Why Would People Pay to Do CrossFit?

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The fitness industry is growing at an explosive rate (Rojas, 2016) and consumers interested in participating are provided with a wide variety of options to fulfill their needs. Consumers may decide to workout on their own, or join a local facility. When deciding to join a facility it is important for a consumer to be sure the facility has what they are looking for both in program offerings and atmosphere (Butler, 2010). The decision to join a facility can be made even more difficult by the large number of options available and the wide differences in cost. One of the more expensive options consumers may consider is CrossFit (Burger, 2014), but it is an option being chosen by many consumers every day (Alfonsi, 2015). Given the higher cost, it makes this researcher wonder what it is that CrossFit offers in order to experience such popularity. CrossFit endeavors to bring state-of-the-art coaching techniques to the general public and at CrossFit, the philosophy is that you do not need a lot of equipment, you need a lot of direction (The CrossFit Box, 2012). CrossFit's approach to fitness is consistent with what is practiced in elite training programs associated with major university athletic teams and professional sports and is based on performing constantly varied functional movements at high intensity (The CrossFit Box, 2012).

In the search for understanding how consumer loyalty forms, both the marketing and sport-specific literature have paid particular attention to the concept of consumer satisfaction (Bodet, 2012). Consumer satisfaction can be defined as an overall evaluation of the service compared to customers’ expectations (Jones & Suh, 2000; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). However, there has been considerable debate in the literature regarding how satisfaction, as a construct, relates to other constructs. Soderlund (1998) examined whether satisfaction and dissatisfaction are poles of a single continuum, or separate constructs. Rosen and Suprenant (1998) examined whether satisfaction may be considered as transaction-specific or an overall, or global phenomenon. Several researchers have examined the relationship between service quality and satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). McDougall and Levesque (2000) examined the relationship between satisfaction and future intentions of customers. The most valuable aspect of satisfaction is understanding how it drives future behavior.

The purpose of this study is to explore the purchase decision experiences of new CrossFit members. The role of satisfaction will be of particular interest in gaining an understanding of the process used in making the decision to purchase a premium fitness service/product. To do so, Fournier's (1998) extension of relationship theory will be used as a guide for this exploratory phenomenology.

There is evidence suggesting that customer satisfaction ultimately determines future intentions and behavior toward a service (De Ruyter, Wetzels, & Bloemer, 1997; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). McDougall and Levesque (2000) proposed a causal path, with perceptions of service quality influencing feelings of satisfaction, which in turn influenced future purchase behavior of customers. In a sport and leisure context, Howat, Murray, and Crilley (1999) found that satisfaction of customers was positively related to willingness to recommend the service of a recreation facility.

This study will use a phenomenological qualitative approach that involves in-depth semi-structured interviews. Exploring the thoughts and reflections of CrossFitters about their own lived experiences affords the opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of how CrossFit is experienced and the meaning ascribed to those experiences. This study is designed to include a total of ten to fifteen individuals drawn from five separate CrossFit facilities in the Tidewater area of Virginia and the only requirements for participation are that the person have joined the facility within the last six months, not be employed by the facility, nor be a relative of an owner, or employee of the facility. A semi-structured interview guide based on the previous literature in consumer satisfaction (Jones & Suh, 2000; McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Soderlund, 1998) was developed. This guide will be used to provide some consistency.
within the participant interviews. This aligns with the semi-structured interview format by allowing the researcher to follow the conversation so greater depth can be achieved in the interviews.

All identified CrossFitters will receive an email invitation that explains the purpose of the study and specifies that participation is entirely voluntary and all information will remain confidential. Prior to the interviews, participants will sign a consent form and provide demographic information. Interviews will be conducted in an office or other quiet location agreed upon by the interviewee and the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used to conceal the identity of participants. Interviews will be performed from December 2017 through January 2018 and data will be analyzed during February 2018.

This study will have practical applications for the marketing by owners of CrossFit facilities as it will provide them with insight into the thought process used by potential members and expose the attributes that led new members to join a CrossFit facility. It will also advance the customer satisfaction literature by sharing the lived experiences of customers who have made the decision to purchase a premium service/product.