

**An Investigation to Inform and Create a Service
Quality Model for the Fitness Industry in the
Northwest of England**

by

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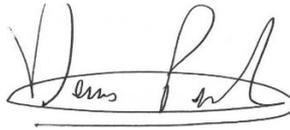
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Abstract

The UK fitness industry has seen periods of significant change, most notably the arrival of budget providers who have established themselves as market leaders in less than a decade. This change has caused havoc among established providers, with some heading towards liquidation, while others re-evaluate their own service, recognising the threat of competition in the industry. Therefore, the need to measure and improve service quality performance has gathered emphasis in the industry, yet many managers may not have access to a legitimate service quality measuring tool that is sensitive to the market in which they operate. This is not only due to the environmental changes, but because of regional variations and limitations in existing models, including age (pre-recession), non-UK based and single provider studies. Consequently, there is a need to produce a service quality model, which shows the characteristics of the contemporary fitness industry in the North West of England, that provides managers with a pragmatic and functional tool.

This study begins by exploring the evolution of the fitness industry, establishing key influences which are displayed via a fitness industry timeline. This informs the mapping of fitness centres in the North West, (n=667) of which 619 are analysed, focusing on the philosophy and beliefs of each site. A framework of providers is proposed, acknowledging more permeable boundaries between categories. Three significant categories emerged, accounting for 35.5% of the industry, while the combined five characteristics cover 77.2% of fitness centres. The characteristics for the three categories map as 'wellbeing and local community'; 'physical environment and price'; 'social environment'.

The next phase of study uses three case studies, aligned to the emergent categories from the fitness industry framework, where interviews (managers) and focus groups (members) are used. A typology of user is

devised, with six key variables which provide a structure to distinguish between the core users at each site. The variables are age; value; engagement; outcome; class; importance. It is also noticeable that there are many similarities, which could be explained by fitness centre users being a distinct group to begin with. Such similarities are further explored in developing a tentative service quality model, which includes five dimensions of interaction; physical environment; outcome; programme; access; that constitutes the proposed service quality model for the North West. The model is tested through questionnaires (n=331), capturing service quality performance and importance scores to provide an 'Importance Performance Analysis' (IPA) framework for each site. The findings lead to alterations for items under 'accessibility', 'outcome' and 'programme'. Therefore, a new tentative North West Fitness Centre (NWFC) model is confirmed. Confirmatory factor results indicate an adequate to good fitting model, with the RMSEA score of 0.67, CFI result of .95 and SRMR at 0.64. Consequently, the research not only offers new and updated knowledge to literature, but its contribution extends to application in the field, providing some managers with a practical measuring tool that not only informs on service quality performance but advises on areas for improvement.

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Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Study

“Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen.” (Michael Jordan).

If a society acts rationally, then the fitness industry would be in short demand, as everyone would eat a balanced diet and move enough to maintain a required, personal level of fitness, as the benefits of such, are overwhelming. We would all *‘make it happen’*. In truth, we may be uninformed or more likely, unwilling. The public are also sold the idea of what fitness should look like, which is often neither representative nor easy to achieve. For many, the difference between expectations of what is required in terms of effort and the results obtained, can be de-motivating and lead to apathy, which brings us back to the fitness industry. The industry is highly competitive with each provider eager to bestow upon society its vision for fitness and how they will help motivate users to achieve individual fitness needs, overcoming individual apathy. This competition, for what continues to be a lucrative market, drives increasing change and complexity in the industry.

Therefore, the fitness industry could be described as being in a state of *‘evolution’*, which is defined as ‘a process of gradual development in a particular situation or thing over a period of time’ (Collins, 2021). It is also evident that this evolution is being driven by the demands of consumers and aims of suppliers who not only seek to chase demand but influence it. In addition to understanding their market, suppliers also need to continually assess how well they are performing and where continuous improvement can take place, to provide a better experience for consumers. For an operations manager in the fitness industry, having access to a suitable tool to measure service quality would provide this valuable information and allow them to control reasoned, measured change. This is essential, as every supplier must operate under restrictions of limited resources, therefore, utilising these efficiently could prove to be the difference between success

and failure as the industry becomes increasingly competitive.

Therefore, this evolution encapsulates the nature of fitness in modern society. A driver for technological change, the fitness industry has seen Worldwide record-high growth, with 183 million users, revenue at \$94 billion and has over 210,000 fitness facilities (IHRSA, 2020). Such returns reflect the significant choice for consumers and indicates access to fitness centres from a multitude of providers each offering their own vision and service concept. Yet, at the same time, affluent societies have seen a rapid growth in obesity to 671 million and two billion overweight worldwide (Seidell and Halberstadt, 2015). Fitness is quite simple, but simple does not always mean easy results, neither for the user, nor for the provider. Complexity however, offers the user choice and excuses, while providers have increased opportunities to sell services and products. As such, the expanding industry continues to provide new and innovative answers to people's fitness needs. Home based fitness is just the most recent trend to benefit from this need for new and exciting fitness solutions, seeing a rapid rise in value, driven by technological change and the worldwide pandemic.

However, this provides a more challenging research environment, with the same complexity making the fitness industry more difficult to interpret, as it means the industry is not static, but sees regular change and development and has become an extremely competitive industry. Indeed, according to García-Fernández and Gálvez-Ruiz (2021), business models in the fitness industry operate in 10–15-year cycles, the last being the 2008 global economic downturn, which saw the growth of low-cost gyms. Such rapid changes indicate significant competition and a real need for suppliers to understand the changing demands of the market if they are to stay relevant and survive. The budget gyms have changed the UK fitness industry over the past decade, as demonstrated in figure 1.1, which identifies and categorises some providers from across the industry through price and location. However, it does not include public sector provision, which in the UK, represents a significant part of the industry.



Figure 1.1: UK health and fitness industry ecosystem
(Oxygen Consulting, 2020)

The fitness industry ecosystem (Oxygen Consulting, 2020) provides an insight to the structure of the fitness industry, yet the terminology around the fitness industry can itself prove complex and is discussed in more detail later in the thesis. This study is primarily focused on all fitness providers who offer access to a gym training area (as opposed to sport specific or health). This is not to say other services provided are dismissed, but should be considered ancillary, such as swimming pools, sports halls, etc. For studies on gym and fitness, academic authors refer to the ‘fitness industry’ (MacIntosh and Doherty, 2007; Andreasson and Johansson, 2014), which appears consistently across research disciplines when describing the industry for studies focusing on various aspects of gym fitness.

Stating that the fitness industry is complex and competitive in nature is not original, however, this thesis seeks to explore the origins and legacies of key changes in the industry, which will provide clarity as to the evolution of

the industry. In so doing, it both provides a platform to better understand how it is structured and consider a legitimate approach to categorising the range of fitness centres. A revised categorisation of suppliers will be identified, which will directly inform the second phase of research. At this stage a case study approach will be taken, with relevant fitness centres selected using the findings from the categorisation of suppliers. This is required in order to capture data that truly represent the wider fitness industry, and will be achieved by undertaking interviews and focus groups with managers and centre members. This will explore differences between users and present key service attributes for the wider industry which will be used to build and test a service quality model for the fitness industry. Such a model is crucial for fitness operators, as many managers may not have access to a legitimate service quality measuring tool that is sensitive to the market in which they operate.

The findings from the study will be focused on the North West of England (NW), where the research will take place. This is partly due to practical reasons in mapping and utilising fitness sites as case studies that are accessible. However, the main reason is that fitness can be distinctive to regions, or as Johansson and Andreasson (2014) describe it, a 'glocal' gym and fitness culture.

1.2 The Nature and Importance of the Fitness Industry

1.2.1 Globalisation and a Homogenised Industry

Andreasson and Johansson (2014) classify the development of the contemporary gym and fitness culture through three important and decisive phases of globalisation. They acknowledge the roots of the gym and fitness culture from ancient Greece through to the bodybuilders of the 19th century, which is where they identify the first stage of globalisation began. Bodybuilders such as Sandow and Atlas travelled extensively, spreading their concept of fitness globally into the early 20th century. The second phase focuses on a move towards mass participation in 1960's/70's America, with boundaries being challenged since. Before this, sport and exercise were

often segregated along gender and class lines. This was taking place in the early, but rapidly expanding gym chains who were looking to attract a wider audience than the 'bodybuilder': this concept was having a popular re-emergence through films such as *pumping iron* (1977). During the third phase of the globalisation in the 1980's/90's, there were global chains such as Les Mills International, which helped drive the homogenisation of the industry. The greater inclusion of aerobics to the more traditional anaerobic exercise by these fitness providers became standard as part of the service offering. During the third phase, Sassatelli (2017:4) identifies some key changes to the training methods and environment in which it takes place, believing the industry is;

“Leaving behind monolithic exercise salons devoted entirely to body building or aerobics, commercial fitness gyms increasingly draw on cognate areas....to provide different blends of aerobic and anaerobic, free-body and equipment-based exercises.”

Fitness is an increasingly hybrid endeavor, mixing eastern and western techniques. It draws from a truly global reservoir of body techniques and emotional codes that are consequently fast-changing (Sassatelli, 2014). Despite the obvious differences between the sectors and the service offering, there are similarities as to how these industries went from local provision to global provider. In this regard, the third phase homogenisation of the industry has also been seen by some as the McDonaldization of gym culture (Andreasson and Johansson, 2016; Monaghan, 2007), while the first significant budget operator and the largest fitness center chain in Germany called itself 'McFit'.

McDonaldization of society is a phenomenon that occurs when a society and its organisations are adapted to have the same operational characteristics that are found in McDonalds. These include efficiency, predictability, standardisation and control. It was Ritzer (2011) that first identified four highly structured aspects leading to McDonald's success. The first step is efficiency which is achieved through fixed standardised

processes. Next is time, as a structured process offers the customer a clearer understanding of how long purchase to consumption will take. Thirdly, a standard service and range of products provides predictability and assurance. The fourth is the controlled environment through which staff and customers flow. In this sense the McDonalds experience is highly scripted and controlled rather than personalised (Ritzer, 2011).

There are numerous examples of McDonaldisation or standardising of the gym, from gym equipment, physical environment, body physique, training methods and memberships to mention a few. One specific example is that of the exercise class and the establishment of Les Mills International in 1997, with the release of their first standardised programme, 'Pump' (Les Mills Community, 2009). Les Mills is the global leader in group fitness with 20 programs currently available, delivered by 140,000 certified instructors in 21,000 clubs across 100 countries and available as live, virtual and immersive classes (Phillips, 2021). Through its branding and standardisation of classes Les Mills International have provided the consumer with a recognisable and reliable fitness class whether they be in the UK or anywhere else in the world.

This can be positive for the user, as in the same way McDonalds offers the consumer something recognisable and safe, the global standardisation of the gym offers few surprises and for the provider they do not need to invest in designing an independent product, while employee delivery can be more flexible (Parviainen, 2011). However, such approaches could curb the development of new aerobic techniques as the standardisation of group fitness offers little to no room for fitness instructors to personalise training methods (Taylor and Garratt, 2010; Andreasson and Johansson, 2016). Yet those delivering Les Mills programs are required to possess new performing skills without extra compensation, as the instructor provides an attractive class so that consumers do not feel that they are a part of the global machinery (Parviainen, 2011).

This three-phase historical development of the fitness industry is hard to dispute. However, numerous authors also point out the strength and influence of sport as a locus for national or local identities, and that these can be commodified and in turn become part of a global culture (Bairner, 2001; Steen-Johnson, 2007). In the world of sport there are abundant examples, but what about the fitness industry? The growth of classes such as Zumba or Bokwa have obvious national identity but have become a more global phenomenon. This interrelationship can also work the other way when trying to marry international fitness facilities into domestic markets, as identified in Norway;

“In addition to adequate financial and administrative resources, the ability of actors to understand and interact with different societal sectors is pointed out as crucial to their ability to translate global, commercial concepts into local contexts” (Steen-Johnson, 2007:343).

Although globalisation of the fitness industry was prevalent in Norway, Steen-Johnson (2007) found that initial corporatisation was not performed from the outset by global corporations. It was the national corporations that acted to translate a globalised training concept and culture into something more acceptable to the Norwegian market. The largest Norwegian fitness chain, Sport Activity Training Centre (SATS) took this approach, combining global perceptions of fitness with the Norwegian keep-fit exercise culture. As with localised defiance of globalised sports (Falcous and Maguire, 2005; Mason, 2002; O'Brien and Slack, 2004), Steen-Johnson (2007) puts forward a case of comparable resistance in the fitness industry. Although there is a consensus on the significance of globalisation and standardisation of the industry, the influence of national and localised culture should not be underestimated. Johansson and Andreasson (2014) refer to this as the 'glocal gym and fitness culture' and point to the variation in markets with countries such as Australia and the United States having a large provision of exclusive gyms and fitness clubs, but in Sweden there is not yet a demand for such facilities.

Although the globalisation of the fitness industry has provided ever increasing standardisation, there are still national and even local differences in how the industry looks and operates. As such, this raises the possibility of variations across the UK, both nationally and regionally. When discussing the choice of provider, García-Fernández and Gálvez-Ruiz (2021) isolate London as unique in the context of cost, with memberships available at £300 or individual classes for £30. Also, when considering providers, some are regional and/or city focused. This is the case with Virgin Active who have significantly realigned their portfolio of centres, with a dominant presence in the southeast, while the NW has a single site. This would indicate that different markets do exist across the UK and should be studied as such. Being based in the NW and having worked in the NW fitness industry it would make this region the most logical to be used for the focus of the study.

1.2.2 The North West of England

Due to the 'glocal' gym and fitness culture this study will be focused on the North West of England, but throughout the thesis wider national and international influences will be present. However, the NW as of itself is a problematic term (Hill, 2002) as in one sense it has a rough historical, geographical location, including Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire, and Cheshire, as well as part of the former West Riding. Yet an early census, in 1911 saw the NW region as including Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire (Hickey, 2015). However, Huggins (2012) suggests it is difficult to define as its variations move beyond just the geographic, including language, culture, economy, political movements, traditions and relationships. Therefore, it is not only a region in a geographical sense, but perhaps better understood as a cultural construct. Although understanding the region in this context is important, for the purpose of the study there needs to be a defined geographic boundary. Therefore, the NW will include and be limited to the commonly accepted five counties of Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire as seen in figure (1.2)

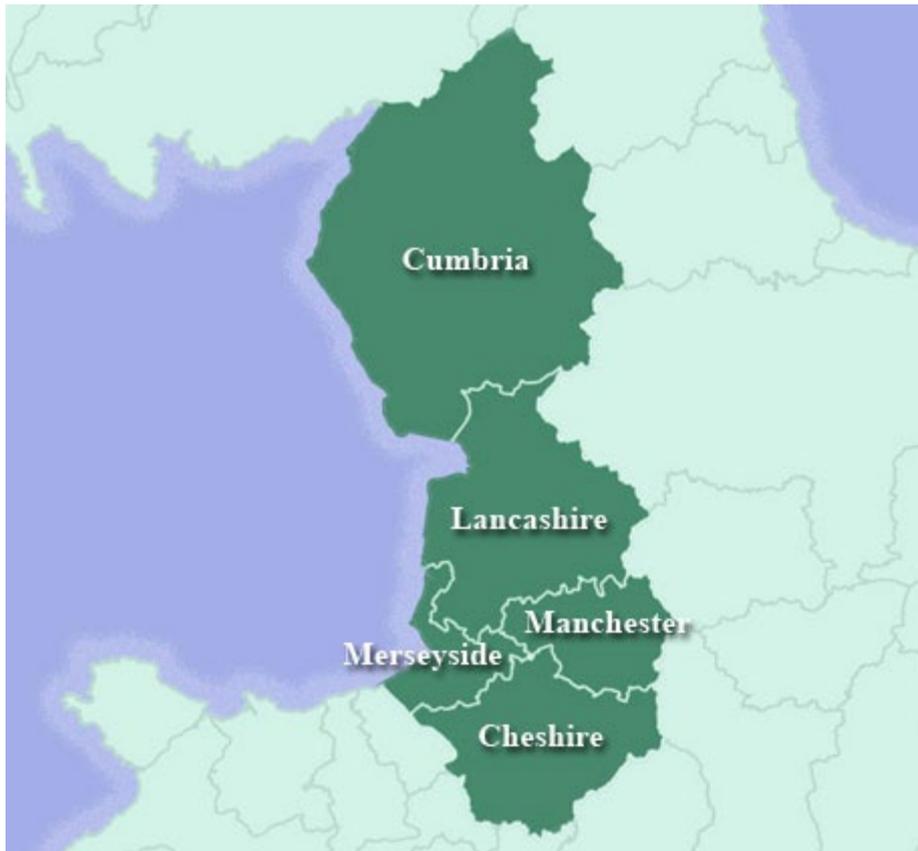


Figure 1.2: The North West region

When considering the nature of the fitness industry in a regional or national context, it is difficult not to separate providers along sector lines. Indeed, key data sources for the industry release separate reports by sector (Mintel 2021; Oxygen Consulting, 2020) as the categorisation in figure 1.1 indicates. The primary reason for this is the difference in aims and the economic activity created in the private part of the industry.

1.2.3 The UK Private Sector

In line with the global private fitness industry, the UK industry has seen continued growth. Approximately 18% of adults in the UK attend a private gym (Mintel, 2019) up from 15% in 2018, while LeisureDB (2019) suggest this is 15.6% across the industry. Yet what is important is both agree the elusive 15% penetration rate has not only been reached but exceeded.

According to LeisureDB (2019) there has been an increase of 4.7% in the number of members, which means 6.1 million members at private health and fitness clubs in the UK. However, LeisureDB (2017) suggest the growth of the budget sector has changed perceptions of expensive private providers with rigid contracts, as users seek better value and flexibility. Indeed, seven in ten people pay under £39.99 per month for their membership (Mintel, 2019). Yet, the leading budget provider and overall market leader, PureGym, relies on memberships for 92% of its revenue, while the Gym Group is at 98% (Mintel, 2019). Ultimately, this had led to continued growth in the value of the UK private fitness industry, sitting at £3.36bn in 2019.

