

Article

Analyzing Consumer Loyalty through Service Experience and Service Convenience: Differences between Instructor Fitness Classes and Virtual Fitness Classes

Manuel Jesús Baena-Arroyo ¹, Jerónimo García-Fernández ¹ , Pablo Gálvez-Ruiz ² and Moisés Grimaldi-Puyana ^{1,*} 

¹ Department of Physical Education and Sports, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Universidad de Sevilla, 41013 Seville, Spain; mbaena1@us.es (M.J.B.-A.); jeronimo@us.es (J.G.-F.)

² Universidad Internacional de Valencia, 46002, Valencia, Spain; pgalvez@universidadviu.com

* Correspondence: mgrimaldi@us.es; Tel.: +34-626681142

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Abstract: The eruption of technology has revolutionized the sports sector, incorporating new elements and new forms, and has therefore targeted sports activities. The inclusion of virtual fitness classes is leading to an increase in the offers available to consumers, expanding the hours that consumers can exercise and leading to a greater variability of customer services. The present study intends to go deeper into the knowledge of the fitness center sector in the Spanish context by evaluating the poorly analyzed area of directed activities, either with a teacher or in a virtual mode, and how these are perceived by the users of the centers. The sample consisted of a total of 1943 users, 1143 of whom were customers who conducted fitness activities directed by instructors, and 800 questionnaires were completed by customers who conducted virtual fitness activities in fitness centers classified as low-cost, medium, and boutique business models. The relationships between service experience, service convenience, satisfaction, and future intentions were analyzed. The results show positive relationships in all the variables studied in the instructor fitness classes. However, they are not significant in some variables studied involving virtual fitness classes.

Keywords: service experience; satisfaction; future intentions; service convenience; instructor fitness classes; virtual fitness classes

1. Introduction

The fitness sector is one of the industries with the largest increase in practitioners worldwide [1]. Thus, there are currently different models of fitness centers, which vary based on the strategies that they use to differentiate themselves. Porter [2] stated that enterprises which base their strategies on differentiation or low-cost strategies have a competitive advantage. This applies in the fitness sector. In particular, characteristics defining low-cost fitness centers include: the ability to operate the entire club with a sole person as the staff; a gym-only proposition; heavy technology and web use; a price point set at a minimum of 50% lower than the industry average; and a facilities design which is very well cared for [3,4]. On the other hand, the so-called boutique fitness centers are those centers that use differentiation strategies [5]. In particular, boutique fitness centers are proliferating more quickly due to the lower investment required for sports facilities and equipment. In fact, Hambrick [6] states that they represent 35% of the total fitness industry in the United States. The concept of boutique fitness centers has moved away from the hotel sector. As a result of their origins, most of the existing literature comes from that sector. The hotel sector conceptualizes hotels with such facilities

as small hotels, with an intimate and individualistic atmosphere and style, or the combination of service quality characteristics, individual design, location, and facilities [7]. Based on these definitions, García-Fernández et al. [5] visualizes hotel fitness centers as fitness centers with an excellent quality of service, well-designed facilities, a good location, and a personalized service model. More recently, a model has also appeared where a public-private relationship is tremendously necessary. In fact, EuropeActive and Deloitte [8] stated in their latest study that this newer model is called a concession operator model or a medium business model, which run large sports facilities in cooperation with public authorities. Its characteristics are that they have large sports spaces, and offer sports services for all types of sports consumers (children, adults, seniors) with public prices.

Therefore, although there has been an increase in sports practice in these sports organizations and a differentiation in the types of fitness centers available, there are few studies that analyze the participation, motivations and benefits of their users in depth in the Spanish context [9]. It can be seen that studies of the last two decades on fitness centers at an international level and in Spain have been oriented toward global studies, mainly descriptive and exploratory, related to quality and satisfaction in fitness centers [10–13]. A promising line of research aimed at the study of customer loyalty and abandonment in fitness centers has recently been incorporated into these studies [14–17].

The present study aims to go deeper into the knowledge of the fitness sector in the Spanish context (low-cost, medium, and boutique fitness centers), by evaluating a poorly analyzed area, instructor fitness classes (IFC: Are carried out in a group and led by a professor, for example conditioning classes, such as CORE, Boot Camp, group training; Urban street, funk, hip-hop, such as strength training, and dance activities such as Urban street, funk, and hip-hop) [18] or in a virtual fitness class (VFC: can be the same sport activities as IFC, but they are developed to involve technological devices, such as cameras, recordings, or videoconferencing) [19], and how these are perceived by the users of the fitness centers. And finally, another aim of the present work is to expand on the few studies that compare this type of fitness activities where the characteristic element is the inclusion or lack of inclusion of the sports technician during the activity, focusing attention on the fitness activities as a key element in the provision of services of fitness centers.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Virtual Activities and Technology in the Fitness and Health Industry

Recently we have witnessed an explosion of technology development in the sports sector, incorporating new elements and new forms, and therefore in the services offered in fitness centers. According to the IHRSA [20], the VFC is leading to an increase in the offer, expanding its schedule, and providing greater variability in customer services.

