

# WHO ARE THE MOST LOYAL USERS IN PRIVATE FITNESS CENTRES?

Author:  
David Martin

email:  
dmartin@us.es

Co-authors:  
García Fernández , Jerónimo  
Cepeda Carrión, Gabriel  
Sañudo Corrales, Borja

University:  
University of Seville

Faculty:  
Management and Marketing Department

## Abstract

### Theoretical background

Customer segmentation is now evident in the marketing plans of private fitness centres (PFC). Similarly, socio-demographic variables have been considered as a useful tool by numerous research studies (Rial et al., 2009), while some other outcomes analyzing the customer behavior are currently considered by the scientific community. In addition, analyzing behavioral variables allow us to estimate the loyalty of users, which represent a new approach towards the understanding of sports consumers. Considering the aforementioned arguments, the aim of this study is to determine whether or not the loyalty of PFC users depends of socio-demographic variables, and also to identify the more sensitive market segments regarding this behavior.

### Methods

This study is part of a cross-sectional, quantitative national research. A questionnaire composed of demographic variables has been developed based on Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman's (1996) scales designed to determine future behavior (loyalty) and price sensitivity (7-point Likert scale). Data has been collected following the snow ball methodology, resulting in a final sample of 2,171 users (40.5% women and 59.5% men) from 92 PFC in Spain. The validity and reliability of the instrument has been tested. Similarly, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the user's segmentation has been assessed using a statistical analysis package (SPSS 18.0, two-step clustering technique and descriptive results).

### Results

The analysis carried out indicates that 82.6% of the sample is between 20 and 49 years old, a 64.1% of the sample have a university degree or are even postgraduate, a 66.1% of the sample have a family of two or more

members, the 77.7% of the sample pay a monthly fee, and among them, the 73% have a whole-day access. In another note, the 77.9% of the sample attend 3 to 5 days on average. A 65.6% of the sample has been users for less than 2 years, and the 81.9% attend to the centers alone or with their relatives. In addition, the scale of behavioral intentions can be considered as reliable and valid ( $\pm = 0.903$ ) explaining the 91.1% of the total variance.

After conducting the analysis of variance (ANOVA), significant differences arise the scale of behavioral intentions according to gender ( $p < 0.05$ ), where women had a higher mean ( $M = 5.88$ ) than men ( $M = 5.66$ ); as well as according to age ( $p = 0.001$ ), where the youngest and older people had the highest scores ( $M = 5.91$  and  $M = 6.01$ ), following a U-Shape distribution. Significant differences were also found according to education ( $p < 0.05$ ), where the higher the educational level, the lower mean scores of repurchasing. Another interesting finding is that families with 5 or more members have a higher mean than average ( $M = 5.91$ ), as well as those who attends only during mornings ( $M = 5.94$ ). Additionally higher means have been found as the number of sessions increases, and for those who have been users for less than 3 months ( $M = 6.00$ ). The same patterns is found for those who attend with friends ( $M = 5.90$ ).

Considering price sensitivity, there are differences according to age where younger people ( $M = 5.86$ ) and the elderly ( $M = 5.86$ ) show a lower sensitivity than average but also regarding the family size ( $p = 0.002$ ), where those with a family of more than 5 members are less price sensitive. This is also the case of those paying a quarterly fee. Finally, there has been no significant differences between the scale of future behavior and the two resulting clusters ( $p = 0.915$ ). However, the less sensitive group to the price was composed by users between 30-39 years, living alone and with a monthly payment (21% of the sample).

### Conclusions

User's segmentation is important due to the increment in the knowledge of consumer's groups and preferences. This study demonstrate that customers behavior is not just dependent on demographics characteristics as reported by Athanasopoulou et al. (2010), the loyalty of PFC users depends on gender, age, education, family, type of fees, frequency of practice, time as users, and social surroundings. Based on the results, one may also establish a pattern of users which are less sensitive to price.

References:

- Athanasiopoulou, P., Oikonomou, K., Douvis, J., Kriemadis, A. and Alexopoulos, P. (2010). Analysing consumer behavior in fitness centres. The 18th EASM Conference, Bridging Sport Management across Europe, p. 198 – 199, Prague, September.
- Rial, A., Alonso, D., Rial, J., Picón, E. and Varela, J. (2009). Un intento de segmentación integral de los usuarios de centros deportivos. Apunts, Educación Física y Deportes, 1, 82 – 91.
- Zeithaml, V., Berry, L. and Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. Journal of Marketing, 60, 31 – 46.