

## CONSUMER SATISFACTION THE TYPE OF FITNESS CLUB IN BACAU

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**Abstract:** *In fitness clubs, the consumer satisfaction degree is hard to assess, because there are many reasons/ sources of satisfaction, many products/services that can be done according to the experience the customer wants to have, passing through all the stages, from a new client, to a satisfied, and a loyal one. Because satisfaction is mainly a specific experience and a subjective phenomenon that can be nevertheless subjected to an objective determinism, an effective strategy of positioning the fitness product can be aimed towards positively influencing the individual's subjective perception at different levels (and/or for different components of the product), for increasing his/her satisfaction.*

*Working with a large group of clients who manifest an interest towards a certain fitness club created the possibility to capture the mutations in the satisfaction level and their causes.*

**Key words:** *satisfaction, consumer, fitness, client, loyal.*

### 1. Introduction

Satisfaction represents "a real key for modeling the client's purchase behavior, based on three groups of variables: cognitive (based on a qualitative superiority of the merchandise, due to its high performance), affective (based on the emotions aroused in the buyer), and co native (based on the seller-buyer interaction during the buying process (Meyer-Waarden, L., 2004)" (quoted by Stăncioiu A. F., Nicolae Al. Pop, 2006).

A general look on the quality of life in Romania shows some aspects of life considered to be positive which are support elements in the people's lives, while other

components are maintaining in negative areas, being permanent sources of dissatisfaction, with social marginalization and exclusion effects (Dobrescu T., 2008).

Fitness for life is "a phrase that represents an entire philosophy revealing the importance of a rational diet in which the physical exercises are an inseparable part of man's existence". (Dragnea A, 1999). In the fitness clubs, as the individual keeps consuming more and more specific packages/products (muscle strengthening programs, muscle elasticization and increasing heart endurance, massage rehabilitation techniques, reflexotherapy and/or sauna

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relaxation, solar, etc.), he becomes a client (fig. 1). The target audience for these activities are the persons preoccupied with improving their fitness, who need specific training for improving the quality of their lives and increasing the effectiveness of socio-professional activities. (Dobrescu T., Stăncioiu A. F., 2007)

Due to the fact that in the field of shaping the physical condition, the product is more an "experience", the role of the marketer is to understand/transform the product in an unique experience lived by the consumer throughout the whole training. Thus, each product must not only have certain characteristics that would differentiate it from the competitors', but these characteristics must also position it as unique in the fitness products/experiences consumer's mind, leading us to a hierarchy his satisfaction degrees (Dobrescu T., Stăncioiu A. F., 2007) (fig. 1).

In fitness clubs, the consumer satisfaction degree is hard to assess, because there are many reasons/ sources of satisfaction, many products/services that can be done according to the experience the customer wants to have, passing through all the stages, from a new client, to a satisfied, and a loyal one.

So the static vision regarding the satisfaction as a state of fact in relation with the customer, is replaced and gradually completed by the cumulated satisfaction paradigm, resulted from a process that can be conducted only in the presence of a stable customer, who comes repeatedly in one single fitness club to achieve certain objectives.

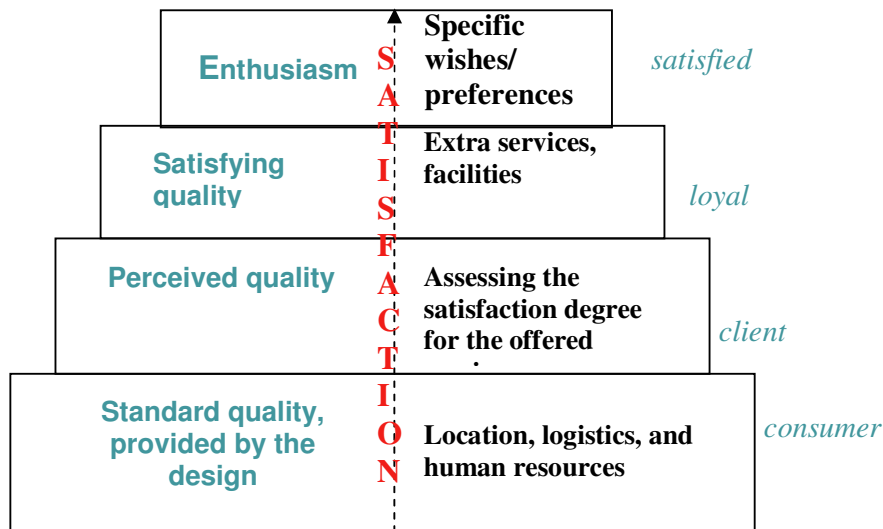


Fig 1. The quality - satisfaction - degree of loyalty relation according to Dobrescu T., Stăncioiu A. F., 2007

Starting from the facts previously stated, the experience lived by a consumer when using a product, divided into dimensions or

attributes, can constitute both the aim - consumer satisfaction, and the base for making loyal customers.