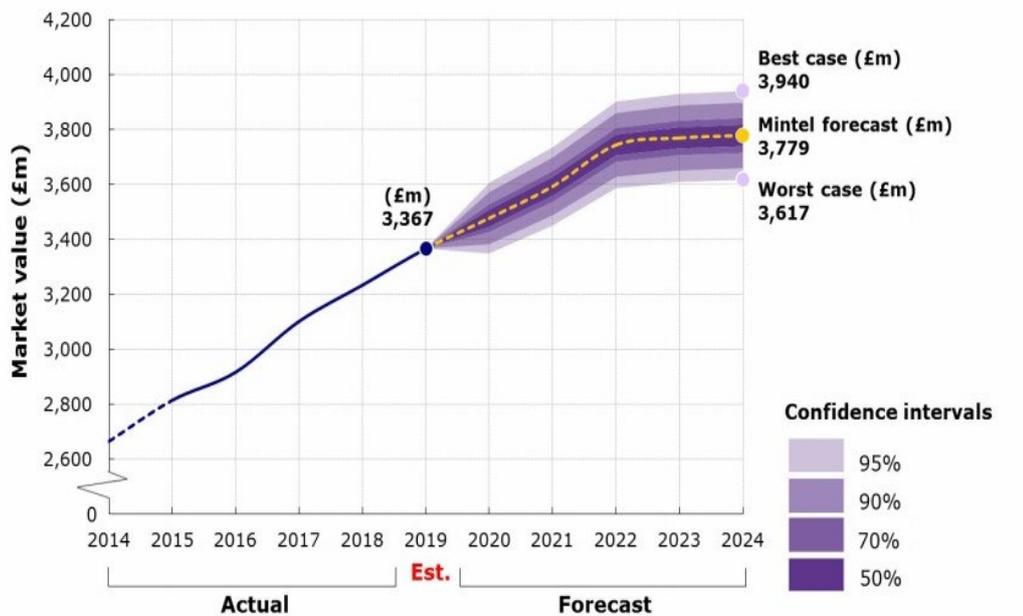


Figure 1.3: Market value

(Mintel, 2019)

The introduction of these providers has not only changed how the industry looks but is widening the market and providing the opportunity for growth, with more first-time users entering the budget market. This has led to a closer alignment of the industry with that of the USA which has a wider supply of budget providers and a greater percentage of the population using

a gym, at 20% (Mintel, 2019). As of 2019, there were 6.1 million UK users in the private sector as seen in figure 1.4, which Mintel (2019) expected to grow in the coming years, supporting the idea of a widening market, attracting new users.

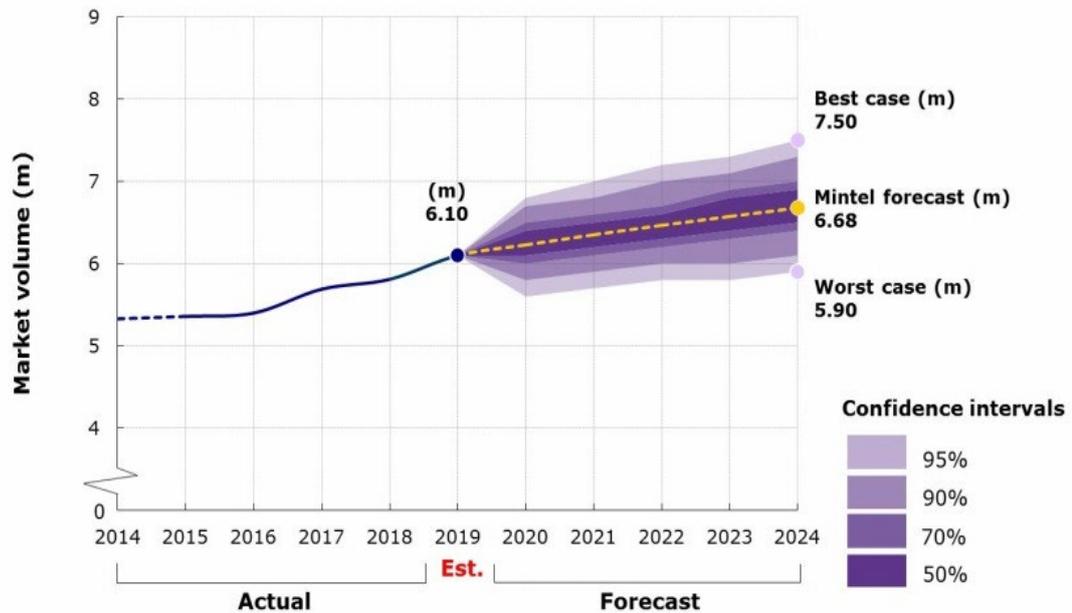


Figure 1.4: Market size and forecast

(Mintel, 2019)

Although budget providers have proven the most influential force on the UK fitness industry in the 21st century, other trends have proven both popular and durable. CrossFit, which was established in 2000, has in many ways challenged contemporary belief in what the service should be and what the market wants. CrossFit became popular around a decade ago when basic box gyms began popping up not only across the country but the world with strength and conditioning workouts performed at a high intensity level in a group setting. CrossFit and other similar training facilities have achieved something quite incredible, by turning fitness training into a sport, culminating in the annual 'CrossFit Games' which has prize money in the millions (CrossFit, 2019).

Such providers partly represent the private sector, which itself accounts for

a majority of the 7,239 total gyms across the UK (LeisureDB, 2019), but the fitness industry also has a significant public sector presence. While more people are members of private health and fitness clubs than public leisure centres, there is stronger short-term potential to boost public leisure centre attendance. Over a quarter of people say they would consider joining a public leisure centre, far higher than the 19% who are considering joining a private health and fitness club (Mintel, 2019).

1.2.4 UK Public Sector

Public leisure centers consist of properties in the ownership of the local authorities (councils). Councils may manage these properties themselves, manage via a trust structure, or subcontract them to the private sector. Although the market size is smaller than the private sector, there is still an estimated 2,048,000 active users in the public sector (Statista, 2017). Although there are no definitive figures for total public fitness centres Mintel (2019) provide a breakdown of operators for public facilities (figure 1.5). Community Leisure UK (2020), who themselves are involved in the running of 780 leisure centres, suggest there are a total of 2727 public leisure centers.

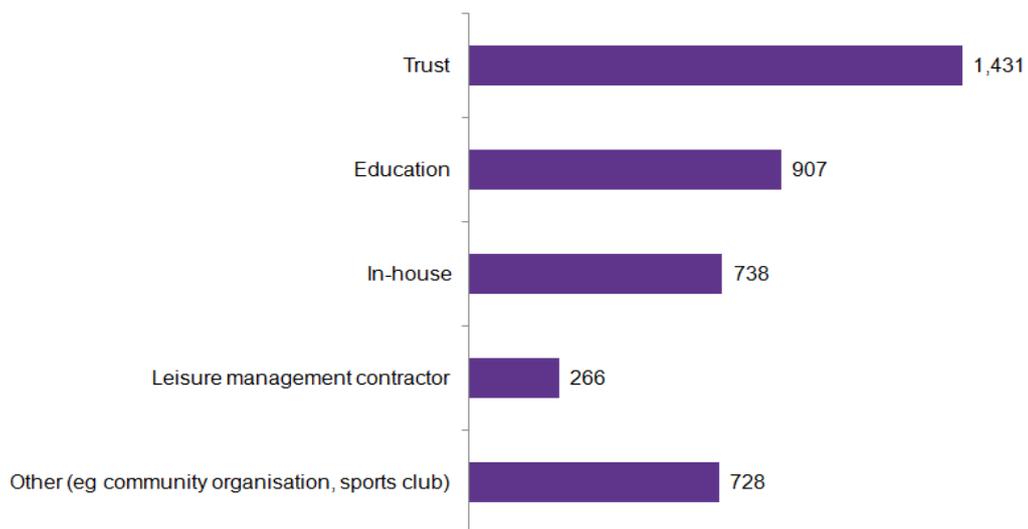


Figure 1.5: Public leisure centre and swimming pool numbers

(Mintel, 2019)

This figure is supported by UKactive (2020), which demonstrates the influence of public sector provision in the UK, which has combined revenues of £1.58bn (figure 1.6).

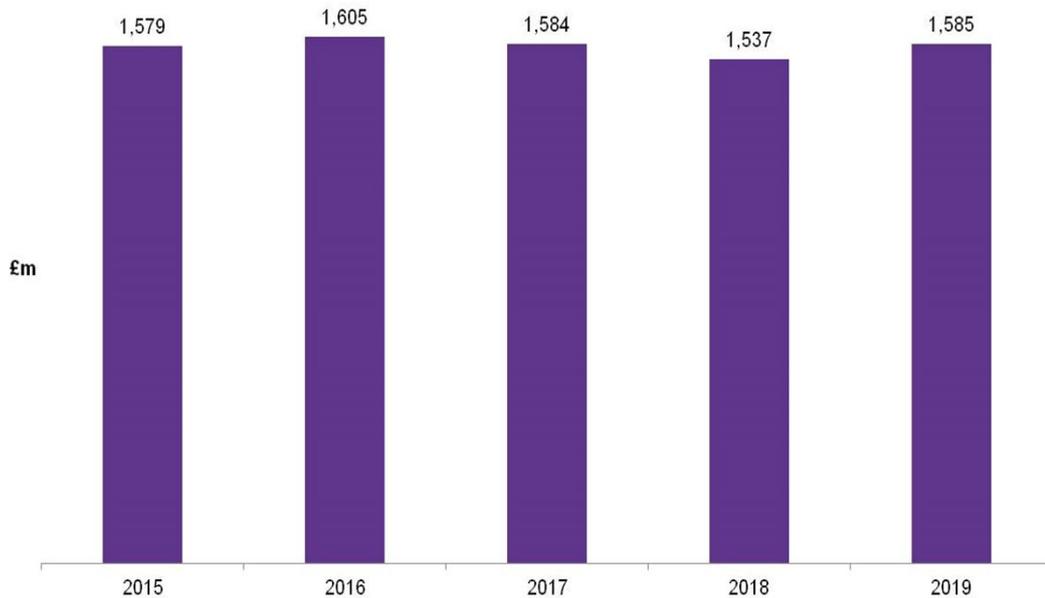


Figure 1.6: Public leisure centre and swimming pool revenues
(Intel, 2020)

While the figures so far show the market size and a financial value for the industry, table 1.1 indicates the total expected health value, over the remainder of a lifetime compared to someone who is not engaged in health and fitness. This demonstrates that the value of the fitness industry is greater than its financial revenues and its true value includes elements beyond the financial, such as health, productivity and social cohesion. This greater added value explains the historical involvement of the public sector in the fitness industry and is further considered in chapter two.

Table 1.1: Expected health value (Sport England, 2015)

Age	11-15	16-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Health cost savings	£16,772	£35,879	£45,831	£28,521	£13,355
Health gain value	£2,524	£5,393	£6,876	£5,190	£1,332

The NW fitness industry has representation from across the sectors, while its historical development can be understood from a regional, national and international perspective, leading to the complex and competitive industry we see today. This provides one component for the rationale, to critically explore its development, applying the same context to better understand the structure of the industry and its key influences. However, the most recent influence has been global in nature, yet its impact may be best understood at national and regional level and has had significant impact on this study – Covid 19 and the global pandemic.

1.3 Global Pandemic and the Fitness Industry

Approximately 2.6bn people, or roughly 30% of the world's population, were living under a form of lock down in 2020, which resulted in 64% of the worlds fitness sites being closed either by decree or voluntary arrangement (LeisureDB, 2020). In a report by Sweaney (2020) based on a sample of 2,000 fitness businesses in the US, UK, Ireland, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia, insights into how the fitness industry has changed globally were drawn. According to the data, some boutique businesses in certain regions such as the UK, are now busier than before Covid 19, while online classes are accounting for between five and ten percent of all activity in countries that are now fully out of lockdown. However, boutique studios have a limited penetration in the NW (but more significant penetration in southern England) but does provide positive signs for the industry when social restrictions are fully removed.

When facilities started to open after the first lockdown in the summer of 2020, gyms were faced with increased requirements designed to ensure safety of staff and clients (Myers et al., 2020). Although gyms provide a sense of community, they are also crowded areas with lots of potential points for the transmission of infection and simply wiping with a towel is now inadequate (Nyenhuis, 2020). These safety requirements resulted in increased costs at a time when capacity was limited. However, while the initial result was facility closures and uncertainty, some in the industry moved to or expanded online classes and programs to maintain engagement with their communities (Sweaney, 2020). This continued during times of limited capacity and helped stabilise these providers as a going concern. It is estimated that home fitness went from 8% to 53% of the market during 2020 and investment in the new category of connected fitness topped one billion dollars (LeisureDB, 2020). The necessity to find a quick solution in maintaining engagement with users drove the inorganic growth of technology in remote fitness during 2020 is likely here to stay, not as a replacement for current providers but an addition to.

In England more specifically, there has been significant disruption to the fitness industry with three separate full lockdowns in a 12-month period (table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Fitness centre access for England 2020/21

Gym open Jan 2020 with no restrictions	
	Gym closed 23rd March
Gym reopens 25th July with restrictions	
	Gym closed second time 5th Nov
Gym reopens 3rd Dec with restrictions	
	Gym closed third time 5th Jan 2021
Gym reopens 12th Apr with restrictions	
Gym open 19 July with no restrictions	

Many physically active adults maintained their habits despite the challenges of the pandemic, according to Active Lives Adult Survey (Sport England, 2021), with just 710,000 fewer active adults between November 2019 and November 2020 compared to the same period 12 months previously. This, however, masks the scale of the changes seen during the initial phase of the pandemic (figure 1.7) as the proportion of the population classed as active dropped by 7.1% or over 3m fewer active adults compared to the 12 months before (Sport England, 2021).

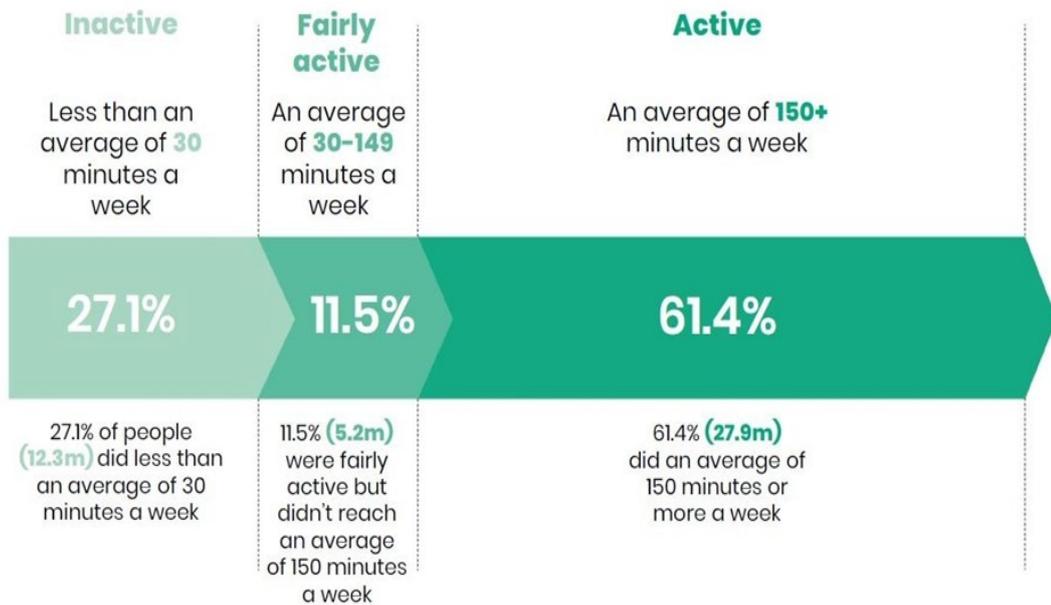


Figure 1.7: The impact of coronavirus on activity levels

(Sport England, 2021)

According to UKactive CEO Huw Edwards, this translated to 700m individual visits to facilities lost during the three lockdowns (Walker, 2021). This was highlighted in an appearance before the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee in January 2021, where industry leaders gave evidence. Those consulted included, UKactive CEO Huw Edwards, PureGym MD Rebecca Passmore, Mytime Active's CEO Marg Mayne and Rich Emerson CEO of the Climbing Academy Group and all painted a disastrous picture for the industry. Unsurprisingly, there was a call for extended government support if the industry were to survive, with the

industry proposing a three-phase plan; a plan for survival, plan for recovery and then plan for the development of the sector so it can play its role in society (Walker, 2021). This is on top of existing support, such as the furlough scheme, with £100m made available to public leisure facilities (Gov.uk, 2021) and a package of support for private providers such as the £18,000 restart grant for individual gyms.

The industry is confident about the medium to long term demand, as UKactive CEO Huw Edwards stated to the committee;

"I am, however, confident that the underlying demand (for gyms) remains strong and that members will return. After all, one of the most googled terms of 2020 was 'when will gyms reopen'".

"That is reflected in us seeing a really strong bounce back in memberships and – more importantly, in visits – after the first lockdown. Memberships were back to 80 per cent of their peak, year on year and visits were at 93 per cent". (parliamentlive.tv, 2020)

Yet, in the short term the damage could be drastic for both public and private providers, as the industry is going to suffer from something of an 'economic long Covid' (Walker, 2021) as it will take time for fitness centres to build revenues back up again. This is compounded by a UKactive survey (2021) which found 54% of leisure facilities were at risk of closure. This is critical and as previously discussed, the value of public provision extends beyond the financial and they are faced with the need to reduce essential services to keep expenditure down. These include community services such as GP referral and social prescribing programmes alongside activities for specific populations.

For the UK private sector, Mintel (2020) highlight the huge hit to revenues during the pandemic period of 2020 (figure 1.8) and supports the perilous picture across the public sector.

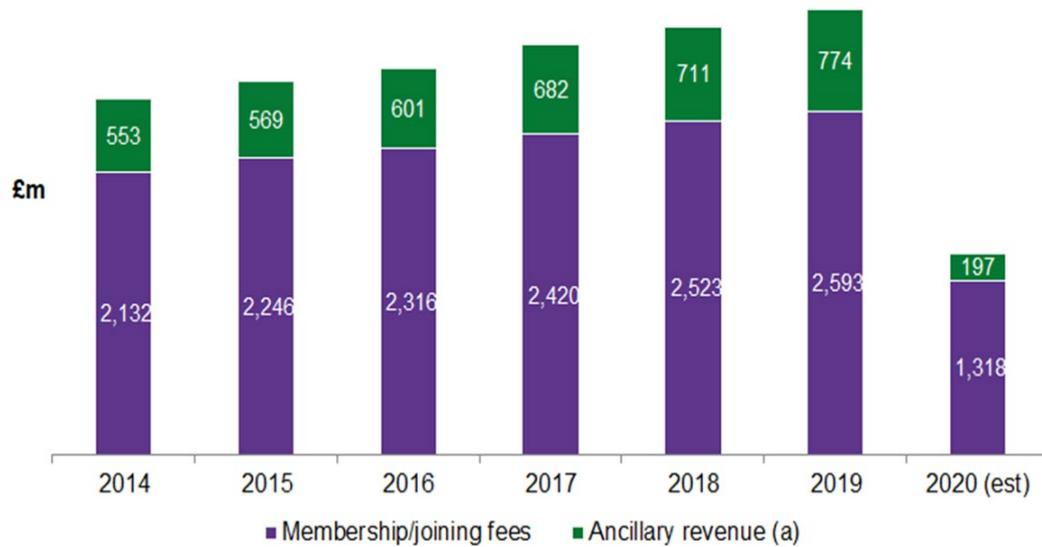


Figure 1.8: Consumer spending in private fitness clubs
(Mintel, 2020)

Mintel (2020) forecast a quick bounce back but table 1.3 suggests it will take three to four years to return to pre-pandemic revenues, which confirms the need for a longer-term government strategy for fitness industry stability.

