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Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction in Fitness Clubs in Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract

This study examines the factor affecting customer satisfaction in fitness clubs in Kathmandu Valley. Customer satisfaction is the dependent variable. The selected independent variables are empathy, assurance, location, reliability and membership cost. The primary source of data is used to assess the opinion of respondents regarding empathy, assurance, location, reliability, membership cost and customer satisfaction. The study is based on primary data of 124 respondents. To achieve the purpose of the study, structured questionnaire is prepared. The correlation and multiple regression models are estimated to test the significance and importance of factor affecting customer satisfaction in fitness clubs in Kathmandu Valley.

The study showed a positive impact of empathy on customer satisfaction. It indicates that empathy delivered by fitness club leads to increase in customer satisfaction. Similarly, the study showed a positive impact of assurance on customer satisfaction. It indicates that assured customers in the expertise, management, equipment attract customers and satisfy them. Likewise, the study showed a positive impact of location on customer satisfaction. It indicates that customers who are satisfied and well facilitated with the location of the fitness club increases the customer satisfaction. Further, the study showed a positive impact of reliability on customer satisfaction. It indicates that reliable fitness club satisfies customers. In addition, the study showed a positive impact of membership cost on customer choice. It indicates that affordable membership cost leads to increase in customer satisfaction.

Keywords: empathy, assurance, location, reliability, membership cost, customer satisfaction

1. Introduction

Customer satisfaction is a measure of how well a product, service, or experience meets or exceeds customer expectations. Customer satisfaction refers to the degree to which customers are content with the products, services, and experiences provided by an organization (Lim *et al.*, 2020). Satisfaction plays a critical role in influencing customer loyalty, repeat business, and overall organizational performance (Sultana and Das, 2016). Recent studies suggest that customer satisfaction within fitness clubs depends on various factors, such as service quality, facilities, pricing, trainer expertise, and the overall environment of the club (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2004). This demonstrates the need for ongoing research to examine the specific elements that influence customer satisfaction within fitness clubs. Understanding these influencing factors would allow fitness clubs to align their services more effectively with customer expectations and preferences (Kumasey, 2014). Salamat *et al.* (2013) argued that customer satisfaction in Tehran's public and private fitness clubs found significant differences, with employee quality, equipment, and physical environment being key factors.

Ferrand *et al.* (2010) highlighted that high satisfaction levels stem from perceived value and service excellence which directly affect members' likelihood of continuing their memberships. Likewise, Moghimi and Jusan (2015) highlighted that factors like cleanliness,

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accessibility, group activities, and community engagement significantly impact customer satisfaction in fitness clubs. Further, Han and Hyun (2015) examined the customer retention in the medical tourism industry: Impact of quality, satisfaction, trust, and price reasonableness. The study showed that reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance directly contributes to customer satisfaction and fosters trust and commitment. A positive member experience involves not just access to fitness facilities but also feeling valued, supported, and engaged by staff and the fitness community. Modern fitness clubs that emphasize personalized experiences and foster community engagement report higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kim *et al.*, 2023). Panda *et al.* (2024) stated that understanding customer expectations and ensuring service quality alignment are fundamental for improving satisfaction in fitness clubs. Customer satisfaction in fitness clubs is directly linked to member retention, as satisfied members are more likely to continue their memberships and engage in word-of-mouth recommendations (Peixoto *et al.*, 2024).

Razak *et al.* (2016) examined the impact of product quality and price on customer satisfaction with the mediator of customer value. The study showed that product quality and price have positive impact on customer satisfaction. Similarly, Andrews *et al.* (2005) assessed the satisfaction towards geography of fitness: an ethnographic case study of the gym in British bodybuilding culture. The study found that facilities and services have positive influence on bodybuilding culture. Likewise, Thanabordeekij (2019) analyzed the relationship of service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty: In the case study of fitness centers in Cambodia. The study revealed that personnel, program and facility have significant relationship with customer satisfaction in fitness clubs of Cambodia. Further, Lim *et al.* (2020) assessed the impact of perceived value, satisfaction, service quality on customer loyalty in women's fitness clubs. The study found that customer perceived value, satisfaction, and service quality significantly influence customers' psychological commitment and behavioral intentions of membership renewal and customer referrals. In addition, Pinto *et al.* (2022) argued that satisfaction in fitness clubs is enhanced by social interactions, group classes, and emotional well-being, as these factors foster a sense of community and support, critical to maintaining engagement and commitment. Moreover, Carter *et al.* (2023) stated that customer satisfaction is a driving factor influencing competitive advantage for fitness clubs, with satisfied customers contributing to brand loyalty and consistent revenue streams".