After 1989, in Romania, as in other countries, fitness clubs flourished. For the people preoccupied with their looks, words like "fitness", "body-building", "aerobic gymnastics" are part of their everyday language, and the advantage of physical maintenance clubs is that they impose a systematic exercise regime and the training sessions are conducted by specialists. (Dobrescu T., 2008)

In such clubs, the necessity for assessing the consumer satisfaction appeared as the clients became more and more demanding, thus the club owners being forced to adapt and surpass the customer's expectations.

The arguments presented above were sufficient to think that this theme is current, its study being needed for the people working to promote physical fitness in Bacau fitness clubs.

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## 2. Material and method

The aim of this study is to identify the fitness club customer's satisfaction degree taking into consideration the characteristics for this type of services.

The *objectives* of this study, generated by its aim, envisaged:

- identifying the degree of satisfaction regarding the surrounding conditions of specialized clubs,
- assessing the satisfaction regarding the services offered in fitness clubs,
- identifying the sources of information on this type of services.

Starting from the importance of knowing the way in which the services of a fitness club offers opportunities that are favorable for clients, I have conducted a poll in a club of this type.

Having this in mind, I formulated the following *hypothesis*, presuming that: Knowing the satisfaction degree of the fitness consumers constitutes a starting point for an improving intervention, thus changing the satisfaction levels and creating loyal customers.

The research was conducted at the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010, on a group of 33 female clients, with ages between 18 and 65. Taking into account the characteristics of the services in general, and the ones of fitness programs in particular, the chosen group is composed only of loyal customers of the club. In order to verify the hypothesis, I have conducted an inquiry at the *Silhouette* fitness club, in Bacau, being given the opportunity to know, as a client, what the club actually has to offer during the fitness and aerobic gymnastics sessions.

The *research methods* used were: study of the bibliographical material, the inquiry method, the statistical-mathematical method and the graphical representation method. The research was in administering a questionnaire containing 18 items, with closed (Yes and No), prefigures, or open answers. In order to evaluate the satisfaction degree, for some answers I asked the subjects to use a scale of 1-10.

The questionnaire aimed to assess the satisfaction degree of the fitness consumers and

to spot the elements in the specialized clubs that would win the loyalty of a customer. It was structured in four sections, considering the complexity of the decisional process in managing a club, and the complex behavior of the consumer throughout the whole session. (Dobrescu T., Raveica G., 2010).

- SECTION 1 comprises items regarding the sources of information;
- SECTION 2 asks the people to assess their satisfaction levels regarding the services offered to them;
- SECTION 3 presents socio-demographic characteristics of the clients being questioned;
- SECTION 4 asks for specific preferences/wishes.

At the end, the subjects were being asked to make suggestions/

recommendations and, optionally, to give some identification data (their names).

### 3. Results

Following the analysis of the results, I observed the aspects presented below. In the first section, I identified the major sources of information for choosing the fitness club. Here, most of the subjects answered they took into consideration different recommendations given by friends, or colleagues. In evaluating the satisfaction degree, I noticed they were *very happy* with the advices they were given and with the promotional materials offered by the fitness club (posters, commercials, etc.)

Answers for Section I

Table 1

Sources	No. of Resp.	Satisfaction indicator
Promotional materials offered by the clubs: posters, media advertising, etc.	10X	9x9, 6x8, 2x7, 5x5, 2x4, 3x3, 2x2
Advice from friends, colleagues, etc.	29X	9x10, 10x9, 5x8, 3x7, 1x5, 2x2, 1x1
Internet search	5X	3x10, 2x9, 3x8, 5x7, 3x6, 2x5, 2x4, 1x3, 2x2, 2x1
Other source, exemplify	1 other source, specialists	1x10, 1x9, 1x1
No answer	0 X	0

