Original Article

Satisfaction evaluation model in the light of marketing mix theory applied to fitness clubs in Poland

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Abstract

Problem statement: Consumer satisfaction is of particular importance in the service sector in which retaining a customer is a way of achieving organization's success. **Approach:** We carried out a survey on members (N=474) of selected fitness clubs located in Poland. We used an originally designed questionnaire which allowed to analyse 7P marketing elements of fitness clubs. Structural equations modelling was applied. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to investigate the data structure in relation to the theoretical concept of 7P marketing mix. In order to examine the tool's structure Standardized Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) was used. **Purpose:** The objective of this paper is create a satisfaction assessment model for services and adapt it to the fitness clubs sector. We aimed to identify factors that may correlate with the customer satisfaction level in fitness clubs in Poland. **Results:** We created a satisfaction assessment tool for services adapted to the fitness clubs sector. We established that seven instruments of marketing mix for services correlate with the customer satisfaction level in selected fitness clubs in Poland. Confirmation model of the research construct provided a reasonably good fit with $\chi^2/df = 1.94$. The result of the χ^2 test proved statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions: The designed tool allows to evaluate all areas of functioning of a fitness club according to the 7P theory for services. The created model can help analyse, evaluate and shape customer behaviour in the contemporary market. We established that the evaluation of seven instruments of the marketing mix allows to assess the satisfaction with the services of a fitness club.

Key-Words: marketing instruments, CSI, measurement, fitness sector

Introduction

Nowadays consumer behaviour and decision-making process in fitness services selection involve many factors and require identifying customer needs in order to satisfy them (Theodorakis, Howat, Ko, & Avourdiadou, 2013). Scholars have noted the importance of product/service quality (Avourdiadou & Theodorakis, 2014; Ko & Pastore, 2007; Lai Teik, 2014), perceived value (Choi, Greenwell, & Lee, 2018; García-Fernández et al., 2018; García-Fernández, Gálvez-Ruiz, Vélez-Colon, & Bernal-García, 2016), service convenience and loyalty (Baena-Arroyo, García-Fernández, Gálvez-Ruiz, & Grimaldi-Puyana, 2020; García-Fernández et al., 2016; García-Fernández et al., 2018) as well as customers satisfaction with product/service (Avourdiadou & Theodorakis, 2014; García-Fernández, Gálvez-Ruiz, Vélez-Colon, Ortega-Gutiérrez, & Fernández-Gavira, 2019) in achieving market success in fitness clubs branch. All those dimensions may lead to improving fitness brand performance, repurchase intention and market share, which are the main objectives of business practitioners (Angelova & Zekiri, 2011). In our paper, we focused especially on the importance of the specific consumer behaviour in the fitness sector: customer satisfaction which is treated as the major factor for organizational success and business sustainability (Manna, Singh, & Bhargava, 2018). Today, attention to these aspects is more critical than ever. Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014) argue that overall satisfaction can be an important driver of customers' future behaviour. In order to acquire and retain customers companies take miscellaneous initiatives targeted at acquiring information about behaviour of the customers in the markets such as their preferences, needs, consumption and lifestyle. Lee et al. (2011) claim that managers of contemporary organizations shall analyse systematically the customers' satisfaction level with the provided services and consequently modify the offer to recognised demands. Therefore we decided to create a satisfaction assessment model for services and adapt it to the fitness sector, which is a growing industry worldwide (Gocłowska & Piątkowska, 2018; Rodríguez-Cañamero, Gallardo, Felipe, & García-Unanue, 2018). We aimed to identify factors that may correlate with the customer satisfaction level in fitness clubs in Poland.

Literature review of the customer satisfaction concept and its relation with 7P marketing mix theory

Concept of customer satisfaction and its measurement

The customer satisfaction is defined as a general measurement of the effectiveness of miscellaneous initiatives related to a product or service which companies undertake (Johnston, 1995). Consumer satisfaction

appears „if performance is higher than expected, dissatisfaction results if it is lower” (Bartikowski & Llosa, 2004). Oliver (1997) explains satisfaction as “a consumer’s fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under- or overfulfillment”.