However, according to the scientific literature, there is no research that relates virtual technology in fitness centers with support for sports activities. On the other hand, in other sports contexts there are jobs that associate training and technology, for example combining indoor cycling with virtual reality [21]. Similarly Shei [22], notes a notable increase in the use of mobile application technology in running. Schwarz et al. [23] also recommend the use of technology in mobile games, since the incorporation of games into everyday life in adolescents would help to improve physical activity.

In the same context, we find that most related research refers to virtual activities in sports activities in health programs [24], mainly as a useful tool in hospital rehabilitation, according to Sheehy et al. [25], since technology in the form of virtual reality exercises proves beneficial for people with dementia [26], and Parkinson's disease [27]. It is also beneficial when it comes to socializing and saving time, since the exercises can be done from home and in groups [28].

In addition, and according to Radhakrishnan et al. [29], the use of digital games improves self-management behaviors in users with cardiovascular diagnoses, hypertension, coronary heart disease, heart failure, or myocardial infarction. Other research in the health field indicates the benefits of the use of technology in patients with problems in the upper limb, foot balance, gait, and general

function in the sub-acute and chronic phases after a stroke [30–32]. Therefore, the growing demand in the medical industry of virtual reality devices has been highlighted [29].

Through this, our intention is to show the importance that technology has and will continue to have in this sector, and the relevance that its study and analysis can have for a greater understanding of it as well as in order to improve the management of fitness centers, including by adapting supply to demand.

2.2. Relationship between Service Experiences, Satisfaction and Future Intentions

As the service experience has become a key factor in customer satisfaction, organizations have begun to prioritize management. According to Calabuig et al. [33], this is a personal reaction and a subjective feeling that occurs in the consumer and takes place after experiencing the service. It is an internal and subjective response of the consumer to any direct or indirect contact with the company which provides the service. That is, it could be said that it is a reaction as a result of the service provision and, therefore, it is considered to be a history of customer satisfaction [34,35].

However, it is not easy to locate the service experience itself, given the magnitude of proposals made by the scientific community. According to reference [36], the service experience is incorporated into concepts such as value, quality, and satisfaction. Gil-Saura and González-Gallarza [37] propose the evaluation of service experiences within a moment of truth. Thus, they become predecessors of customer satisfaction, considered, in turn, as a clear competitive advantage, are difficult to imitate and take advantage of.

Similarly, Bodet [38] recognizes that service experiences, whether negative or positive, affect the overall satisfaction and intentions of consumer behavior, despite the particularities in the sports and leisure sector. Foroughi et al. [1], in their study of fitness centers in Malaysia, analyze behavioral intentions, delight, and satisfaction, referring to satisfaction as the accumulated experiences of clients with the gym and its services, although they also point out that it is the pleasant feeling produced when comparing expectations with the performance of the service that causes satisfaction. Therefore, it is considered that there is a positive relationship between service experiences and both customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Thus, the following hypotheses are posed:

Hypothesis 1. *The service experience has a positive relationship with the satisfaction of IFC and VFC customers.*

On the other hand, there is another factor to keep in mind in terms of the service experience, above all as a positive antecedent in the intention of behavior and, consequently, in the loyalty of the clients [15,38]. Similarly, the literature confirms the direct relationship between the service experience and future intentions [39].

The measures carried out within the attitudinal approach calculate the degree of commitment that the customer acquires with the company, mainly based on terms of behavior intention, where they are considered as measurements prior to the action, which provide a projection, or early warning of the performance or results of the individual's behavior, meaning they are indicators of causes [40].

Hence, the service experience has become a key factor in customer satisfaction and future behavior, contributing to an inimitable competitive advantage in managing service experiences to promote and improve customer loyalty [41–43]. Therefore, it is considered that there is a positive relationship between service experiences and behavioral intentions, so the following hypothesis is posed:

Hypothesis 2. *The service experience has a positive and direct effect on the future intentions of IFC and VFC customers.*

2.3. Relationship between Service Convenience and Satisfaction and Future Intentions

Previous research relates variables such as service convenience and customer satisfaction. García-Fernández et al. [44], highlight a positive relationship between service convenience and satisfaction in clients of low-cost fitness centers. However, when talking about convenience, we refer to the sacrifice or stress perceived by the consumer. This is the perception of the latter in terms of comfort, represented in time and effort at the time of purchase [45]. In the same sense, according to Trail et al. [46], customer satisfaction predicts their future intentions.

