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Comparative Analysis of Customer Satisfaction with Online and Offline Fitness Programs

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Abstract. The article deals with the comparison of customer satisfaction with online fitness training and identifies the factors determining the level of customer satisfaction. An ascertaining and controlling questionnaire revealing customers' attitudes towards online fitness training, showing customers' satisfaction with online classes (compared to offline fitness training) was conducted. The attributes and distinction of online fitness and offline fitness from fitness using digital technologies (video lessons, blog, specialized smartphone applications, etc.) were defined. The organizing online fitness training methodology, based on the application of online calls to accompany and meet the needs of customers, was compiled and substantiated. It has been established that the following determinants exist which determine the level of clients' satisfaction with fitness training: level of expectation, presence and degree of involvement of a trainer, quality of training program, consistency, individual approach, synchrony of training sessions, possibility to maintain physical activity. As a result, we conclude that many trainees have not had their first experience of participating in an online training session. We therefore assume that the first demonstration session (its quality, content, organization) largely determines future participation in training. If the client is satisfied with the trial session, it is highly likely that they will participate in online training again.

Keywords: online fitness training, remote training, distance physical education, exercise, satisfaction with online fitness training.

Research area: physical education.

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Сравнительный анализ удовлетворенности клиентов, занимающихся фитнесом по онлайн- и офлайн-программам тренировок

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена вопросам сравнения удовлетворенности занимающихся фитнесом в режиме онлайн и установлению факторов, определяющих уровень удовлетворенности потребителей. Проведено констатирующее и контрольное анкетирование, раскрывающее отношение клиентов к тренировкам по фитнесу онлайн, показывающее удовлетворенность клиентов занятиями в онлайн-формате (в сравнении с офлайн-обучением фитнесу). Определены признаки и разграничены понятия «онлайн-фитнес» и «офлайн-фитнес» от фитнеса с применением цифровых технологий (видеоуроки, блог, специализированные приложения на смартфоне и др.). Составлена и обоснована методика организации фитнес-тренировок в онлайн-формате, строящаяся на применении звонков в режиме онлайн для сопровождения и удовлетворения потребностей клиентов. Установлено, что существуют следующие детерминанты, определяющие уровень удовлетворенности клиентов от занятий спортом: уровень ожиданий, присутствие и степень участия тренера, качество программы тренировок, систематичность, индивидуальный подход, синхронность проведения занятий, возможность сохранить физическую активность. В результате мы приходим к выводам о том, что многие тренирующиеся не имели первого опыта участия в онлайн-занятиях. Поэтому мы предполагаем, что во многом от первого демонстрационного занятия (его качества, содержательности, организованности) зависит дальнейшее участие в тренировках. Если клиента удовлетворит пробное занятие, то с высокой вероятностью он будет участвовать в онлайн-обучении снова.

Ключевые слова: онлайн-фитнес, удаленное обучение, дистанционное физическое образование, упражнения, удовлетворенность онлайн-обучением по фитнесу.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought up to date the application of e-learning and/or distance learning technologies in the organisation of fitness classes. As the author's practical experience in training trainees using online learning tools shows, this type of organisation

of the training process poses a rather extensive number of problems, which cannot but affect customer satisfaction when they apply for fitness services.

The relevance of research into the satisfaction of fitness clients with online and offline training programmes is inextricably linked to

issues of improving the process of teaching physical education and sport and organising support in remote locations. In addition, the organization of the training process “online” requires clients to have more skill, some experience in performing exercises, clear and strict control by the instructor in order to perform exercises correctly and monitor the technique, physical condition, plan and schedule training, systematize classes to ensure the quality cumulative effect of fitness training on online programmes (Rybachuk, 2020).

Statement of the problem

It also becomes problematic in an online fitness environment to conduct movement work digitally – the offline training process often involves direct body contact with the trainer, maintaining motivation and possibly providing first aid if there are any problems. Nevertheless, the online format of fitness training also has high prospects related to facilitated training, the involvement of families and more people in the training process, the organisation of frontal training, and the flexibility of online fitness methods when the trainee does not have time and opportunity to participate in training in a face-to-face format (Benefits of Remote Training During COVID, 2022).