Researchers have developed a number of models, scales and indexes used to measure customer service satisfaction. Those studies are usually conducted using techniques and tools typical for classic quantitative as well as qualitative marketing research (e.g. SERVQUAL, CIT or CSI) (Gocłowska, Piątkowska, & Lenartowicz, 2019; Milner & Furnham, 2017). Although numerous methods of measuring consumer satisfaction exist, it is impossible to indicate one universal tool that would fit every sector (Śmiatacz, 2012). Analysis of consumer satisfaction surveys are highly dependent on the specific research problem, the industry and the particular product or service (Śmiatacz, 2012).

7P marketing mix theory and its relation to customers’ satisfaction

In the theory of the marketing mix for services, 7 instruments (7P) can be distinguished, used by companies to influence customers’ behaviour (Anitsal, Girard, & Anitsal, 2012). Four of them (product, promotions, place, price) belong to traditional 4P marketing theory, which was expanded by Booms and Bitner (1981) who added three novel instruments: people, physical evidence, and process. Many researchers noticed that those marketing mix elements have a significant positive impact on consumer satisfaction (Baidya & Basu, 2009; Garg, Singh, & Kumar De, 2016; Kim & Lough, 2007; Lee et al., 2011). For instance Yelkur (2000) reports that consumers experience services through elements of marketing mix and she explains the relationship between elements of marketing mix and consumer satisfaction with service companies. Similar studies were conducted by Garg et al. (2016) and Baidya & Basu (2009).

Material & methods

Study design

We developed a questionnaire on the basis of Alexandris & Palialia’s tool (1999) and theory of marketing mix 7P. Due to translation process and cultural adaption of the tool, we checked its internal consistency in a pilot study in 2016 performed on the purposive sample of the selected fitness club in Warsaw (N=76). The refined version of the questionnaire was used in the full-scale research which was carried out in March-June 2017 in three clubs belonging to the biggest fitness chains in Poland.

Participants

The study was carried out on participants of sports and recreation classes attending 3 different fitness club chains in Poland. The critical case sampling was used, which involves the selection of facilities which, in terms of specific criteria, best represent the issue under study (Flick, 2009). Therefore, clubs belonging to the largest (number of facilities in the country) and the most dynamically developing fitness clubs chains (number of customers in the facility under study) were selected.

In total, 547 customers of the selected clubs were invited to participate in the study. The refusal rate was 13.3%. Finally, the sample of 474 participants of sports and recreation activities in selected clubs was subject to further analysis. The sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of the studied sample (N=474)

Factors	Sample	
	N	%
Club		
Jatomi Fitness	170	35.9
Calypso	154	32.5
S4	150	31.6
Gender *		
Women	296	62.4
Men	174	36.7
Age*		
<19	35	7.4
19-24	126	26.6
25-29	106	22.4
30-39	88	18.6
40-49	91	19.2
50-59	17	3.6
≥ 60	8	1.7
Education		
Elementary	15	3.2
Secondary	261	55.5
Higher	194	41.3
Marital status*		
Married	183	38.6
Widow/er	8	1.7

Divorced	30	6.3
Single	250	52.7
Household net monthly income per capita*		
<PLN 800	23	4.9
PLN 801-1500	31	6.5
PLN 1501-2500	141	29.7
PLN 2501-5000	136	28.7
≥PLN 5001	140	29.5
Number of children*		
0	301	63.5
1	90	19
2	55	11.6
3	17	3.6
≥4	7	1.4
Professional status		
Student	142	30
Employed (full or part time)	195	41.1
Working on the basis of civil law contracts	40	8.4
Working without a contract	15	3.2
Unemployed	20	4.2
Pensioner	10	2.1
On maternity/parental leave	7	1.5
Self-employed	2	0.4
Total	474	100

* The numbers do not add up to 100% because the missing data has been removed from the table.

Measure

The questionnaire of 56 items grouped in 7 areas of the clubs' operations as a consequence of the 7P theory of the marketing mix (Table 2). Each area of the clubs' operations was measured on the 5-point Likert scale, in two dimensions: service satisfaction (from dissatisfied to very satisfied) and the significance (from unimportant to very important) of the analyzed items (Table 2).