As indicated above, the negative perception of the perceived value of a service has a negative influence on satisfaction and future intentions. A clear example is observed in that the consumer's travel time from home or work, the accessibility to the sports center, the transport, the access to private parking, or the importance or need of physical activity, could cause a strong sacrifice due to a lack of time. In short, this is a future intention of abandonment [14], or in this case what Zeithaml and Bitner [47] called non-monetary psychological sacrifices. Also reference [33], for their part, discuss the monetary or perceived quality of a sports service, which reduces satisfaction and therefore service convenience as well. In order to confirm the findings in IFC and VFC, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3. *There is a direct and positive relationship between the service convenience and the satisfaction of IFC and VFC customers.*

Similarly, when analyzing the scientific literature, the relationship between factors such as service convenience and behavioral intentions seems obvious. This can be seen in the work of reference [48], which analyzes the relationship between different service conveniences and behavioral intentions and, finally, the satisfaction of users of health clubs in Taiwan. In other disciplines, examples include the exploratory work in marketing in art museums of Geissler et al. [49], authors' internet services in Colwell et al. [50], those of online purchases of Dai [51], and those of the last five years in India of Mathur et al. [52] on convenient behavior and post purchase satisfaction in the health insurance market, as well as the service convenience of electronic retailers [53].

Knowledge of the user's service convenience is a priority for managers of sports and fitness centers, since this depends largely on the intentions in users' behavior. Therefore, in order to confirm the relationship existing in the other works mentioned, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4. *There is a positive relationship between service convenience and future intentions in IFC and VFC customers.*

Finally, the relationship between satisfaction and future intentions is to be highlighted, as indicated by Clemes et al. [54]: "The strategic management of perceptions of service quality and the understanding of how these perceptions affect value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions are very important for success in sports organizations" (p. 370).

Hence, the relationship between consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentions has been previously confirmed, assuming that a satisfied customer is likely to recommend the service to potential customers [55]. Therefore, the relationship between satisfaction and service quality makes up a non-immediate indicator of behavioral intentions [56–58]. In fact, in the sports sector, the work that relates the aforementioned variables is also known, as is the example of the work done by reference [59] on the relationship between service problems and perceptions of service quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions of customers in Australian public sports and leisure centers.

A more current example is the case with Kouthouris and Alexandris [60] on satisfaction and behavioral intentions in the sports tourism sector, or satisfaction and the intentions of consumer behavior over 60 years presented by Kim et al. [61]. Therefore, it is considered that there is a positive

relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Thus, the following hypothesis is raised:

Hypothesis 5. *There is a positive relationship between satisfaction and future intentions in IFC and VFC customers in fitness centers.*

We offer an illustrative summary of the hypotheses in Figure 1.

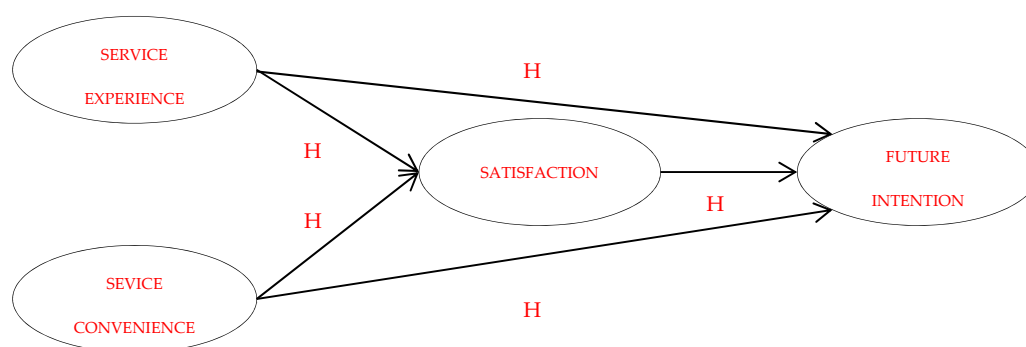


Figure 1. Model of the stated hypotheses.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants

The target population for this study consisted of members of fitness clubs in Spain. A total of 2000 questionnaires were distributed in 10 different fitness centers (low-cost, medium and boutique business models), of which 57 were deleted due to missing data, leaving 1943 valid questionnaires. From the total of the sample, 1143 were completed by clients who performed IFC and 800 questionnaires were completed by clients who did VFC.