The aim of the article is to compare the satisfaction of fitness customers with online and offline training programmes and to develop recommendations for improving the quality of online training.

Materials and methods

In the study, we used a sufficiently large amount of foreign literature on the problems of organising online training, as well as drawing on our own experience and collected empirical data. We relied on methods such as theoretical analysis and synthesis, comparison, synthesis, comparison, questionnaires, SWOT analysis, and observation.

In revealing the specifics of comparing the satisfaction of clients forced to switch from face-to-face meetings and classes with a trainer to online fitness, we face the following tasks:

1. Define and distinguish the concepts of ‘online fitness’ and ‘offline fitness’ from fitness

using digital technology (video lessons, blog, specialised smartphone apps, etc.).

2. Formulate and pilot a questionnaire reflecting customer satisfaction with online classes (compared to offline fitness training).

3. To develop recommendations for improving training programmes and to describe the methodology for organising fitness training in an online format.

Discussion

It is important to emphasise that by online fitness training programmes we mean facilitated fitness sessions led by a trainer using video communication technology as a fundamental way of communicating, tracking technique, and organising frontal sessions in which the trainer observes the simultaneous performance of exercises by several trainees and gives general training instructions (Davveri et al., 2022). Off-line fitness training is a traditional type of training for both group, paired and individual training under the guidance of a trainer. It is important to make a fairly clear distinction between online fitness training and the use of digital technology; and although online fitness training includes the use of digital technology, in our practice it is conducted in a synchronous format. Digital technology may involve asynchronous training, in which case the trainee uses, for example, special training apps, watches videos of techniques and uses visual instructions (Chunlei et al., 2020). Such training undoubtedly has high advantages in terms of autonomy and independence from the time factor; however, it does not allow building interaction between trainer and trainee, organising follow-up, etc., which creates quite extensive risks that reduce the quality of online training.

In addition, following the quarantine and gym restrictions, many of the clients interviewed expressed a number of concerns about online training:

– They feared that they would not be able to train at home due to a lack of special equipment (50 %);

– Afraid of getting the exercises wrong and not getting the trainer’s comments (30 %)

– had problems with motivation to participate in training because they ‘did not feel responsible for running the sessions’ (55 %)

– did not want to participate in training because they did not see the point in it (70 %).

We can also state that clients did not understand how the ‘online’ training process would be organised, which created additional difficulties with motivation. To overcome these factors, a free trial session of online training

was organised, in which 116 people took part under our supervision. During this session, we explained the methodology of the sessions (described below) and conducted a questionnaire recording the trainees’ expectations of the training process. The client satisfaction survey for online fitness classes was based on a specially designed questionnaire with ten closed-ended questions (Table 1). One hundred and eleven people took part in the survey. The re-

Table 1. Questionnaire reflecting customer satisfaction with online fitness classes

№	Contents of the questionnaire (question)	Response options	Distribution of responses in the ascertainment phase (first meeting at Zoom)
1	Do you find it difficult to learn online?	1. Yes. 2. No. 3. I don't know	1. 25 % 2. 15 % 3. 60 %
2	Is it important for you to be accompanied, commented on and supervised by a trainer?	1. Yes. 2. No. 3. I don't know	1. 85 % 2. 5 % 3. 10 %
3	Are you ready to practise on your own without a trainer?	1. Yes. 2. No. 3. I don't know	1. 5 % 2. 85 % 3. 10 %
4	Would you prefer an indoor class to an online class?	1. Yes. 2. No. 3. I don't know	1. 70 % 2. 0 % 3. 30 %
5	Why would you choose a class with a trainer?	1. The trainer draws up my training programme, my schedule. 2. This motivates me to exercise. 3. I worry about doing the exercises correctly	1. 40 % 2. 20 % 3. 40 %
6	Have you had any experience of participating in online training?	1. Yes. 2. No	1. 10 % 2. 90 %
7	What do you think might be lacking in online training?	1. Lively communication. 2. Performing exercises under the supervision of a coach. 3. The use of sports equipment	1. 35 % 2. 25 % 3. 40 %
8	What would you prefer?	1. Study at home on your own. 2. Work out at home under the guidance of an online trainer. 3. Work out at a gym on your own	1. 5 % 2. 60 % 3. 35 %
9	How would you describe your likely impressions of participating in an online fitness programme?	1. Positive. 2. Neutral. 3. Negative. 4. Difficult to answer	1. 20 % 2. 40 % 3. 5 % 4. 35 %
10	What affects your satisfaction with your training?	1. The quality of the programme. 2. Feeling of slight fatigue. 3. Sufficiency of contact with the coach	1. 60 % 2. 10 % 3. 30 %

Source: compiled by the author.

sults of the ascertaining stage are grouped with the questionnaire table (in percentages).