Table 1.3: UK health and fitness industry market size and forecast
(Mintel, 2020)

	Total (£m)	Annual change (%)
2015	2,815	+5.6
2016	2,917	+3.6
2017	3,102	+6.3
2018	3,234	+4.3
2019	3,367	+4.1
2020 (est)	1,515	-55.0
2021 (fore)	2,357	+56.0
2022 (fore)	3,102	+32.0
2023 (fore)	3,285	+6.0
2024 (fore)	3,562	+8.4
2025 (fore)	3,689	+5.0

A significant reason for the forecasted period of two to three years in which revenues will return to pre-existing levels, is the changing attitudes of the market. It comes as no surprise that users are wary of cleaning processes and capacity levels of gyms as seen in figure 1.9. It is likely to take time for the public to feel fully confident and relaxed in social settings.

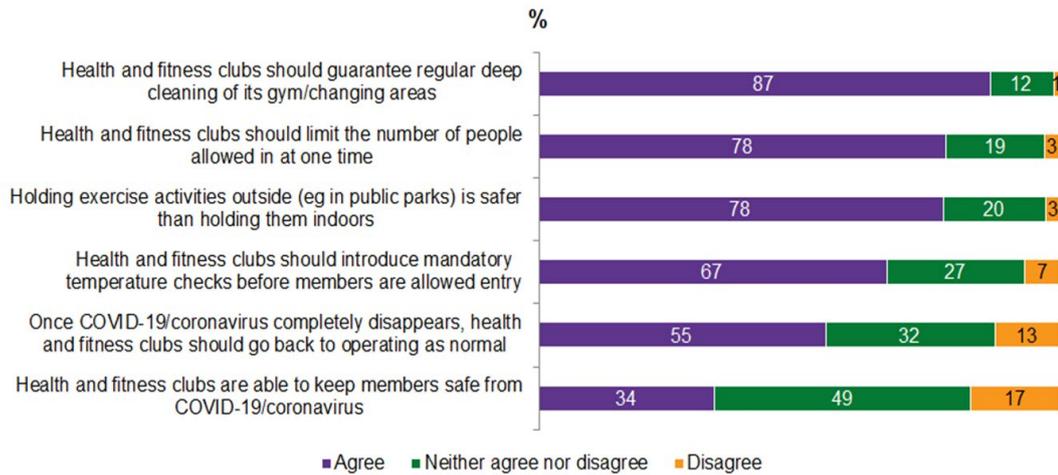


Figure 1.9: Attitudes towards fitness clubs and COVID-19
(Intel, 2020)

The fiscal impact inflicted on the public sector is seen in figure 1.10 and the public sector is receiving some limited support for fitness centres from central government. However, Mintel (2020) suggest significant challenges lay ahead to regenerate ageing facilities after a decade of austerity has left local authorities struggling to subsidise continuing operations and invest in their facility stock (this is covered further in chapter two).

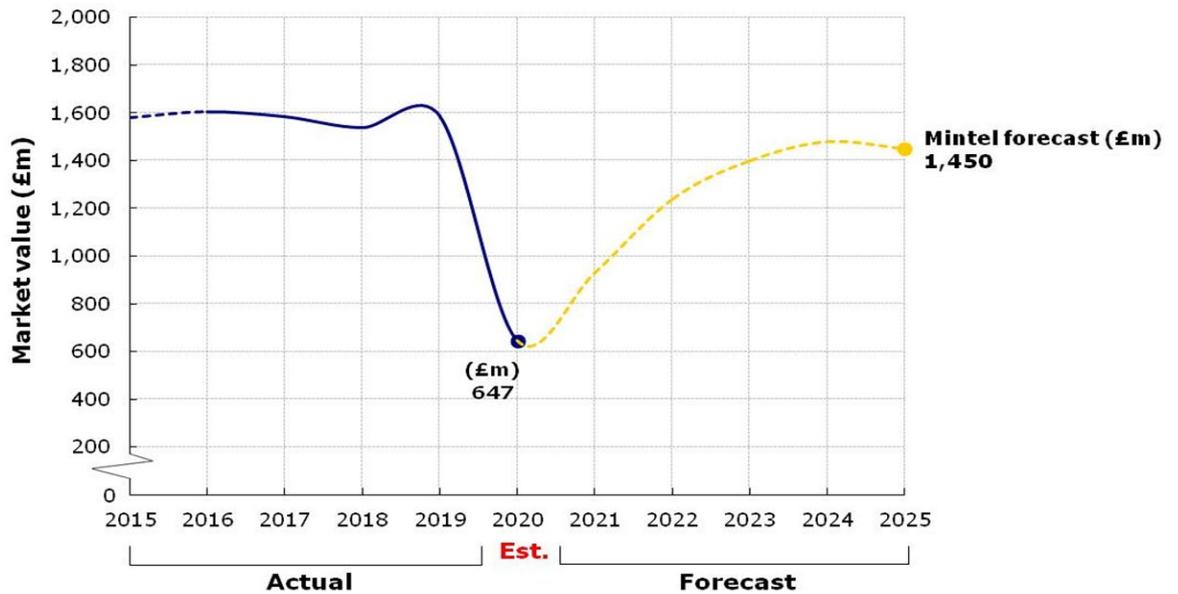


Figure 1.10: Market size in public sector
(Intel, 2020)

Despite the financial support for the public sector, around 400 gyms, pools and community centres have shut since the start of the pandemic (UKActive, 2021). The District Councils' Network (DCN), which represents 180 district councils providing leisure services in England, suggest a £325m gap in funding remains (Guardian, 2021). The DCN (2021) found 59% of centres could close within the year and of those able to remain open, 80% are warning that they will have no choice but to rationalise many services. As previously highlighted, this is devastating as the wider value of such facilities could be lost. Research by the King's Fund discovered that for every £1 invested in a leisure centre, £23 in value is created (Guardian, 2021). As with the private sector, it would appear users will take some time to return but the fact most do indicate a desire to do so should be encouraging (figure 1.11).

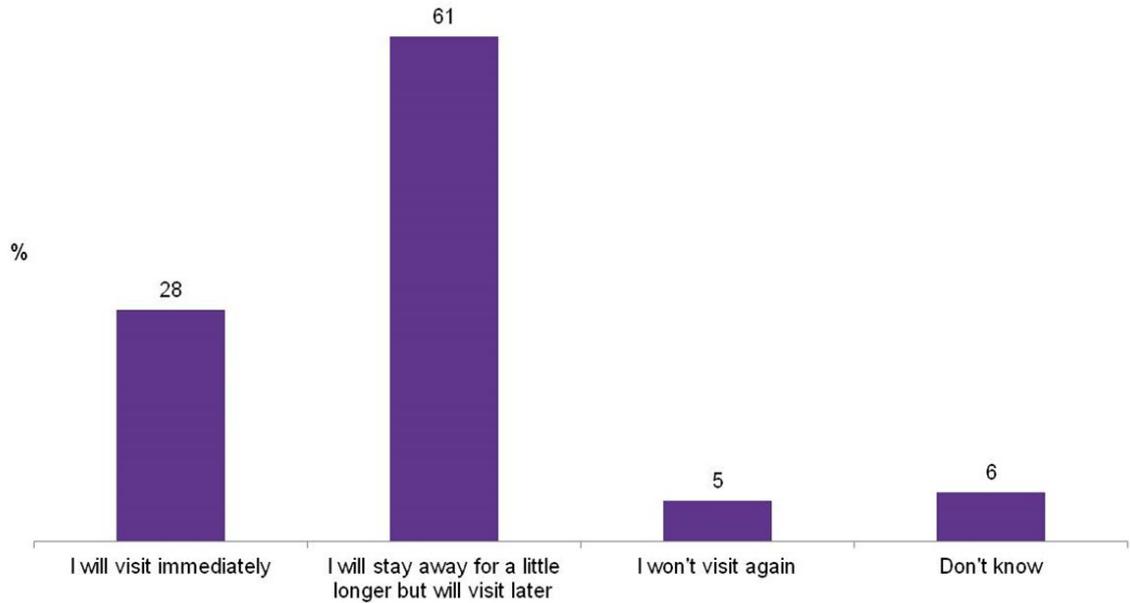


Figure 1.11: Enthusiasm for returning to public leisure centres, July 2020 (Mintel, 2020)

As highlighted in the Mintel report (2020), effectively communicating with users and adopting good practice will speed up the process of convincing users that it is safe to return. Operators need to focus on communicating their ability to keep changing rooms, showers and equipment clean, while identifying specific measures they can take to provide reassurance to key target groups. The continuation of offering a wider service through online classes and programmes will also retain the engagement with their members in the intervening period.

The global pandemic has hit the fitness industry significantly hard and there is compelling reason for concern in the short term for the viability of many providers. However, in the medium to long term there is a compelling case for optimism and a return to a pre-pandemic market size, which should be further boosted by the technological advancements in home fitness.

Regarding this study, the pandemic has led to delays in collecting data and disruption in analysing and writing, as the study began before the pandemic, with write up during the (potential) tail end and some data being collected

before and after the pandemic began. Secondary data has also changed considerably during 2020 as this section demonstrates and paints both a different and at times misleading picture for the future of the industry, as it is expected to go back to some normality when all restrictions are lifted. At this stage it is not possible to truly know the lasting effects the pandemic will have and therefore, while the thesis acknowledges the pandemic's impact, it works off the current evidence that given time the fitness industry will return to something of its former self. As such, the industry will continue to be highly competitive and creative in meeting the needs of the market, as seen with live online fitness and will further develop in line with the suggested 10–15 year business cycle (García-Fernández and Gálvez-Ruiz, 2021). Alongside these industry changes, greater emphasis has been focused on quality of services in the fitness industry in the past 15 years (Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007; Yildiz, 2011). With an increasingly discerning market, providers now more than ever need to ascertain what consumers see as important, understand and manage expectations, while striving to meet or even exceed perceptions.

1.4 Rationale for Research

Working in the fitness industry for several years in both operational and administrative management positions provided me with a front-line view of the changes and developments in the industry. This is where my interests were first piqued regarding the structure and competition of the industry and the importance of service quality in delivering a positive experience.

As previously highlighted, the entrance of the budget provider caused significant flux in the industry, which up to that point could be more easily segregated via sectors of provision. Prior to this, many private facilities offered a similar service product at a comparable price and assumed to know what the user wanted. Working during this critical time (started 2009) was exciting, as new entrants quickly challenged the orthodoxy and put significant pressure on providers such as Total Fitness, who had up to that point appeared untouchable industry leaders. This competition drove

increased choice, yet paradoxically caused a decrease in the number of fitness facilities and a changing of the guard among the fitness industry leaders (LeisureDB, 2012). It was becoming evident that the industry could no longer be categorised as a public / private structure and needed to be considered in another way as differentiation between private providers became starker, with price being just one new aspect of this. As competition grew for a share in this growth industry, it was becoming evident that the market was also more discerning, and in turn more emphasis was being placed on the quality of service in the fitness industry (Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007; Yildiz, 2011). This was at a time when I was managing several teams as an operations manager, including reception.

On being pressed about sales figure for merchandise, I suggested this was not the best use of resources as selling an umbrella made a fraction of the revenue that a new member or retaining a current member would achieve. As reception would significantly form first impressions of any potential new members or be the point of contact for any complaint, it made more sense to put time and effort into developing a team that delivered on service quality rather than taking their focus away on sales issues. I did not win that argument, but there was a gradual acknowledgement that superior service quality was of value. This eventually resulted in consistently high member service scores. Yet, the wider insight of what users saw as important, was not well understood.

Academically, it has been widely identified that service quality management in the fitness industry had historically received little research attention (Chelladurai and Chang, 2000; Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007). However, research in the area has developed over the past 15 years (Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Alexandris et al., 2004; Afthinos et al., 2005; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Lam et al., 2005; Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007; Moxham and Wiseman, 2009) which has coincided with rapid growth in the industry (Algar, 2011). Moxham and Wiseman (2009) provide insight into the practicalities of providing a high quality fitness service but suggest further work should be done on testing the generalisability of service attributes

across the industry in order to ascertain whether the findings are representative of the fitness industry. This is critical as wider literature on service quality insists the need for 'fitness industry specific' measures for service quality (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Lam et al., 2005; Martinez and Martinez, 2010). Add to this the idea of the glocal fitness industry (Johansson and Andreasson, 2014) and it indicates an industry wide service quality model is needed for the defined NW region.

There are issues with many current studies conducted in the fitness industry in meeting the needs for a service quality model that show the characteristics of industry. Most research is carried out at single venues or for individual organisations, with little consideration given to the industry as a whole (Albayraka and Caber, 2014). Research has been carried out in the wider field such as that by Lentell (2000) which looks at customer satisfaction across seven public leisure facilities but again this is isolated to public provision. Polyakova and Mirza (2016) reviewed empirical and conceptual research that proposed new or adapted service quality models for the sport and fitness industry, identifying nine. Of these, only one was UK based (Moxham and Wiseman, 2009) and was completed solely in the private sector at a single provider. Further to this, the study was more focused on the implementation of service quality from the corporate and operational levels. Also, considering the rate of change in the industry only one was produced in the past decade (Yildiz, 2011) and this was in Turkey.

Key literature on the measurement scales of quality for the service industries originates around the late 1980s and early 1990s (Harvey, 1998). A key early contributor in fitness, was Chelladurai et al. (1987) who define five dimensions of fitness-service attributes (SAFS). Chelladurai et al. (1998) found that facilities and equipment were the most influential attribute, which was also the case in the study performed by Lentell (2000), when researching users at public sites in England. However, this does contrast from a study of leisure centres in Scotland by Tawse and Keogh (1998) who found that the key quality issues for customers included; value for money, health and safety and class objectives. This indicates that it cannot be

assumed that users in the UK all share the same demands and expectations, and that a meaningful model of service quality across the fitness industry would have to account for this glocal distribution. Chang and Chelladurai (2003) further developed a quality dimension in fitness services with nine dimensions including elements such as service climate, management commitment to service quality and interpersonal interaction. Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) build on this work by adding member retention.

What becomes evident when analysing existing service quality research in the fitness industry is not only the age of the existing models, but their development is based on data often taken outside of the UK and from single providers. This offers up three distinct problems for providers in the NW when utilising a current model at their site. From a practical perspective, the need will be greatest for those providers who cannot fund or have the specialism to produce their own site-specific model. For many of the largest providers they have internal tools such as questionnaires and mystery shoppers, but this is not feasible for smaller/medium providers. This in itself raises the question of ease of use and interpretation, as the fitness centre staff will only realistically use a service quality model if it is simple to process and produces easy to interpret results, enabling them to better align resources.

Considering the problems that have been identified in both the nature of the industry and the current limitations among existing service quality models, it is evident that there is a need to address a gap in understanding of service quality on a regional level. However, to achieve this there first needs to be a better understanding of the industry, who the providers are and how they are structured so that any new model better epitomizes it, and, therefore, more valid for the industry. Having examined the issues in the field, progressive objectives have been developed which provide a channel to achieving the aim of a new and much needed service quality model for the fitness industry.

1.5 Research Aim and Objectives

Therefore, the aim of this study is to produce a tentative service quality model, which shows the characteristics of the contemporary fitness industry in the North West of England, that will provide managers with a pragmatic and functional tool, which is easy to interpret. Further objectives will be identified and clarified which specifically focus on the fitness industry and how providers in the NW region can better understand the market, while also measuring their service quality performance against the important attributes for their users.

Therefore, to fulfil the aim of the research the following objectives of the research are:

Objectives

i. To investigate the evolution of the 'fitness industry' within the North West of England. Thereby establishing what constitutes the fitness industry concept.

This objective enables the exploration of the origins and legacies of key changes in the industry, which offers some clarity to the complexity of the industry, demonstrated through a fitness industry timeline.

ii. Distinguish key constituents of providers and users within the fitness industry.

a) Develop a more comprehensive and contemporary framework of fitness centre types.

This objective enables the mapping of the fitness industry providers in the NW and administer an alternative approach to categorising the range of different fitness centre types, which will also inform case study selection for the following objectives.

b) Develop a fitness consumer typology, classifying the key demographic and psychographic determinates of fitness centre users.

This objective enables analysis of consumers at the selected case study sites, by consulting managers and consumers it will expose differences between user types at the different fitness centres.

iii. *Develop and test a service quality model suitable for use by fitness centres, in order to assess any gaps in their service offerings.*

The final objective evaluates key service attributes which will inform the dimensions of a new service quality model for the fitness industry in the NW. This will be tested, to confirm the service dimensions and present results in a pragmatic and functional way, therefore achieving the overall aim and providing an original contribution to knowledge.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This section will outline and explain the approach to be taken to the structure of the study, to achieve the aim and objectives. However, it should be noted that my positionality as a social researcher within this socio-cultural study, holds significant influence over the structure of the thesis. The route to developing a Service Quality Model for the fitness industry, begins by acknowledging it is formed through the social construction of knowledge and its impact stretches far beyond the financial returns to owners. Community, health and socialising are just some of the service characteristics that can be derived from the provision of a facility and more importantly those that use it, which demonstrates its socio cultural position, and importance. Therefore, it is important to understand the thoughts and feelings of those involved, to gain an appreciation of the wider service attributes that influence and drive agency among those involved in fitness centres.

Pragmatism has been used as the philosophical research position underpinning the study (covered in detail in chapter 7). A driving principle of Pragmatism is that engagement in philosophical activity should be done to address problems, not to build systems (Biesta, 2009). As such, the structure of the thesis and research methods are chosen as those most likely to provide insights into the question with no philosophical loyalty to any

alternative paradigm (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Therefore, the approach and overall structure of the thesis as chosen by the researcher is directed by the aim and objectives of the inquiry and applies a mixed methods approach with the use of case studies in the second stage of research.

Chapter one provided an outline to the fitness industry identifying it as being a glocal construct and established the NW region as the location for study, before setting out the industry economic size and scope in England and the UK. This was followed by an exploration of the pandemic effects on the fitness industry which has been significantly impacted. Finally, there was a rationale for research, including service quality in the fitness industry before setting out the aim and objectives for the study. **Chapter two** focuses on the historical development and evolution of the fitness industry worldwide, before narrowing into a national exploration. The end of the chapter includes a timeline for the industry which forms the grounding for the first objective. **Chapter three** covers relevant service concepts and characteristics, with **Chapter four** exploring critical service quality models. This is built on in **Chapter five** which flows into the existing service quality models for the fitness industry and provides methodological and conceptual input to the study. **Chapter six** covers objectives one and two(a), providing discussion and results of a fitness centre framework for the NW. **Chapter seven** describes the research philosophy and includes the research strategy, methods of data collection and outlines the analysis adopted by this study. **Chapter eight** provides an initial outline of the case studies and is followed by an in-depth discussion and analysis of the case studies in relation to attributes which form the proposed model and questionnaire (objective three) and consumer demographics and psychographics to identify a user typology for the type of fitness provider (objective two b). **Chapter nine** provides the results and analysis from the questionnaire and establishes a practical service quality model, devised and tested for the NW fitness industry. **Chapter ten** draws the study together to give overall conclusions for the objectives on the evolution of the fitness industry and an assessment of the tested service quality model. It also includes proposed

recommendations for research and consideration for the limitations of the research.

