



“BECAUSE I CHOOSE TO”: REASONS FOR WOMEN TO CHOOSE BOUTIQUE FITNESS CENTERS

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The aim of this study is to investigate the women’s perspective about boutique fitness center and explain their opinions through service quality dimension and demands of these customers.

Methodology/Approach: The study was in qualitative research technique and phenomenology pattern was used. The study sample consisted of 9 female customers of a private boutique fitness centers selected. The data was collected through face-to-face interview and content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data.

Main results: The results show that female participants’ opinions about preferring the boutique fitness centers are linked in the sub-themes as Socialization, Physical Changes, Location & Transport, Security, Customer-oriented, Environment and Program of the theme Preference Reasons. In conclusion, the most significant factors affecting participants to take part in boutique fitness centers are physical changes, socialization and program.

Theoretical and methodological contributions: The paper theoretically contributes to the literature related to boutique fitness centers by revealing reasons for female customers to choose boutique fitness centers in terms of experiential point of view.

Keywords: Fitness. Consumer. Service quality. Boutique fitness. Women.

Cite como

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"PORQUE YO ELIJO": RAZONES POR LAS QUE LAS MUJERES ELIGEN LOS GIMNASIOS BOUTIQUE

RESUMEN

Objetivos: El objetivo de este estudio es investigar las percepciones de las mujeres sobre los gimnasios boutiques y explicar sus opiniones a través de la dimensión de la calidad del servicio y las demandas de estos clientes.

Metodología / Enfoque: El estudio utilizó la técnica de investigación cualitativa y se utilizó el patrón fenomenológico. La muestra del estudio consistió en nueve clientas de un gimnasio boutique privado. Los datos se recolectaron mediante entrevista presencial y se utilizó el método de análisis de contenido en el análisis de los datos.

Contribuciones teóricas y metodológicas: Los resultados muestran que las opiniones de las participantes femeninas sobre la preferencia por los gimnasios boutique están vinculadas en los subtemas como socialización, cambios físicos, ubicación y transporte, seguridad, orientación al cliente, medio ambiente y programa. En conclusión, los factores más importantes que afectan a los participantes a participar en los gimnasios boutique son los cambios físicos, la socialización y el programa.

Contribuciones teóricas y metodológicas: El artículo contribuye a la literatura relacionada con los centros de fitness boutique, en cuanto a las principales razones por las que las mujeres eligen un centro de fitness boutique desde el punto de vista experiencial.

Palabras clave: Fitness. Consumidor. Calidad de servicio. Boutique fitness. Mujeres.

“PORQUE EU ESCOLHO”: MOTIVOS PARA AS MULHERES ESCOLHEREM ACADEMIAS DE GINÁSTICA BOUTIQUE

RESUMO

Objetivos: O objetivo deste estudo é investigar a perspectiva das mulheres sobre academia boutique e explicar suas opiniões através da dimensão da qualidade do serviço e das demandas dessas clientes.

Metodologia/Abordagem: O estudo foi na técnica de pesquisa qualitativa e foi utilizado o padrão fenomenológico. A amostra do estudo consistiu em nove clientes do sexo feminino de uma boutique privada de academias de ginástica selecionadas. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevista face a face e o método de análise de conteúdo foi utilizado na análise dos dados.

Principais resultados: Os resultados mostram que as opiniões das participantes do sexo feminino sobre a preferência pelas academias boutique estão vinculadas nos subtemas como Socialização, Mudanças Físicas, Localização e Transporte, Segurança, Orientação para o Cliente, Meio Ambiente e Programa do tema Motivos de Preferência. Em conclusão, os fatores mais significativos que afetam os participantes a participar de academias de ginástica boutique são mudanças físicas, socialização e programa.

Contribuições teórico-metodológicas: O artigo contribui com a literatura relacionada às academias boutique, a respeito dos principais motivos pelos quais as mulheres escolhem uma academia boutique do ponto de vista experiencial.