Turning to Table 1, the results of the pilot phase (primary data collection and analysis in order to develop a programme that meets the preferences and expectations of consumers) show the following views and general characteristics of the trainees on the possibility of online training:

- 90 % of respondents have no experience with online training: their views are based on prejudices and myths, their initial opinion;
- 85 % of those surveyed need accompaniment from a trainer – this shows the particular importance of the use of distance communication
- for 60 % the decisive factor of satisfaction with the training programme (exercises, their coherence, etc.)
- 80 % of respondents cannot properly characterise online training (although they have no experience of participating in it), moreover, for 5 % participation in it would be of a negative nature;
- for 40 % of respondents, the lack of sports equipment becomes one of the decisive factors that affect the quality of training (something that respondents feel will be lacking in the training process).

This shows the perceived average satisfaction with online fitness training. We can conclude that expectations are rather negative-neutral, with nothing to back them up. Our aim was to dispel these negative attitudes by organizing online training according to our own developed methodology.

The methodology was based on the principle of synchronous learning. According to I. K. Far and his co-authors, the synchronous format of fitness classes allows to reduce the influence of one of the main problems: the trainer's inability to monitor the motivation of the trainee, his technique, effective dosage of exercises and load, intensity depending on physical condition (Far, 2016). Furthermore, the results of our questionnaire show the particular importance of accompaniment and observation for the trainees. It should be emphasized that our methodology for organizing fitness in an online format was based on (Jong, Murray, 2016; Rob-

inson, Moy, 2022; Top 5 reasons to attend virtual fitness classes during COVID-19, 2022):

- using video communication technology (we used Zoom calls and timetabled them according to group comfort factors)
- excluding exercises which require special training equipment from the programme (we have used other substitute exercises which do not require such equipment);
- maximum identification of online training with the offline programme (maintaining the structure, breaks, timing, and other specific aspects of the organisation of a traditional fitness programme);
- keeping workouts systematic and creating an optimal training schedule, strictly adhering to the timetable;
- group frontal training method was taken as the basis. It implied parallel work of small groups (4–5 persons), which provided timely control of technique;
- classes lasted about 1 hour and included all standard steps: from warm-up at the beginning to warm-up at the end; they did not have a strong character (in order to avoid injuries etc.);
- the group was formed based on the principles of differentiation: the trainees were independently segmented by the trainer according to their skills, physical fitness and medical contraindications.

All of these factors formed the basis for the organisation of the online fitness training programme. In doing so, we focused on creating as comfortable and friendly an environment as possible, in which the trainees did not feel embarrassed, putting the trainees in an environment close to reality. The function of the trainer was to a greater extent reduced to that of a coach; E. Fazeeva and her co-authors point out that such an arrangement forms the conditions for increasing the effectiveness of online training. The authors note that a fitness coach “not only makes training more effective and safe, but also more entertaining”, allows systematizing the learning process, making an individual plan and training programme (Far, 2016).

A total of over fifty group training sessions (over a period of 3 months) and 12 additional individual sessions (to meet the need for

increased training intensity) were carried out using our methodology. At the end of the training process, we repeated the questionnaire presented earlier; the results of the control phase of our experiment are as follows:

Fig. 1 shows the answers to the question “Do you find it difficult to learn online?”

Referring back to Fig. 1, it can be seen that the programme we have put together has reduced by 20 % the number of those exercising who have difficulty with the ‘online’ training process. In addition, a positive factor in the application of our methodology for organising online fitness training was the reduction in the number of respondents who doubted their difficulties.

Fig. 2. Shows the answers to the question “Is it important for you to be accompanied by the trainer, his/her comments and supervision?”:

The data in Fig. 2 shows that the application of the method has excluded the group of people who doubt the importance of the trainer’s support when conducting online training sessions. This reflects to a greater extent the effectiveness of the coaching that 95 % of respondents need.