Chapter two: The Evolution of the Fitness Industry

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to explore the historical development of fitness, with key milestones and developments that have had lasting implications for the contemporary fitness industry. Andreasson and Johansson (2014) believe the historical development of the gym and fitness industry cannot be understood without an international, historical perspective. This is because techniques, tools, and physical exercises applied in fitness facilities across the globe are the results of culture, refined during the 20th century. Van Hilvoorde (2008) states that in understanding the modern fitness culture it is important to recognise its roots that evolved more than a century before;

“It is possible to find case studies from different countries throughout the literature, pointing towards both similarities and differences in the way the fitness industry gained its specific national or local form and expression”. (Andreasson and Johansson, 2014:106)

This demonstrates that despite fitness being a global industry with significant similarities across borders, the fitness industry is not completely generic. Each nation and even region need to be studied independently, to identify where it sits between standardised and local forms of influence. As such, this chapter will map the historical development across international, national and where relevant, regional influences before setting out the current industry position for the NW. This will cut across the three sectors and market trends, highlighting their influence on the fitness landscape and progressing through to the industry upheaval just over a decade ago.

2.2 Ancient Civilizations and Fitness

2.2.1 Worldwide Influence

In order to thoroughly understand the evolution of the fitness industry in the NW, a broader appreciation for the unfolding of fitness on a national and international level is required. The earliest examples of fitness centres can be traced back thousands of years and across continents, ranging from

Greece, Mexico, China and Egypt (Mechikoff and Estes, 2006). However, perhaps what is important to note is the purpose for these earliest examples of fitness centres. A common theme for establishing these centres were for military purposes which for some overtime became part of their culture (Becic, 2016). Although the Greeks trained to improve their military skills, they were also using gymnasia over 2,500 years ago to engage in practice for sporting competition and in aesthetic training, to gain and maintain the perfect body (Mechikoff and Estes, 2006). In ancient Egypt athletics and other fitness activities were common among the nobles and soldiers, such as running, dancing, acrobatics and archery. It was important for a pharaoh to remain fit as they competed in the Heb-Sed festiva (Harrison, 2017).

2.2.2 Ancient Greece

This wider purpose of the gymnasium in ancient Greece is a key legacy and easily identifiable in today's fitness industry. However, in ancient Greece the gymnasium held an even wider significance than we identify with today. Gymnasiums were very important social institutions with wider functions of learning and associated with eminent public figures such as Plato and Aristotle (Lindenlauf, 2016). The importance of these institutions can be seen through the attention to detail in their construction. The gymnasium at Epidaurus built in the fourth century B.C. is regarded as an outstanding example of ancient Greek architecture, particularly among those buildings designated for secular use (Heurtley, 1967).

According to the Oxford dictionary (2016), a gymnasium is a room or building equipped for gymnastics, games and other physical exercise. Those facilities in ancient Greece had some similarities with parts of the fitness centres of today, including baths and changing rooms. However, the training areas would be unrecognisable to our modern view, much like a comparison of today's major team sports such as football and its earliest incarnation (Brighton et al., 2020). It may be thought of as similar to today's athletics facilities, with open-air areas and no fixed equipment to perform the ancient Olympic sports such as running, discus and wrestling (Jones, 2014).

Other significant differences to today's gymnasiums include the gender divide as facilities were for men only and the fact that fitness activities were undertaken naked at the gymnasia (Mechikoff and Estes, 2006). The term 'gymnasium' translated back to its Greek origin of 'Gymnos' roughly translates as 'to train naked'. Although we can easily identify some key differences to the function and operation of gymnasia in ancient Greece to today, it is roundly accepted that today's fitness industry has its roots firmly in the gymnasia of ancient Greece.

2.2.3 Roman Empire

As the Roman Empire grew and the power of ancient Greece started to diminish, the wider non-military purposes of gymnasia were lost as institutions such as gymnasia were not considered to have a practical purpose (Delaney and Madigan, 2015). The ancient Greek beliefs and practices would be rediscovered however, during the renaissance in Italy and spread with the help of the typed word which resulted in the first known printed book on sport and exercise in 1569, 'de arta gymnastica' (Chaline, 2015). Despite the rediscovery of Greek practice during the renaissance, it was the period of enlightenment in central Europe that would foster the return of the gymnasium. This reintroduction would come through youth education based on the books and ideas of leading figures of the enlightened movement such as John Locke and Jean-Jaques Rousseau.

2.3 Enlightenment and the Return of the Gym

2.3.1 Germany

The international spread of the gymnasium and physical education owes much to 18th century Germany. In 1774 Johan Friedrich Simon was the first pioneering school teacher to incorporate physical education into the curriculum at Johan Basedow's philanthropium in Dessau, Germany (Mechikoff and Este, 1998). Although this school would only survive until

1793, it proved influential and inspired others to provide fitness centres for the youth. Christian Salzmänn was one such believer and developed his own institute in 1785, at Gotha, also in Germany. This institute proved to be more successful and more influential, with one of Salzmänn's employees, Johann Friedrich GutsMuths, writing the book 'gymnastics for the young' which would be printed in various countries, spreading its influence, including to the USA at the turn of the 19th century (Chaline, 2015).

The spread of this physical education movement in Germany can be seen at the start of the 19th century driven by the associates and followers of pioneers such as Simon, Salzmänn and GutsMuths. The reason for this spread had much to do with the Napoleonic wars and its aftermath, with many fleeing persecutions. However, others looked to fight back such as Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, the 'Turnvater' (father of gymnastics), who opened the Turnplatz in Berlin 1811 (Chaline, 2015). The 'Turner movement' was more than just about gymnasiums and exercise, they were political at the core and through physical training prepared men for military combat, in a reflection of the ancient civilizations.

2.3.2 Sweden

Per Henrik Ling, frequently referred to as the father of gymnastics, was influenced by his studies of ancient Greece, and above all, was informed by the German physical functional training and founded the Gymnastic Central Institute in Stockholm Sweden (1813). The new form of gymnastics had four categories: pedagogic, military, medical and aesthetic, with all movements having to be performed correctly under an instructor's guidance (Brodin, 2008). The first form was military, which focused on exercise to develop soldiers, while the medical form held the belief that through proper posture and movement, it could help overcome and prevent certain physical problems. The third principle emphasized the ability of exercise to bring the body under the control of the individual's will (mind-body), while the fourth pillar was aesthetic, with bodily expression through thoughts and feelings (Ling and Cyriax, 1912). This approach to gymnastics had considerable

influence on future gymnastics and forms the core of modern-day aerobics. Most evidently is the adoption of free-standing exercises in group, which were introduced by Ling as they were advantageous pedagogically as well as practically, over the earlier predominant training. Ling would also have a lasting influence on the medical world in areas such as orthopedics and physiotherapy, using massage as well as physical exercises for healing acute forms of pain (Melnick, 2015).

2.3.3 UK

Some of the first pioneers and students of Jahn and Ling made their way to London, while others headed to the new world taking part in the American civil war fighting for the union. Karl Volker, who opened one of the first gymnasiums (although still outdoor) in England in 1825 at Regent Park and then another near Finsbury Square in London, where for a monthly fee Volker offered training on several physical activities and had over 700 members (Grimes, 2013). Volker's gym had some similarities to the modern fitness industry, with fees, memberships and a return of the uniquely Greek concept of training for the sole purpose of improving the participants' physical fitness. However, he was not the first to set up a gym in the UK, this title belongs to Peter Heinrich Clias who set up a gym the year before in 1824 after King George IV had identified the benefits of this fitness movement. Clias was appointed 'Director of Gymnastics' for the British military, setting up at the Royal Military Asylum in Chelsea (Grimes, 2013). However, these gymnasiums were still based outdoors and had little resemblance to the gymnasiums of today.

The industrial revolution was in full swing in Britain at this time bringing larger populations together to provide the workforce to fuel its expanse. However, this brought with it terrible living conditions, disease and for some a fear for the moral state of its citizens. One such individual was George Williams, the founder of the YMCA (young men's Christian institute, 1844). George was a Draper and was concerned about the welfare of his fellow workers and began a prayer and bible study group which grew and attracted

men from across London (YMCA, 2016). This was not a liberal organisation however, with religion at its centre and would develop the principles of 'Muscular Christianity'. The idea of incorporating gymnasiums into their organisation would only arrive over 30 years later after the spread of the YMCA to the USA in 1851 and the opening there of the first YMCA gym in 1879 (YMCA, 2016). Within two years this was adopted widely by the now worldwide organisation and its legacy lives on with 114 sites across England and 15 in the NW alone (YMCA, 2016).

2.3.4 Fitness in the North West

The North West has few, if any, claims to fitness industry firsts, however some of the wider sociocultural developments would have lasting implications for the sport and leisure industry. Walton (1987) points to the NW being the first truly industrial region in the world, which allowed parts of Lancashire's 'cotton' towns to have disposable income in the mid nineteenth century. This developed popular leisure institutions slightly ahead of industrial contemporaries elsewhere and also included swimming pools and parks, provided by voluntary clubs and local authorities. The process of industrialisation drove urbanisation and would prove a catalyst for the whole of sport and leisure. Sassatelli (2014:237) identifies the significance of urbanisation to the fitness industry, as urbanisation has come to characterise contemporary societies and;

“Fitness gyms are presented as the ‘natural’ solution to our ‘unnatural’ lifestyle, as urban dwellers and as a therapeutic fix to the ills of metropolitan living.”

As previously mentioned, Christianity played a role in the development and spread of fitness. In the 1830s Joseph Livesey started an adult total abstinence movement which reacted against Christianity's more 'moderate' temperance movement and supported the notion of a healthy body and healthy mind lifestyle (Huggins, 2012). Although the YMCA would dominate the Christian fitness landscape, it is evident that ideas of leisure, sport and

fitness, where already taking root in the NW. Over a hundred years later the earliest municipal fitness facilities would begin to appear, including the Cadishead Leisure Centre, in Manchester, one of the very first centres in the NW, opened in 1965 (Salford community leisure, 2015). This would be the start of local leisure provision for the region which would spread right across the region.

The NW region is more synonymous with the development of sports (professionalisation) and leisure more widely. However, the development of the fitness industry has not been in isolation from sport and leisure, rather, it has drawn considerable influence from these areas, as the rest of the chapter will continue to show.

2.3.5 USA

The YMCA's influence was preceded in the USA by the earlier followers of the German gymnastic movement. Charles Beck, widely accepted as developing the first school gymnasium in the USA in 1827 at the Round Hill School in Northampton, Massachusetts, was also a German immigrant fleeing mainland Europe (Freeman, 1983). The failed revolution in Germany (1848) drove more Germans to the USA, taking the 'Turner movement' with them. The first turnverein was established in the same year in Cincinnati and others soon sprang up across the USA. As noted above, many liberals who left Germany ended up fighting in the American civil war (1861-65), by which time there were 150 turnverein in the USA (Chaline, 2015).

2.4 Early Commercial Fitness

Outside of these identified organisations who established gymnasiums for military and youth education purposes, a rather unexpected industry had hit on the idea of physical fitness being of commercial benefit. The fairs and traveling circus had become renowned for their strongmen. Among the most famous was Hippolyte Traite, who would go on to open the first commercial indoor gymnasium in Brussels (1840) and first purpose built indoor

gymnasium in Paris (1849). To fund this, Trait set up a limited stock company and devised the first price differentiated packages rather than a blanket fee (Chaline, 2015).

In England, the development and spread of the commercial indoor gymnasium can be traced back to Eugen Sandow. The German born strongman also had a history of performing in the circus, before moving to London and gaining notoriety for his strength in England. This led to fame in America, performing in the World's Fair of 1893 and became the first bodybuilder to be filmed (Chaline, 2015). By 1897 Sandow had returned to London and opened his first private gymnasium, which was seen very much as a middle-class club.

The timing of their careers as strong men was more important than their physical prowess, as they certainly were not the first strong men to travel and perform across Europe. The advent of photography, greater promotional opportunities, travel and an upwardly mobile middle class all proved key determinates in lifting these men from obscurity to become the first real health and fitness entrepreneurs. Other similarities between these two men were their slow gradual move away from the apparatus seen in the Turnplatz and an adoption of free (differing size) weights, to allow for muscle building, which is still evident in today's gymnasiums (Brighton et al., 2020). However, the newly evolving fitness industry would not have a seamless development through to the 21st Century, instead it would not see much development for about half a decade due to popularity of other leisure pursuits, developing sports and the two World Wars.

2.5 Fitness in the 20th Century

2.5.1 Physical Culture

While the commercialisation of fitness was beginning, it must also be remembered that for many, physical culture was strongly connected to religion, as previously identified with the early YMCA (Putney 2001). The

Muscular Christianity movement was seen as a way to develop a healthy, religious, and morally righteous lifestyle where 'manliness was next to Godliness' (Green, 1986). The YMCA would have 4,500 gymnasiums by the beginning of the twentieth century (Reich, 2010; Stern, 2011).

These early developments within physical culture and role models such as Sandow were forerunners to the bodybuilding culture developed on the west coast of America and other locations in the 1970s (Hunt, 1989). At the beginning of the 20th century, free weights and barbells were becoming more widely used after their development under men such as Sandow, who brought the idea of physique to new heights (Klein, 1993). The gym and bodybuilding in particular were still niche, but it produced one of the most iconic body builders of any generation, Charles Atlas (real name Angelo Siciliano). Sandow was a hero to Atlas and inspired him to start lifting weights. He also experimented with pulleys, calisthenics, and other exercise programs that were popular at the time (artofmanliness, 2016) developed by Sandow and Trait. Atlas would develop his own training regime using isometric training and unlike his predecessors, Atlas developed a regime that did not require a gym but could be done at home. Atlas turned this into a mail order business at the start of the 1920's and proved to be an instant hit (Klein, 1993). From these profits Atlas eventually opened his own gym in New York. Although Atlas would not become a major influence on the gym scene, his position as an icon and role model through the turn of the century was pivotal in linking the founding generation of body builders and their ideas of gym training and muscle beach in the 1930's. The earliest commercial gyms across Europe in the 19th century were successful, however they were unique and anomalous (Grimes, 2013). Despite being the vanguard of commercial provision, they were not comparable to a modern gym or even to each other and in many ways, they would prove to be an aberrant in the evolution of the fitness industry.

2.5.2 Muscle Beach and Early USA Gyms

Although the emergence of the commercial gym in the 19th century can be

followed, remarkably, it was a public provision that would prove the catalyst for the development of the first recognisable private gyms as we see them today. In the interwar period, the USA was dealing with the wall street crash (1929) and the great depression (1929-41) that followed. Not unlike recent down turns in the economy, the government responded by driving forward central projects to try and boost the economy and help kick start growth in the private sector. Perhaps the most famous of these was the Hoover Dam, constructed from 1931-36. On a smaller scale a beachfront project was given the go ahead in 1934 at Santa Monica in California (Devienne, 2019). It was a multi-use facility, free to use and had a weight training area as well as an area with gymnastic equipment which would have not looked dissimilar to the earlier Turnplatz, such as rings, parallel bars and climbing bars (Chowder and Gropp, 1998).

It would be the weight training especially which made this public space famous, gaining the name 'muscle beach', attracting participants and spectators alike. The merits of this public project and its importance to the emergence of a standardised fitness industry was not in the excellence of its facilities but in bringing together likeminded individuals with a passion for fitness and more specifically weight training in one location. A number of gyms would open up around this area to support the weightlifting community, however these were very basic, often in dirty basement dwellings with an overriding focus on free weights and referred to as 'dungeons' by Chaline (2015). An enduring fitness community had developed despite its niche position and limited provision. The commercial gym was here to stay and would evolve to become mainstream, attracting a wider demographic of users. However, in order for this to happen, significant changes would occur. An early pioneer in trying to attract a more varied user was Jack LaLanne, who established a gym in 1936 in Oakland California, introducing the first leg extension machine and variable weight machines, founding a modern fitness movement (Dalleck and Kravitz, 2002). However, others were also looking to take gyms mainstream, such as Victor Tanny, who had a different approach to achieving the same goal (Black, 2013).

After initially failing to find traction on the East Coast with a new concept of gym that would be open to all users (previously the domain of men and particularly body builders) Victor Tanny headed to California and would go on to open several gyms in the early 1940's (Knight, 2014). This new type of gym was divergent and distinctive from previous gyms, with its focus on cleanliness, music, mirrors and lighting, new maintained training equipment and a more welcoming atmosphere synonymous with other types of entertainment and leisure providers (Malley, 2014). Indeed, some sights were multi-purpose, with cinema, ice-skating or bowling also on offer (Knight, 2014). The looming second world war would have a serious impact on the industry and Tanny's gyms would have to close, however the seed had been planted that the gym could be more than a centre for body builders, or the preserve of the earliest providers of the gym, such as the Turners or the YMCA. The gym could shake off its niche status, be opened to the rest of society and operated more in line with the burgeoning leisure industry, which had really grown out of the latter stages of the industrial revolution providing greater leisure time, disposable income, and a revolution in technology.

2.6 Post War Period in the USA

2.6.1 Expanding the Fitness Service

Following the second world war it was no surprise the industry took off from where it had to pause and Tanny had opened several gyms by 1947. Rather than separating the body builder, these new gyms were also adopted by this group, as they were a vast improvement on previous facilities, but Tanny would make strides in encouraging wider sections of the public to use his facilities, especially women (Heywood, 1998).

Into the 50's and 60's the gym started to become an industry, with others also opening chains of new gyms such as Robert Delmonteque, a popular fitness magazine model during the 1950's, who opened hundreds of gyms

in both the USA and abroad, called 'American Health Studio' (muscle&fitness, 2011). As well as a gym offering of weights and training machines they also developed the ancillary services seen in some centres today, such as saunas, steam rooms and Jacuzzis (Chalin, 2015). Despite the upward trend of this newly evolving industry, yet again pioneers such as Tanny and Delmonteque would see their clubs close or be sold off. However, this new type of gym would be here to stay and in 1965 the first Gold's gym was established by Joe Gold in Venice California (goldsgym.com, 2017). Gold would go on to sell his business in 1970, after struggling with the challenges of the industry, just like Delmonteque and Tanny whose gym he used to train in. However, Gold's gym is still with us today and operates on a truly global level, serving more than three million members (goldsgym.com, 2017). Joe Gold himself would return to the industry just a few years later opening the World gym, and this time would take it on to be a tremendously successful enterprise.

The first Gold gym would prove an important and iconic site in the years to come (if only Gold had known at the time), after the release of the film *Pumping Iron* (1977) focusing on the professional world of bodybuilding, including competitions and the day-to-day training. The film followed the leading protagonists such as Lou Ferrigno and of course Arnold Schwarzenegger who trained out of the Gold gym in California. This would result in something of a renaissance for body building but also provide worldwide exposure for the gym and the fitness industry (Klein, 1986). However, it is important to note that the early years of Gold gym as a facility, sat between those dungeon gyms around muscle beach and the new leisurely welcoming facilities of the 1960's. Gold's gym would evolve however, and its offering would be closely aligned with its competitors, supplying a more rounded training facility which looked to attract the wider market of the fitness market. By the late 1970's and early 80's the more homogenous fitness industry we recognise today had developed and had begun its spread across the USA (see figures 2.1 and 2.2) and ultimately the western world.