Table 2. Encoding instruments of the marketing mix 7P in the study

Marketing mix 7P instrument	The area of the club's activity and abbreviation used in the study	Detailed items of the studied area
People	Staff of the fitness club (DK)	Detailed items of the studied area Q1.1 Attitude of the service staff to the club's customers Q1.2 Ratio of instructors and trainers to club customers Q1.3. Instructors' knowledge of the work they do Q1.4 Professional experience of instructors and trainers Q1.5 Contact between instructors and trainers and participants Q1.6 Physical fitness of instructors and trainers Q1.7 Physical appearance of instructors and trainers Q1.8 Involvement of instructors/trainers during classes Q1.9 How instructors and trainers conduct their classes Q1.10 Level of individualization of classes (instructors pay attention to individual needs of participants)
Product	Classes offered and other services of the club (OZ)	Q2.1 Number of sport and recreation classes to choose from Q2.2 Timetable per week (weekly schedule) Q2.3. Suggested class hours (daily schedule) Q2.4 Following market trends in club activities Q2.5 Breakdown by groups on the basis of physical fitness Q2.6 Gender breakdown Q2.7 Ability to freely choose the classes attended Q2.8. Number of people in group classes Q2.9 Number of services outside sport and leisure activities (availability of massages, dietary advice, cosmetic services, restaurants, etc.) Q2.10 Quality of sport and recreation activities in the club
Price	Price of classes and other services (CE)	Q3.1. Prices of sport and recreation activities Q3.2 Prices of additional services in the club (e.g. massages, dietary advice, cosmetic services, restaurants, etc.) Q3.3 Attractiveness of the promotion and level of discounts from basic prices Q3.4. Special offers for club customers Q3.5 Payment terms for classes Q3.6 Methods of payment for classes

Promotion	Promotional activities of the club (DP)	Q4.1 Transparency of the club website Q4.2 Ease of movement on the club website Q4.3 Adaptation of the club website for use on mobile devices Q4.4. News on the club's website Q4.5. Use of leaflets and posters to promote the club's offer Q4.6 Method of communication between the club and the customer Q4.7 Frequency of communication between the club and the customer Q4.8 Benefits of a loyalty card Q4.9 Number of promotions addressed to customers
Physical evidences	Appearance and equipment of the club (WK)	Detailed items of the studied area Q5.1. Size of the changing room Q5.2. Number of lockers available in the changing room Q5.3 Appearance and condition of the changing room Q5.4. Number of showers in the changing room Q5.5 Appearance and condition of bathrooms and toilets Q5.6 Amount of exercise space Q5.7 Modernity of sports equipment Q5.8. Quality and condition of sports equipment Q5.9. Number of sports equipment Q5.10 Maintaining cleanliness in the club Q5.11 Club interior design
Distribution	Club location (LK)	Q6.1. Location of the club in the city Q6.2. Club signs, directions to the club Q6.3. Access to the club from your place of residence or work Q6.4. Number of parking spaces in front of the club Q6.5. Possibility to reach the club by public transport
Processes	Other aspects of the club (IN)	Q7.1 Access to information about classes, prices, timetable, etc. Q7.2 Customer service efficiency Q7.3 Punctuality of starting and ending classes Q7.4. Club opening hours Q7.5 Efficiency of complaint handling

Data analysis

In the study we applied structural equations modelling. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to investigate the data structure in relation to the theoretical concept of 7P marketing mix. In order to examine the tool's structure Standardized Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) was used. Due to data gaps not exceeding 6% for individual indicators, they have been supplemented with a neutral value (zero). The analysis included 474 observations and 56 variables divided into 7 unequal content areas (constructs). The indicators of multidimensional evaluation of distribution normality suggested the choice of the resistant method; calculations using the generalised smallest squares method were chosen. For measuring the model fit, the Normed Chi-square (χ^2/df), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) were analysed. We carried out Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests to verify the normality of the data. Internal reliability was determined by Cronbach's alpha using a cut-off value of 0.7 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). The statistical inference included descriptive statistics using the arithmetic mean (M), the standard deviation (SD), skew (skewness) and kurt (kurtosis). The analyzes were performed in the IBM® SPSS® Amos™ 44.0.

