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Adoption of practices in fitness clubs in pune: A step towards sustainable development

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Abstract

With the growing demand for fitness services, effective service management and operations have become essential. This study aims to identify the best strategies for managing fitness centers in Pune City to enhance customer engagement and ensure long-term stability and sustainability. A categorical approach was used, involving 20 semi-structured interviews with managers of fitness facilities. The interviews included private institutions with diverse business models: 6 low-cost, 10 mid-market, and 4 premium centers. Managers were asked about their profiles, facility characteristics, managerial decisions, and personal perspectives. The results revealed best practices in five key areas: general policies, marketing, facilities, offered services, and customer service. To succeed, fitness centers must maintain good tangible quality, provide excellent customer service, implement loyalty programs, and adopt online marketing strategies. Additionally, facilities should offer sports amenities, reasonable pricing, and ensure accessibility within a 15-minute commute. This study complements existing literature with practical insights, offering valuable implications for promoting fitness behaviors and encouraging physical activity.

Keywords: Sustainability, fitness service, customer service, loyalty programs, sporting facility, best practices

Introduction

A growing number of fitness facilities is a result of the past several decades' increased level of physical activity engagement. This success has resulted in the establishment of over 210,000 fitness facilities around the globe, catering to over 183 million members (Walsh, 2019) ^[14] and 90 million health-conscious individuals in India alone (Krishna, 2019) ^[8]. The manner that fitness is paid for has also changed. In the nation, there are over 24,000 gyms and studios; 95% of them are organized businesses, while the other 5% are not. Inside the fitness industry, an organized center is defined as one that operates a network of locations, either inside or between cities, and where 95% of the population lacks access to technology, has a poor operating capacity, and offers little chance of managing and growing its user base (Krishna, 2019) ^[8].

In actuality, 96% of fitness centers in India lack a website or an app. Within this scenario, fitness centers have emerged as the go-to sports facilities, supporting the social promotion of sports and physical activity adherence. As a result, the fitness industry has become more intricate. Some instances of the process of professionalization and diversification include the new business models, including boutique or low-cost centers (Motwani, 2019) ^[10].

The bulk of India's urban population has adopted a sedentary lifestyle, which has led to an outbreak of health issues in the twenty-first century. Obesity and its associated cardiovascular problems and diabetes are the most common of these maladies. In order to counteract the risk factors linked to health, upper and middle class Indians are becoming more conscious of the need of eating a healthy diet and including exercise into daily routines. Therefore, there has been an increase in the number of people enrolling in fitness facilities, along with the notion to prevent health diseases and also to improve one's aesthetic look, which arose from the glamour-laden visual entertainment media. There has been a significant shift in the way we view fitness in the modern world, with many new gyms opening and the ones that already existed opening up their hi-tech zones with add-ons like spinning, saunas, and salad bars. Gyms are no longer just for some sweaty freaks working out hard to gain valuable muscles (Jena, 2013) ^[6].

In order to remain competitive in the quickly evolving industry, fitness centers are placing a greater emphasis on long-term sustainability and client engagement.

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They need to modify their services in line with fitness industry trends in order to draw in clients and broaden their market share. The necessity to enhance services is a result of centers becoming more competitive and professional. The intricacy of services provided by fitness centers demands better management techniques. Effective management of the business is essential to the health of the organization and its clients. Businesses that can't hold onto their position run the danger of going out of business or changing to fit new markets. Developing managerial strategies requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates qualitative design and quantitative data. The goal of this study is to pinpoint the best methods used by fitness facilities to boost patron engagement while maintaining long-term sustainability and stability. The research question that is whether certain managerial decisions regulate the firmness and success of

fitness centers (n.a., India Gyms, Health and Fitness Clubs Market to 2027, 2023) ^[11].