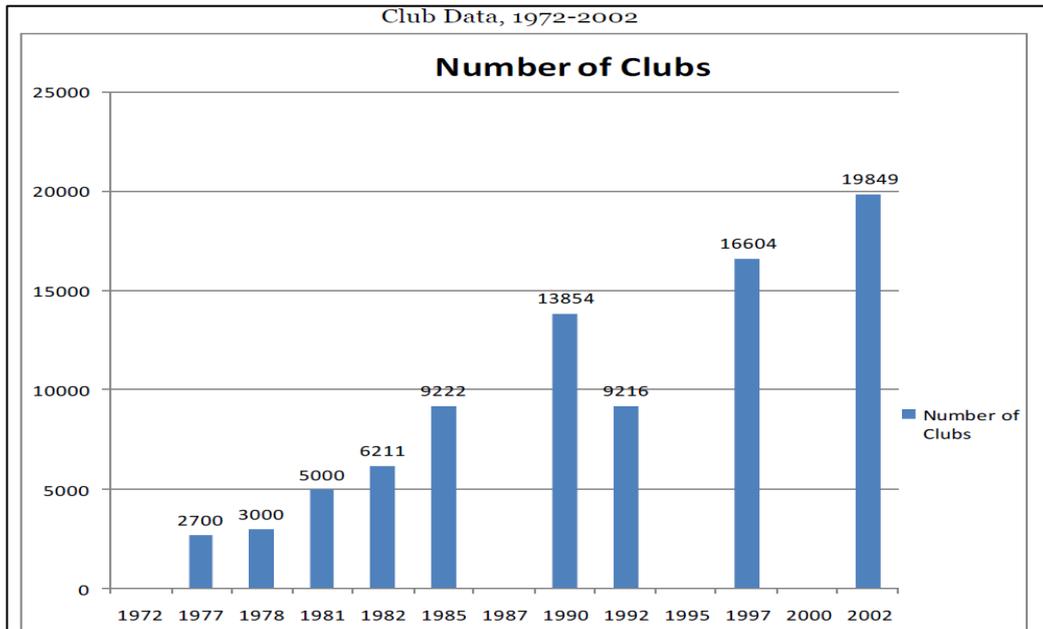


Figure 2.1: Fitness clubs across the USA

(Stern, 2008)

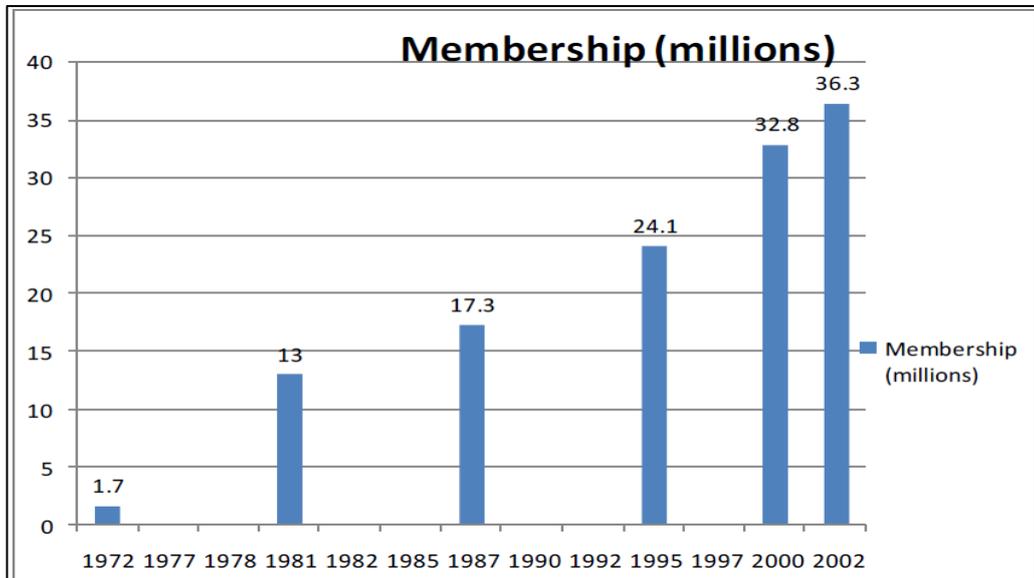


Figure 2.2: Fitness club members across the USA

(Stern, 2008)

2.6.2 The Emerging Modern Gym

Having had such a significant influence on the fitness industry, it is perhaps no surprise that the first 24-hour club, 'Nautilus', opened in California. 24-hour fitness, which opened in 1983, identified how the wider leisure industry was looking to meet the demands of a rapidly changing leisure market and adopted a similar model. Florida (2019) identified this shift occurring first in urban settings, where desirable residences inhabited the same location as late-night leisure amenities. Rowe and Lynch (2012) also point to the altered distribution of work and mode of living, which closely related to the conditions creating leisure possibilities and a 24-hour city. The influence of Nautilus on the North West of England is tenuous, as it took considerable time to be adopted as an approach to fitness delivery, yet it has come to dominate private sector provision in the past decade.

Grimes (2013) identifies the change in the fitness movement itself, with gymnastics moving very much out to be its own sporting discipline and the change from Jahn's fraternal ideology eventually filtered down to the gymnasiums, fitness centres and fitness magazines of the 21st-century. This also combined with the growth of body building and progressive weight training, bringing recognisable, generic free weights and weight training machines to the fore as central to the gym service. However, the current fitness industry is more than a progressive weight training centre. Parts of the fitness industry offer complementary facilities such as wet areas, as devised by Delmonteque in the 1950's. The increasing influence of aerobic exercise is perhaps of greater significance and seen as a key component in the homogenised fitness industry of today (Heywood, 1998). Previously, as seen at the inception of muscle beach, the elements of weight training and the older traditional form of gymnastics were catered for but not necessarily aerobics. Although aerobics was later in arriving to the fitness mix, it would have a rapid and lasting impact on the fitness industry.

2.6.3 Technological Development

Technology was changing the environment of the gym (as elsewhere in

society) with evermore diverse types of mechanical training equipment and the first patented exercise machines beginning to appear at the turn of the century (Wigglesworth, 2007). By the 1970's more user-friendly weight machines and then aerobic equipment, like exercise bikes and rowing machines were becoming common place in US gyms (Dibble, 1989), moving towards the recognisable environment of today. Today, electrical training equipment is also a part of the offering such as running machines and data tracking systems to analyse sessions (Culture, Art, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority, 2013). Aerobics in particular, was brought to the fore by technology, initially by the aerobic machines but also by a merging with an unrelated technology, television and the VCR.

In 1970's America, new media and advertising was beginning to push the concept of what size and shape the perfect body should be. At the time, the primary answer to this was exercise. As previously explored, the commercial gym had been established in the USA and one established gym owner was Richard Simmons (Dalleck, 2012). Unlike many other earlier owners Simmons was not obsessed by body building but interested in aerobics and aerobic classes. Simmons appeared on the daytime TV show 'Real People' in 1980 and was filmed taking his aerobic dance classes (Dalleck, 2012). This proved popular, especially with woman and drove the concept of commercial home fitness (Maguire, 2008). This was soon followed by Jane Fonda's workout book in 1981 which topped the New York Times best sellers. The next year Fonda brought her popular classes into the home like Simmons, but this time by producing an exercise video, which despite her concerns turned out to be the biggest selling exercise video of all time. Jane Fonda was certainly not the first to promote fitness classes for women (Ashburner, 2005) but became the most iconic. Further videos would include yoga and finally take exercise classes from being a separate provision at dance studios to being a requirement of a gym, provided in the form of exercise studios. Therefore, technology impacted the industry long before the programmable running machine or exercise bikes that allow users to take on renowned courses from the comfort of the gym. It also had a

profound effect on the user, with women increasingly using the new type of gyms offering aerobic and anaerobic exercise.

Fonda had studied and based her classes/videos on the work of Dr Kenneth Cooper who is seen as the father of aerobics after the publication of his book 'Aerobics' in 1968 (Mansfield, 2011). A further 23 workout videos would be released having considerable influence in transforming exercise classes (Mansfield, 2011) from being a separate exercise form, to being a staple of most gyms, provided in the additional separate space of exercise studios. Aerobics had a profound effect on the industry, with women increasingly targeted, whether that was through home-based fitness, stand-alone fitness classes or using the new type of gyms offering aerobic and anaerobic exercise.

Perhaps the culmination in recognising the potential scope of female users in the fitness market, was the new wave of women only clubs. As clubs had always been the domain of men provision for woman had been an afterthought and even the idea of women undertaking rigorous training was considered 'unfeminine' (Hargreaves, 2002). However, some clubs were offering 'ladies' nights' by the 1960's, but training approaches were far more limited, with use of machines like vibrating belts or rolling machine to remove fat. The new female only clubs began to appear in the early 90's with Curves Fitness opening in 1992. This became a franchise three years later, eventually reaching England by 2002. Although not the first women only site in England, it did set a precedent in approach to fitness, using standardised 30-minute group classes.

In many ways Cooper was a pioneer, as his work on aerobics was based on his research and belief that fitness could be used to improve health. This idea would be here to stay as a specific health threat was looming.

2.7 Health and Fitness

It is often said, that timing is everything. For the fledgling fitness industry, the beginning of the obesity epidemic was certainly that. Paradoxically coexisting with malnutrition, which had been a much greater concern in the west as recently as the first half of the 20th century, an escalating global epidemic of obesity is spreading to many parts of the world (WHO.int, 2015). The world health organisation says that 35% of adults aged 20+ are overweight and the worldwide prevalence of obesity has nearly doubled between 1980 and 2008. In England there were over a million hospital admissions for causes directly related to obesity in 2019, with 67% of men and 60% of women overweight or obese (Guardian, 2021). The USA leads the way with obesity rates at 35% for adults and 15.5% for children (cdc.gov, 2015). Affluent societies have seen a rapid growth in obesity to 671 million and two billion overweight worldwide (Seidell and Halberstadt, 2015), which has been linked to a more sedentary lifestyle and therefore the contemporary gym would appear to offer a solution.

The other substantial change is diet and especially cheaper convenience food. Peretti (2013) highlights the strong lobbying from the fast-food industry that put the blame squarely on a sedentary lifestyle and the choices of the individual. This has perpetuated the notion of fitness and going to the gym as the main solution to the obesity epidemic, as opposed to government regulation or simply achieving a healthy balanced diet were exercise helps maintain a healthy weight and improves health and fitness (Vairavamurthy et al., 2017).

The longitudinal study by Metcalf et al. (2010) goes further, by suggesting the causal link in obesity is that fatness leads to inactivity, but inactivity does not lead to fatness. However back in 1956, a flawed study by Johnson et al. (1956) appeared to show the opposite, that being less active caused weight gain. The fact that causality was misinterpreted proved to have a legacy for the fitness industry, as a co-author was Jean Mayer, a man who would

become nutrition advisor for the WHO, UNICEF and for three US presidents from 1969 (Chaline, 2015). As such, early American policy around obesity and weight control would go on to focus heavily on the use of fitness (Metcalf et al., 2008). Later studies would also show that despite the rapid increase in diabetes among children since the 1990's, their activity levels had changed little in the same period. The fierce debate of cause and solution around obesity is ongoing, yet what is important for the fitness industry is perception and its positioning as a solution to obesity and weight loss. The Mintel report into Health and Fitness clubs (2015) identified by far (with 50% of respondents) the main reason for people going to the gym was to lose weight. So the continuation of rising rates in overweight and obese people in the UK will not doubt mean the fitness industry maintains its ties to this customer and be as important in the future as it has been in the past, despite evidence that exercise can be an inefficient approach to tackling obesity.

In the UK, Gilman (2008) identifies a reference in the Times, to a 'war against obesity, sloth and addiction' as early as 1981. From that year a 7% increase in obesity would occur in the next ten years and warrant action to be taken by the British government for the first time (Jebb et al., 2013). However, this was in the form of wider policy around health and exercise and was only to receive specific new policies in 2004 to halt the continuing obesity rates, particularly among children. The public inquiry also brought leading figures from the food industry under scrutiny as an appreciation for the role diet played was beyond question. The 'new call to action on obesity' in 2011 reinforced many points of Labour policy since 2004, with a continued commitment to reverse the obesity trend and stressed the effects of over consumption (gov.uk, 2011). More recently the focus has subtly shifted to sugars rather than fats as being the major challenge for obesity among children in-particular. In the government's 2015 report 'Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action', it states that;

As part of work undertaken for this report a competency framework for people working in the catering, fitness and leisure sectors was developed. Widespread adoption of this, alongside wider accredited

training, is likely to increase relevant knowledge and improvements in diet such as reductions in the amount of sugar consumed (BMJ, 2015:1).

Therefore, the worrying trends in obesity continue to be a focus for the fitness industry. People who are overweight or obese are prone to further illnesses and can become a serious burden for the NHS. This has seen a surge in GP referrals, first set up around 1990 with more than 600 schemes in place two decades later (Pavey et al., 2011), where patients are sent on subsidised gym sessions. Despite understanding the causes of obesity for many decades, it continues to be a grave concern for society. Yet, since its commercial inception, the fitness industry has and continues to be influenced by this issue, whether that is through its marketing or its service provision.

2.8 UK Fitness Provision Across the Sectors

As demonstrated, the modern fitness industry emerged in the USA, particularly through the provision of gyms in the commercial sector. However, the provision of gym halls through schools were also provided (firstly the private schools) and made up a large part of public provision. There is no doubt that the model of provision in these sectors had huge influence on the UK, with the YMCA and the new private chain gyms in-particular providing a benchmark for their respective sectors. However, the emergence and development of public provision of leisure facilities was different in the UK and parts of Europe (Steen-Johnsena and Kirkegaard, 2010; Ulseth, 2004) and is a widely agreed and established narrative in British sports textbooks for over a decade (Robinson, 2004).

2.8.1 Voluntary Provision

Past empires had seen the benefits of fitness, but for objective military purposes (such as the Roman empire, identified previously). This was no different in Britain, where questions of the nation's fitness (men of fighting

age) had been raised after the Napoleonic wars and a position of 'Director of Gymnastics' for the British military in the early 19th Century was developed. However, any real public body would not be developed for a considerable time. The Central Council for Recreative Physical Training had been set up in 1935 (who would become The Central Council of Physical Recreation in 1944, or CCPR) (Macdonald, 2013) to promote and encourage activities, mainly for youths and help nurture a growth in 'keep fit' classes in the 1930's (Wigglesworth, 2007). They would also play a key part in the fitness development of soldiers for the Second World War effort (Mason and Riedi, 2010). This organisation also held sway with the sports and youth voluntary bodies as there was no single body to represent sport so the CCRP filled this void and established itself as the primary source of guidance for the government on sport and fitness. The rich history of sport in the UK where many modern sports were stratified in the 18th and 19th century, provided people with various types of fitness activities. The expansion of the middle classes in particular led to philanthropists providing sport to the working class and often a link back to Muscular Christianity. Some of the most famous included the founders of confectionary companies, such as Rowntree and Cadbury who provided playing fields, swimming pools and gymnasia. As these were provided (initially) through the voluntary sector, it is understandable why there was no public body and was not prioritised after the war. However, as identified by Holt and Mason (2000) early calls for public provision were being made with the Youth Advisory council, who in 1943 called for adequate sport and physical recreation facilities.

Post World War two, Britain saw a revolution in the welfare state. The CCPR, through government grants, aided in the implementation of a raft of changes in policy relating to sport and physical activity, especially in education (Macdonald, 2013). So ambitious was the CCPR, it began to set up national physical recreation centres where youths would go for short periods of intensive training. These facilities had little in common with today's gyms, with most activities based outside, and became the centres

for sports excellence, including locations such as Bisham Abbey and Lilleshall Hall. However, the link between the state and leisure centre provision had begun and the British government was beginning to see the social and practical benefits of leisure provision and the need to open it up to all. As previously identified, this was more difficult in the field of sport and fitness as the independent NGB's looked to retain control of their sport. Wigglesworth (2007), suggests that despite the dominance of sports clubs at this time, for some of their members, fitness training was becoming more important than the sport and was aided with the development of exercise machines coming on to the market in the first half of the 20th century. Ultimately, the position of government would continue to be of debate for another decade. Just what was the state's role within sport and leisure?

2.8.2 Early Public Provision

The demise in sporting success on an elite international front fueled the debate about more central control, direction and funding. The pressure built further with research from Birmingham University suggesting other European countries were much better served by their public sectors, in terms of facilities and funding (Coghlan and Webb, 2003). So, in 1957 the CCPR commissioned a report (Wolfenden report, 1957) to investigate the role of the state and its provision for sport and leisure. The report was in favour of a building programme of new multi-purpose leisure facilities, while improving access to existing facilities such as those in the hands of education authorities and the earliest municipal facilities, including Manchester Cadishead Leisure Centre, opened in 1965 (Salford community leisure, 2016). Although the debate and the following report came out of concerns for elite sport performance, its suggestions and reasonings were wider ranging, including reducing juvenile crime, social benefits and fitness of the general populous. The Conservative government at the time was still dubious about the expansion of the state however and so it took until 1966, under a Labour government led by Harold Wilson to push forward with greater state intervention, starting with the creation of the Advisory Sports Council (ASC) (Houlihan and White, 2002). By 1970 a Conservative

government was back in power but had softened their stance on public influence in sport and leisure provision and by 1972 the ASC had executive as opposed to advisory powers and a Royal Charter.

The continuous nature of government intervention also aligned with European philosophy for sport and leisure, as by 1968 the European Council had developed an outline for sport, identifying that it should also be seen as an activity, something done in leisure time for purposes of recreation and relaxing. This proved to be the foundation of the Council of Europe's Sports charter in 1975, with a slogan of 'Sport for All'. This year also saw the very first white paper on sport and recreation in the UK, published by the Department for the Environment (Coulter, 2017). As had always been the case, the government highlighted the contribution of the voluntary sector, but perhaps for the first time spelled out its inability to provide the wider aims for leisure and recreation development that was envisioned. For the next decade the Sports Council was focused on these new egalitarian principles, and at times worked closely with local government to put it into practice. In 1972 there were 27 public leisure centres and by 1981 there were 770 (Christopher, 2015), which represented a colossal increase in local provision and would continue through the 1980's with the public sector at the heart of it.

2.8.3 Early Private Provision

The fitness industry, as we recognise it today, had been developing and growing commercially in the USA for a number of decades through post-industrial societies and into a period of mass consumption, so it is perhaps no surprise that the UK would soon follow suit. The development of public provision in the UK had evolved somewhat separately, with a strong link to sports still present. However, the gym with free weights, weight training machines and even aerobic classes, was being incorporated. By the 1980's the commercialisation of the fitness industry had begun, with David Lloyd opening his first club in Heston in 1982 (DLL.com, 2016).