Results

The results of the CFA analysis are shown in Figure 1. Due to the relationships between the constructs, in addition to the values of the coefficients for the individual areas, the path factors between the constructs were also checked. Model provides a reasonably good fit with $\chi^2/df = 1,94$, RMSEA = 0,045 (0,044-0,047), AGFI = 0,766, CFI = 0,446; TLI = 0,395. The result of the χ^2 test proved statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). In CFA large samples are required to obtain robust, reliable parameter estimates, but they increase the likelihood of significant χ^2 values indicating inadequacy of a hypothesized model (Hair et al., 2019). As for χ^2/df , the acceptable threshold level is below 3.0 (Little & Kline, 2016). Values of RMSEA of less than 0.05 imply a satisfactory model fit. AGFI value is close to 0.8 acceptable level. Only two last indices (CFI and TLI) have a lower value than expected and show a moderate fit. It is therefore possible to consider further theoretical exploration of the model and possibly consider the size of the structure and constructs.. No paths with statistically insignificant coefficients appeared in relation to the theoretical structure. It should be stressed that the modification indexes indicated that removing or adding any paths did not improve the model fit. Therefore, due to the theoretical background, the model was not modified, because the construct of the whole tool was confirmed. All dimensions of the test tool were interconnected. The values of both raw correlation coefficients and pathway coefficients indicate strong relationships between the different dimensions of the tool (Table 3). The strongest relationships

can be observed between the appearance of the club and the price ($\beta=0.409$); and between the location of the club and its other aspects ($\beta=0.406$).

Table 3. Interdependencies between tool dimensions (N=474)

Spearman's rho coefficient	DK	OZ	CE	DP	WK	LK	IN
DK							
OZ	0.364*						
CE	0.224*	0.326*					
DP	0.196*	0.314*	0.459*				
WK	0.176*	0.215*	0.503*	0.356*			
LK	0.136*	0.241*	0.498*	0.363*	0.485*		
IN	0.331*	0.255*	0.284*	0.292*	0.319*	0.340*	
Path coefficients (β)	DK	OZ	CE	DP	WK	LK	IN
DK							
OZ	0.386*						
CE	0.310*	0.350*					
DP	0.246*	0.350*	0.217*				
WK	0.205*	0.187*	0.409*	0.187*			
LK	0.205*	0.222*	0.384*	0.219*	0.317*		
IN	0.356*	0.271*	0.344*	0.313*	0.286*	0.406*	

* $p < 0.01$

Path coefficients (standardised) for individual items within the research tool were mostly above 0.7, although it should be noted that questions Q7.5 had a very low path coefficient ($\gamma=0.39$) (Figure 1).

Note: CE- Price; DK- People; OZ- Product, WK- Physical evidences; DP- Promotion; IN- Processes; LK- Distribution

Figure 1. Confirmation model of the research construct

The statistics obtained showed that all the variables showed significant differences from the normal distribution (Table 4). The measurements obtained indicate very high reliability of the measurement - the highest for the appearance of the club ($\alpha=0.91$), the lowest for its other aspects ($\alpha=0.73$).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for measured items

Spearman's rho coefficient	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurt	D	α
DK	4.13	0.70	-0.55	-0.09	0.05*	0.91
OZ	4.02	0.62	-0.39	0.07	0.06**	0.88
CE	3.78	0.70	-0.42	0.53	0.06*	0.89
DP	3.85	0.70	-0.85	1.58	0.06*	0.92
WK	3.83	0.71	-0.15	-0.30	0.10*	0.92
LK	3.70	0.90	-0.54	-0.12	0.08*	0.84
IN	4.05	0.71	-0.47	0.11	0.09*	0.73