Gocłowska *et al.* (2019) investigated the customer satisfaction and its measurement in fitness club of Warsaw. The study revealed that there is a positive relationship of pricing, service quality, facilities, and the social environment of the clubs with customer satisfaction in fitness clubs. Similarly, Barbosa *et al.* (2022) examined the determinants of service quality influencing customer satisfaction in fitness centers: A systematic review. The study showed the nine dimensions of service quality as predictors of customer satisfaction: facility quality, instructors and reception staff quality, price, supporting services, service recovery, service assurance and online marketing have positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Likewise, Salamat *et al.* (2013) assessed the customer satisfaction in private and public fitness clubs in north of Iran. The study found that there is a significant difference between the overall customer satisfaction in private and public body building clubs, and also significant difference existed between the customer satisfaction from equipment, fee, accessibility factors and staff quality.

Soita (2012) examined about measuring perceived service quality using SERVQUAL: A case study of the Uganda health and fitness sector. The study found that

responsive and assurance have positive influence on service quality in Uganda health and fitness sector. Similarly, Pedragosa and Correia (2009) investigated the expectations, satisfaction and loyalty in health and fitness clubs. The study revealed that satisfaction is an intermediate variable that is positively related to various other constructs and of crucial importance in determining the loyalty in Health and fitness club. Likewise, Pradeep *et al.* (2020) assessed the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in fitness firms. The study concluded that there is a positive relationship between respondents prioritized price, quality, hygiene, safety and customer satisfaction.

In context of Nepal, Gurung (2023) investigated the factors influencing customer satisfaction in Butwal Sub-Metropolitan city gyms. The study found that customer satisfaction is positively influenced by advertising, location, and price, as these factors demonstrate statistical significance. Similarly, Neupane and Devkota (2017) analyzed the impact of service quality dimensions on patient/customer satisfaction: A study of private hospitals in Nepal. The study concluded that each dimension of service quality is positively correlated with patient satisfaction. Likewise, Thapa and Yogi (2024) examined the service quality and customer satisfaction with reference to cellular phone industry of Nepal. The study revealed that there is a positive and significant relation between five dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction. Further, Shrestha (2021) assessed the relationship between service quality, amenities and customer satisfaction in the context of Nepalese fitness clubs. The study emphasized that members' satisfaction is dependent on service quality, cleanliness, and the range of group classes available. In addition, Adhikari (2019) examined the perceived effect of merger on employee satisfaction on Nepalese commercial banks. The study showed that membership flexibility and community-building activities have positive impact on customer satisfaction.

The above discussion shows that empirical evidence vary greatly across the studies on the factors affecting customer satisfaction in fitness clubs. Though there are above mentioned empirical evidence in the context of other countries and in Nepal, no such findings using more recent data exist in the context of Nepal. Therefore, in order to support one view or the other, this study has been conducted.

The major objective of this study is to examine the factors affecting customer satisfaction in fitness clubs in Kathmandu Valley. Specifically, it examines the relationship of empathy, assurance, location, reliability and membership cost with customers' satisfaction in fitness clubs in Kathmandu Valley.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: section two describes the sample, data, and methodology. Section three presents the empirical results and final section draws the conclusion.

2. Methodological aspects

The study is based on the primary data which were collected from 124 respondents through questionnaire. The study employed convenience sampling method. The respondents' views were collected on empathy, assurance, location, reliability, membership cost and customer's satisfaction. This study is based on descriptive as well as causal comparative research designs.

The model

The model estimated in this study assumes that customer satisfaction depends upon

empathy, assurance, location, reliability and membership cost. Therefore, the model takes the following form:

Customer satisfaction = f (empathy, assurance, location, reliability, membership cost)

More specifically,

$$CS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 E + \beta_2 A + \beta_3 L + \beta_4 R + \beta_5 MC + e$$

Where,

CS = Customer satisfaction

E = Empathy

A = Assurance

L = Location

R = Reliability

MC = Membership Cost

Customer satisfaction was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the students were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “I feel that the staff at the fitness club understands my individual needs or concerns”, “My overall satisfaction with the fitness club is positively affected by the lack of empathy shown by the staff” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.823$).

Empathy was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the students were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The trainers show empathy and support during my workouts”, “The staff at the fitness club demonstrates a genuine understanding of my fitness goals” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.831$).

Assurance was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The trainers provide clear instructions and guidance during workouts”, “I feel confident in the qualifications and expertise of the fitness club staff” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.789$).

Location was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “I feel more motivated to work out because of the fitness club’s location”, “The fitness club is conveniently located near my home or workplace” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.796$).

