

# The Determinants of Intention to Repurchase Membership in Sports Service: a Study of Fitness Centers in Tehran, Iran

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**Abstract** - The main aim of this research was to examine the relationship between the factors that influence the intention to repurchase membership in fitness centers in Tehran, Iran. The study was a quantitative research which collected data by using self-administered questionnaires. A total of 408 questionnaires from members in 12 fitness centers in Tehran, Iran were analyzed. The relationship among the variables was examined by using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings of the study revealed that service quality, attitude, subjective norm, and customer involvement are significantly and positively related to intention to repurchase membership, while, Islamic values was found to be significantly and negatively related to intention to repurchase membership. The mentioned determinants were related to intention to repurchase membership through the mediator of customer satisfaction. The results of the study also indicated that gender is a significant moderator of the relationship between members' satisfaction and their intention to repurchase membership.

**Keywords** - Attitude, Customer Involvement, Customer Satisfaction, Fitness, Islamic Values, Repurchase Intention, Service Quality, Subjective Norm

## I. INTRODUCTION

The fitness industry emerged with spread of the idea of being muscular, influenced by the physical culture that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Andreasson & Johansson, 2014). The fitness

industry generated over \$81 billion in revenue in 2015 with more than 187 thousand fitness centers and health clubs serving over 151 million members across the globe (IHRSA, 2016). Modern fitness became popular in Iran in 1990s when fitness industry in a modern sense emerged. Since then, Iran has witnessed an overwhelming increase in the number of fitness centers. Currently, there are over 12,000 fitness centers and bodybuilding gyms providing fitness services across the country (Fitness and bodybuilding is growing, 2016). The popularity of fitness among the Iranian population, especially the youth is mainly due to rise in health consciousness, emergence of new social trends and standards of attractiveness, and rise in interest in bodybuilding (IFBB, 2016). The fitness industry is characterized as an industry with low customer loyalty where member retention is as low as 55-70% (IHRSA, 2009). Considering that almost 80% of the revenue of fitness centers comes from membership fee, loss of nearly 30-45% of members yearly makes retaining members the main challenge of fitness managers and marketers (Intel, 2011). In spite of the essential importance of retaining members in fitness industry, studies investigating the factors that affect intention to repurchase membership, especially from the consumer view, globally as well as in the Iranian context are scarce. Thus, this research attempts to examine the determinants of intention to repurchase membership in fitness centers in Iran by incorporating service quality of fitness centers, members' attitude toward fitness, members' perception of subjective norm, members' satisfaction with services as

well as members' psychological and psychographic characteristics such as members' involvement with fitness and members' Islamic values in the proposed model.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. Service Quality**

Service quality refers to the comparison of customers' expectations prior using the service with the actual service performance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The majority of literature indicates the positive effect of service quality on customer satisfaction. It has been found that service quality leads to consumer satisfaction and consumers who have a more positive perception of service quality tend to feel a greater degree of satisfaction in the context of fitness centers (Argan, Argan, Kose, & Soner, 2014).

### **B. Attitude**

An attitude towards a behavior is a person's assumption that performing that behavior is considered good or bad, therefore the person favors or disfavors exhibiting such behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Consumers' attitudes toward a behavior has been found to influence the degree of satisfaction with engaging in a behavior and willingness to continue performing such behavior (Lee, Tsao, & Chang, 2015). As a result of integration of Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (e.g., Liao, Chen, & Yen, 2007), it can be asserted that consumer satisfaction mediates the relationship between attitudes and repurchase intention.

### **C. Subjective Norm**

Subjective norm points out an individual's perception of significant others approval or disapproval of exhibiting a certain behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In other words, Subjective norms are the perception hold by individuals that their referent groups such as family, partner, or friends may support or oppose engaging in a particular behavior. The association among attitudes, subjective norms,

behavioral intention, as well as actual behavior is explained by the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) proposed by Ajzen (1985). TRA posits that attitude towards a behavior and subjective norm determine the intention to perform the behavior where intention per se serves as the direct predictor of the behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Subjective norm has been found to have an effect on the degree of satisfaction with a service provider and consequently intention to repurchase the service (Hsu & Chiu, 2004). Similarly, through the integration of ECT with TRA, it can be posited that consumer satisfaction mediates the relationship between subjective norm and repurchase intention.