*p<0.01

Discussion

It has been confirmed that consumer satisfaction is particularly sensitive to the marketing mix strategy adopted which stands in line with previous studies. Garg et al. (2016) proved the indirect impact of four elements of the marketing mix (product, price, promotion and distribution) on consumer satisfaction. However, Baidya and Basu (2009) claimed that not all elements of the marketing mix have the same impact on consumer satisfaction, and their results may be a starting point for scientific considerations on the strength of impact of particular elements of the marketing mix on satisfaction with products and services. Many scientists argue that there is a positive correlation between the price of a service and the level of satisfaction (Cheng, Lai, & Yeung, 2008; Oliver, 1997). Niko et al. (2015) believe that an organisation that wants to increase satisfaction with its offer should pay special attention to the price perceived by customers. The authors suggest applying price reductions and discounts without losing product quality. A positive correlation between consumer satisfaction and the processes taking place in the organisation and the location of the organisation has also been proved. Such analyses were carried out, for example, by Yelkur (2000), who recognised the processes taking place in the organisation as an important factor related to customer satisfaction. In the case of studies conducted in fitness clubs, these processes include customer service efficiency or complaints handling. Berbeko (2004) analysed the factors relevant to visitors to sports facilities and identified accessibility to a sports facility and the location of the facility in a given area as the most important elements in the assessment of a sports facility.

As far as the relationship between the marketing mix and consumer satisfaction in the sports and leisure industry is concerned, Yee, Yeung and Ma (2013) indicate that the satisfaction of fitness club consumers is related to several marketing instruments, especially personnel, physical evidence, quality of service and psychological factors. Kim and Lough (2007) who analyzed the private golf training services offered by a private organization in South Korea found a positive correlation between the instrument concerning club staff (people) and consumer satisfaction. Both soft competences such as courtesy and empathy as well as the knowledge and substantive skills of the entire club's staff proved to be significant. Ko & Pastore (2007) also emphasise the importance of the staff and their knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards service recipients in assessing consumer satisfaction. Lee et al. (2011) that physical evidence such as, for example, the surroundings of the club, the greenery around the club, the condition and aesthetics of the changing rooms and lockers in the club, as well as the equipment are related to the satisfaction of the participants, especially women. The literature on service marketing also points to the importance of physical evidence in the assessment of the entire organisation (for example, the provision of comfortable, clean facilities and appropriate facilities in the organisation) in the process of service provision (Ko & Pastore, 2007). The studies on customer satisfaction with services distinguish, apart from 7P, more factors related to the existence or lack of consumer satisfaction. Direct correlation between customer satisfaction and loyalty is found. Satisfied offer recipients become loyal customers (Garcia-Fernández, Gálvez-Ruiz, Fernández-Gavira, & Vélez-Colón, 2016; Kim & Lough, 2007; Mostert, Petzer, & Weideman, 2016). Other researchers point to the link between satisfaction and the quality of services – the higher the quality of service perceived by consumers, the greater customer satisfaction (Raza & Rehman, 2012; Widawska-Stanis, 2016).

Conclusions and Implications

The product offer of organizations providing sports and leisure services (in terms of quantity and value) is currently very wide and complex (Berkko, 2018). Producers of goods and service providers involved in sport and recreation activities expect a good diagnosis of consumer behaviour in the markets for sport and recreation services from researchers in these areas of physical culture. An important behaviour of a consumer expected by companies is his or her satisfaction with the organisation's services. The designed tool allows to evaluate all areas of functioning of a fitness club according to the 7P theory for services. Therefore, the created model can help analyse, evaluate and shape customer behaviour in the contemporary market. We established that the evaluation of seven instruments of the marketing mix allows to assess the satisfaction with the services of a fitness club. The study may be considered as a prelude to further scientific analyses of the respondent's personal characteristics that affect his or her satisfaction. However, today's consumers are demanding and aware of the great variety of recreational and sports services (Berkko, 2004). Their tastes and preferences change frequently.

Many fitness clubs try to adapt their offer to the ever-new consumer expectations. Moreover, due to other factors influencing consumer satisfaction (e.g. the degree of customer loyalty), we suggest that further research should be conducted in order to find out what the needs and expectations of fitness club participants have and what is their level of loyalty to the organisation chosen. Trying to correlate the needs and perception of fitness and fitness services and loyalty with consumer satisfaction could change the approach of a sports and leisure organisation to the consumer.

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Ethical Clearance - The study design has been approved by the Senate Ethics Committee of the Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw (No. SKE 08/2016).

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