In relation to gender the detailed information is offered in Table 1. The female respondents contributed 68.1% and the male respondents were 31.9%. A higher percentage of female clients opted for IFC (78.0%). This was the same in the VFC, although with a smaller difference (54.0%) over men (46.0%). With regard to age, more than 80% of the participants were between 19 and 50 years old. A total of 660 (34.0%) respondents were between 19 and 30 years old, 542 (27.9%) were between 31 and 40 years old, and 397 (20.4%) were between 41 and 50 years old. The remaining age ranges (less than 18 years old, between 51 and 60 years old, 60 years old and more) each had less than 10% of the participants. With regards to academic achievement, 1.1% ($n = 20$) indicated that they had no studies, 6.0% ($n = 116$) had elementary education, 14.1% ($n = 274$) had middle school completion, 31.4% ($n = 611$) indicated high school education or professional preparation, 36.5% ($n = 710$) had college education, and 10.9% ($n = 212$) were master or doctorate graduates. As for the type of membership, 79.5% ($n = 1546$) had a monthly membership, while 12.6% ($n = 244$) had an annual membership, and similar percentages were obtained for users with a quarterly membership (3.9%; $n = 76$) and another type of membership (4.0%; $n = 77$). As for length of past attendance in the fitness center, 33.2% ($n = 644$) indicated less than 6 months, 25.7% ($n = 500$) between 6 and 12 months, 17.4% ($n = 338$) between 1 and 2 years, 11.1% ($n = 215$) between 2 and 3 years, 7.6% ($n = 148$) between 3 and 4 years, and 5.0% ($n = 98$) more than 4 years.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of gender and age of participants.

	IFC		VFC		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	251	22.0	368	46.0	619	31.9
Female	892	78.0	432	54.0	1324	68.1
Between 16–18 years old	42	3.7	66	8.3	108	5.6
19–30 years old	391	34.2	269	33.6	660	34.0
31–40 years old	306	26.8	236	29.5	542	27.9
41–50 years old	254	22.2	143	17.9	397	20.4
51–60 years old	110	9.6	63	7.9	173	8.9
More 60 years old	40	3.5	23	2.9	63	3.2

3.2. Measures

The questionnaire initially consisted of 43 items and was developed based on multi-item scales validated in previous studies on fitness centers (Table 2). The section on service experiences has been adapted from the proposals of Orsingher and Marzocchi [62] and Otto and Ritchie [63], a scale composed of 16 items organized into three dimensions (hedonic, social and utilitarian experience). Service convenience was measured with a scale composed of eight items proposed by García-Fernández et al. [44] in fitness centers, divided into four dimensions with 2 items each: access, transaction, benefit, and post-benefit. This instrument is based on a work by Chang and Polonsky [48], originally made up of fifteen items and five dimensions. Satisfaction was measured with six items used by García-Fernández [64], based on Oliver [65] and Cronin et al. [36], and which has been used in other studies on sports services (e.g., reference [66]). Future intentions were measured via thirteen items from Duque [67] adapted by Setó-Pàmies's [68] study with three dimensions (loyalty, pay more, and complaining behavior). A ten-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (10) was used to assess these items.

Table 2. Survey items.

<i>Service experience</i>
<i>Hedonic</i>
This activity produces a pleasant feeling of wellbeing in me (Hed_1)
The activity contributes to alleviating my problems (Hed_2)
This activity covers my needs (Hed_3)
In this activity I relax from tension (Hed_4)
In this activity my privacy/safety are guaranteed (Hed_5)
<i>Social</i>
Doing this activity is an unforgettable and/or stimulating experience (Soc_6)
Doing this activity is a new and different experience (Soc_7)
Doing this activity is an escape from routine (Soc_8)
By doing this activity I socialize with other people (Soc_9)
Doing this activity contributes to improving my personal happiness (Soc_10)
<i>Utilitarian</i>
By doing this activity I feel part of the service provision process (Util_11)
During time doing the activity, I try to collaborate so that the experience of the service is more satisfactory (Util_12)
The staff inform me of everything necessary during my time doing the activity (Util_13)
I feel that the result of the service provision is under my control (Util_14)
I was right to do this activity. The service received corresponds to what I expect from a good directed activity (Util_15)
I really enjoy doing this activity (Util_16)
<i>Service convenience</i>

Table 2. Cont.