Reliability was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The fitness club consistently provides the services it promises”, “The fitness club provide consistent hours of operation as advertised” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.835$).

Membership cost was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents

were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “I feel that the membership cost at the fitness club is justified by the quality of services provided”, “The additional costs for classes and services at the fitness club are not frustrating” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha=0.861$).

The following section describes the independent variables used in this study along with the hypothesis formulation.

Empathy

Empathy is a critical emotional and interpersonal factor in shaping customer satisfaction across various service industries, including retail, hospitality, and fitness clubs. Empathy plays a significant role in customer satisfaction by enhancing the quality of the service experience. The empathy provided by the fitness club has a positive impact on customer satisfaction in the fitness clubs (Karatepe and Tekinkus, 2006). The customers feel an empathetic connection with a service provider resulting in positive attitudes and enhanced loyalty and hence has the significant relationship with the customer satisfaction in the fitness clubs (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002). Yuksel (2020) stated that when service employees demonstrate empathy by providing personalized care, actively listening, and offering tailored responses which makes customer satisfied so, hence empathy is directly correlated with the customer satisfaction in the fitness clubs. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction.

Assurance

Assurance refers to the employees’ ability to instill confidence in customers by demonstrating their competence, professionalism, and knowledge of the service. Assurance plays a vital role in shaping customers’ perceptions of the service provided and, ultimately, their satisfaction with the service experience (Tsiotsou, 2020). Kuo (2021) stated that when customers are assured that the staff can effectively meet their fitness needs and hence makes the customer satisfied. Effective communication, attentiveness to customer needs, and professional behavior help build trust, which directly affects customer satisfaction (Chakraborty, 2020). Akbari *et al.* (2021) stated that assurance and customer satisfaction are directly correlated with each other. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between assurance and customer satisfaction.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability of a service provider to consistently deliver accurate, dependable, and high-quality services that meet or exceed customer expectations (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Reliability has the direct relationship with the customer satisfaction in the fitness clubs as stated by (Vinh and Khanh, 2022). Reliability, as a critical dimension of service quality, directly affects how customers perceive the product or service and whether they feel their expectations were met (Lin and Hsieh, 2022). Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₃: There is a positive relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction.

Location

Location in the fitness industry refers to the geographical positioning of the fitness

club, which affects how easy it is for customers to access the club and how convenient it is to integrate fitness into their daily routines (Kim and Moon, 2020). The convenience of location can reduce friction related to time commitment and travel costs, both of which influence how frequently customers use the facilities (Lee *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, a location that is in a safer, more pleasant environment, such as close to parks or public transport hubs, can enhance customers' perceptions of the overall quality and value of the club, improving their satisfaction (Hsu and Chou, 2021). Gonzalez and Anton (2020) demonstrated that customers' satisfaction and location of the fitness clubs are positively correlated with each other. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between location and customer satisfaction.

Membership cost

Membership cost in a fitness club typically includes various pricing models such as monthly subscriptions, annual memberships, pay-per-use, and discounts for long-term commitments (Kim and Moon, 2020). Customers will be satisfied if they perceive they are receiving good value for the cost paid. In the context of fitness clubs, membership cost is often associated with the quality of the facilities, availability of equipment, range of classes, and the expertise of trainers (Nguyen and Simkin, 2020). Gruber and Reisch (2020) found that customers in fitness clubs are willing to pay higher membership fees if they perceived the overall quality of service (e.g., modern equipment, fitness classes) to be high, leading to increased satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Lee and Lee (2020) indicated that when customers perceive the cost to be fair and reasonable in relation to the services provided, satisfaction increases significantly, even for higher membership prices. Based on it, this study develops the following hypothesis:

H₅: There is a positive relationship between membership cost and customer satisfaction.

3. Results and discussion

Correlation analysis

On analysis of data, correlation analysis has been undertaken first and for this purpose, Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients along with mean and standard deviation has been computed and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients matrix

This table presents Kendall's Tau coefficients between dependent variable and independent variables. The correlation coefficients are based on 124 observations. The dependent variable is CS (Customer satisfaction). The independent variables are E (Empathy), A (Assurance), L (Location), R (Reliability), and MC (Membership cost).

Variables	Mean	S.D.	C	E	A	L	R	MC
C	3.879	0.281	1					
E	3.855	0.293	0.307**	1				
A	3.929	0.295	0.073	0.136	1			
L	3.931	0.338	0.055	0.021	0.011	1		
R	3.976	0.263	0.193**	0.095	0.139	0.015	1	
MC	3.974	0.309	0.124	0.081	0.154*	0.283**	0.002	1

Notes: The asterisk signs (**) and (*) indicate that the result are significant at one percent and five percent levels respectively.