An important, yet often understated or even excluded provider which identified the commercial opportunities of health and fitness in the 1980's were hotels (Gibson, 1998). In much the same way that Wigglesworth (2007) suggests that the private clubs offered the increasingly affluent 'baby boomers' an alternative to the YMCA in the USA, the hotel gym offered exclusivity over the inclusive public facilities in the UK. Martin and Mason (1986) noted a general trend during the early 1980's towards a public demanding at least the same standards they experienced at home and work in their fitness provider, and the hotel industry was well placed to provide it;

“Hotel groups such as Forte and Queens Moat House are linking leisure facilities to their hotels to increase their attractiveness to visitors. Many prestige hotels, particularly in hotel resorts, have sporting facilities, swimming pools, squash courts and tennis courts within the hotel precinct” (Torkildsen, 1992: 245).

The changing demand for exclusivity can be explained, to some extent, by the nature of British politics under the Thatcher administration, with a staunch belief in capitalism and free market economics over social welfare and Keynesian interventionist policies (Bull, Hoose and Weed, 2003). This created increasing affluence for some, especially in the mid 80's, when the five years to 1988 real output increased by 20% in the UK (Martin and Mason, 1990). At the time, Roberts et al. (1988) stated that differences in provision and users can arise from the way in which markets pressure commercial services towards exclusiveness. This was not necessarily in the sense of restricting access to socio-economic elites, but because the different services and client-groups tend to be kept apart, which was occurring in all commercial markets. The study by Roberts et al. (1988) around participant sport in the commercial sector used a hotel gym that had its own membership and management, but the facilities were available free of charge to hotel guests, which is still a common practice in hotels today. As identified by Torkildsen (1992) hotels were offering a wider leisure offering which the onsite gym member could potentially access. So rather

than being a functional fitness venue like public facilities or the commercial 'straight' health and fitness businesses which were offering no additional social or sporting attractions as identified by Roberts (1988), they could be better described as health and fitness spas. This is still seen today in hotels that offer gym memberships, but it is also now widely adopted by the fitness industry, particularly by the more exclusive fitness providers.

Socio-economic separation was evident in the development of more exclusive (and expensive) fitness providers and to some degree a divergence in expectations between public and private facilities;

“Commercial clubs that allow members to change and shower in private are catering for a section of the public that would dread having to use 'public' facilities (Roberts et al., 1988: 151).

However, it would be wrong to suggest that this was the only measure by which users differed when comparing their chosen fitness provider. Indeed, age and sex were more significant with some commercial clubs being predominantly male (Roberts et al., 1988). Also, public sport and leisure provision did not suffer the same levels of funding cuts experienced by the other areas of the Welfare State in PM Thatcher's first term (Bramham and Henry, 1985), so the difference in fitness provision between the sectors was not as wide as perceived.

2.8.4 Modern Public Sector: CCT and Best Value

After the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, the political shift to the right also brought further change and opportunity in the public sector, with compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) introduced to local government. Leisure was no longer a right, but just another service that should be dictated by the free market (Bull et al., 2003). The tendering process was introduced to promote efficiencies and savings in the public sector, through the expertise of those in the commercial sector. Commercial contractors were provided the opportunity to bid for the right to run the 'public' leisure

facilities, previously the domain of the Local Authority Services. However, for some the process undermined the whole premise of public provision, leading to a situation;

“Where the well-off can choose from a wide range of services and opportunities offered at market prices while the remainder- the leisure losers- are left with a minimum of public services, retained mainly through legal commitment or social expediency” (Ravenscroft, 1993: 43).

One of the big issues with CCT was its concept of quality measure, which was adopted directly from the private sector and thus had the marginalising effects synonymous with the commercial sector (Ravenscroft, 2009). Therefore, it has been widely argued that CCT as a policy undermined social objectives and placed pressure on local authorities to have a more commercial philosophy (Coalter, 1998; Howell and McNamee, 2003). MacVicar and Ogden (2001) support this view on CCT and that the focus on finance, encouraged authorities to advocate revenue over user targets. This began the blurring of the lines between the sectors which is in existence today. Although achieving efficiency and cost saving are logical ideals, without true measures on access and service quality which was often the key criticism of CCT (Boyne, 1999), it is difficult for the public service provider to perform its true function.

CCT would eventually be replaced in 1999 by Best Value, under a New Labour, Blair government. It was seen as something of a return to the plurality of leisure provision from the early twentieth century (Bull et al., 2003), providing facilitation, rather than the interventionist approach of Labour in the 1970's. Best Value is the legislation that local authorities still operate under today and has changed little since its inception. Much like CCT, Best Value retains an expectation on efficiency and economic improvement and keeps the concept of competition to drive continuing improvement of provision. The duty of Best Value also requires councils to

consider overall value – including social value – when considering service provision. Under the coalition government, a single page of new Best Value Guidance was produced by Eric Pickles MP (2011:4) highlighting how government;

“Wanted to encourage public agencies and civil society to collaborate more, including greater involvement for voluntary and community organisations as well as small businesses in the running of public services.”

This push for greater collaboration is understandable when put into the context of eye watering cutbacks for local authorities. The local government associations own study ‘Under Pressure’ (2014), lays bare the challenges faced by local councils as funding for local services would shrink by 66 per cent by the end of the decade, with obvious impacts for leisure facilities (pools, gyms and parks). Liverpool County Council (LCC) has seen Central Government funding cuts of £173m in recent years, hitting the city with a 56 per cent funding cut in real terms since 2011. In health club management (Phillips, 2014), Liverpool Mayor Joe Anderson suggested Liverpool, along with other northern cities, had been hit hardest through Government’s austerity, aimed at local authorities. The cuts to date have impacted on levels of provision, as councils try to adapt to the rapidly changing environment in which they operate, indeed APSE (2012) found that two thirds of councils were unprepared for the reductions to the 2012 budget. For some it has meant taking on greater collaboration with the other sectors and reforming the organisational structure of leisure provision.

2.8.5 Managing Public Provision

Charitable leisure trusts have become an ever more common model for delivery since the late 1990’s which some link to the ethos of New Labour (Sesnan, 2001) and the reorganisation and reduction in capital funding to councils in the mid 90’s. In 1993, Greenwich Council was one such local authority seeking a way to run its leisure centres in the face of public

spending cuts. In developing a separate charitable social enterprise, independent of the council (the first of its kind), they could transfer the control of leisure facilities under its control and reduce costs, taking advantage of its charitable status (GLL.org, 2017). Within three years they began expanding beyond Greenwich, running community services across the UK, including council leisure sites across Cumbria and in 2017 GLL took up management of leisure facilities across Preston. Currently GLL is the industry leader in managing public leisure facilities (figure 2.3).

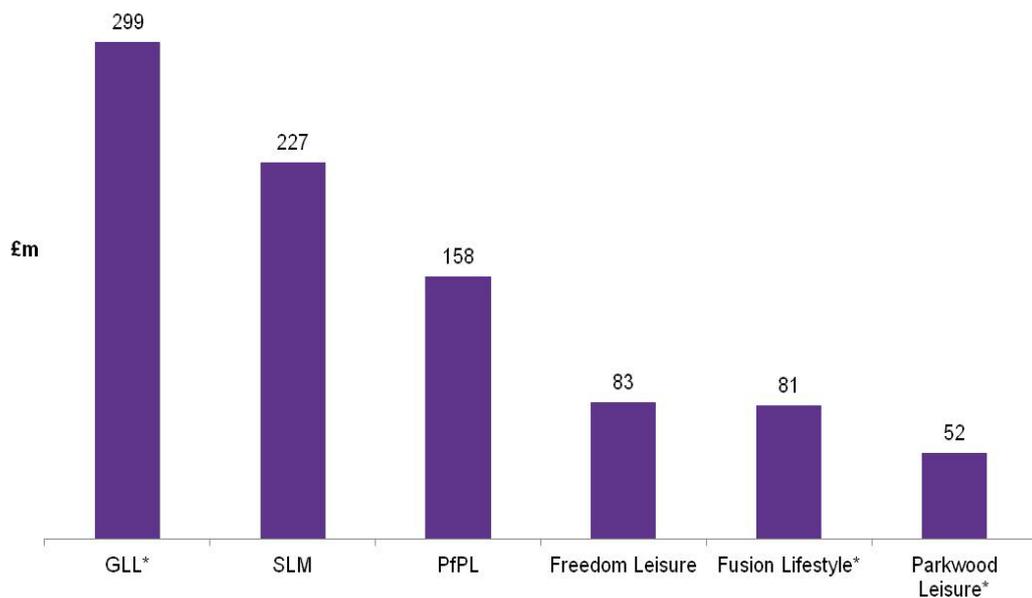


Figure 2.3: Leading leisure centre operators, by revenue, 2018/19
(Intel, 2020)

Simmons (2004), noted that 50% of British local authorities provided the majority of public leisure services directly, with leisure trusts providing 30% (Birch, 2013). However, the trend has been more councils transferring ever increasing numbers of leisure centres to trusts, including Birmingham, where they have also retained other sites through partnerships with local health authorities (Conn, 2015). Charitable trusts have been running public gyms and swimming pools since the 1930s, but an acceleration in the number of trusts has occurred, as local authorities look to make financial savings. Best Value certainly helped drive this trend, forcing local authorities to review the form of service delivery (Simmons, 2004) with a range of

business models being operated. However, there is also criticism of this trend (ESSU, 2008) with the audit commission finding service delivery better at directly delivered local authorities compared to trusts. After completing ten Best Value inspections of local authority leisure services where Trusts were operational, 64% received only a fair one-star service and one was rated poor, which was later returned to in-house control. Other concerns from the ESSU report included democratic accountability, as by definition the trust requires independence from the council. In the North West, upwards of 70% of local authority provision is operated by a form of trust, but some councils are transferring back control to in house management, such as Halton in 2016, finding that the benefits of a trust do not necessarily equate to better service to local users. This continues to complicate what we mean by public sector fitness providers, as local authority direct provision fitness facilities, continue to alter in increasingly unusual ways, including partnerships and delivery from the private and third sector. There is even the case in Copeland Cumbria, where North Country Leisure (trust) who ran the facilities agreed to become a wholly-owned subsidiary of GLL (trust) in 2015, with NCL continuing to directly operate its leisure facilities across Cumbria (Copeland.gov, 2015).

A 2014 report produced by RPT (2014) consulting on behalf of Merthyr Tydfil (table 2.1) identified the business case for establishing a not-for-profit distributing organisation. The wider management options were set out as follows;

Table 2.1: Options for managing leisure facilities in Merthyr Tydfil (RPT, 2014)

In house option
where the service is continued to be managed through an organisation on which the Council has total control, in effect maintaining the status quo in terms of control and governance. This would include direct provision and an organisation wholly owned by MTCBC.
A new Not for Profit Distributing Organisation (NPDO)
where the service is managed by a newly established NPDO specifically set up to run MTCBC services. The NPDO is established by MTCBC from the existing Leisure Services Department. The NPDO could be one of a number of different types including a CLG, IPS, CIC, CIO and could be a co-operative or mutual.
An existing NPDO
Where the service is managed by an existing NPDO which operates services for other Councils, such as Celtic Community Leisure (managing Neath Port Talbot Leisure Facilities) or HALO Leisure (managing Bridgend Leisure Services). Typically these trusts have developed following an initial transfer of services through the creation of NPDO to deliver leisure services. They are usually either a CLG or an IPS but can be other types of NPDO and could be consider to be a co-operative
Hybrid Trusts
Where the service is operated by a private sector Leisure Management Contractor, such as Leisure Connection, DC Leisure, SLM, through a NPDO organisation. It should be noted that within the private sector all of the major operators also have different operating models which enable the benefits of NNDR savings and VAT to be realised, commonly known as Hybrid Trusts. Indeed some of the organisations are now established as registered charities, such as Active Nation. Typically these organisations are CLG's
Private Sector
Where the service is operated by a private sector Leisure Management Contractor, such as Leisure Connection, DC Leisure, SLM, without the use of a NPDO organisation. All the operators offer this potential as well as their NPDO organisation (Hybrid Trusts). In addition there are a number of major FM companies who are now running services such as libraries and other facilities as part of a major outsourcing approach. A joint venture approach could also fall into this category

RPT (2014) consulting suggested the NPDO option best matched the needs of the council if it were to avoid cuts in service. However, further refining to the type and scope of the NPDO was needed. These included charitable company limited by guarantee (CLG), industry and provident society (IPS), community interest company (CIC), charitable incorporated organisation

(CIO), co-operative and mutual and unincorporated association or trust (gov.uk, 2014). What this indicates is the sheer complexity that now pervades the 'public sector' which would traditionally operate under in-house management. However, not for profit or trusts are not the only emergent structures managing public provisions. Financial cuts to local authorities have also proven the catalyst for a more recent phenomenon, 'asset transfers', where public facilities are being transferred to local volunteers to deliver and manage services, for and on behalf of the community. Nichols et al. (2015:76) found that while 'there are a set of common issues there is no common approach' when it comes to business models for such sites. This provision more than any demonstrates the notion of the 'Big Society' which has been a driving principle for the conservative government. Indeed, in 2009 the Conservatives produced a policy paper focusing on local communities developing and aiding provision of their sporting services (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012). King (2013:365) suggests the future of local services may require "significant adaption and innovation within emerging organisational frameworks in order to ensure survival". The weight of evidence would suggest this is accurate, with the vast range of organisational structures adopted by local authorities evident.

Another point to consider with trusts, is that local authority grants typically accounted for 20-50% of income two decades ago (Simmons 2004), now it hovers around 0% for many. So, much like the commercial sector there is a heavy burden on sales and membership to maintain the operation. Simmons (2004) suggested the adoption of trusts was a way to protect a public service against the inexorable shift towards the commercialisation of leisure services. However, as these providers need to take a more commercial approach to make up the increasing gap in funding, it could become less obvious how they differ to the commercial sector, especially when the private budget gyms are considered, as they are able to more than compete on price, with Sports Direct offering £5 memberships (Sports direct, 2016). Worryingly for LA providers, the Mintel report (2014) shows some evidence that saturation of budget providers is being approached in some areas and

this is leading to budget clubs cutting fees. Therefore, competition between budget clubs and LA's is likely to intensify. Simmons (2004) identified further factors beyond public sector reform that caused the move away from direct LA public provision, which included raised customer expectations. With increased competition from the budget commercial sector, the focus on customer expectation and service quality is likely to be a critical factor in the future success of LA provision.

2.8.6 Modern Private Provision

In the same way changes to the macro environment in the 1980's played a key role in opening the industry to the commercial sector, the same could be said for the budget sector in the past decade. Mintel's (2015) report on the commercial fitness industry states that like other consumer markets, the UK's 2008 recession was the catalyst for a polarisation within the private health and fitness club industry. This is detailed further in the previous year's report (Mintel, 2014), showing how the budget sector thrived during the tougher economic times during that period and has led to a polarisation within the fitness industry, with the mid-market chains hardest hit.

In 2008 John Treharne opened the first 'The Gym' fitness centre in Hounslow. Operating as a budget fitness centre with low membership fees. The following year Peter Roberts opened the first four 'PureGym' sites in Leeds, Manchester, Wolverhampton and Edinburgh. Both were new 24-hour budget chains focusing on offering low-cost flexible membership. Until this point private gyms in the UK had tended to cling to the idea of greater service offering and exclusivity. By adopting a more competitive business models for the fitness industry, as had existed in the Germany and the USA for decades (i.e. first 24 hour and budget gyms) both providers would top the UK gym membership table within six years, with Pure Gym ahead of the rest with 730,000 members at 160 gyms as seen in figure's 2.4 and 2.5 (Mintel, 2016).

The budget gym was first established in Germany under the 'McFIT' brand in 1997 by Rainer Schaller, who had an ambition to make fitness training affordable for all (McFIT.com, 2021) and would secure itself as the industry leader domestically. It proved to be a pioneer, becoming the most popular business model of the 21st Century based on delivering a convenient, user-friendly, no-frills, high-tech service at affordable prices. While the overall philosophy has stayed very much the same, the offering has evolved, and in 2012 McFIT introduced a new concept to gym users, 'Home of Fitness'. The pricing was still discount, but the offering now looked and felt premium (Cracknell, 2017).

According to Leisure Database (2017) the budget sector in the UK, accounts for 15% of the private market (less than £20 a month), which is still growing. To operate as a budget provider, the facilities do not include swimming pools, saunas or cafes and operate with a bare minimum of staff by embracing modern technology. This enables them to offer low pricing and avoid annual contracts.

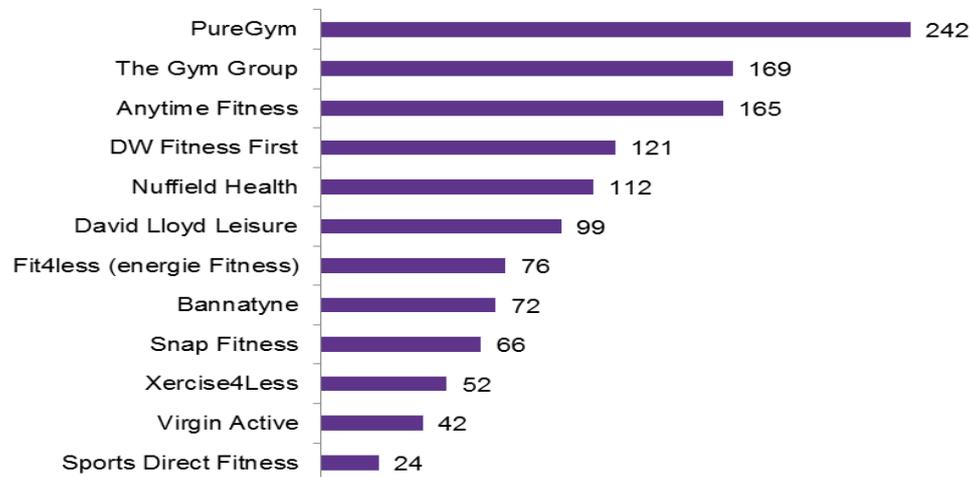


Figure 2.4: Leading private fitness club operators by sites

(Intel, 2019)

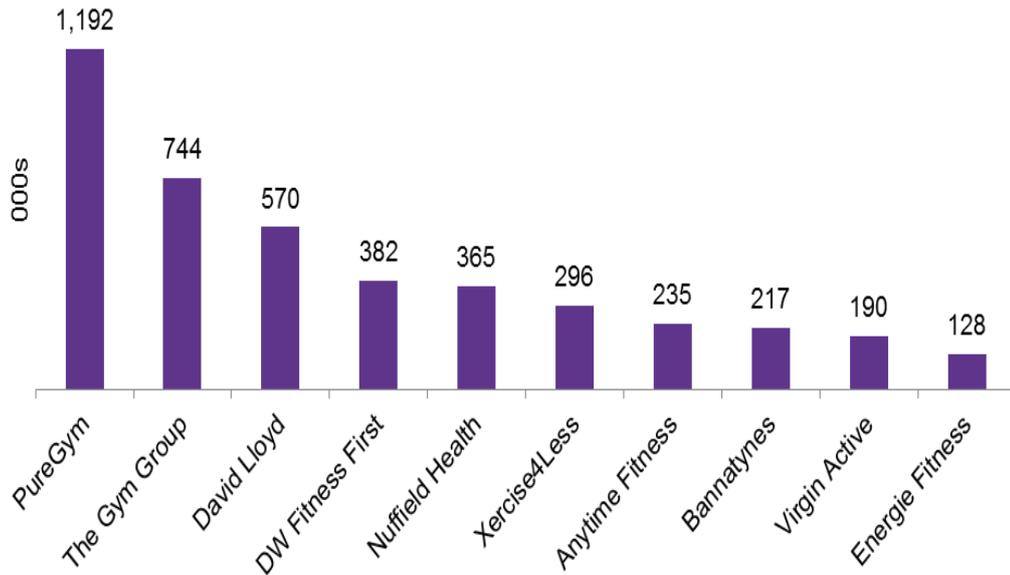


Figure 2.5: Leading private fitness club operators, by membership
(Mintel, 2019)

In 2015 LA fitness was acquired by Pure Gym, while Fitness First sold its Queen’s Park health club to a Leisure Trust, the founding site in 1993 that led to a 360 club global portfolio, while the remaining UK sites were put up for sale. Algar (2011) suggested by 2013 such influences would polarise the industry structure. In an interview with the Managing Director of Pure Gym, Peter Roberts confirmed this idea of an ever squeezed middle, going as far as to say. “The middle is virtually gone, except for in London” (Cave, 2015:1).