<i>Access</i>
It did not take much time to reach this fitness center (Acc_1)
I can easily figure out the location of this fitness center (Acc_2)
<i>Transaction</i>
The method of payment provided by this fitness center is convenient (Trans_3)
I was able to complete my purchase quickly in this fitness center (Trans_4)
<i>Benefit</i>
I could easily obtain benefits from the services provided in this fitness center (Ben_5)
The speed of providing services in this fitness center met my requirements (Ben_6)
<i>Post-benefit</i>
When I had a problem, this fitness center resolved my problem quickly (PBen_7)
This fitness center enabled me to arrange my next exercise programs/plans with minimal effort (PBen_8)
<i>Satisfaction</i>
I'm satisfied with this activity (Sat_1)
In general, I'm delighted when I do this activity (Sat_2)
I have a satisfactory experience doing this activity (Sat_3)
My decision to choose this activity was right (Sat_4)
In general, I'm satisfied with this activity (Sat_5)
I think I did what was right when I decided to do this activity (Sat_6)
<i>Future intentions</i>
<i>Loyalty</i>
I'll convey positive aspects about the activity to other people (Loy_1)
I'll recommend the activity to anyone who seeks my advice (Loy_2)
I'll encourage my friends and family to practice this type of activity (Loy_3)
For any activity I want to do, I'll consider this type of activity as the first option (Loy_4)
In the coming years, I'll do more sports activities of this kind (Loy_5)
In the coming years, I'll do less sports activities of this kind (Loy_6)
I may do another type of sports activities in my sports center (Loy_7)
<i>Pay more</i>
Although the prices are somewhat higher for this type of activity I'll remain in this sports center (PM_8)
I'm willing to pay a higher price to do this type of activity (PM_9)
<i>Complaining Behavior</i>
I'll change to other activities if I have a problem during the service (CBeh_10)
If I have a negative experience with the activity, I'll tell other customers/people about it (CBeh_11)
If I have a problem with the type of activity, I'll complain to external organizations such as the Association of Consumers and Users (CBeh_12)
If I have a problem with the activity, I'll complain to the directors of the sports center (CBeh_13)

3.3. Procedure

The process of data collection consisted of contacting the fitness centers requesting a meeting with each center's general manager of. After the meetings and after having obtained a positive response to participating in the study, details such as time commitment and the dates to administer the questionnaire were coordinated by three specialized researchers. Each researcher had the premise of informing the participants of the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and that the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses would be guaranteed, requesting their participation in the study and obtaining the informed consent from all the participants included in the study. The questionnaires took about 15 min to complete and the data were collected over four months, specifically from September to December 2017.

3.4. Data Analysis

SPSS and AMOS version 21.0 procedures were used to conduct the statistical analyses. We mainly conducted three statistical analyses in order to achieve the research goals: exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and a structural equation model (SEM) analysis.

The CFA was conducted with a maximum likelihood estimation to examine the psychometric properties associated with the constructs and items in the hypothesized model. Goodness of fit was examined by computing the following fit indices: the ratio chi-square to its degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), CFI (*comparative fit index*), IFI (*incremental fit index*), TLI (*Tucker-Lewis Index*), PCFI (*parsimony comparative of fit index*), and RMSEA (*root mean square error of approximation*). Chi-square by degrees of freedom values should be less than 5.0 [69] and it is necessary to indicate that the χ^2 statistic has been shown to be sensitive to sample size [70]. CFI, IFI and TLI indices should surpass 0.90 [71]. Values above 0.60 for the PCFI [72,73], and values below 0.05 for the RMSEA indicate excellent fit [74,75]. Standardized factor loadings (λ) of 0.60 and above with significant p -values, and modification indices (MI) were used to locate any problematic items that contributed to a misfit of the data [76]. Then, we checked the internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability ($\text{CR} > 0.70$) [77,78]. Convergent validity was evaluated through the average variance extracted ($\text{AVE} > 0.50$; Hair et al.) [78] and discriminant validity was also investigated, in this case when the AVE for each latent construct exceeded the squared correlations between that construct and any other [79]. SEM analysis was used to investigate the hypothesized causal relationships between the different constructs of the model proposed, analyzing both the global model and the model according to the groups of participants.

4. Results

The values for univariate skewness and kurtosis were satisfactory for all the variables within the conventional criteria for normality (-3 to 3 for skewness and -7 to 7 for kurtosis). Since the instrument was constructed from different scales, the internal structure was measured by means of an EFA using Principal Components Analysis and Oblimin oblique rotation, previously testing the factorization conditions using the Bartlett and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin tests. The KMO value found was 0.98 and the Bartlett Test of Sphericity reached a statistically significant value of $p < 0.01$ [χ^2 (1596) = 110880.24], indicating that the item factorization was adequate. The solution yielded a total variance explained of 67.25%. The findings of an initial CFA indicated an adequate fit in the measurement model: $\chi^2/\text{df} = 4692.40/764 = 6.14$, CFI = 0.951, IFI = 0.951, TLI = 0.945, PCFI = 0.844 and RMSEA = 0.051 (90% CI = 0.050, 0.053). The size of the factor loading is a criteria used to evaluate the reliability of the indicator with the constructs it intends to measure [79]. As a result, eight items showing a factor loading lower than the conservative threshold of 0.60 were removed, specifically two of the scale of future intentions (Loy_6: $\lambda = 0.378$; Loy_7: $\lambda = 0.424$). Further, several items showed a high MI, so we proceeded to include covariance between errors, specifically between items Soc 7 and 8 (MI = 67.23), Loy 1 and 2 (MI = 57.97), CBeh 10 and 12 (MI = 51.06), Sat 2 and 3 (MI = 134.66), Sat 4 and 6 (MI = 144.17). Finally, we eliminated item Util_12 because it presented high modification indices with several items. Therefore, a CFA without these items was re-conducted. As a result, better goodness-of-fit indices were generated: $\chi^2/\text{df} = 3231.86/680 = 4.75$, CFI = 0.965, IFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.960, PCFI = 0.841, and RMSEA = 0.046 (90% CI = 0.044, 0.047). Table 3 shows high factor loadings in all items, ranging from 0.610 to 0.964 and these were statistically significant, providing evidence that each item appropriately captured its respective factor. The regression weight estimate was situated between 17.31 and 101.07, hence indicating evidence of convergent validity.