The answers to the question “Are you ready to train independently without a trainer? 3:

Turning to Fig. 3, it should be noted that the data obtained generally correlate with the data in Fig. 2, and indicate the need for the participation of the trainer in the training process on the part of online trainees. At the same time, we dare to suggest that the absence of a trainer would negatively affect the trainees’ impression of the training sessions (video lessons, specialized applications).

The answers to the question “Would you prefer a classroom session to an online one? 4:

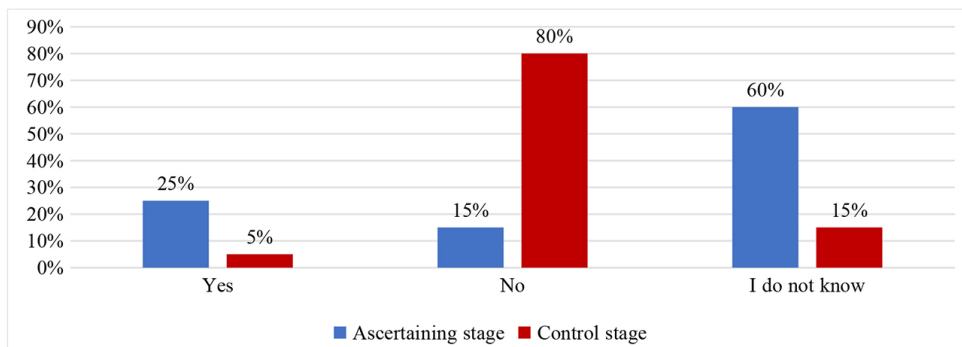


Fig. 1. Answers of respondents to the question “Do you experience difficulties when learning online?”

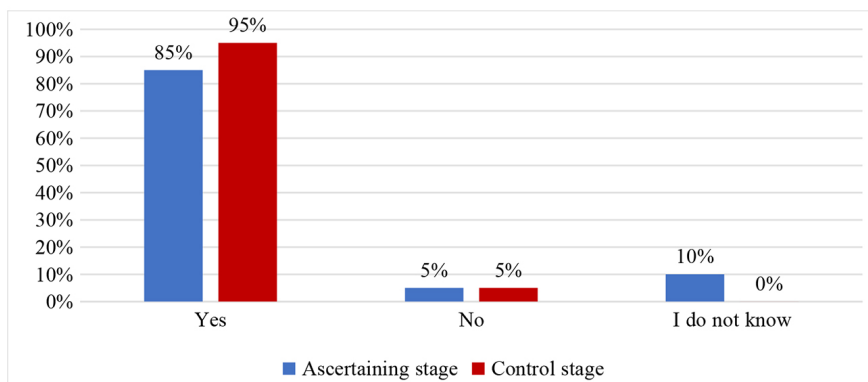


Fig. 2. Answers of respondents to the question “Is the trainer’s support, comments and supervision important for you?”

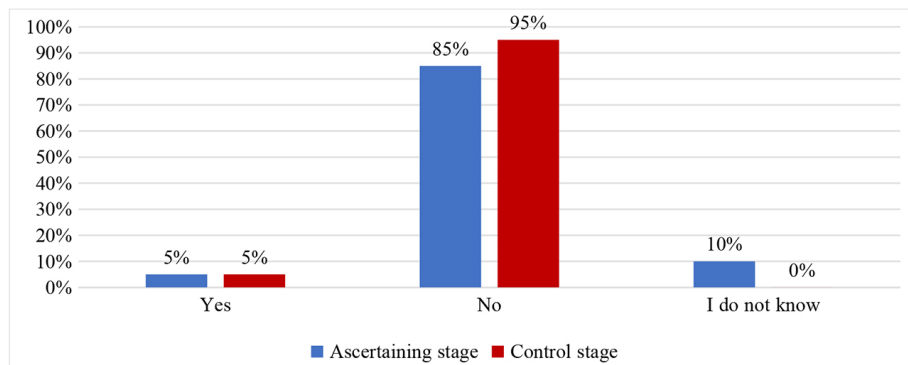


Fig. 3. Answers of respondents to the question “Are you ready to train on your own without a trainer?”