### **D. Consumer Involvement**

Consumer involvement refers to the extent of perceived relevance, interest, or significance of particular stimuli, products, or services to the consumer (Homburg & Giering, 2001). In the context of sports and exercise, involvement addresses consumers' views about being engaged in fitness and physical activities. These views include the extent of importance, interest, and value consumers consider for fitness and physical activities (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997) as well their degree of awareness regarding such activities (Woolf, 2008). Highly involved consumers tend to perform better in developing expectations, thus, they are able to make better purchase decisions in order to meet their needs that consequently lead to a higher level of satisfaction (Spreng & Sonmez, 2000). Thus, highly involved customers feel a higher level of satisfaction (Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998).

### **E. Islamic Values**

'Values' has been defined as a long-lasting belief which a certain behavior is personally or socially preferred over a different or opposing behavior (Rokeach, 1973). According to the expectancy value theory (Feather, 1963), values along with expectations guide and determine individuals' behavior. Religion has a great influence on the daily lives of Muslim majority nations and takes precedence over many aspects of their lives such as economy, relationships, and lifestyles. 'Islamic values' has been defined as a body of Islamic ethical

principles and guideline that tells between the appropriate and inappropriate manner from the Islamic perspective and determines what behavior is acceptable (Hameed, 2009). Thus, Individuals who hold high Islamic values observe and evaluate their environment through the Islamic scope and include those values into every aspect of their lives (Mokhlis, 2006) which consequently, affects their consumption preferences and behaviors. Situations of high materialism and hedonism cause conflict of values for those individuals who hold high level of religious values (Vincent & Othman, 2012). Services and programs offered at fitness centers are mainly driven by hedonic motives and promote attributes such as physical attractiveness, enjoyment, and pleasure, while Islamic values are driven by collective oriented motives such as spirituality, moderation, and selflessness. Therefore, Individuals who hold high level of Islamic values are expected to experience a lower level of satisfaction with hedonic and materialistic services offered at fitness centers and as a result, hold a weaker intention to continue using such services.

**F. Customer Satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction refers to a person’s overall feeling of happiness and contentment with a purchase transaction (Harris, 2010). The Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) proposed by Oliver (1980) posits that customers hold expectations about the performance of goods or services prior the purchase. Satisfaction occurs when the performance matches the expectations, while when the performance fails to meet the expectations, dissatisfaction happens (Bhattacharjee, 2001). It has been argued that customers who experience a higher level of satisfaction hold stronger intention about repurchasing products or services (Howat, 2007).

**G. Repurchase Intention**

Repurchase intention has been defined as the consumers’ desire to continue their relationship with a certain service provider and use their product or service again (Jones & Taylor, 2007). It has been suggested that firms

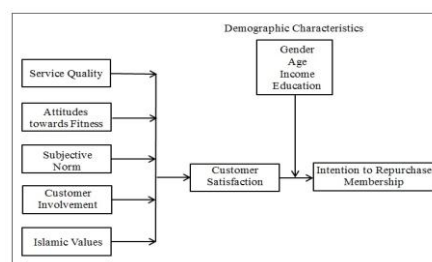
benefit in a great extent from maintaining their relationship with customers and as a result, repurchase has been considered as an essential factor in determining effectiveness and long-term success of firms (Krumay & Brandtweiner, 2010).