Palavras-chave: Fitness. Consumidor. Qualidade de serviço. Boutique fitness. Mulheres.



1 Introduction

Many studies have shown the importance of physical activities for many years (Diaz et al., 2015; Hulteen et al., 2018; Piercy et al., 2018). The physical activity carried out by an individual without pushing themselves so hard can be twice as much effective in preventing death at an early age and serious illness especially for middle age and later periods (Farrance et al., 2016; Gonçalves et al., 2017; Moraes et al., 2016). Physical activity is often defined as the most effective way to be healthy. It has many benefits on human body such as decreasing blood pressure, weight loss, cardiovascular improvement, muscular stamina, developing immunity to illnesses and preventing illnesses related to old age (Batoulia & Saba, 2017; Nasi et al., 2019; Porras et al., 2018; Wilhelm & Pinto, 2018). On the other hand, social circle including cultural norms and cultural history of an individual has a distinctive effect on physical activity. In this sense, while arranging an individualistic behavior such as physical activity, there can be economic, social and cultural constraints (Joseph, Ramaswamy, & Wang, 2018). That the physical activity gained such an important place in the social life increased the popularity of the fitness centers.

By definition, the concept of fitness requires a formation of strength which can be tested by weight or grocery lifting, flexibility which can be observed through a yoga posture or when you bend to tie your shoes and cardiovascular endurance which can be performed when you do power’ walk or walk to work. Furthermore, the definition can include aspects such as character, attractiveness, happiness, strength, morality, intelligence, courage, honesty and how these aspects change the body. In addition, doing sports has some benefits for the people. The literature review reveals that physical exercise can be helpful, if not a cure, to many problems of the modern people (Langlois et.al., 2013; Tanaka et.al., 2009). Considering literature, it can be seen that there are many benefits coming along with physical activities and these are not limited with body improvement; on the other hand, physical exercise is a way to socialize, feel good about one’s self and self-confidence. Today physical activity has a place in leisure, and it is rather intentional; however, it was not like this in the past since the technology was not enough to help people do daily house works easy (Maguire, 2007:1). Hornbuckle (2019) estimated that boutique fitness centers will contribute to the fitness trends by ranking in the top three in 2018, 2019 and 2020. It is also known that promoting the daily fitness activities is a must today. So, fitness centers which are specialized for the needs and requests of women have become popular and in demand.



All these benefits draw the attention of the researchers to the question of “where to do sports?”. As it is mentioned before, there was an expanding trend for mass-exercise-halls; also known as franchise fitness centers. As people started becoming member of these places, the service quality became more and more important in the competition. While the substance and determinants of quality may be undefined, its importance to firms and consumers is unequivocal (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The recent tendency towards boutique fitness centers that can be observed in life and approved by the literature led the researchers to investigate the perspectives of women in boutique fitness centers deeper and try to understand their reasons in terms of service quality. Since the literature does not include deeper understanding in terms of preferences, the study is thought to contribute to the literature. In the light of this, the aim of this study is to investigate the women’s perspective about boutique fitness center and explain their opinions through service quality dimension and demands of these customers.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Service Quality in Sports Centers

The concept of service quality generally defined as any activity or benefit which was provided by one party to another, ownership of which cannot be transferred to the other parties and is especially abstract (Kotler et al., 2005). To Zeithaml (1987), service quality is about the overall excellence or superiority of a business from the perception of customers. On the other hand, Parasuraman et.al. (1988) states that service quality can be described through a from of attitude related to satisfaction and comparison of expectation of customers to the given service. High quality service has become the policy of most of the firms and companies in today’s world in order to compete and survive in the market (Solimun & Fernandes, 2018). This situation bears resemblances to fitness sector as well (Yildiz, Polat & Güzel, 2018; Yıldız, Polat, Sönmezoğlu & Çokpartal, 2016). With the adaptation of technology in every aspect, sports centers are also in the competition of survival since the customers can reach all kinds of information easily through the Internet. Also “millions of dollars are daily spent in different countries for sports, and the needs for athletic activities in order to alleviate mental and physical problems are getting more and more pervasive” (Barshan et al., 2017).