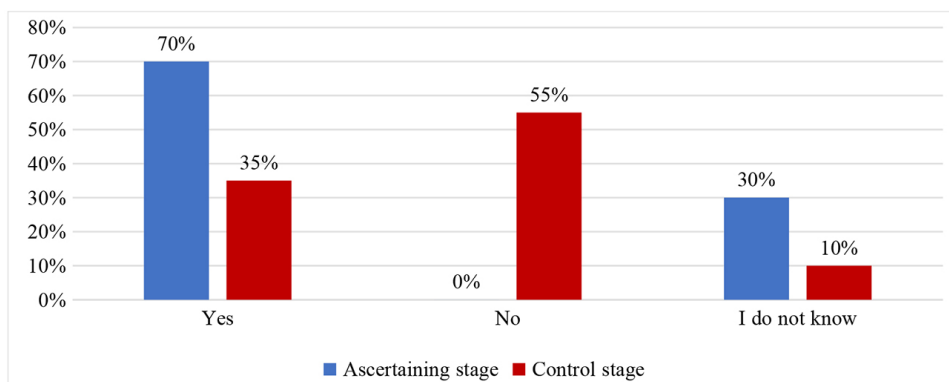


Fig. 4. Answers of respondents to the question “Would you prefer an indoor class to an online class?”

The data in Fig. 4 shows that the developed methodology of online training has increased by 55 % the number of those who are willing to exercise online at home, excluding the constant trips to the gym. This indirectly indicates an increase in consumer satisfaction with the possibilities of organizing the fitness training process online (with synchronous sessions with a trainer, using a video link).

Fig. 5. Presents the answers to the question “What would you prefer?”

The data in Fig. 5 shows that for 90 % of respondents, following the results of training according to the compiled methodology, online training with a trainer became more preferable than arranging independent fitness both at home and in the gym. All of this brings us to the key question that describes the level of consumer satisfaction with online training.

To the question “How can you describe your impressions of participating in online fitness?” the respondents’ answers were distributed as follows (Fig. 6):

The results of the questionnaire (fig. 6) show that the systematic implementation of the previously presented methodology of online fitness training has become one of the sources of increasing the level of consumer satisfaction with the services of fitness trainers. As can be seen, the group of those who receive negative emotions from online fitness training has been completely eliminated. In addition, the number of doubters (by 20 %) and those who experience neutral emotions (by 25 %) has also decreased. All these groups shifted to those who experience exclusively positive emotions from online training.

Thus, based on the results of our questionnaire and comparative experience of online and

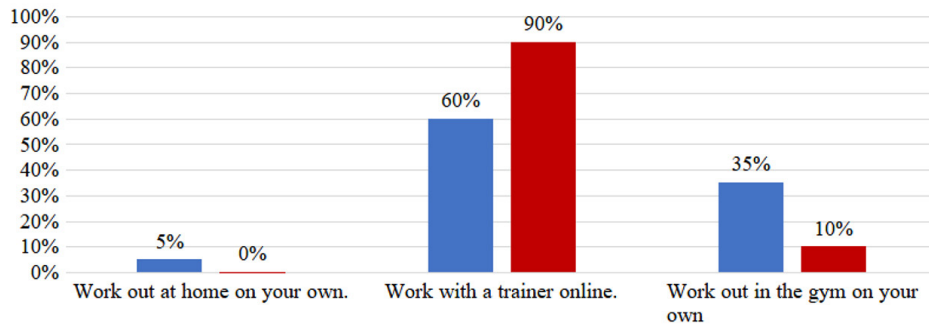


Fig. 5. Answers of respondents to the question “What would you prefer?”