Table 3. Measurement model and dimensions, reliability, validity, and dimensionality statistics.

Scales and Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	Item	Standardized Factor Loading (λ)	Regression Weights	
						N-Stand	Stand
<i>Service experience</i>							
Hedonic	0.92	0.92	0.71	Hed_1	0.889	1.00	0.89
				Hed_2	0.804	0.97	0.80
				Hed_3	0.878	1.04	0.88
				Hed_4	0.883	1.01	0.88
				Hed_5	0.740	0.89	0.74
Social	0.89	0.90	0.63	Soc_6	0.868	1.00	0.86
				Soc_7	0.736	0.87	0.74
				Soc_8	0.813	0.91	0.81
				Soc_9	0.694	0.95	0.70
				Soc_10	0.854	1.00	0.85
Utilitarian	0.91	0.92	0.70	Util_11	0.773	1.00	0.77
				Util_13	0.774	1.08	0.77
				Util_14	0.764	0.91	0.76
				Util_15	0.921	1.12	0.92
				Util_16	0.932	1.09	0.93
<i>Service convenience</i>							
Access	0.77	0.79	0.66	Acc_1	0.739	1.00	0.76
				Acc_2	0.878	0.99	0.86
Transaction	0.81	0.82	0.69	Trans_3	0.809	1.00	0.80
				Trans_4	0.850	1.04	0.86
Benefit	0.87	0.88	0.78	Ben_5	0.850	1.00	0.86
				Ben_6	0.914	1.02	0.91
Post-benefit	0.78	0.79	0.65	PBen_7	0.834	1.00	0.83
				PBen_8	0.780	0.86	0.79
Satisfaction	0.98	0.98	0.90	Sat_1	0.923	1.00	0.95
				Sat_2	0.936	1.02	0.96
				Sat_3	0.9	1.02	0.96
				Sat_4	0.958	0.98	0.95
				Sat_5	0.964	0.99	0.94
				Sat_6	0.953	1.00	0.92
<i>Future Intentions</i>							
Loyalty	0.91	0.93	0.75	Loy_1	0.925	1.00	0.93
				Loy_2	0.946	1.05	0.95
				Loy_3	0.940	1.05	0.94
				Loy_4	0.838	1.01	0.84
				Loy_5	0.626	0.99	0.63
Pay more	0.70	0.73	0.58	PM_8	0.610	1.00	0.93
				PM_9	0.889	0.66	0.56
Complaining Behavior	0.76	0.81	0.51	CBeh_10	0.695	1.00	0.58
				CBeh_11	0.690	1.21	0.69
				CBeh_12	0.781	1.57	0.79
				CBeh_13	0.690	1.23	0.69

Note: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; N-Stand: non-standardized values; Stand: standardized values; all factor loadings significant at $p < 0.01$.

Additionally, the reliability of the scale is also demonstrated because the α value and CR indices of each of the dimensions obtained are higher than the threshold of 0.7, specifically between 0.70 and 0.98 for Cronbach's alpha and between 0.73 and 0.98 for composite reliability. The AVE for all dimensions ranged from 0.51 and 0.90, exceeding the generally accepted value of 0.50. The discriminant validity of the dimensions was also confirmed according to the criterion of Fornell and Larcker [79] (Table 4).

Table 4. Discriminant validity analysis for dimensions in the measurement model.