Thus, the next question, it is easy to observe the quality of a product; however, how can a member of a fitness center observe the quality or, more appropriate to say, service quality of a fitness center? Many businesses are now interested in the answer to that question and the



answer is simple: expectations of the members. As some businesses collapse, some others learn better and provide with a better service quality ranging from accessibility to cleaning. Since the market of sports centers is getting bigger and bigger, the importance of service quality has become central. According to Polyakova and Mirza (2016), service quality does not form its ladders on its own, but it is created with the customer himself. In this, customers take part in physical activities, and they shape the standards of service quality through feedbacks.

As Foroughi et al., (2016) suggests, providing the customers with the high quality of service increases the levels of customer satisfaction and thus their loyalty. What dimensions form the service quality was explained in the literature by many researchers. Parasuraman et al., (2002), presents five dimensions affecting service quality which are as follows: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. These dimensions introduced by researchers have still kept their place in the customer satisfaction. Previous research supports the idea that the dimensions of service quality have a positive impact on customer satisfaction and happiness (Theodorakis et al., 2015). However, although these sports centers provide with everything today, boutique fitness centers are becoming more and more fashionable because they provide with one-on-one lessons of experienced trainers. Also, the literature emphasizes the importance of service quality in achieving behavior intentions (Tran, 2020) and developing customer loyalty and continuance of physical activity participation (Lee, 2017) which brought researchers to the investigation of service quality from the perspective of female participants in boutique fitness context.

2.2 Boutique Fitness Centers

By definition, a boutique fitness studio is a small gym, generally between 800 and 3500 square feet, that focuses on a more community-like group exercise in one or two specific fitness areas (Li et al., 2019). Boutique fitness centers include specialty areas in which the instructors offer both personal training programs and special types of sports such as Pilates or Yoga. This changed the attention of the consumers from big franchise gyms to smaller but to-the-point ones (Aronowitz, 2018). Thus, this industry grew rapidly in the recent years. The boutique fitness craze is getting wider and wider as time goes by. As Li et al. (2019) states, the trend was ranked no. 10 in 2018; however, it increased to no. 5 in 2019.

Today boutique fitness studios are considered as one of the “top fitness trends” in Europe according to the report of the European Survey of Fitness Trends for 2020 (Batrakoulis,



2019). The literature also suggests that boutique fitness options represent the 35% of the total sports center industry (Hambrick, 2017). Also, Hemme et al., (2017) presented that small gyms and entrepreneurs, which includes boutique fitness centers, have captured a significant share in the sports industry and they are constantly growing in number. The reason lying behind is that these centers offer small group environment and personalized coaching approach for their members who have different types of bodies since they require a personalized set of movements and action plans (Schmidt, 2018). Also paying attention to each customer and showing their clear progress result in the perceived service quality and customer loyalty (García-Fernández et al., 2020; Henderson, 2016). As a result, these implications reveal that “boutique fitness studios adapted to today’s desires” (Aronowitz, 2018).

Before boutique fitness centers, traditional gyms offered equipment and place to do sport; however, personal trainers were not enough to satisfy the needs of a lot of customers. The Boutique fitness centers; on the other hand, are founded by trainers with a passion for boutique fitness, and they are trying to fight and survive against large nation-wide businesses (Crabbe, 2018). These centers turned the traditional way of gyms up-side-down with personal attention and space they offer to their customers. Furthermore, in terms of boutique fitness center owners, these centers are proliferating more quickly since they require less amount of finance for investment (Baena-Arroyo et al., 2020; García-Fernández et al., 2020). Not only investment process is different but also the pricing policy for the customers is also different in the boutique fitness centers. Since traditional gyms can have hundreds of customers, their pricing policy can be cheaper than the boutique fitness centers; however, boutique fitness centers apply specialized programs which attracts members without any complaints or problems about the price.

