

Understanding The Role of Members In Fitness Centres: A Perspective Based On Stakeholder Theory

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Aim of the research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of fitness member's perceptions of power, urgency legitimacy and interest (i.e., self-perceived importance as stakeholders) on their behavioural intentions towards the fitness centres.

Literature review

The stakeholder theory has emerged to understand how to improve organisational management and researchers agree that stakeholders are people or groups that either affect or are affected by an organization's actions (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). There are many approaches for identifying stakeholders, it is commonly accepted that stakeholders' is dependent on the levels of power (i.e., the degree to which the stakeholder is capable of influencing the organization), urgency (i.e., the extent to which the stakeholder claims for immediate attention), legitimacy (i.e., the perception that the stakeholder actions are appropriate according to social values; Mitchell et al., 1997) and interest (i.e., the degree to which stakeholder wants to know or learn about the organizations; Bryson, 2004).

Members are pivotal stakeholders as they contribute to overall revenue of the organisations both directly (i.e., consumption of services/products) and indirectly (i.e., word-of-mouth). While the theory of stakeholders has been applied to different industries, little is known from the member-as-stakeholder perspective in the fitness industry. Most previous studies on members have examined aspects such as consumption-related emotions, service quality or satisfaction to predict behavioural intentions (e.g., Pedragosa, Biscaia, & Correia, 2015). A considerable amount of variance in behavioural intentions always remains unexplained, with researchers often suggesting additional measures to better understand members' reactions towards their organisations (Avourdiadou & Theodorakis, 2014). By focusing on members' self-perceptions of their levels of power, urgency, legitimacy and interest, managers may be in a better position to understand how members perceive their importance towards the organisation and develop tactics within a broader retention strategy.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The study sample consisted of members from one fitness centre located in Lisbon (Portugal), and an online survey was posted on the official Facebook page. A total of 425 participants started the survey and after data screening, 151 surveys were deemed usable for data analysis. The survey included 19 items. Power (4 items), urgency (3 items) and legitimacy (4 items) were adapted from Mattingly (2007). Five items to capture interest were specifically designed for this study based on the definition above. Additionally, 4 items based on Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014) were used to measure behavioural intentions. All items were measured using a 10-point Likert-type scale (1 = not likely at all, 10 = extremely likely). Data were analysed with AMOS 22.0. A two-step maximum likelihood structural equation model was conducted to examine the proposed relationships.

Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

The results of the measurement model indicated an acceptable fit to the data [$\chi^2(160) = 276.82$ ($p < .001$), $\chi^2/df = 1.73$, CFI = .96, GFI = .84, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .07]. The composite reliability values were all above the cut-off point of .70, while AVE values were greater than .50 indicating convergent validity. Discriminant validity was accepted given that the AVE values for each construct were greater than the squared correlations between that construct and any other. The structural model indicated an acceptable fit to the data [$\chi^2(160) = 276.82$ ($p < .001$), $\chi^2/df = 1.73$, CFI = .96, GFI = .84, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .07]. Path coefficients indicate that power and urgency were not significant predictors of behavioural intentions ($p > .05$). Legitimacy ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$) and interest ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$) showed a significant positive relationship with behavioural intentions. Jointly, power, urgency, legitimacy and interest accounted for approximately 39% of the variance of intentions behavioural ($R^2 = .39$).

The findings suggest that members are important stakeholders, given that a substantial amount of the variance in behavioural intentions (i.e. worth-of-mouth, increased participation and renewal of membership) were explained by their perceived levels of power, urgency, legitimacy and interest. The predictive role of legitimacy and interest suggest that managers should acknowledge members' importance for organisa-

tional success. In this sense, it is important to monitor their claims and keep them updated about existent features of the gym and its staff, as well as to promote high ethical standards of service delivery and fulfil their expectations (Avourdiadou & Theodorakis, 2014). Also, managers should encourage and develop the curiosity of the members in relation to the whole gym environment (e.g., new services, events). While the results offer useful insights for managers, this study should be considered as an initial step towards a better understanding of members' role as stakeholders. Future studies should examine different fitness centres, and focus on both members' self-perceptions and managers' opinions of the role of different typologies of members in order to better understand how to improve organization performance.

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