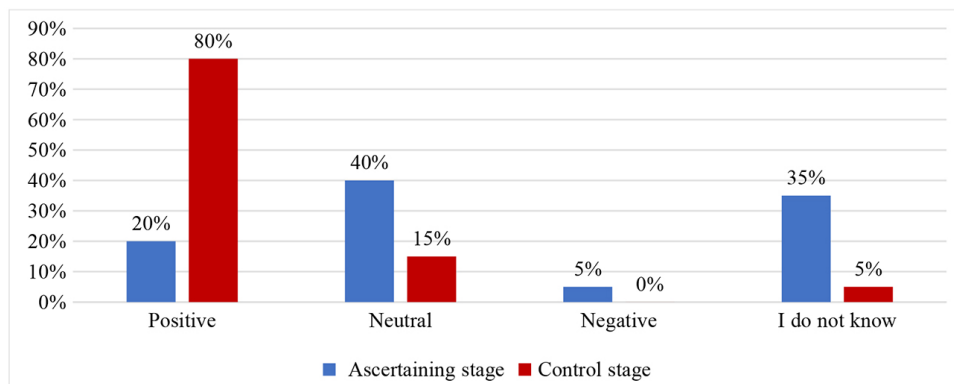


Fig. 6. Answers of respondents to the question “How can you describe your impressions of participating in online fitness training?”

offline fitness training programmes, we can establish the following determinants that determine the level of customer satisfaction with exercise:

1. The presence of own expectations. Has emerged as the most significant factor. Moreover, in the case where expectations were rather negative, it had a negative impact on satisfaction and the level of motivation to participate in the training process.

2. Availability of communication with the trainer, consultations, training sessions, control sessions. Assumes participation of the trainer in the training process, exclusion of transition to asynchronous training format (observations show that this has a negative impact on the level of motivation).

3. Systematic of training. Effective online fitness training requires a pre-formulated plan

and schedule for training, which ensures the formation of discipline in the trainee.

4. High control over the results, individual support. Requires a high degree of commitment from the trainer to the trainee, a distraction to their needs, resulting in a positive effect on the satisfaction of the trainee’s attendance at training sessions.

5. Ability to remain physically active. However, consumer satisfaction with online training is negatively affected by the lack of specialised sports equipment, which significantly narrows the possibilities of training many muscle groups.

Based on the results of our study, let us form a SWOT analysis of the online fitness training process according to the presented methodology (Table 2) (Online Fitness Class Disclaimer, 2022; The Ultimate Free Workout Plans PDF For All Fitness Freaks, 2022):

Table 2

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – high autonomy of training; – training at "convenient time" and "convenient place"; – increased trainer attention to the details of the training; – the use of video communication as a basis for communication between the trainer and the trainee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – lack of sports equipment; – difficulty in coordinating the trainees in a group format; – difficulty in demonstrating exercise technique; – lack of body contact (physical interaction) between trainer and trainee
Features	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – minimising the 'gap' between online and offline training; – increasing the physical activity of groups of citizens who are not inclined to go to the gym; – organising 'large group' sessions, focusing on the popularisation of fitness; – organising effective support for the training process; – involving entire families in the training process; – increasing physical activity under quarantine, etc; – compensating for the lack of communication; – use as an alternative to self-training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – lack of opportunity to practise online; – lack of an adequate sports ground; – lack of motivation; – unreported medical contraindications

Source: compiled by the author

The data in Table 2 show that the key prospects for ensuring the satisfaction of online fitness clients are built on compensating for the lack of training due to situational constraints. In addition, in the long run, with the right quality and output, the online training process has a positive effect on the motivation to participate systematically in online training. However, we take the position that online interaction cannot completely replace "offline training", as there is no equipment in such a case. However, it is promising to solve the issues of participation of certain narrow groups in online training (e.g. the elderly), which is particularly reflected in the possibilities of organising the training process.

Conclusion

Thus, based on our analysis, we were able to establish that:

1. Satisfaction of clients with fitness classes directly depends on such indicators as the level of expectations, presence and degree of participation of the trainer, quality of the

training programme, consistency, individual approach, synchrony of classes, possibility to maintain physical activity.

2. We can state that many of the trainees have not had the first experience of participating in an online training session. We therefore assume that further participation in training sessions depends to a large extent on the first demonstration session (its quality, content, organization). If the client is satisfied with the trial session, it is highly likely that they will participate in online training again.

3. Key perspectives on the satisfaction of online fitness clients are based on compensating for the lack of training due to situational constraints. In other words, online sessions cannot fully replace face-to-face training in the gym, but they can serve as an effective interim measure oriented towards client satisfaction, an expression of the trainer's flexibility and willingness to meet the client's needs.

All this shows that the methodology used to organise the training process can indeed have a positive impact on training results.

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Online Fitness Class Disclaimer

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