3 Method

3.1 Research Model: In this study, phenomenology which is one of the qualitative research techniques was chosen. Phenomenology pattern is an effective technique in revealing individuals’ experiences, perceptions and ascribed meanings related to a phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). As Patton stated (2015), asking questions in dialogues and in chatting environment, being encouraging and giving feedbacks, controlling the interview process and being neutral are important principles for qualitative research. In order to achieve this, the interviewers applied these suggested principles.



3.2 Participants: 9 female customers of a private boutique fitness center which has around 250 customers chosen by convenience sampling method in the province of İzmir, Turkey participated in the study. The sample was chosen as such in order to reveal the female perception. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that 3-10 participants will suffice in the qualitative research with the phenomenology pattern. Consequently, it can be said that the current study includes sufficient number of participants. The participants receive Pilates lessons with personalized programs and individual trainers. Most of the participants are single and they either have bachelor’s degree or are bachelor’s degree students. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018), expresses the usage of convenience sampling method as the improbability of using other sampling methods. The information related to participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Information Related to Study Participants and Interviews

	Participants	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Interview Records (min.)
1	P1	44	F	Single	14.37
2	P2	42	F	Single	13.25
3	P3	28	F	Single	16:00
4	P4	20	F	Single	13:34
5	P5	56	F	Married	17:17
6	P6	37	F	Married	20:00
7	P7	31	F	Married	16.01
8	P8	36	F	Single	15.38
9	P9	42	F	Single	14:21

Source: Research data.

3.3 Data Collection Tools: In collecting data interview technique which is an important method in terms of effecting the scope and deepness of replies was used. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018) suggest that interview technique is a strong method used in revealing perspectives, experiences, emotions and perceptions of people. As interview approach, Patton’s (1987:95) interview form approach was used in the study. Interview questions were prepared by researchers in the light of expert opinions. The interview form consists of two parts. The first part includes information such as participant briefing form, the place, date, time and record duration and personal information related to the participants. The second part includes semi-structured, open-ended questions developed by the researchers. The questions are derived from service quality dimensions since the loyalty and satisfaction of customers are related to it. During the interviews, the questions were asked systematically using face-to-face interview techniques by the researchers.



3.4 Data Collection and Data Analysis: In the process of data collection, a boutique fitness center in Izmir (Turkey) was contacted and necessary permissions to start the study were taken. Subsequently, the customers of the boutique fitness center were contacted and permissions of the ones who want to participate in the study voluntarily were obtained and appointments were scheduled. In order to make the participants comfortable, interviews were made inside the fitness center. The data collected using a voice recording device was written down in a digital platform by the researchers. Also, the researchers took notes during the interviews in order to increase the reliability of the interview. The organized written data were coded by three scientists who have full knowledge of qualitative research. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, a coding system in participant definition was used (P1, P2, P3 etc.).

In the data analysis process, descriptive analysis method was chosen in order to analyze the data clearly, to reach correct results by evaluating the link between cause and effect and to evaluate the data properly. In the process of defining data and uniting similar expressions in notions and themes, content analysis was used. In the phase of content analysis, notion that can explain the obtained data were in the focus. The aim of the content analysis is to determine similar data, gather them in the frame of certain notions and logical themes and organize them in such a way that the readers can understand them (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2018). Also, the obtained interview data were analyzed in Voyant tool text mining program, and connection web model was revealed.

3.5 Validity and Reliability: In the process of qualitative research, validity and reliability are the most significant criteria of the credibility of the study results. In order to obtain the validity of study results, face-to-face interviews were made with the participants by taking their permission first and the data were collected directly in the field of study. Moreover, the calculated Kappa reliability test values displayed that the agreement value was determined as 0.82. According to the agreement values defined by Landis and Koch (1977:165), it can be said that the calculated agreement value is “almost perfect agreement”.

