestión e innovación en Servicios Deportivos, Ocio, Recreación y Acción Social (SEJ-525)" (Junta de Andalucía. Consejería de Innovación, Ciencia y Empresa).

Artículo invitado con revisión.

leisure contexts, Theodorakis et al. (2014) revised some studies where it was being used single-item measure of perceived value (Murray and Howat, 2002). Nevertheless, Boksberger and Melsen (2011) considered due to the number of attributes that an influence perceived value of an overall customer perception.

However, others scholars have considered perceived value too complex and have opted for multidimensional (Lapierre, 2000). In fact, there are some studies that have examined whether customer value is better modelled with multidimensional approach (Martín et al., 2010). Finally, among all varieties of conceptualizations of value, Zeithaml (1988) tradeoff model is the most commonly used framework.

Yu, Zhang, Kim, Chen, Henderson, Min and Huang, (2014) claim behavioural intentions may change owing to unpredictable events. It is considered as an immediate antecedent of actual behaviour (Kwon, Trail and James, 2007). A positive experience lead to favourable behaviour intention toward the service provider, in contrast, when customer perception does not meet expectations, may influence subsequent customer's behaviour (Sambandam and Lord, 1995). Although behavioural intentions has a participation in the value-intention chain, being that customer experience is likely to determine the perceived value of service and further, leads to other outcomes such as repurchase intention (Kim and Choi, 2013).

(Yu et al., 2014). Likewise, as Calabuig, Núñez-Pomar, Prado-Gascó and Añó (2014), some studies confirm the relationship between perceived value and behavioural intentions in sport management context. Therefore, it tends to be the most frequently researched loyalty construct (Theodorakis et al., 2014).

The aim of this study is to examine the theoretical relationships between service experience, perceived value and behavioural intentions by proposing and comparing a model in groups fitness class (GFC) and virtual fitness class (VFC) in the context of sports and fitness centres.

## Method

### Participants

The sample was collected from 1943 customers (1143 group fitness class and 800 virtual fitness class' customers), 31.9% males and 68.1% females. Data were collected from ten private fitness centres in Spain.

### Instrument

The customer perception components consist of an ad hoc collection of 30 items that measures each of the components. All items were taken directly or were slightly modified from previously validated measures. Specifically, the service experience scale was adapted from Garcia and Sañudo (2013).

The perceived value items come from Martín et al. (2010). The behavioural intentions measure used a scale developed and tested by Setó (2003). The scales are ten-point Likert-type scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

### Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS 20.0. Internal consistency of the constructs was measured through Cronbach's alpha. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and Bartlett's test of sphericity. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was estimated to test the relationships between constructs. Goodness of fit indices were used for both the measurement and structural models:  $\chi^2/df$ , RMSEA, CFI, GFI, IFI y TLI. In addition, a multi-group analysis was tested by comparing the difference between two invariance models based on the change in CFI value (Byrne, 2009).

## Results

Reliability analysis showed satisfactory results, the Cronbach's alpha values obtained were above the recommended .70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), as well as likelihood to the EFA (Table 1), carried out using an Oblimin oblique rotation.

The goodness-of-fit indices produced through the CFA indicated that the model showed an adequate fit to the data [ $\chi^2(244) = 2270.12$  ( $p < .001$ );  $\chi^2/df = 9.30$ ; RMSEA = 0.065 (CI = .063, .068); CFI = 0.957; NFI = .953; TLI = 0.952; IFI = 0.958], even though  $\chi^2/df$  relationship was above the threshold of 3 (Kline, 1998) as the  $\chi^2$  statistic has been shown to be sensitive to sample size (Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2009). Values for CFI, NFI, TLI and IFI were situated above the recommended 0.90, and the index RMSEA obtained an acceptable adjustment (0.06) with values of 0.063 and 0.068 for the minimum and maximum intervals of confidence of 90%.