**H. Moderating Factors (Gender, Age, Education, and Income)**

It has been argued that females experience a greater degree of satisfaction and intention to maintain their relationship with a service provider (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Older consumers show a higher level of resistance to competitors’ advertisements which make them less likely to switch to other service providers (Patterson, 2007). It has been asserted that consumers with lower levels of income are more likely to maintain their relationship with a service provider in order to avoid switching costs which make them less sensitive to reduction in the level of satisfaction the may experience (Walsh, Evanschitzky, & Wunderlich, 2008) and consequently their intention to retain their relationship with the service provider. Highly educated consumers are more cable of evaluating other products or services, which makes them more likely to switch to other service providers (Laroche, Rosenblatt, & Mannining, 1986) and as a result, hold lower intentions to repurchase.

**III. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

The framework of this research was built based on the theoretical framework and literature. The framework of this research was derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen, 1985), Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980), and Expectancy Value Theory (Feather, 1963). The research framework is presented in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1** Framework of This Research

### **A. Research Hypotheses**

Based on the discussed literature the following hypotheses are posited:

**H1:** Service quality of a fitness center is positively related to member's satisfaction with the fitness center.

**H2:** Member's attitude toward fitness is positively related to member's satisfaction with the fitness center.

**H3:** Subjective norm is positively related to member's satisfaction with the fitness center.

**H4:** Member's involvement with fitness is positively related to member's satisfaction with the fitness center.

**H5:** Member's Islamic values is negatively related to member's satisfaction with the fitness center.

**H6:** Member's satisfaction with the fitness center is positively related to member's intention to repurchase membership.

**H7a:** Gender has a moderating effect on the relationship between satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership.

**H7b:** Age has a moderating effect on the relationship between satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership.

**H7c:** Education has a moderating effect on the relationship between satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership.

**H7d:** Income level has a moderating effect on the relationship between satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership.

## **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research applied a descriptive quantitative method in order to profoundly investigate the consumer behavior in the fitness industry in Tehran, Iran. Both male and female members of fitness centers in Tehran, Iran were the respondents of this research. Due

to the lack of official statistics on number of fitness members in Tehran, the sample size was estimated based on Yamane's (1973) formula which yielded approximately 400 observations. By using simple random sampling technique 12 fitness centers from the sampling frame of 81 fitness centers in Tehran were selected. The respondents from the 12 fitness centers (34 sets of questionnaires from each fitness center) were selected through convenience sampling method. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect the data from the respondents. The questionnaire contained two parts: part 1 intended to collect the demographics and part 2 intended to measure the variables under the study. In order to evaluate service quality of fitness centers, the service quality assessment scale (SQAS) (Lam, 2000) was adapted. The scale contains 20 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Attitude toward fitness was measured by the attitude scale (Knabe, 2012). The scale contains 10 bipolar items measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Subjective norm was measured by the subjective norm scale (Knabe, 2012). The scale contains 4 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Modified Involvement Scale (MIS) (Kyle, Absher, Norman, Hammitt, & Jodice, 2007) was adapted to measure consumer Involvement. The scale contains 15 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Islamic Values was measured by the Sahin Index of Islamic Values (Francis, Sahin, & Alfailakawi, 2008). The scale contains 17 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Customer satisfaction was measured by customer satisfaction scale (Chang, 1998). The scale contains 5 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Intention to repurchase membership was measured by intention to repurchase scale (Clem, Ravichandran, & Karpinski, 2013). This scale contains 3 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale. All of the measurement scales used to measure the variables under the study have been proved reliable and valid in past research. The questionnaire statements were checked for content validity. The questionnaire was first translated into Persian and then back translated into English so as to make sure the Persian translation and the original English version

were the same. Data was collected from 12 fitness centers in Tehran through convenience sampling during March 8<sup>th</sup> to April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. In total, 408 usable questionnaires were analyzed. Data analysis was performed by using SPSS 18 and AMOS 16.

