BASES 2008

Lead author: Helen N. Watts
Centre for People @ Work
University of Worcester
Henwick Grove,
Worcester
WR2 6AJ
01905 542047
h.watts@worc.ac.uk

Author 1: Dr Jan Francis-Smythe

Scientific research
Poster
Health and Physical Activity
Health Psychology
Leisure Management
Helen Watts Bases 2008

Membership retention in the fitness industry: The development and validation of a predictive model.

Fitness club managers are becomingly increasingly concerned with membership retention rates yet there appears to be no empirical research into the factors underlying member attrition i.e. what makes people decide to cancel the membership? Whilst there is a wealth of research into member attendance (exercise adherence) as well as member satisfaction there is little, if any, empirical research which bridges the gap between member attendance and retention. The aim of this paper is three-fold. Firstly, to introduce the design of this research project aimed at developing a predictive model of membership retention in fitness clubs. Secondly, to report the findings to date and thirdly, to suggest the managerial implications of this findings.

This PhD research project is mixed-method in design (QUAL-Quan); which began with a qualitative phase. This phase consisted of a literature review followed by telephone interviews conducted with a stratified random sample of gym members (n=25). The findings of the interviews were combined with the results of the literature review to identify potential components of a conceptual model of fitness club attendance and retention. Thus, the quantitative phase began. The identified components suggested as underpinning attendance and retention included attitudinal, normative and control beliefs towards attending their fitness club, levels of self-determination towards attending fitness clubs, habitual attendance, social anxiety, social identity, perceived service quality, brand identification and commitment. The Membership Retention Questionnaire (MRQ) was developed to measure the components in this model and firstly 'snowballed' to a purposive sample of gym members and secondly distributed to members of one club. This model is subject to further factor analysis and structural equation modelling of the quantitative findings. This research methodology is unique in its application to researching fitness club retention, due to its sampling of fitness club *members;* not just fitness club *users*, and an upcoming longitudinal analysis (12 months) of the model's value in predicting *actual* membership retention; not just membership *intentions.*

The managerial implications of these findings include the importance of distributing the MRQ to members at various time points throughout their club membership. This allows the measurement of relevant behavioural and psychological factors which can be used to assess 'risk' in members and implement effective interventions in order to increase attendance and retention rates.