Review of Literature

The India Online/Virtual Fitness Market is valued at \$298.3 Bn in 2022 and is projected to reach \$2388.4 Bn by 2030, with a CAGR of 29.7%. The market is driven by the increasing popularity of online fitness classes, particularly among the millennial population, who are turning to healthier eating habits and workout routines. Major players in the market include Wexer, MINDBODY, ClassPass, Fitness On Demand, Les Mills International Ltd., Navigate Wellbeing Solutions, Sworkit, Wellbeats, REH-FIT, and Fitbit. The market offers convenience, flexibility, motivation, focused attention, assurance, cost-effectiveness, and comfort, contributing to its growth (Savani, 2023) ^[13].

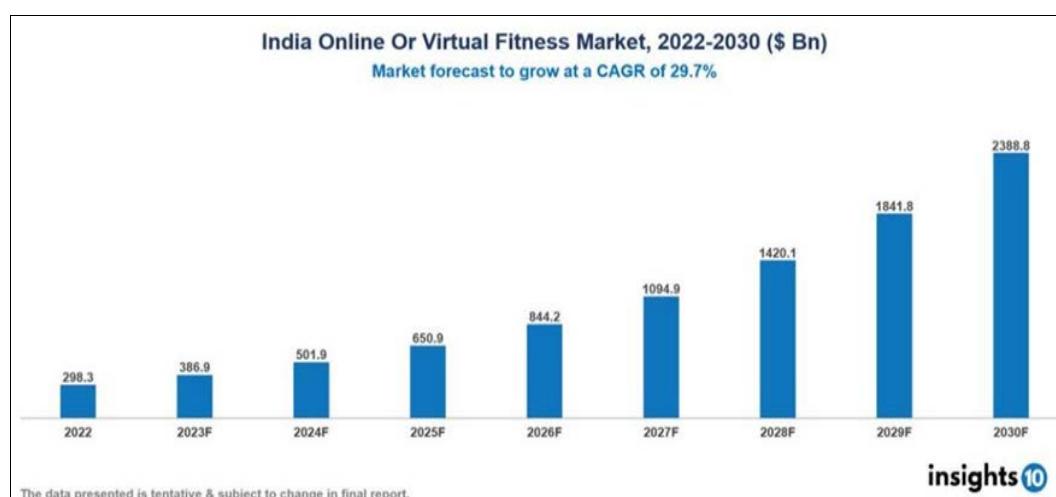


Fig 1: India online or virtual fitness market, 2022-2030 (\$ Bn)

A study conducted on mid-term behavioral changes using reinforcement, confrontation, and social influence nudges found that reinforcement and confrontation nudges effectively motivated people to produce clean energy after a month of use. Social influence nudges produced a collaborative attitude, as people enjoyed seeing the energy produced by active machines in a joint effort with others training in the gym. This suggests that long-term studies are necessary to understand behavioral changes and their underlying factors (Marti, 2021) ^[9]. The study reveals that women prioritize service attributes such as variety, personal training, and fitness service quality more than men. They are more attracted to services like swimming pools and peripherals. However, older members feel less satisfied with cleanliness and safety. These findings suggest that organizations should consider these differences to provide tailored services and best practices for engaging more people in physical activity (Jairo León-Quismondo, 2020) ^[5]. The study analyzed the relationship between service scape and customer loyalty in fitness centers using Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis. Results showed improvement margins in equipment and facility condition, with women over 21 having the most room for improvement (Jerónimo García-Fernández, 2020) ^[2]. In 398 fitness facility customers, the study looks at how management characteristics, psychological factors, and demographics affect customer satisfaction, perceived value, and future plans. The findings indicate that management characteristics are superior predictors than age, gender, subjective well-

being, or emotions (Fernando García-Pascual, 2020) ^[2].