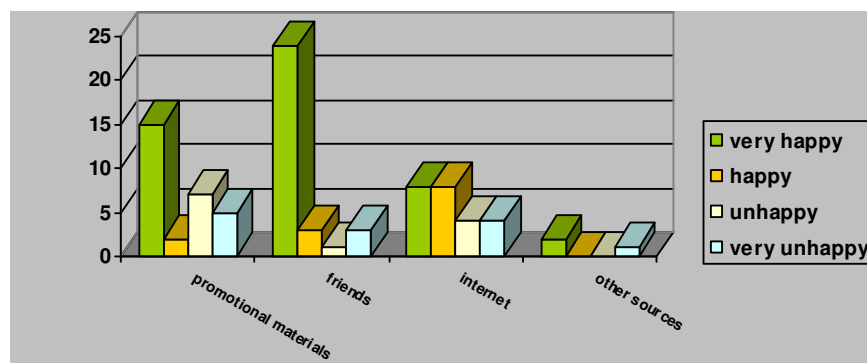


Chart 1. Section I satisfaction results

In the second section, I tried to assess the consumer satisfaction regarding the services they were offered. The club offered a variety of services, including Body building, Pilates, Step dancing, Tae bo, Aerobic dancing, electrostimulation, and the body building. (Table 2).

Table 2

Answers for Section II - The degree of diversity for the fitness activities

Services	Chosen	Attended
Aerobic dance	25X	20X
Body building	17X	16X
Pilates	2X	2X
Step dancing	5X	3X
Tae bo	3X	3X
Electrostimulation	10X	3X
Massage	16X	5X
Sauna	13X	6X
Others	6 out of which 1 fitness, 1 packing	4 out of which 1 fitness, 3 not specified
No answer	0	0

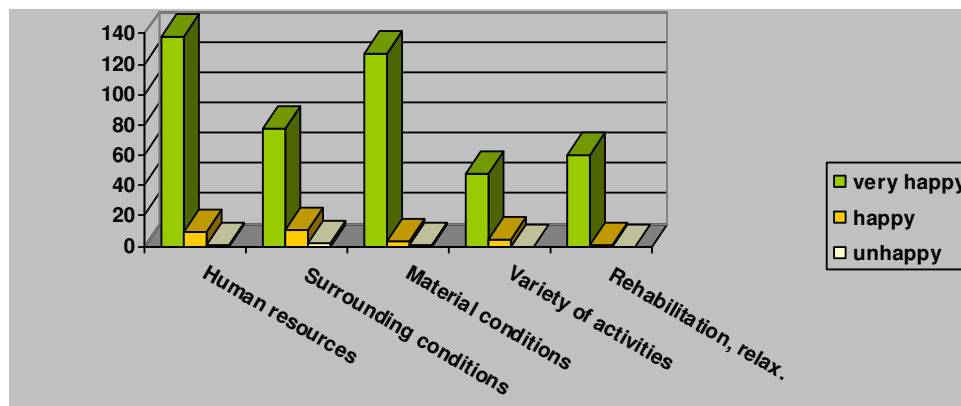


Chart 2. Section II satisfaction results

Assessing the satisfaction for each of the services used by the subjects showed the majority being *very happy* for the quality of the human resources and surrounding conditions. They mentioned: the kindness of the reception personnel, the presence of qualified fitness instructors and kinesiotherapists, a pleasant working environment, the possibility to personalize your training session, the possibility to work in groups of people with the same level of training.

Highly valued are the material resources, meaning the quality of the specialized training devices and equipment, their condition, their variety, and the possibility to dose your effort and to assess it.

The subjects also valued the large spaces of the rooms where the sessions took place, the cleanness of the locker and training rooms, of the bathrooms; the air conditioning giving the optimal working temperature, the security offered for the

personal belongings (deposited in lockers, left on benches), the sound equipment, TV, and the possibility to choose your subscription based on your preferences.

Also, the possibilities for physical rehabilitation, relaxation, and a multiple choice of options (massage, sauna, solar, shower, effort stimulation and maintenance products, refreshing drinks) are also appreciated by some of the subjects.

*Answers for Section II – services*

Table 3

Services	Subjects x Mark
1. Human resources (personnel)	86x10, 23x9, 19x8, 5x7, 4x6, 1x5
2. Surroundings	11x10, 44x9, 22x8, 8x7, 3x6, 2x2
3. Material resources	69x10, 47x9, 14x8, 3x7, 1x5
4. Variety degree of fitness activities	27x10, 15x9, 6x8, 3x7, 1x6
5. Rehabilitation, relaxation	41x10, 16x9, 3x8, 1x7

Among the favorable answers are also the ones about the lack of problems encountered during training sessions, and even if encountered, they were promptly solved.

After the inquiry, I observed that 100% of the subjects said they would recommend the club to their friends, the preferred services being the electrostimulation, the solar and the massage.