It was observed that the findings revealed in the process of research were in harmony with the studies in the literature. By considering consistency in the phases of data collection, data analysis and data evaluation, the researchers approached the subject as a whole and were in a constant critical approach. The variety was obtained by including individuals with different ages and wages which are presented in Table 2.



4 Findings

In this part of the study, findings obtained from the data and their evaluations are given.

Table 2. Socio-demographic information related to the participants

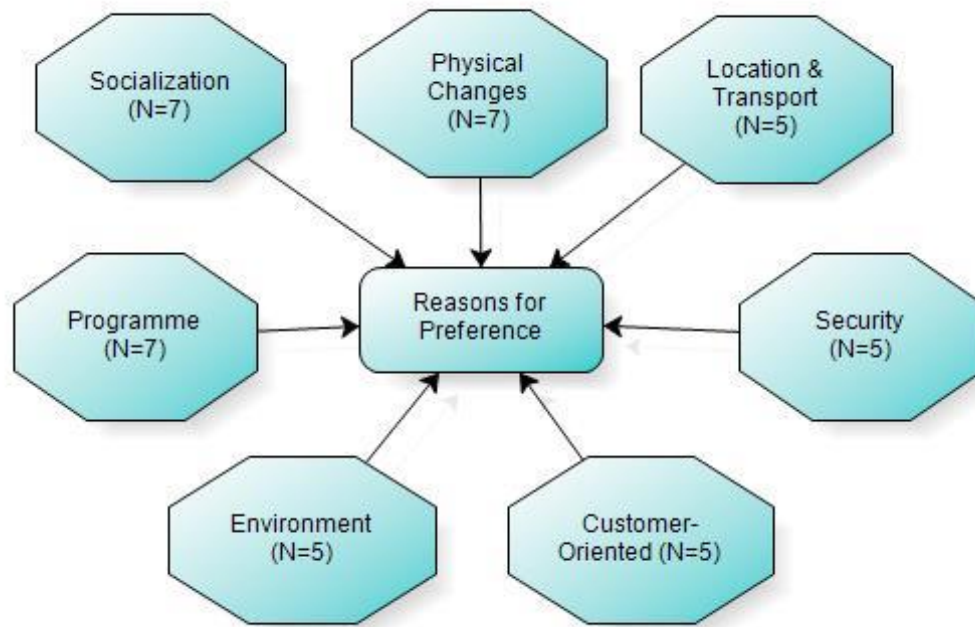
	Participants	Working Year	Occupation	Monthly Personal Income (\$)	Membership Duration (in months)
1	P1	25	Export Manager	841	3
2	P2	18	Academician	1514	4
3	P3	1.5	Engineer	504	5
4	P4	-	Student	-	12
5	P5	34	Academician	2355	12
6	P6	13	Doctor	504	41
7	P7	6	Doctor	925	8
8	P8	6	Self-employed	-	36
9	P9	2	Teacher	841	5

Source: Research data.

As seen in Table 2, there nine female participants in the study. Except for the participant who is a student, the working year was determined as ranging between 1.5 year and 34 years. Also it was seen that the participants belong to different occupations. The membership duration of the participants ranges between 3 months and 41 months.

Findings Related to the Reasons Why Female Participants Choose Boutique Fitness Centers

This study was conducted in the frame of the question “what are the reasons for women to choose boutique fitness centers?” and interview questions were asked and their opinions on this matter were taken. In the light of participant opinions, the obtained findings as a result of the analysis of the obtained data were presented in Model 1.