According to the study, women's fitness was most consistent with Godin questionnaire evaluations of sweat-inducing and regular heavy exercise, whereas men's fitness indicators were strongest in peer comparisons of fitness and activity. While regular activity was linked to cardiovascular health and body fat management, perceptions of intense activity were linked to cardiovascular health (Bouchard, 1995) ^[1]. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effects on cardio-respiratory, lactate removal rate, endurance, and body composition responses to fitness trends such as resistance training (RT), high intensity functional training (HIFT), and choreographed high intensity courses (CHIC). All groups' body fat percentage, fat mass, and fat-free mass significantly decreased, according to the results. Cardio-respiratory tests demonstrated increases in muscular absolute and relative endurance, aerobic endurance, and maximum aerobic capacity for all three treatments, including HIFT and CHIC (Habil Hamdouni, 2024) ^[4]. In order to help sports managers enhance customer experiences, the research proposes a sports center management model that focuses on customer experience, satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty. It also reveals that satisfaction mediates the link between service experiences and customer commitment (García-Pascual Fernando, 2023) ^[3].

Objectives of the study

To understand the concept of Practices in Fitness Clubs

To know the sustainability in fitness clubs

To suggest the best suitable practice that can help in building sustainable fitness practices in fitness clubs

Research Methodology

Through semi-structured interviews, cross-sectional qualitative research was conducted. Data was gathered in the first phase, which involved a study of the literature and the use of an interaction cum administration structured questionnaire with 18 items covering personal characteristics, fitness facility features, and management.

The sample consisted of 20 fitness facility managers, ages ranging from 22 to 50 ($M = 33.91$; $SD = 9.26$), with an average of 6.34 years ($SD = 5.32$) of experience in comparable roles. Privately run fitness facilities in the Pune area that aren't focused on martial arts or basic sports and include at least one weight room with machines and free weights as well as one or more rooms for group instruction were required to conduct the prerequisites for participation. The study examined several business models, such as premium centers ($n = 4$ managers), mid-market centers ($n = 10$ managers), and low-cost centers ($n = 6$ managers).

Reaching saturation with 20 important agents, the sample

size was sufficient and suggested that conducting further interviews would not produce additional insights. The study's participants were approached directly and extended an invitation to participate willingly. In certain instances, the interview ended there and then, in others, a follow-up encounter was scheduled. All of the participants gave their consent to be voice-recorded for research proposals (no other documentation was permitted other than the questionnaire), with the understanding that their answers would always remain anonymous. The interviews lasted 15 to 18 minutes on average ($SD = 6.82$).

Hence, the present research is carried out with research setting as – i) the *research area* is the *Pune city*, ii) *descriptive study* as *research type* with *cross sectional qualitative type*, iii) the sample techniques as *non-probability convenience sampling*, the *sample size* is 20.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out in the sameThe Constant Comparative Method requires that the interviews be finished and actually transcribed at the same time. The interview data is then codified, and it is then divided into several groups.

Table 1: Table of codification, reported responses and categories in Fitness Centers

S.N.	Code	Reported Responses	Categories
1.	Supplementary Services	2	Services Offered
2.	Classes in Group	45	
3.	Technology in Centre/Service Offering	5	
4.	Service Quality	21	
5.	Level of Maintenance	20	Facilities Offered
6.	Importance	14	
7.	Availability of Equipments	15	
8.	Locker Rooms	39	
9.	Hygiene and Cleanliness	18	
10.	Space (Capacity in Large)	15	Service Offering to Customers
11.	Grievances/Complaints	5	
12.	Reception Counter	13	
13.	Familiar Treat (Attention)	6	
14.	Personal Treat (Attention)	8	
15.	Instructor (Inclusive of PT)	27	
16.	Loyalty	20	
17.	Man Power/Staff	118	Marketing and Social Quotient
18.	Brand Image	15	
19.	Competition among other Fitness Clubs	12	
20.	Recommendations/ Influences	21	
21.	Promotional Activities /Offers	8	
22.	Social Networks	9	
23.	Traditional/Customary Tools	14	Pre-requisites at Fitness Club for Members/ Customers
24.	Members/Customers Attainment	6	
25.	Restricted Holidays (RH)	16	
26.	Opening Days	20	
27.	Opening Hours	23	
28.	Price	29	
29.	Parking	6	
30.	Location of Fitness Center	22	

Table 2: Outcome Parameters of the table – The outcomes are revealed and organized into five segments as categories:

Categories	Codes	Probable Solutions (Budding Theme)
Service Offered	Supplementary Services, Classes in Groups, Technology in Center and Service Quality	Loyalty and Personalization, Tips for Customer Attraction, Key Service with Group Class, Premium centers, Diverse member profile, Increases enjoyment of activities, Ease in Management, Premium Centers, limited by Fees, Members Motivation, More Decisive than Equipment, awareness of Value instructors, PTs and Match between Offered and Delivered of services
Facilities Offered	Level of Maintenance, Importance, Availability of Equipments, Locker Rooms, Hygiene and Cleanliness and Space (Capacity in Large)	No Great Concern and Preventive maintenance, Important Effect on Customer Contentment, lucrative and other facilities, Brand awareness by Customer, Technology Awareness yet to be considered, Tech richness of Machines, Lockers Safety and Spaciousness, Showers and Spas and Steam Facility, Activity and Non-Activity Space and hygiene and Enough Space for new arrangements
Service Offering to Customers	Grievances/Complaints, Reception Counter, Familiar and Personal attention, Instructor (Inc. of PT) Loyalty and Man Power / Staff	Grievances Strategies (Resolutive) according to size of center, Well trained Receptionist, Emotional Link and Mid-Market and Proximity based while Familiar and Personal Attention, Self-Motivated Instructors, Loyalty Plan to help customer retention, Due Man Power Planning at fitness center for Employee Satisfaction and Training and Development
Marketing and Social Quotient	Brand Image, Competition among other Fitness Clubs, Recommendations/ Influences, Promotional Activities /Offers, Social Networks, Traditional/Customary Tools and Members/Customers Attainment	Branding Tactics, Impression Management, Adaption in Market, Customer Experience and Cost Satisfaction, Price Orientation, Social Quotient, Flyers, Newsletter, Posters, Latent Demand and Potential Demand
Pre-requisites at Fitness Club for Members/ Customers	Restricted Holidays (RH), Opening Days, Opening Hours, Price, Parking and Location of Fitness Center	District Collector Holidays, Standard Working Hours, 360 Working Days, Sundays half Working, Decisive Price, Low Cost, Fees as per market trend, Location and Public Transport Connectivity and Minimum Time Reach.

Result of Data Analysis and Interpretation (Manager and Members Perception)

Segment - Service Offered Point of View:

The results of the interview analysis showed that group classes which offer incentive, fulfillment, loyalty, and the chance to work with a particular instructor are the most valuable offerings for fitness facility management. Since it draws in new clients, the quantity of group lessons may also be utilized as a marketing technique. Since it is supplied by the employees and is seen as a differentiator, service quality is valued more than equipment. Although greater costs can enhance the quality of the service, customers mostly consider pricing when making their decision.

In order to enhance customers' sense of service quality, managers must first identify their objectives and driving forces and make sure that the services they provide align with their promises. A fitness facility must first evaluate its clients and comprehend their short-, medium-, and long-term objectives. With the introduction of fitness equipment that enhances the enjoyment of physical exercise and streamlines the administration of new registrations and group class bookings, premium centers are becoming more technologically advanced. In centers with high prices, supplemental services must be taken into account as a means of meeting the diverse needs and varied client profiles.

Segment - Facilities Offered Point of View

Managers of fitness centers place a high priority on the physical aspects of their offerings; their top priorities are tidy locker rooms. In gyms, the weight room is the most popular area, while the swimming pool is viewed as an extra feature. Since 90% of individuals travel through lockers, they are the most significant area. Not just in the changing rooms but also in the activity areas and corridors, cleanliness is crucial. Managers think that maintaining a high standard of hygiene and upkeep is vital. Additionally,

they stress how crucial it is to inform clients about ongoing maintenance and to replace equipment on a regular basis.

The managers express dissatisfaction with the present size of their venues and feel that larger areas and more activities may enhance their service. They contend that while smaller rooms may result in unhappiness, larger areas do not always translate into contentment. Users don't find equipment brand to be particularly important because, in upscale centers, technology is both appealing and practical. Mid-market gym managers caution about low-cost centers benefiting from the remarkable advancements in fitness machines, which make it easy to exercise even without instructors.