Variables	HED	SOC	UTIL	ACC	TRANS	BEN	PBEN	SAT	LOY	PM	CBEH
HED	0.71										
SOC	0.61	0.63									
UTILIT	0.66	0.60	0.70								
ACC	0.28	0.21	0.26	0.66							
TRANS	0.26	0.24	0.28	0.62	0.69						
BENEF	0.37	0.34	0.39	0.54	0.65	0.78					
PBENEF	0.31	0.31	0.35	0.33	0.61	0.62	0.65				
SATISF	0.70	0.61	0.68	0.26	0.28	0.38	0.33	0.90			
LOYAL	0.68	0.60	0.70	0.26	0.27	0.37	0.30	0.70	0.75		
PMORE	0.19	0.21	0.23	0.11	0.16	0.23	0.25	0.24	0.31	0.58	
CBEHAV	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.05	0.03	0.04	0.07	0.11	0.09	0.51

Note: HED: Hedonic; SOC: Social; UTIL: Utilitarian; ACC: Access; TRANS: Transaction; BEN: Benefit; PBEN: Post-benefit; SAT: Satisfaction; LOY: Loyalty; PM: Pay more; CBEH: Complaining Behavior. Values in the diagonal are AVE values while the off-diagonal are squared correlations between the constructs.

After confirming the measurement properties of the scale, SEM involved the relationships between the different dimensions of the measurement model. The findings showed that the structural relationship model had a moderate level of fit: $\chi^2/df = 3593.87/719 = 4.99$, CFI = 0.959, IFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.956, PCFI = 0.884 and RMSEA = 0.048 (90% CI = 0.046, 0.049). First, the R^2 measure and the path coefficient [70] were assessed and showed that service experience, service convenience, and satisfaction explain 82 per cent of the variance of future intentions ($R^2 = 0.820$). In this model, service experience showed a stronger, more significant, and more positive effect on satisfaction $\beta = 0.91$; $p < 0.001$) and future intentions ($\beta = 0.23$; $p < 0.001$), while service convenience showed a lower predictive influence on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.40$; $p < 0.05$) and future intentions ($\beta = 0.09$; $p < 0.001$). We proceeded to analyze the SEM analysis in both groups (IFC and VFC) and the path coefficients for each model are illustrated in Figure 2. The adjustment of the models was satisfactory for the IFC group [$\chi^2/df = 2831.01/719 = 3.93$, CFI = 0.953, IFI = 0.952, TLI = 0.949, PCFI = 0.878, and RMSEA = 0.051 (90% CI = 0.049, 0.053)] as well as for the VFC group [$\chi^2/df = 2370.05/719 = 3.29$, CFI = 0.950, IFI = 0.951, TLI = 0.946, PCFI = 0.876, and RMSEA = 0.054 (90% CI = 0.051, 0.056)].

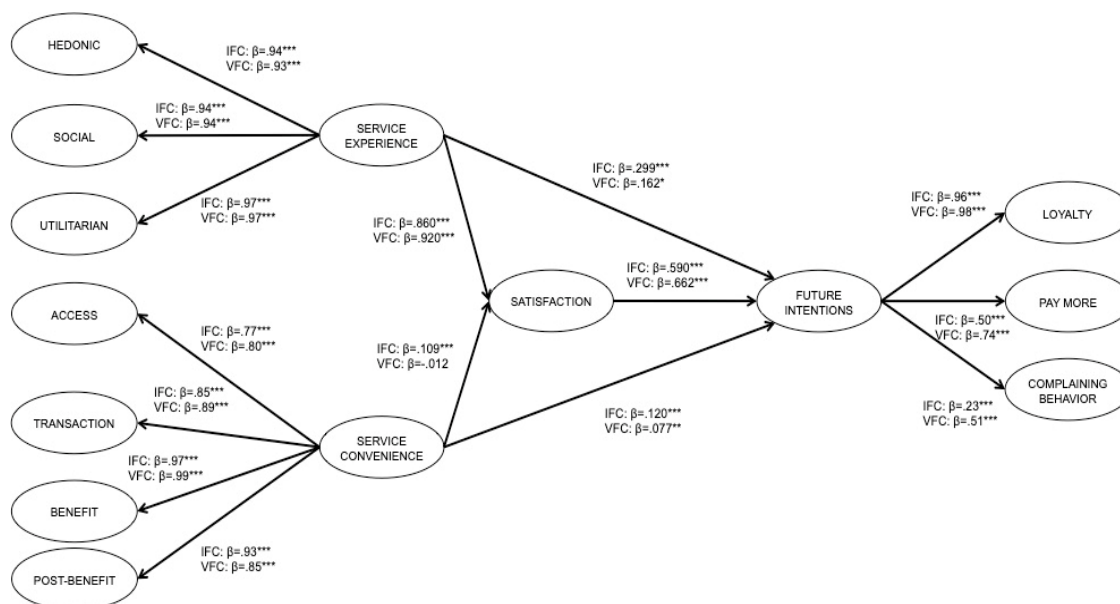


Figure 2. Structural model with parameter estimates (path coefficients). Note: $*** = p < 0.001$; $** = p < 0.005$; $* = p < 0.05$.