Model 1. Reasons for women to prefer boutique fitness centers (Prepared by Authors)

As can be seen in Model 1., female participants’ opinions about preferring the boutique fitness centers are linked in the sub-themes as Socialization, Physical Changes, Location & Transport, Security, Customer-oriented, Environment and Program of the theme Preference Reasons. According to their answers, the participants have shown the most related and significant factors about their preference. Thus, it can be inferred from the model that most of the participants take part in this activity with the purposes of physical changes such as losing weight or keeping fit, having an individualized program and socialization which includes meeting new people and bonding with them. Also other reasons why they prefer such boutique fitness center are the environment where they can feel free while doing exercise, location and transport which emphasizes the easy accessibility, security which is felt by the customers as a need and demand and customer-oriented approach of the center which is a must for each boutique fitness center since their emergence required being customer-oriented.

Expressions related to reasons for preference

The participants provided with two kinds of expressions during the interviews. These are categorized as positive expressions and negative expressions in the study. The positive expressions mainly identified their positive opinions about the boutique fitness center of which they are current members. However, negative expressions explain their negative impressions



and experiences about the large-scale fitness centers. These negative expressions pushed the participants to boutique fitness centers.

Positive Expressions related to reasons for preference

Socialization

According to the answers obtained from the participants, socialization has a main impact on the preference of boutique fitness centers. Since human nature requires, human beings are social creatures and need communication in the environment they spend their time. This need is expressed by the P2 as follows:

“Also, apart from that, these kinds of places are naturally good for socialization. Because you can meet with different people [working in] different sectors, you can have an hour to let it all hang out (P2).”

Physical Changes

One of the clear purposes of any leisure sport-related activity is to obtain physical changes. This purpose may include losing weight, keeping fit or improving muscle strength but they are all part of the same desire. This desire is expressed by P5 and P8 as follows:

“... naturally everybody’s expectation is to have a more flexible body and it is very important naturally because as one gets older, body movements become very limited like knees start to ache etc, body joints become hardened. So, these are my primary goals, I mean, sustaining my life actively; also, my second aim is to lose weight (P5).”

“... so now I went to those [gyms], as well a few years ago. Also, I did Pilates at home by myself, at the same time; I also became a member of a gym. I got more efficiency here; to be honest it changed my body structure. This is more beneficial for me (P8).”

Location & Transport:

The answers of the participants revealed that one of the most important factors of boutique fitness center preference is the location of the boutique fitness center and the ways of transport to reach it. As most of the participants are working class females, their time is valuable



for them and easy access has become more and more significant. The significance of location and transport is expressed by P1, P6, P7 and P9 as follows:

“... I think of it as more appropriate for me since it is closer to my house, they deal with me personally and I can arrange time flexibly and that’s why I prefer this (P1).”

“... [boutique fitness center’s] being close to the places where members live is important in terms of continuing your life together with sports. For this reason, I think [boutique fitness centers] should expand in numbers everywhere. That way, people can do sports easily (P7).”

“... The first feature, I think, and the most important feature of a sports center is being close to home (P6).”

“... one of the most important factors while doing sports is being close to home (P9).”

Security

According to the participant opinions, they want the environment where they do sport to be secure and comfortable. Also, it can be said that these results have a significant effect of preferring boutique fitness centers for the female participants.

“... of course, doing sports one on one is better and while doing sports, there are one or two people except for yourself. And this person is also a female. As a result, you do not encounter a situation in which you feel uncomfortable in terms of sexually or physically. For me, this is one of the biggest factors (P1).”

“...I feel comfortable because there is not a possibility of a male who can make me feel uncomfortable while doing sports (P6).”

Customer-Oriented

The answers of the participants show that their preference stems from customer-oriented programs as well. These personal schedules enable them to do exercises in flexible times and days. Also, these schedules prove themselves useful as they meet specific needs of the members. P1 and P5 explain the usefulness of customer-oriented programs as follows:



“... a program which is specific only to me is made because I travel a lot and I may not be able to come here regularly every week. We, with my trainer here, have the freedom to make a plan which is appropriate for me every week also with the compensation lesson (P1).”

“...and then I heard that the most appropriate places are saloons which give reformer or mat Pilates with a personal trainer. Then when this place was opened, I came to ask for information by chance. Now I continue coming here (P5).”

