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### **Analysing consumer behavior in fitness centres**

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### **Background**

Knowing your customers and satisfying their needs is at the core of today's marketing paradigm. However, consumer behavior varies across industries and is considered to be multi-dimensional (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Many researchers have investigated the effect of service quality; customer satisfaction; perceived service value; or cost of services, on consumer behaviour in different industries including banks; fast-food; dry cleaning; athletic services; entertainment; thematic parks, and health institutes (e.g Bigne et al., 2005). In athletic services, research has focused on service quality and customer satisfaction dimensions and on how these affect current and potential behavioral intentions (e.g Theodorakis & Kambitsis, 1998). In fitness centers, Papadopoulos et al. (2004) conclude that there is a strong relationship between all service quality dimensions and positive word-of-mouth communications whereas Afthinos et al., (2005) find that demographic factors such as gender affect perceived service quality expectations and therefore influence consumers' behavior. Finally, only Wang et al. (2008) analyse consumer behavior in fitness centres and how it has changed in recent years.

### **Objectives**

The objective of this study is to analyse consumer behavior in fitness centres. In detail, we aim to study consumers' motives for becoming members in a fitness centre; the selection criteria they use; their psychographic & demographic profile; the factors that affect their satisfaction from the fitness centre; their behavior in the fitness centre, and their future behavioral intentions regarding the fitness centre.

### **Methods**

The study is descriptive in nature intending to describe the way consumers behave in a fitness centre. With this goal in mind a survey was undertaken based on a structured questionnaire that was personally administered to a purposive sample of 350 respondents from 12 fitness centres in Greece. The questionnaire is divided into 6 sections, namely consumer motives; selection criteria; behaviour in the centre's area; demographic & psychographic profile; factors affecting satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Some parts were constructed by the authors whereas satisfaction factors were based on Kim & Kim (1995) and Afthinos et al. (2005) and behavioral intentions on Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Theodorakis & Kampitsis (1998).

### **Results**

Results show that respondents are 61% women and 39% men, most of them (44,6%) belong to the 24-35 age category; have a high educational level (42,6%), and more than half are members of fitness centres for more than 1 year (55,15%). Although the sample is dominated by women, 82,86% use weights whereas only 53,71% take part in group workout sessions. Consumer motives are athletic and social while selection criteria are grouped into 4 major categories: quality of environment & equipment; extra offerings such as massage, or hair-styling; value for money aspects of the offer (opening hours – prices – quality of personnel) and social issues (social relations to personnel, friends already members etc.). Factor analysis on psychographic factors shows that there are 4 types of customers in fitness centres, the “Sports-savvy consumer”; the “Health-oriented consumer”; the “Athletic consumer” and the “Pressured consumer”. These consumers exhibit different consumer behavior in most areas analysed. Also, demographic characteristics such as age or gender seem to affect consumers’ behaviour.

### **Conclusion/Application to practice**

Results agree with previous studies that demographic characteristics such as age or gender affect consumer behaviour (e.g. Afthinos et al., 2005). However, this study shows that consumer behaviour is also heavily influenced by consumers’ attitude towards sports and the athletic way of life. These findings agree with Galanis (2006) that lifestyle affects consumption in sport centres. The results of this study are likely to assist the management of fitness centres in their efforts to segment their market appropriately; customise their offer according to each type of customer; promote their services effectively and customise their promotional message according to the type of customers they address; and put together different service packages that satisfy different customers.

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