5. Discussion

Most of the studies focused on the fitness sector have fundamentally addressed the importance of perceived quality as the first step to customer loyalty, in addition to demonstrating that other variables, such as satisfaction, are determinants in consumer behavior [44,80,81]. In the case of this study, the influence of the service experience and the service convenience on satisfaction and future intention were addressed. In this way, the analysis provided by this study is about a sports service that is increasingly more present in fitness centers. It is interesting due to the incorporation of technology and its impact on management.

First, customers who have a preference for fitness activities are characterized by being female (68.1%) with an average age that is between 19 and 30 years old representing 34%. In this sense, these data coincide with other, previous studies regarding their gender distribution for the three fitness activities profiles [38,81,82]. However, the data contrast with those obtained by other investigations [83–85]. It coincides in relation to the VFC with Baena-Arroyo et al. [86], having fewer percentage differences in gender. Regarding age, the values are very similar to other studies reviewed [64].

Regarding the model, this work explored the relationship by going deeply into the influence of the following variables: service experience, satisfaction, and future intentions and, in turn, that of service convenience on satisfaction and future intentions in IFC and VFC customers. In this sense, differentiating relationships by groups, within IFC and VFC, relationships are positive and significant, highlighting service experience, satisfaction and future intentions, coinciding with the results of similar works that show positive relationships in sports centers and fitness centers [5,81,87,88]. These findings are of interest since they have shown that the service experience is more decisive about satisfaction and, finally, in future intentions in the VFC. In this way, strengthening actions which contribute to creating experiences in VFC consumers will bring about greater satisfaction and therefore consumer loyalty. Also, positive and significant relationships are obtained between service convenience and satisfaction and future intentions. However, the latter is not significant for the VFC group-data, contrary to what was found in other works [36,89–91].

One of the strengths of this work is the knowledge of the relationships used in a new context in fitness centers, with a high presence of virtual training technology. In this sense, the service experience showed a greater predictive force for satisfaction in virtual activities, in line with the idea presented in other studies [31,32]. In the same way, the satisfaction by users of VFC presented a greater predictive force about future intentions than IFC. Although the prediction force differences were small in these relationships, these results show a significant change in the way users perceive activities that use technological means for their development, having the capacity for permanent innovation.

5.1. Managerial Implications

We consider that this work has several implications for management. First of all, it is confirmed how the service experience influences satisfaction, as well as satisfaction influencing future intentions, these being determining variables for both IFC and VFC customers. For that reason, the fitness center must work and strive for the need to articulate a series of strategies to survive in an increasingly competitive market, ensuring that processes aimed at improving the service experience and satisfaction are a guarantee to improve the rate of customer retention, and therefore future intentions. In addition, many fitness centers currently use VFC to complete the offer of services at times with a lower influx of users, so we consider that studies of this type can be very useful for the improvement of these activities and, consequently, the service experience.

5.2. Limitations and Future Investigations

The present work is presented as a pioneer in the analysis of VFC and IFC customers. However, it presents several limitations. First of all, despite having a large sample, we consider that the type of

non-probabilistic convenience sampling is the main limitation. In addition, VFC and IFC are analyzed in private fitness centers, so other types of sports facilities of interest, such as public fitness centers, are being overlooked. Secondly, the type of cross-sectional study shows less consistency than if it had been performed longitudinally, which would have offered greater consistency in the results presented.

Although it is understood that the limitations can be considered a weakness of this research work, in contrast they also represent a strength as a bridge to future lines of research and action. More specifically, a longitudinal study could be carried out that would help to understand how the customer service experience evolves and how strategies could be applied to achieve more value through activities, and thus for other variables such as fidelity, the real index of permanence, the rotation or attrition of customers over a year. Likewise, it would be interesting to expand the work to other types of public and private sports facilities in addition to fitness centers, as well as to use another type of sampling.

6. Conclusions

The present work seeks to compare the relationships between the variables: service experience and satisfaction; service experience and future intention; service convenience and satisfaction; service convenience and future intentions; and satisfaction and future intentions in IFC and VFC customers. In relation to the hypotheses raised, there is a positive relationship between service experience and satisfaction, satisfaction about future intentions. and service experience and future intentions in both IFC and VFC customers. However, different relationships between service convenience and future intentions are observed, which have a greater influence on IFC customers than on VFC customers. In addition, there is a low but significant influence of service convenience on satisfaction in IFC customers, while in VFC customers this reaction is not significant. In the same way, there is a stronger relationship between service convenience and future intentions in IFC customers than in VFC customers, this being an interesting factor in the development of actions toward this type of customers.

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