Environment

Feeling comfortable and observing the cleanliness of a fitness center’s environment is crucial for the participants. The significance of the environment of the facility is explained by P1 and P8 as follows:

“... it is important that these saloons should be more comfortable and clean (P1).”

“... [it is] clean, changing room is very elegant and there are many things that we might need such as deodorants, cotton pads, liquid soap so it suffices in this sense. As per the sport tools, they are always being cleaned by a housekeeper, I see her all the time (P8).”

Program

The program created by an expert trainer is another preference factor represented by the participants. The participants clearly do not want to be left alone with complex programs and moves that they do not know how to perform. Thus, the importance of program is explained by P2 and P7 as follows:

“...you can also see how good your personal trainer with whom you work with is. Because when you go some other places, many places do not ask about that (P2).”

“...I think, the personal trainer is the biggest factor why I continue doing sports. I expect a special attention. I want [my personal trainer] to give instructions to me (P7).”



Negative expressions related to reasons for preference

Security

The participants’ opinion about large-scale fitness centers reveal that they do not feel secure in crowded areas while doing a specific move of exercise. P2 expresses the insecurity created in large-scale fitness centers as follows:

“...yet as I said before, while doing a specific piece of exercise, feeling the stares at myself in crowded places makes me feel very uncomfortable so that’s why I do not like them [gyms]. (P2).”

Customer-Oriented

The content analysis results obtained from the interview data display that female participants tend to stay away from the crowded and large-scale sports centers. So much so that, the participants expressed that when sports centers have a great number of customers yet a small number of staff, this creates a negative environment for them. They also included that this is a significant stressor for them.

“...I think, the number of trainers is not sufficient when compared with the number of customers there, especially between those hours. Because of that, yes, there are too many [gyms] but I don’t think that they are very effective in terms of health and instead of relaxing, people become more stressed (P3).”

“...it was very crowded, and you could not find any sports equipments to work with, so they had to wait. And also, they do not follow your status up (P9).”

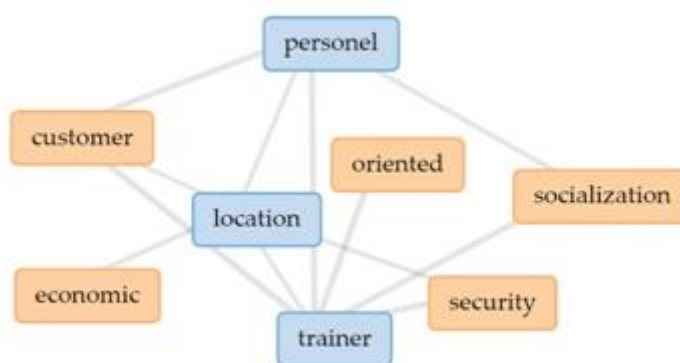


Figure 1. Connection Web Model (Voyant tools).



In Figure 1, Connection Web Model, which is obtained as a result of the study results, is demonstrated. In the model, the interactive relation of the reasons leading customers to boutique fitness is revealed.

5 Discussion

According to the views that were obtained through face-to-face interviews, the prices at the sports center are not important for the participants. They expressed that they are ready to pay anything no matter how high the costs are. In the literature, it can also be seen that the prices had low influence on the participants when compared to the benefit of the received service (Loureiro et al., 2019). However, León-Quismondo et al., (2020) found in their study that price is a significant factor in choosing a certain fitness center. In this group of participants, the cost of service they receive does not seem significant because when Table 1 is considered, the monthly income of their own and their families reveal that most of these participants are above the average in terms of economic situation in terms of economic situations and status in Turkey. This is not surprising because the location of the boutique fitness center also requires members with good income level.