In the Mintel (2015) report it is seen that 57% of non-gym users stated they were not users due to cost of membership fees. The perception of an industry with high membership fees is changing, but gradually, with the 2019 figure at 53%. Budget gyms continue to aggressively attack the fitness industry with low priced memberships with monthly costs starting from approximately £10-£15 per month for some of the large budget providers (DW, Pure Gym). However, Sports Direct went even further, offering monthly membership from as little as £5, after entering the industry in

December 2014. Speaking to Health Club Management, Sports Direct's head of sales and products, Mel Crossland said;

"We are expecting large amounts of additional spend from gym users, both because of the convenience of the on-site store for impulse buys and the fact that they're the exact target market for Sports Direct products" (Phillips, 2015).

It would seem impossible to maintain a business model built on such aggressive pricing, but as stated, for some, the gym is just the vehicle to help drive secondary spend, especially through its retail arm. However, Sports Direct has not established itself as a significant competitor in the industry to date, while those leading providers rely on over 90% of their revenue from membership fees (Intel, 2019). As in wider society, we are seeing a more savvy consumer, who is both price conscious and sensitive, but does not expect a drop in service quality and organisations such as PureGym are leading the way in meeting this challenge. It is doing this on a number of fronts, firstly, exploring the idea of a female-only proposition which have been successful in Germany and the introduction of Small Box Facilities (SBFs). PureGym opened 11 additional SBFs throughout 2019 under the embedded brand name 'PureGym Local', bringing its total to 15 in the UK. Francine Davis, PureGym's commercial and strategic development director, said;

"we decided to create a model about a third of the size of a standard club, which wasn't just about taking the Pure Gym model and cutting it down, but about creating a brand new proposition with new floor layouts and flexible space. These are vibrant, friendly, local gyms, with semi-open studios, inviting usage when no classes are running. The back office is minimised too, with the desk on the gym floor, so the staff are there to help" (Walker, 2018).

These sites are critical to not only fend off competition from the increasing number of small-box boutique concepts which dominate cities such as

London but challenge them by offering a similar concept at a lower price. However, other box style fitness centres have also proven influential, focusing on training style and social engagement. The most recognisable of these is CrossFit, whose physical environments are basic, yet fees expensive.

2.8.7 CROSSFIT

CrossFit began expanding across the USA under an 'affiliated' model, before Andrew Stemler brought the brand to the UK, opening CrossFit London in 2005 (crossfitlondon.com, 2009). Rather than a flexible make-up of services providing choice and comfort, Dawson (2017) points to a 'greedy institution', as CrossFit demands a high degree of commitment from members, which becomes a lifestyle. Much like 'Curves' women only gyms and the boutique gyms, the structure is very much timetabled classes as opposed to individual training. The physical environment is sparse, often located in old factories or out of business units (referred to as 'THE BOX'), which in some ways replicates the early 'dungeon' gyms. There is minimal equipment and limited autonomy as training requires active participation, which is central to making CrossFit. Perhaps the most noticeable difference is the cost, with the budget gyms offering membership from £5 to £20 a CrossFit membership is £60-£80 per month, matching some of the most exclusive fitness clubs for price. CrossFit justifies the high price with the individual attention members receive from coaches through group sessions making it more like a personal training session (Fry, 2013).

An initial assessment of CrossFit may draw the conclusion of paying more for less, but with its huge success this is clearly not the case. Bailey Benson and Bruner (2019) undertook a study into the organisational culture of CrossFit and found its success rooted in shared experiences and a keen sense of community. The espoused beliefs and values identified among users included pride in the gym, inclusivity, and a strong sense of community. Success of fitness centres has more often been attributed to

service offering, pricing, location and marketing (Haywood et al., 1990; Peel and Torkildsen, 1986). However, the rapid growth and success of CrossFit, which in so many ways does not appear to fit with the rest of the industry, points to the importance of company values and having members truly buy into the beliefs of the organisation. In understanding the growth of CrossFit, it is possible to see that beyond the traditional measures such as price, the values and aims of an organisation should be considered when trying to understand how the fitness industry is composed.

2.9 Fitness Industry in the NW: Timeline of Key Influences:1934 – 2017

The history of the gym and emergence of wider fitness centre provision has been a long and complex process. Although we can trace the roots of the gym back as early as Ancient Greece, the major influences of the contemporary gym have occurred more recently, developing as the result of a global history heavily concentrated in the 20th Century (Andreasson and Johannson, 2014). Although there are records of private gyms before the 1930's, in places such as France, Belgium and the UK (Grimes, 2013; Chaline, 2015), these were quite different to the modern incarnation and never became established, proving to be the exception rather than the norm. Before this time provision came in the form of the third sector through organisations such as the YMCA and the Turnverein in the USA (Putney 2001), but still, would not be recognisable to today's gym user. Although training methods had evolved and more equipment was being utilised (especially free weights) there had been limited development of the gym before the 1930's.

With changing perceptions of fitness, technological advancement and a more affluent society the environment was right for the modern gym and for a commercial sector to emerge and survive, where its previous manifestations had failed. The early 20th Century had its first fitness celebrities such as Atlas and Sandow, who were the forerunners to bodybuilding culture and although they had limited impact on the gym scene they were the link to the body builders and their methods of training at

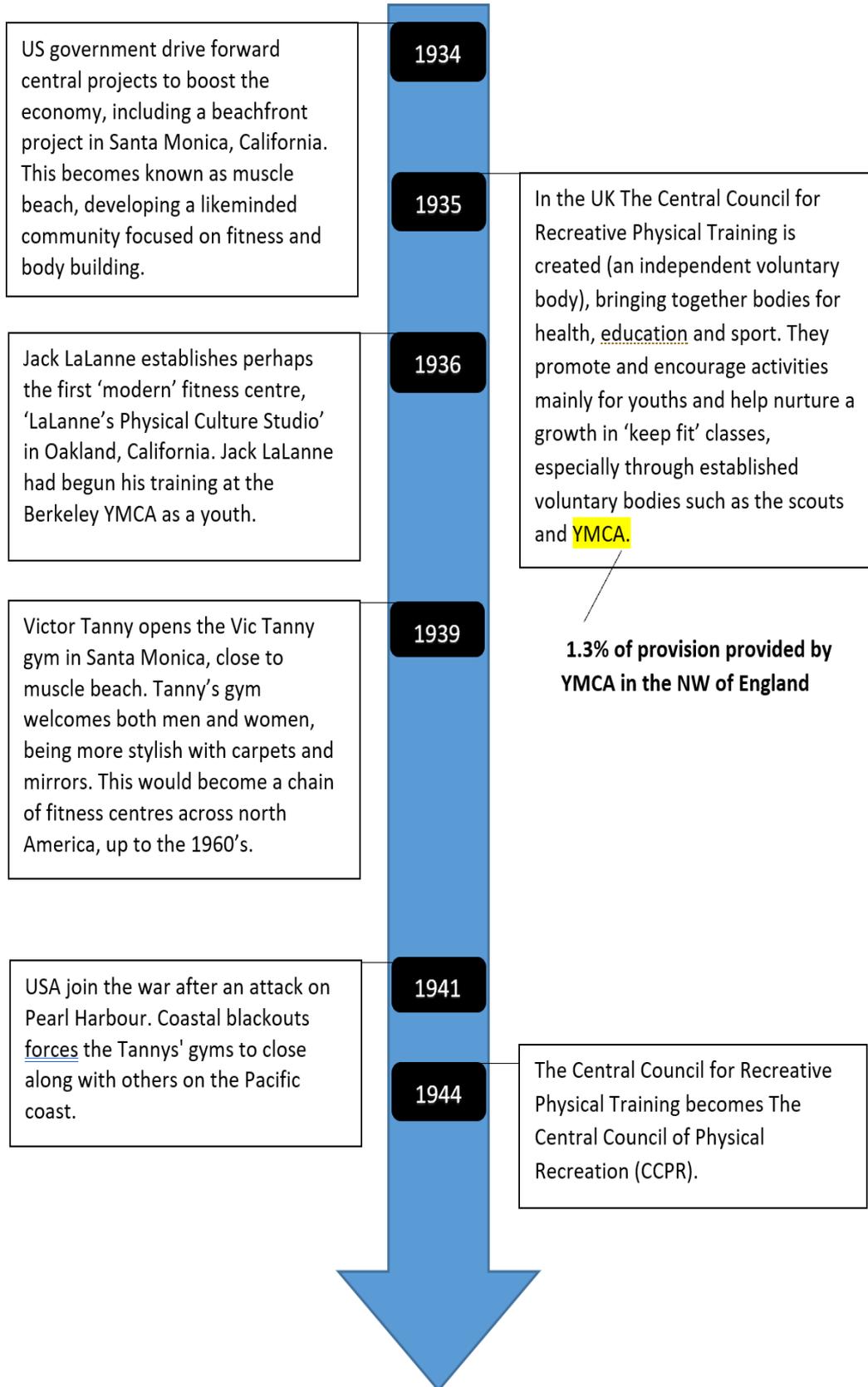
muscle beach in the 1930's.

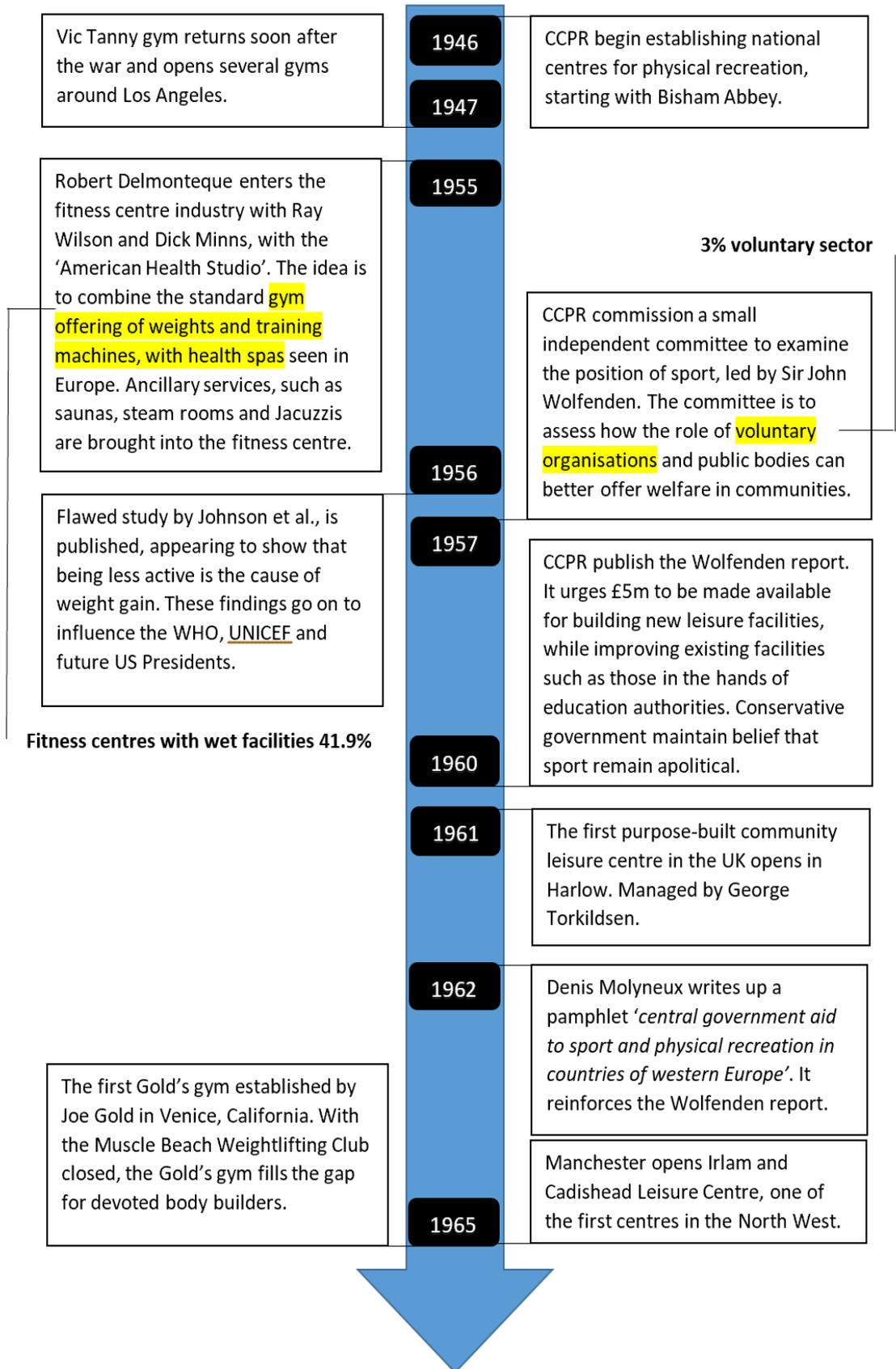
In the UK, the third sector was still dominant and would be for the coming decades after the 1930's. However, what is evident is a changing perception towards fitness by the state and although slow, it would be the public sector that would prove the catalyst for the modern gym in the UK and the developments seen in the USA from the 1930's onward would provide an illustration for the industry in the UK later in the 20th Century (Chaline, 2015).

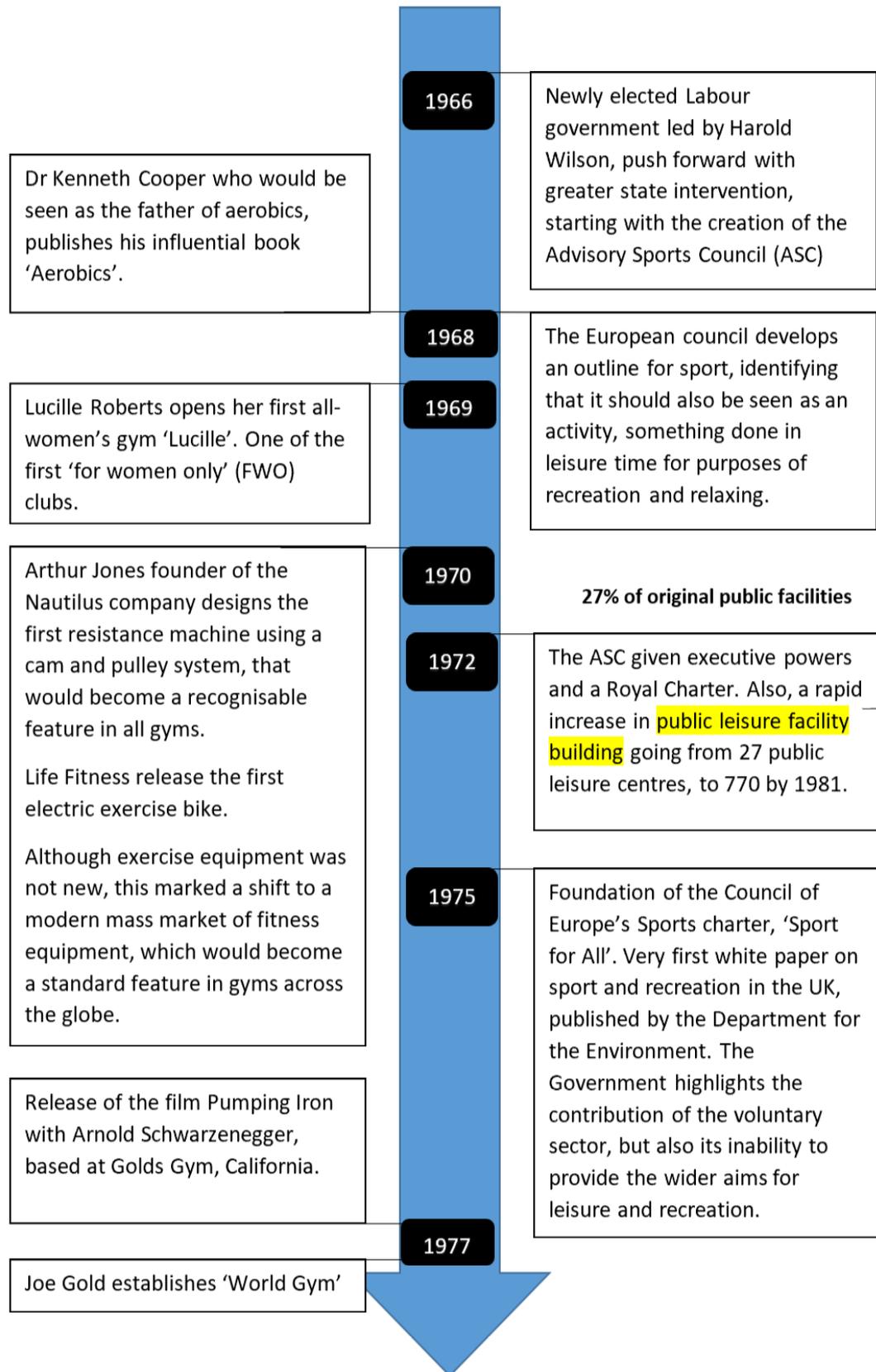
The compilation of this chronological timeline is intended to provide a clear reference point, identifying the key events leading to the contemporary industry in the NW of England and inform on the changing fitness industry concept. Therefore, the timeline also includes associated data from the mapping of the NW fitness industry (chapter six), explicitly showing the extent to which the NW has been influenced by key changes and developments (highlighted in yellow). The structure of the timeline allows events abroad to be mapped alongside those of the UK, providing a clearer picture of how the events (mainly but not exclusively the USA), helped mold the fitness centre in the UK. The timeline commences in 1934, as it is identified as sitting at a pivotal juncture between the classical gym, dominated by the third sector and traditional training methods and the emerging commercial and public fitness providers who offer increasingly varied training environments.

Figure 2.6: Fitness industry timeline: 1934 – 2017

Developed from the early explorative stages of this study, into the evolution of the fitness industry.