Segment - Service Offering to Customers Point of View

Regardless of the economic strategy, customer service is a critical component for managers in sports facilities. The reception area should be built on trust and confidence as instructors are regarded as the cornerstones of customer service. A mix of familiar and personal goodies is a basic necessity for success, particularly in proximity-based centers that are oriented at the mid-market. Supervisors also stress the significance of employee concerns and the requirement that workers provide solutions whenever they can. The number of members and the size of the firm determine the complaint management strategies. Supervisors think that enhanced client retention has resulted from loyalty programs, senior member rewards, and increased difficulty in unsubscribing.

Happy and motivated staff members will have a good impact on gym operations. To maintain a positive environment, managers also place a high priority on maintaining the same human resources. A sufficient amount of group class instruction and the proper certificates should be held by new teachers.

Segment - Marketing and Social Quotient Point of View

The study explores marketing strategies in fitness centers,

focusing on the importance of adapting to current demands and the increasing competition. Managers generally do not prioritize marketing for the success of their centers, but they believe that adapting to the demands of the market is crucial. The most powerful strategy is recommendation, which is inexpensive and suitable for any business model. Improving brand image through hosting events near the facility increases brand visibility and conveys more confidence to clients. Special offers are a fast and easy strategy for targeting price, while some managers phone former members and dropouts. Social networks are highly influential, as they provide immediacy and anonymity, making customers feel more free. Marketing strategies should also be oriented to non-active customers, such as those who do not practice sports. Traditional marketing tools like newsletters, mailing, flyers, and street-poster advertising are not considered key factors in marketing strategies, as they are not considered key factors in the success of fitness centers.

Segment - Pre-requisites at Fitness Club for Members/ Customers Point of View:

Managers of gyms often consider the monthly fee as the main factor in choosing a gym. Low-cost gyms prioritize price over service quality, while mid-market centers aim for fair fees that match the delivered service. Premium centers target specific customer profiles, ensuring exclusivity and confidence. Center location is also a key factor, as gyms are often perceived as proximity-based businesses. Managers believe that gyms should have wide opening hours, ranging from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., to provide equal competition opportunities. However, some managers argue that users adapt to the gym's opening hours, as gyms typically operate 363 days a year, closing only on Christmas and the New Year. On-site parking is also a factor, depending on factors like accessibility by public transport or neighborhood location. Overall, gym managers aim to match the customer profile and provide equal competition opportunities.

Finding and Observations

This study looks at the best management practices for fitness facilities with an emphasis on long-term sustainability. It highlights the importance of communication between users and employees, customer support, and the role of receptionists. Supervisors are aware that complaints might happen and that different center sizes use different strategies.

Small centers concentrate on one-on-one interaction, whereas large low-cost centers use online platforms and conventional operating methods. Client retention may be improved with the use of loyalty programs and online resources. Group sessions are often offered by fitness centers; however, traditional group programs are becoming less prevalent in Pune.

Managers at fitness centers anticipate a rise in the use of technology, particularly in group programs. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are employed in online marketing campaigns to spread information and improve brand perception. Fitness centers need to be physically located, but first and foremost, they must offer top-notch customer care. Maintaining cleanliness is crucial, particularly in the changing areas. Customers don't need swimming pools or other indecisive areas because they are seeking for certain facilities. A fitness center's monthly

expenses and location determine how profitable it is, and these factors greatly influence customer choice.

The COVID-19 epidemic has given sports facility management new opportunities to leverage digitization and technology. Despite social isolation, the post-COVID-19 period will nonetheless need stringent hygiene standards and kind customer service.

Recommendations

The statements of solutions or recommendations have been derived from the interview with managers and data analysis as:

Revolutionizing Retention: The Key Strategies for Fitness Businesses -

In the competitive world of fitness, customer service, staff connection, and loyalty programs are essential retention strategies. To ensure success, managers prioritize these tactics, tailoring them to the size of the center. Options may include personalized one-on-one interactions or standardized processes.