The structural model analysis revealed that service experience has a positive and significant effect on perceived value ( $\beta = .74$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and behavioural intentions ( $\beta = .76$ ;  $p < .001$ ), but poor fit of the perceived value on behavioural intentions ( $\beta = .16$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Multigroup analysis using factorial invariance (GFC and VFC) reveals fit index results for no restriction model [ $\chi^2(112) = 2805.49$  ( $p < .001$ );  $\chi^2/df = 5.74$ ; RMSEA = 0.049 (CI = .048, .051); RMR = .21; CFI = 0.95; NFI = .94; TLI = 0.94; IFI = 0.95] and for fix factor loadings [ $\chi^2(91) = 2860.31$  ( $p < .001$ );  $\chi^2/df = 5.61$ ; RMSEA = 0.049 (CI = .047, .051); RMR = .21; CFI = 0.95; NFI = .94; TLI = 0.94; IFI = 0.95]. CFI values were below 0.01 (Cheung and Rensvold, 2002), indicating a well-fitting model (Loehlin, 2003).

	$\alpha$	KMO	Bartlett's test	Var. explained
Service experience	.947	.956	18142.85 (66)	64.06%
Perceived value	.957	.912	14565.12 (15)	82.84%
Behavioural intention	.897	.894	10527.49 (15)	70.88%

Tabla 1. Reliability analysis and EFA results

## Discussion

The results obtained in the present study demonstrate how to integrate service experience, perceived value and behavioural intentions in a model focus on GFC and VFC. Otherwise, this study examined the theoretical relationship among the variables. Results of the CFA suggested good fit between the proposed model and data collected. Different coefficients provided strong evidence of validity and reliability of the scales.

Service experience has a positive and significant effect on perceived value (Kim and Choi, 2013) and, it has a positive effect on behavioural intentions (García and Sañudo, 2013; Zomerdijk

and Voss, 2010). The relationship between perceived value and behavioural intentions has poor fit in contrast to others scholars (Calabuig et al., 2015 and Yu et al. 2014). Multigroup analysis reveals fit index for no restriction model and fix factor loadings. This conceptual model will assist managers improving the behavioural intentions of their customer, thus offering a structure for keeping business success through highly experiential service and customer perceived value (Theodorakis et al., 2014). Likewise, there should be considerably similar strategies for GFC and VFC context, including these sport services on customer supply. However, further studies are needed due to the rapid progress and the increasing competitiveness in the fitness sector.

### LA RELACIÓN ENTRE LA EXPERIENCIA DE SERVICIO, EL VALOR PERCIBIDO Y LAS INTENCIONES DE COMPORTAMIENTO EN CLIENTES DE ACTIVIDADES DIRIGIDAS

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Experiencias de servicio, Valor percibido, Intenciones de comportamiento, Centros de *fitness*, Clases dirigidas con técnico, Clases dirigidas virtuales.

**RESUMEN:** Comprender la percepción del consumidor durante su experiencia dentro de un centro de fitness resulta fundamental para que los gerentes puedan entender las intenciones de comportamiento futuras de sus abonados. Este estudio pretende esclarecer la importancia y la necesaria evaluación de la experiencia de servicio, el valor percibido y la intenciones de comportamiento, así como la relación entre dichas variables dentro de las actividades dirigidas con técnico y las actividades dirigidas virtuales, utilizando para ello una muestra de 1.943 usuarios. El análisis factorial confirmatorio indica un adecuado ajuste para el modelo de medida propuesto. Por otro lado, el análisis de ecuaciones estructurales utilizado revela una relación positiva y significativa de las experiencias de servicio hacia el valor percibido y las intenciones de comportamiento respectivamente. Sin embargo, el modelo muestra un pobre ajuste entre el valor percibido y las intenciones de comportamiento. La percepción global del consumidor en ambas actividades puede resultar un elemento de estudio para los gerentes con el objetivo de mejorar la oferta de servicios de *fitness* utilizando las nuevas tecnologías para así incrementar las intenciones de compra.

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