### V. FINDINGS

The male and female respondents accounted for 59.8% and 40.2% of the sample population, respectively. Those respondents aged less than 40 years old made up the majority of the respondents with 72.3% of the sample population. The largest group of the respondents had completed university/college with 43.6% of the sample population. 60.3% of the respondents had a monthly income of less than 6 million Toman (US\$1842). The values of average variance extracted (AVE) for all of the constructs (ranging from 0.611 to 0.823) exceed the cutoff point of 0.5 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006), thus convergent validity is verified. The values of maximum shared Square variance (MSV) for each pair of constructs as well as average shared square variance (ASV) for each constructs indicate that  $AVE > MSV$  and  $AVE > ASV$ , thus, discriminant validity is verified.

The values of composite reliability (CR) for all of the constructs (ranging from 0.60 to 0.86) exceed 0.6 (Hair et al., 2006). Thus, composite reliability is verified. The results of analysis also indicate relatively high values for Cronbach’s alpha (ranging from 0.650 to 0.860). All the alpha vales were greater than 0.60, cut off level of reliability suggested by Malhotra and Birks (2007) indicating that the items in each factor were internally consistent. With regards to the results of SEM, values of several goodness-of-fit measures show a good model fit to the data. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.916 which exceeds the acceptance value of 0.9 (Hair et al., 2006). The  $Chisq/df = 2.484$  which is less than value of 3 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06 which is in the accepted range of 0.05-0.08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The baseline comparisons fit indices of IFI, TLI, and CFI are 0.924, 0.903, and 0.923, respectively, which are all above the acceptance value of 0.9 (Hair et al., 2006). The model of this research with standardized coefficients incorporated is presented in Fig. 2. The summary of hypotheses tests for the main and moderating effects is presented in Table I and Table II, respectively.

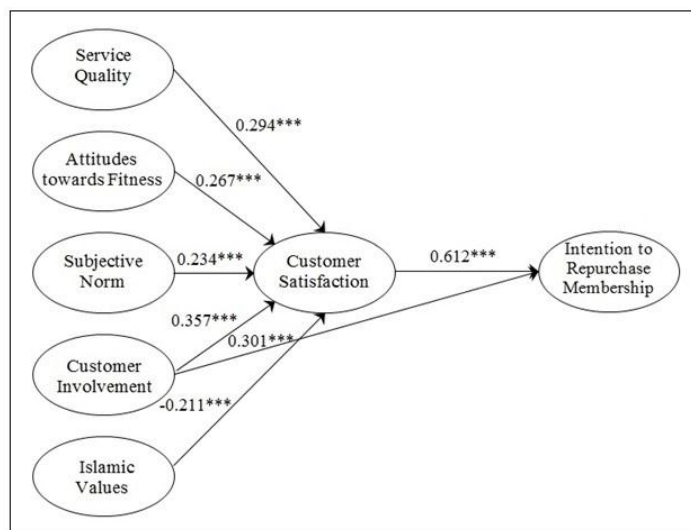


Fig. 2 The Model Predicting Intention to Repurchase Membership

**TABLE I**  
**THE SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES TESTS FOR THE MAIN EFFECTS**

Hypotheses and Structural Path	Critical Ratio (C.R.)	Standardized Regression Weight ( $\beta$ )	Result
H1: Service Quality $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction	5.581	0.294***	Supported
H2: Attitude $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction	4.724	0.267***	Supported
H3: Subjective Norm $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction	4.101	0.234***	Supported
H4: Involvement $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction	6.256	0.357***	Supported
H5: Islamic Values $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction	6.256	-0.211***	Supported
H6: Customer Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Intention to Repurchase Membership	7.117	0.612***	Supported

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

**TABLE II**  
**THE SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES TESTS FOR THE MODERATING EFFECTS**

Hypotheses	Critical Ratio (C.R.)	P-value	Result
H7a: Gender moderates Customer Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Intention to Repurchase Membership	2.401	**	Supported
H7b: Age moderates Customer Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Intention to Repurchase Membership	0.890	Not Significant	Not Supported
H7c: Education moderates Customer Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Intention to Repurchase Membership	1.006	Not Significant	Not Supported
H7d: Income moderates Customer Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Intention to Repurchase Membership	-1.487	Not Significant	Not Supported