The Rise of Technology and the Decline of Group Education -

While group education has long been a staple in European fitness centers, it is now becoming less prevalent. In its place, technology is predicted to play a larger role. This includes the use of innovative tools and apps to enhance the fitness experience and keep members engaged.

From Online to Offline: The Power of Marketing -

To cultivate a strong brand perception and establish favorable connections, fitness centers must utilize both online and offline marketing techniques. This includes leveraging social media, email campaigns, and targeted advertising, as well as creating a positive in-person experience for members.

While physical components like weight rooms and locker rooms are necessary, maintaining proper hygiene is even more crucial for retaining members. In addition, larger sporting venues and non-decisive locations, such as swimming pools, are highly valued by managers.

Location, Location, Location: The Key to Success -

A fitness center's success heavily relies on its location and monthly costs. These factors vary based on the services provided and must be within a maximum travel time of 15 minutes for convenience and accessibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted sports facility management to adapt and evolve, transforming challenges into opportunities. Technology is being utilized to ensure safety and efficiency, with contactless check-ins and virtual training sessions. Balancing technology with hygiene practices is crucial for long-term viability. The goal is to adapt and emerge stronger, more efficient in the long run.

Conclusion

By using best practices, this research seeks to improve member acquisition, customer retention, and service delivery in fitness facilities. The profitability and long-term viability of fitness facilities depend heavily on critical managerial choices. Intangible elements of service, such as locker rooms and spotlessly clean areas, are as crucial. Perception is greatly influenced by the quality and

trendiness of group lessons, and technology can enhance the experience. Social networks should be used to implement online marketing techniques, and a reasonable monthly membership and location should be ensured. By offering management implications for fitness service managers and scientific consequences for the sector, the research closes the theory-practice divide.

Future research could address best managerial practices for

fitness centers' sustainability and continuity using a longitudinal approach and including participants from diverse nationalities or other target groups.

The below referred diagrammatic model specifies about Adoption of Practices in Fitness Clubs with special reference to Pune City: A Step towards the Industry's aspirations for sustainable development as:

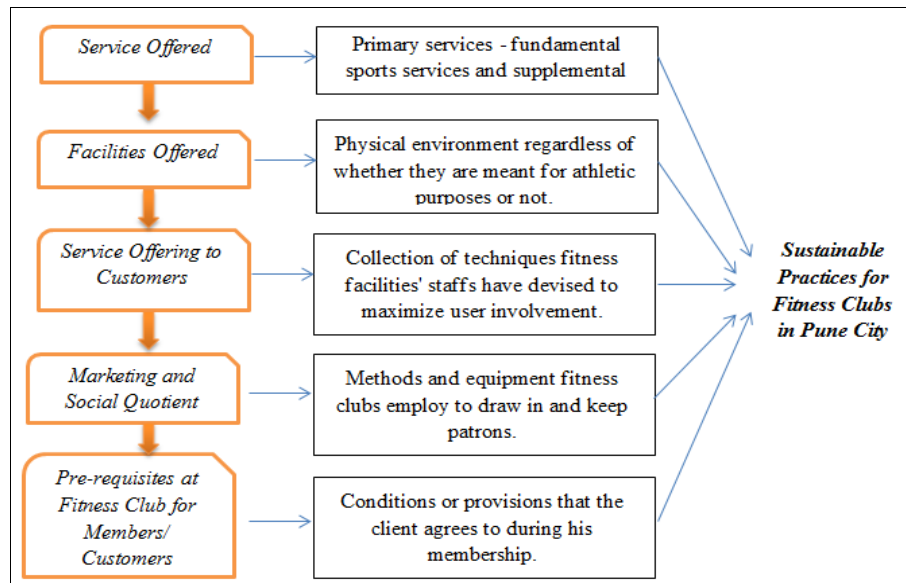


Fig 2: Adoption of practices in fitness clubs from the punt view of sustainable development

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