

## Consumer perception and behaviour retention in Gyms and Health Clubs

**Gonçalves, Celina.** Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (celinag@ipb.pt)  
**Correia, Abel.** Technical University of Lisbon

**Introduction:** The present study aims to find out to what extent the perception that the members have from gyms and health clubs (GHC) contributes to the retention, through specific variables. It tries to go beyond the exclusive study of quality, searching for a set of dimensions and indicators of positioning as important factors for retention.

One of the main reasons why the members dropout the practice of physical activity is the inability to feel or see the positive consequences related to the health and well-being in their practice (Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis & Grouios, 2004). The services of the GHC shall provide the opportunity to achieve desires, such as weight loss, socialization, fun, relaxation, among other benefits (Brenda & Stotlar, 1996) if it does not happen members dropout because they seek some sort of satisfaction in these organizations that justifies what they pay. The industry of fitness is a very dynamic market, therefore the need to understand the members is essential. It costs five times more to attract a new member than retain an existing one. So we should look for potential customers but the focus on retention is essential to the balance of GHC (Grantham, Patton, York & Winick 1998). It is possible to understand the reasons why members join the club: specialized human resources, pleasure, friends influence, friendly staff and proper space. Furthermore, the perception that the clubs are overloaded, intended for a young audience, suited to coupling, the lack of attention from the staff, dissatisfaction with the programs, cleaning of the facility and dishonesty of the business are strong reason for dropout (Tharrett & Peterson, 2006).

**Methods:** The analysis model is formed by: dimensions (resources, accessibility, service and image); specific variables (motivation for the practice, constant/inconstant motivation, frequency, activities attended and monthly spending); independent variables (age, gender, qualifications and income) and output variable (retention).

In the descriptive statistics the parameters of central tendency and dispersion are analysed and in the inferential statistics the discriminant analysis and the factor analysis in principal components (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 1998). The sample is formed by 8 clubs of the group Solinca Health & Fitness Clubs totalising 2520 members. The sample shows an error band of  $p=0,05$  (Tagliacarne, 1976).

**Results:** The female members, with higher qualifications, have an average perception of the club's image which favours the abandonment. The middle aged members show a constant motivation in both genders due to the prestige of the Solinca group. The members showing the improvement of the physical condition as main motivation consider the Solinca as specialised and intend to visit the club frequently.

**Discussion:** It seems that people need the practice in order to feel improvement in their well-being and health. One of the main reasons why members abandon the practice of physical exercise is the incapacity to feel or to see the positive consequences related to health and well-being in its practice (Tharrett & Peterson, 2006).

Thus the GHC search for social and economic exchanges, exchanges of meanings and emotions, besides meeting their target group in the constant search for the reaching of their goals. With the growing increase of competition, it is necessary to conquer and preserve a position which satisfies the member. For a member to continue in the organisation, the member needs to find value in the participation (Green, 2005).

### References:

Aaker, D. A., Kumar, V., & Day, G. S. (1998). *Marketing research* (sixth edition). USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Alexandris, K., Zahariadis, P., Tsorbatzoudis, C., & Grouios, G. (2004). An Empirical Investigation of the relationships among service quality, customer satisfaction and psychological commitment in a health club context. *European Sport management Quarterly*, 4 (1), 36-52.

Brenda, G. P., & Stotlar, D.K. (1996). *Fundamentals of Sport Marketing*. USA: Fitness Information Technology, Inc.

Grantham, W.C., Patton, R. W., York, T. D., & Winick, M. (1998). *Health Fitness Management: A comprehensive resource for managing and operating programs and facilities*. United States of America: Human Kinetics.

Green, C. (2005). Building sport programs to optimize athlete recruitment, retention, and transition: Toward a normative theory of sport development. *Journal of Sport Management*, 19 (3), 233-253.

Tagliacarne (1976). *Pesquisa de Mercado: Técnica e Prática*, 2.<sup>a</sup> Edição. São Paulo: Atlas.

Tharrett, S. J., & Peterson, J. A. (2006). *Fitness Management: A comprehensive resource for developing, leading, managing, and operating a successful Health/fitness club*. United States: Healthy Learning.