The **third section** identified the socio-demographic indicators characterizing the lifestyle of the studied consumers, realizing a correlation between it and the

satisfaction degree. Thus, we can see that several clients come from other fields than the ones mentioned before, that is the private sector, and the average monthly income for them is around 1000 - 1500 lei (at the date of the inquiry).

To the question "What was the reason for choosing the services of a fitness club?" most of the subjects answered they give priority to the improvement of physical condition, maintaining their health, losing weight, muscle strengthening, increasing heart endurance, and in a smaller amount, for shaping their bodies.

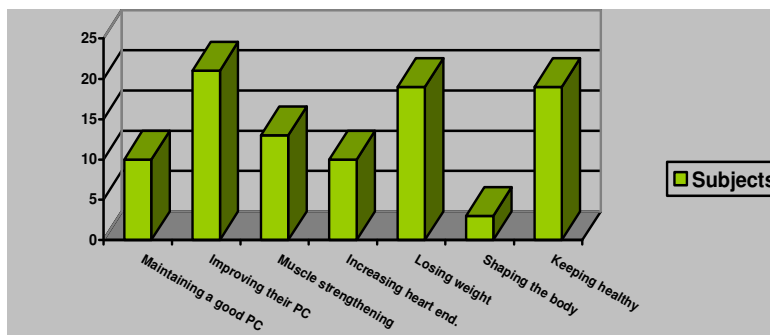


Chart 3. Section III results, according to the reason for choosing the services

The **fourth section** tried to identify the specific preferences the subjects have, how would they improve the services of the fitness club.

In the case of repeating the same experience in the *Silhouette* fitness club, their preferences were several (table 3).

*Preferences inside the chosen club*

Table 3

Improve the services	Preference	
Location	The same-28X	Other-3X
Services	Personalized-17X	No-8X
Offers: subscription	Yes-30X	No-1X
Possibilities for subscriptions	2-3 programs-12X	more programs-15X
Possibilities for attending the sessions	Regular-25X	Sporadic-4X
Service diversification	Yes-29X	No-3X
Surroundings conditions	Yes-29X	No-0
Commitment of the staff	Yes-26X	No-3X
Rehabilitation, relaxation programs	Yes-24X	No-2X
Working in groups	Yes-22X	No-6X
The diversity of the specialized equipment and devices	Yes-27X	No-1X

The suggestions given by the subjects envisaged the following:

- An improvement of the working conditions
- A request for newer offers, including loyalty bonuses
- A variation of the aerobic-type programs
- More various offers for elderly persons
- Hiring specialists for each form of fitness
- Strictness and exactingness in assessing the work done by the customers
- Modifying the aerobic sessions schedule according to the clients' time
- More different fitness devices

#### 4. Conclusions

After conducting this research, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. Because satisfaction is mainly a specific experience and a subjective phenomenon that can be nevertheless subjected to an objective determinism,

an effective strategy of positioning the fitness product can be aimed towards positively influencing the individual's subjective perception at different levels (and/or for different components of the product), for increasing his/her satisfaction.

2. The questionnaire aimed to assess the satisfaction degree of the fitness consumers and to spot the elements in the specialized clubs that would win the loyalty of a customer.
3. Taking into consideration the complexity of the decisional process in managing a club, and the complex behavior of the consumer throughout the whole session, the questionnaire, structured in four sections, gave data regarding the sources of information for choosing the location.
4. The assessment of the consumer satisfaction regarding fitness clubs, the various services they provide (body building, Pilates, Step dance, Tae bo, Aerobic dance, electrostimulation), the personalized treatment ensured by a specialized personnel, rehabilitation

through massage techniques, sauna relaxation, solar, and many others, has shown a superior level of client satisfaction.

5. The questionnaire identified the indicators characterizing the consumer's lifestyle, allowing me to make a correlation between it and the satisfaction degree, and to identify the data regarding supplementary services.
6. The interpretation of the results on the basis of satisfaction scores for all the determining attributes/factors which the consumers said they were "very happy" about, will ease the creation of loyalty strategies, price, product, packaging and personnel strategies, and also actions with an immediate result, to diminish the clients' migration (offering supplementary services, etc.).
7. In order for the action to be effective and relevant, it is necessary for the inquiry to be conducted periodically, the subjects could represent the loyal customers, and the fitness club should have an extensive database of the clients, constantly updated.
8. Working with a large group of clients who manifest an interest towards a certain fitness club created the possibility to capture the mutations in the satisfaction level and their causes, and confirmed the initial hypothesis.

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