Table 1 shows the Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients of dependent and independent variables. The study shows that empathy is positively correlated to customer satisfaction. It indicates that empathy delivered by fitness club leads to increase in customer satisfaction. Similarly, assurance is positively correlated to customer satisfaction. It indicates that assured customers in the expertise, management, equipment attract customers and satisfy them. Likewise, location is positively correlated to customer satisfaction. It indicates that customers who are satisfied and well facilitated with the location of the fitness club increases the customer satisfaction. Further, reliability is positively correlated to customer satisfaction. It indicates that reliable fitness club satisfies customers. In addition, membership cost is positively correlated to customer choice. It indicates that affordable membership cost leads to increase in customer satisfaction.

Regression analysis

Having indicated the Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients, the regression analysis has been carried out and the results are presented in Table 2. More specifically, it shows the regression results of empathy, assurance, location, reliability and membership cost on customer satisfaction in the fitness clubs in Kathmandu Valley.

Table 2

Estimated regression results of empathy, assurance, location, reliability, membership cost on customer satisfaction

The results are based on 124 observations using linear regression model. The model is $CS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 E + \beta_2 A + \beta_3 L + \beta_4 R + \beta_5 MC + e$ where the dependent variable is CS (Customer satisfaction). The independent variables are E (Empathy), A (Assurance), L (Location), R (Reliability), and MC (Membership cost).

Models	Intercepts	Regression coefficients of				Adj. R _{bar} ²	SEE	F- Value
		E	A	L	R			
1	2.531 (8.094)**	0.350 (4.324)**				0.126	0.263	18.694
2	3.215 (9.611)**		0.169 (1.992)			0.024	0.278	3.968
3	3.488 (11.826)**			0.099 (1.329)		0.006	0.280	1.767
4	2.855 (7.627)**				0.258 (2.743)**	0.050	0.274	7.524
5	3.145 (9.774)**					0.185 (2.290)*	0.276	5.243
6	2.330 (5.962)**	0.328 (3.869)**	0.072 (0.861)			0.124	0.263	9.697
7	2.126 (4.793)**	0.328 (3.872)**	0.054 (0.624)	0.070 (0.971)		0.123	0.263	6.777
8	1.756 (3.545)**	0.303 (3.540)**	0.025 (0.280)	0.061 (0.851)	0.155 (1.629)	0.135	0.261	5.816
9	1.638 (3.224)**	0.288 (3.323)**	0.012 (0.133)	0.024 (0.295)	0.156 (1.636)	0.093 (1.034)	0.261	4.870

Notes:

- Figures in parenthesis are t-values.
- The asterisk signs (**) and (*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent level respectively.
- Customer satisfaction is the dependent variable.

Table 2 shows that the beta coefficients for empathy are positive with customer satisfaction. It indicates that empathy has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of Yuksel (2020). Similarly, the beta coefficients for assurance are positive with customer satisfaction. It indicates that assurance has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of Akbari *et al.* (2021). Likewise, the beta coefficients for location are positive with customer satisfaction. It indicates that location has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. This finding is

consistent with the findings of Gonzalez and Anton (2020). Further, the beta coefficients for reliability are positive with customer satisfaction. It indicates that reliability has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of Lin and Hsieh (2022). In addition, the beta coefficients for membership cost are positive with customer satisfaction. It indicates that membership cost has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. This finding is similar to the findings of Gruber and Reisch (2020).

4. Summary and conclusion

Customer satisfaction is a vital component in driving customer loyalty, business growth, and overall success in the marketplace. Similar to other areas of service and business, various factors contribute to customer satisfaction, including product quality, customer service, pricing, and the overall shopping experience. A positive customer experience significantly enhances satisfaction. When customers feel valued, respected, and supported by a business, they are more likely to remain loyal and recommend the company to others. Providing attentive, responsive, and personalized service helps to build trust and create lasting relationships. Moreover, competitive pricing combined with superior product quality contributes to a favorable customer perception, reinforcing their confidence in the brand. Businesses that prioritize customer feedback and continuously strive to meet or exceed customer expectations foster a sense of trust, reliability, and satisfaction, which are critical for long-term success and growth.

This study attempts to examine the factors affecting customer satisfaction in fitness clubs in Kathmandu Valley. The study is based on primary data of 124 respondents.

The major conclusion of the study is that empathy, assurance, location, reliability and membership cost have positive impact on customer satisfaction. The study also concludes that empathy followed by reliability and membership cost are the most influencing factors that influence the customer satisfaction in fitness clubs in Kathmandu Valley.

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