The primary sub-themes in boutique fitness center study are physical changes, socialization and program preferences. The female participants in this boutique fitness center, first of all, expect physical changes in their bodies. These changes can be classified as “losing weight” and “becoming fit”. Since most of the participants’ educational levels are high, they are more aware of (1) what to expect and (2) why physical activity is important in their daily lives and for their future in terms of physical health. Burn and Niven (2019) suggested in their study on individuals who participate in HIIT that individuals start exercise with the intentions of improving endurance, social affiliation, appearance and stress management. So most of these participants expect changes in their bodies.

“Socialization” is another important subtheme as it is expected from a group of people taking Pilates lessons together become socialized; however, in this group socialization is a more important subtheme since they take these lessons individually. This shows that the members spend extra time in the boutique fitness center and make friends. Tsitskari et al., (2014), studies leisure involvement in their study and found that the subscale of social bonding can reflect the characteristics of their participants and suggested that the managers of fitness clubs should provide with opportunities for social interaction for their members. Also, it can be seen that many centers advertise their facility using socialization as an offer (Braun, 2017).



Lastly, “program” is very important for the participants. Many participants want to be followed and instructed by a knowledgeable trainer. They want to know why they do a certain move and how it works for their body. So the program carried out by the trainer becomes especially important. Also, they cannot find this special program and attention in wide-spread franchises because there are a lot of members working almost at the same time. So there are standard programs for everyone and they can only consult their trainers when they have difficulty in doing a certain move. However, boutique fitness centers provide their customer with the special attention that they need. Some of the participants may not know or understand what should be done, so they feel more comfortable with a PT. Fischer and Bryant (2008) found in their study that participants exercising with a certified personal trainer have a more positive attitude towards exercise behavior when compared to the individuals who do not have a personal trainer when they do exercise. According to China Survey of Fitness Trends 2020, personal training/program was ranked no. 17 in 2018 and soared to no. 3 in 2019 (Li et al., 2019) which clearly shows that personalized and purposeful training programs shape the fitness center preferences of the customers.

Also the location level of the center has an important place in terms of participant priorities. When Table 1 is considered, it can be seen that almost all of the participants are working class. For the working class people, time and energy are very significant since they are unable to create extra time for leisure. So being a member of a fitness center that is close to their houses is a big advantage. When the weather conditions are harsh (too rainy, too hot or too cold), location of a fitness center becomes extremely important. Wong et al., (2010) studied physical activity levels of adolescents and found that their perceptions about the easy access to sport facilities have a positive effect on their physical activity level. That is, the closer the facility is, the more physically active they become.

Also security of the fitness centers is important. Mostly, people do not want to feel the stares or gazes on themselves while doing sports. Our target group consists of female participants, and some of the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the unisex gyms. Thus, “safety” is one of the reasons why the participants chose this specific boutique fitness. When the literature is considered, it can be hard to find studies focusing on the safety of the fitness centers.



6 Conclusion

As a result of the obtained data, in our study, the most significant factors affecting participants to take part in boutique fitness centers are physical changes, socialization and program. It is clear from their statements that the participants start doing exercise in this particular boutique fitness center with the aim of physical changes. Also socialization plays an important role in today’s world since more and more people need to unplug and have face-to-face conversation. This boutique fitness center provides their members with the opportunity of socializing and having real interactions with others. Also, what attracts these participants is individual attention and personalized schedules. Since they are aware of their needs and tried other large-scale fitness centers, they seek for a close attention from the boutique fitness center. Getting this special attention makes them continue their exercise habit in this particular fitness center. It is believed that as long as the expectations and the demands of the participants are met, the quality service will be provided and female boutique fitness members will continue participating in specific activities.

6.1 Limitations

As the nature of any research requires, there is a number of limitations in this study. First, this study does not intend to make a generalized deduction. Thus, it was conducted using qualitative research model. Second, the participants are selected in only one boutique center in İzmir, Turkey. No other boutique fitness center or large-scale fitness center members were included.

6.2 Future Research

The future research may include other boutique centers in different cities to observe geographical changes. Also, the future research may make a comparison between boutique fitness centers and large-scale fitness centers in order to reveal if there are significant differences between the members of different options.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.



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