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , Not Supported=Not Significant

### A. Discussion

The results of analysis indicated that service quality, attitude, subjective norm, and customer involvement are significantly and positively related to customer satisfaction ( $\beta=0.294$ ,  $\beta=0.267$ ,  $\beta=0.234$ , and  $\beta=0.357$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively). Islamic values also has a significant but negative relationship with customer satisfaction ( $\beta=-0.211$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 are supported. The results of analysis also reveal that customer satisfaction is a significant and positive determinant of intention to repurchase membership ( $\beta=0.612$ ,  $p < .001$ ), therefore H6 is supported. With regards to the moderating effects, it was found that gender significantly moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership (C.R. =2.401,  $p < .01$ ) such that

the relationship between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership was found to be stronger for females ( $\beta=0.834$ ) as compared to males ( $\beta=0.593$ ). Therefore, H7a is supported. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the association between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership did not differ across age, education, and income ( $p > .05$ ). Therefore, age, education, and income are not significant moderators of the relationship between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership, and as a result H7b, H7c, and H7d are not supported.

### VI. CONCLUSIONS

The findings showed that service quality, attitude, subjective norm, customer involvement, and Islamic values are significantly related to

intention to repurchase membership through the mediating factor of customer satisfaction. The findings show that members who have a higher perception of the quality of services at a fitness center, hold stronger and more positive attitudes toward fitness, perceive a stronger support from the significant others, and are more involved with fitness activities experience a higher degree of satisfaction. Members who hold stronger Islamic values are less satisfied with the services offered at that fitness center. Members who are more satisfied with the services offered at a fitness center are more likely to hold strong tendency toward maintaining their relationship with that fitness center and as a result, repurchase membership. Gender was found as a significant moderator of the association between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership, such that the association between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership was found to be stronger for females in fitness centers. Contrary to expectations, age was not found to be a significant moderator of the relationship between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership. This finding may be explained by considering that older members are more likely to have free time and as a result, are more capable of looking for alternative service providers (Moos, 2004). Education and income were not found to be significant moderators of the relationship between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership. This finding may be explained by considering that members with higher levels of income and/or education are more likely to trade off time in favor of search for alternative products or services, thus tend to engage in repurchase behavior (Cooil, Keiningham, Aksoy, & Hsu, 2007).

#### **A. Implications**

This research incorporated the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Expectancy Confirmation Theory (ECT), and Expectancy Value Theory to develop the framework in order to examine the elements that affect member satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership in the context of Iranian fitness centers. In the context of Iranian fitness industry, there is no

research found investigating the determinants of intention to repurchase membership, particularly from the consumers' view. To the best of the author's knowledge this is the very first research that investigates the determinants of intention to repurchase membership in fitness centers in Iran by incorporating members' psychological and psychographic characteristics such as their involvement and Islamic values in the proposed model. The findings of this investigation shed light on the importance and weight of each determinant of satisfaction and intention to renew membership from the members' perspective.

#### **B. Limitations and Future Research**

While the data were statistically sufficient for the analyses they were limited to only 12 fitness centers in Tehran. The data were collected in a specific period of time. Passage of time may cause changes in perceptions and attitudes of members thus, the findings of this study may reflect the perception of fitness members only in that specific period of time. Adding other elements influencing customer satisfaction than the ones investigated in this research may enrich the proposed model in future research. Investigating the effects of elements such as length of relationship, market competitiveness, brand image, price, and body image on satisfaction and intention to repurchase membership may add further knowledge. A cross country research especially in the Middle East may help future researchers to compare the findings of the study in different geographical locations and countries. Specially, a cross country investigation on the effect of Islamic values and religiosity on satisfaction and repurchase intention in the Middle East may offer additional insights. A qualitative research would be particularly helpful to explain the feelings and attitudes of Iranian consumers beyond and above what has been found in this research, thus add further insights to the consumer behavior in the Iranian context.

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