82% of sites in the NW have classes

Gym owner Richard Simmons, who focuses on **aerobics and aerobics classes**, appears on the daytime TV show 'Real People' taking his dance classes. This proves popular, especially with woman and creates the concept of commercial home fitness.

1980

9% of provision delivered through hotels

Butwin (1982) is one of the first academics to identify the adoption of **gyms, as an important service offering for hotels**, to attract businessmen and women. These become the first private sector health and fitness clubs in the UK as memberships are offered to local users as a way of increasing revenue.

Jane Fonda releases a workout book, which tops the New York Times best sellers. The takes strong influences from Dr Kenneth Cooper's 'Aerobics'.

1981

Jane Fonda releases a workout video for VCR, performing aerobic exercises taken from her book. Initially priced at \$59.95, Jane Fonda's Workout sells over 200,000 units in a year. It would become the biggest selling exercise video of all time.

1982

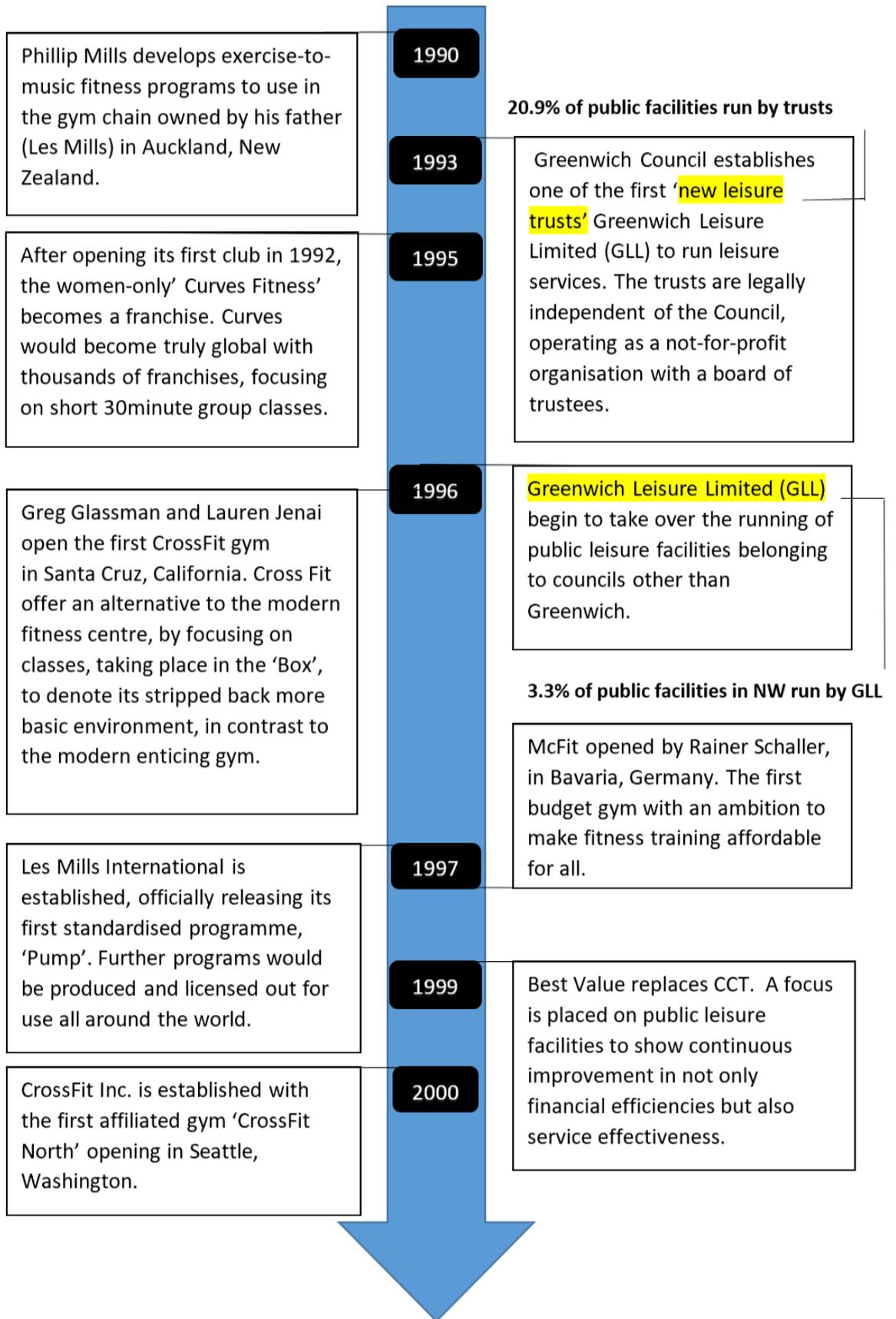
David Lloyd opens his first club in Heston. A new exclusive fitness centre alternative, to the voluntary and more recent public sector provision.

69% set up through private initiatives

A 24 hour club opens in California called '24 Hour Nautilus'. The company, 24 Hour Fitness, would go on to be a leading global provider.

1983

Compulsory Competitive Tendering introduced (CCT). Commercial contractors are provided the opportunity to bid for the right to run the 'public' leisure facilities, previously the domain of the Local Authority Services.



5% of provision is women only

2002

Although not the first for **women only** (FWO) club in the UK, the first Curves club franchise with its alternative approach to fitness proves a catalyst for other similar FWO fitness centres.

3.6% are CrossFit affiliates

2005

After a trip to Santa Cruz Cross Fit Andrew Stemler returns with the **CrossFit** Level 1 Trainer Certification and opens the first CrossFit affiliate in the UK 'CrossFit London'.

2008

John Treharne opens the first 'The Gym' fitness centre in Hounslow. Operating as a budget fitness centre with low membership fees

4% of total provision in NW

2009

Peter Roberts opens the first 4 **'Pure Gym'** sites in Leeds, Manchester, Wolverhampton, and Edinburgh. A new 24-hour low-cost chain focusing on offering low cost flexible membership. In order to operate as a budget provider, the facilities do not include swimming pools, saunas or cafes and operate with a bare minimum of staff. They would become the market leader in 6 years.

64% of sites offer membership with no joining fee

Average monthly membership *£29.50.
Monthly fees range from £5 to £159.

*cheapest option over the year.

2014

Sports Direct open their first fitness centre in Aintree, Liverpool. Offering a membership from just £5 a month, it brings a new challenge to established budget operators.

2015

LA Fitness sites bought up by Pure Gym and Sports Direct after being squeezed out of the market. This represents the challenge faced by mid-priced providers with the rapid growth of budget providers.

Fitness First (UK), which had previously been the UK's leading operator is bought up by DW Sports.

2016

Virgin Active sell off 35 UK clubs to Nuffield Health (a not for profit organisation).

2017

The NW of England has approximately 680 fitness centres. The private sector dominates with 69% share of the market, the public sector holds 27% of facilities and 3% from the traditional third sector.

2.10 Chapter Two Summary

This chapter has explored the occurrence of key influences for the fitness industry that have shaped the UK and more specifically NW fitness industry. Considering the UK, it is evident that the fitness industry has broadly traversed or been heavily influenced by the three phases of globalisation as identified by Andreasson and Johansson (2014). Additionally, it is clear some significant domestic influences in developing the contemporary market, such as the legacy of voluntary sports clubs and public provision are still prevalent today.

It could be argued the most critical stage in its contemporary evolution happened around 2008, with the downturn in the global economy. This was a key driver for the 'budget gym' which has brought greater competition to the market, squeezing out some private providers situated in the middle of the market. The economic environment also accelerated the diversification of management structures providing public services in the UK. Influence through policy (CCT and Best Value) before this point is unmistakable, with public private partnerships and trusts becoming more common, with a desire to achieve greater value for money while ensuring service quality. However, the scale and scope of change since 2008 has brought into question what we mean by public sector provision, especially as the budget gym makes fitness accessible when considering socio-economic barriers.

Over the past century in the UK, local level fitness provision has seen consistent change due to a range of political, social economic and technological factors. Initially dominated by the voluntary sector, the environment changed with the extensive development of a public sector and finally this was added to with the new private providers (Gratton and Kokolakis, 1997; Scheerder and Vermeersch, 2009). The UK fitness industry, which became commercialised as recently as the 1980's, was much more static before the budget providers changed fitness perceptions and quickly strangled the middle range providers. The 21st Century has also seen a blurring of the boundaries between the traditional three sectors, with

cross sector cooperation and competition the norm (Gratton and Taylor, 2000).

With a more dynamic and competitive industry, providers finally started to focus in on service quality as an approach to meet the demands of a more discerning market and a way to differentiate from other providers. Therefore, Chapter Three will consider service quality and its constituent parts in order to better interpret the characteristics and constructs which inform relevant service quality proficiency in the fitness industry and service quality measures.

Chapter 3: Introduction to Service Quality, Characteristics and Constructs.

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore and critically analyse the key aspects that pertain to service quality, its characteristics and constructs. In many ways it will act as a deconstruction of service quality and present the developments of knowledge in the field. The challenges posed by the early application of manufacturing quality theory and concepts will be examined and compared against the changing approaches brought about by the philosophies of early service pioneers. In this period, academics attempted to explain differences between goods and services which generated the need for a development of new frameworks, combining the traditional with a new approach. A critical juncture was the move from company to consumer service focus, bringing in critical constructs such as the concept of perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. There has been debate as to the true meaning and value of these constructs in relation to service quality, and if they represent the same concepts. Further focus on the customer has continued, which is reflected in the theory of value co-creation from the perspective of service-dominant logic, which will also be covered.

3.2 Service and the Service Concept

It has been suggested (Edvardsson, 2005) that theoretical definitions of service need to be at a high level of abstraction to cope with the diverse phenomenon of service. Haywood-Farmer and Nollet (1991) encapsulated this issue when trying to define service, by suggesting that when trying in a few words to describe 15% of the economic activity of developed nations, is it any wonder that there are exceptions for all definitions? In the three decades since, the service sector has significantly grown in size and economic importance. The service industries include the retail sector, the

financial sector, the public sector, business administration, leisure and cultural activities, accounting for 80% of total UK economic output (Gross Value Added) and 82% of employment in January-March 2021 (Brien, 2021). The fitness industry itself has become a highly competitive market within the services sector and it is undoubtedly one of the industries with high growth rates of employees worldwide (Foroughi, Iranmanesh, Gholipour and Hyun, 2019).

Yet, despite reservations of Haywood-Farmer and Nollet (1991), numerous authors have grappled with the concept of service. According to Gummesson (1987) service is something that can be bought and sold but which 'you cannot drop on your foot'. Although this definition is somewhat tongue in cheek, it does seek to separate service from goods and points to a key characteristic difference. Many authors have maintained that the key differences between goods and services are that services are intangible (Rathmell, 1966; Bateson, 1977; Shostack, 1977; Sasser et al., 1978; Lovelock, 1981), heterogeneous (Sasser et al., 1978; Booms and Bitner, 1981; Shostack, 1984), inseparability (Sasser et al., 1978; Gronroos, 1978; Carman and Langeard, 1980) and are perishable (Sasser et al., 1978; Zeithaml et al., 1985).

These four traditional service characteristics are well established in the service field (Buswell, Williams, Donne and Sutton, 2017) with definitions of service dealing with some or all these elements, such as Lindquist and Persson (1993) who identify service as an action or interaction which occurs within a relationship. This links to production and consumption, yet more importantly highlights the importance of the customer in the service concept. Gronroos (1990: 27) agrees, stating that;

“A service is an activity or series of activities of more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessary, takes place in interactions between the customer and the service employees”.

Parasuraman et al. (1985) affirms the importance of customers in the process by suggesting that services are performances rather than objects. Edvardsson (1997) views a service as part of the wider concept of the product, as a product may consist of goods or services, or a combination of these. The emerging deliberation from the service characteristics and the definitions provided is the existence of the customer inside many service operations and as such, the importance of the service quality performance and thus perception of the customer. This supports the notion that service quality is a critical concern for management.

Added to the customer interaction element, Gronroos (2001:150) introduces process as a key element stating that service is “a process that leads to an outcome during partly simultaneous production and consumption processes”. This is also evident in service research by Edvardsson, Gustafsson and Roos (2005) who suggest that services are considered by a number of authors to be activities, deeds or processes, and interactions (Solomon et al., 1985; Lovelock, 1991; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Goldstein et al. (2002:121) agrees with this, defining the service concept as “the how and the what of service design and helps mediate between customer needs and an organisation’s strategic intent.” In a practical sense, the process element can be seen in the service design of a business. Goldstein et al. (2002) also highlight a further element, customer needs. Gronroos (2001) offers further clarity, describing it as where services are provided as solutions to customer problems. From this perspective, Edvardsson (2005) poses three key dimensions for the service concept, which are describe as;

- (1) activities
- (2) interactions (which could be described as what separate services from physical products)
- (3) solutions to customer problems.

Clark et al. (2000) perceive the service concept as a mental picture, held by

both the customers and employees. Only by achieving significant alignment between these groups is it possible to create a service concept that is understood by the employees and customers (Clark et al., 2000). Therefore, it is imperative to minimize a gap between expectations and service delivery (Goldstein et al., 2002). This understanding is the basis for many service quality measures such as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988) which will be analysed in the following chapter.

Sasser, Olsen, and Wyckoff (1978) applied the phrase 'service concept' to describe the bundle of elements, which can be combined for sale. In this context, (Sasser et al., 1978; Normann, 2000) services have two distinct components:

- Core services/attributes; (what is delivered)
- Peripheral or additional services. (how it is delivered)

In essence, the core service is the primary offering which provides the solution to consumer problems/needs. In the fitness industry context, this would include the gym area. Iacobucci and Ostrom (1993:258) define core attributes as "the core of a service is that part of the service we think of when we name the service." As such, peripheral attributes are everything else, including the activities and interaction elements described by Edvardsson (2005). However, Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) suggest that some peripheral services are necessary in order to provide the core service such as a car park (location dependent) at a fitness centre and some give additional appeal to it, such as wet facilities. Goldstein et al. (2002) also further separates peripheral attributes into physical (Chase and Stewart, 1994) and interactional (Butcher, Sparks and O'Callaghan, 2003) attributes. Physical attributes include environmental, equipment, components of the service delivery, while the interactional attributes include all of the interpersonal encounters involved in the service delivery. As identified with Clark et al.'s. (2000) 'mental picture' (expectation), a service concept, both core and peripheral attributes have been shown to be positively associated with

overall service quality and customer satisfaction (Butcher, Sparks and O'Callaghan, 2003; Goldstein et al., 2002; Chase and Stewart, 1994; Iacobucci and Ostrom, 1993; McDougall and Levesque, 2000)

3.3 Service Characteristics

There are significant differences between services and goods (Ghobadian, Speller and Jones, 1994; Fitzgerald, Johnston, Brignall and Voss, 1993), set out by the four traditional service characteristics, previously highlighted and can be termed as IHIP (inseparability, heterogeneity, intangibility, and perishability) characteristics. Fitzgerald et al. (1991) believes that taken together, these four characteristics pose a unique set of problems for service managers. However, Lockyer (1986) suggests such characteristics are not unique to service and they are equally applicable to the outputs of manufacturing. The main premise is that services are similar to goods and that the suggested service characteristics are not unique to services (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). However, Edvardsson et al., (2005) believes the focus should not be on differences between goods and services, but on differences in how we want to portray value creation with customers (and other stakeholders) where the customer's perspective is emphasised. Edvardsson et al., (2005:118) conclude that;

“services are as different from each other and from products as products are from each other. There is a fundamental difference between services and service, which echoes into the thoughts for future research. Looking at service as a perspective on value creation through the lens of the customer may add to future understanding of the service approach.”

Vargo and Lusch (2004), support this perspective, as they believe that the characteristics have mostly been discussed through the lens of the service provider, instead of the lens of the customer. When considering the IHIP characteristics and traditional approach, it becomes clear that they relate to

service delivery and pose considerations of how to manage services – the provider perspective. Some authors have argued for a new approach which considers the customer (Gronroos, 2001; Gummesson, 1995). Gronroos (2001) suggests they do not buy goods or services, but rather purchase offerings that render services, which create value. Therefore, it is recommended (Edvardsson et al., 2005; Middleton, 1983) that looking at service as a perspective on value creation through the lens of the customer, as customers describe the characteristics that are important for them and naturally leave out the ones that are not adding value. Edvardsson et al. (2005) suggest a new way of portraying service:

- service is a perspective on value creation rather than a category of market offerings.
- the focus is on value through the lens of the customer.
- co-creation of value with customers is key and the interactive, processual, experiential and relational nature form the basis for characterising service.

This new approach can be seen alongside the traditional approach in figure 3.1 as devised by Buswell, Williams, Donne and Sutton (2016). Edvardsson et al. (2005) suggests on a general level the service definition is a perspective. It has to be determined at a specific time, in a specific company, for a specific service, from a specific perspective. This could be the supplier, consumer or both. As such, the characteristics are useful in some situations and Edvardsson et al. (2005) suggest considering service as a perspective on customer relationships may form a fruitful approach for future research. Therefore, the traditional IHIP characteristics will be reviewed, considering the new approach (figure 3.1).

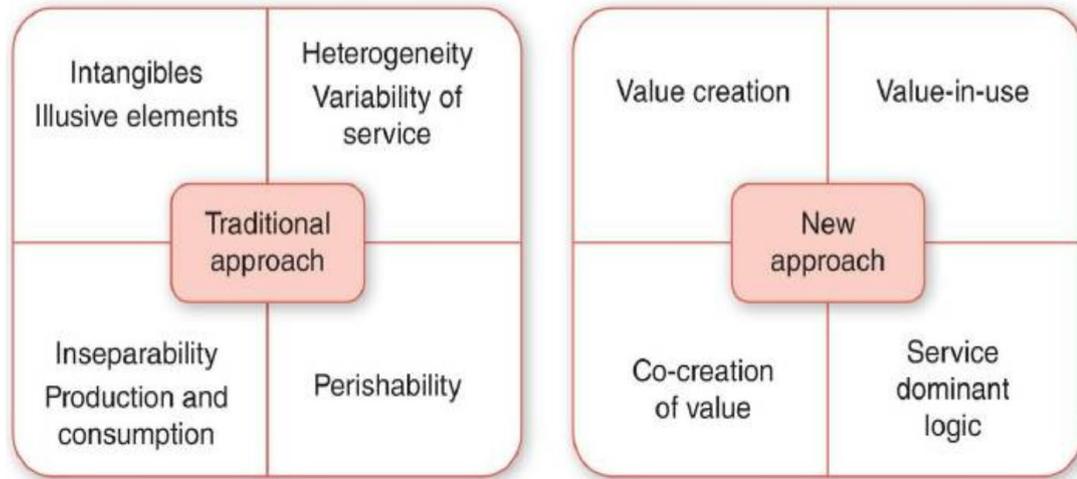


Figure 3.1: Service characteristics: traditional and new approaches
(Buswell et al., 2016)

3.3.1 Inseparability

As highlighted above, the characteristics may be useful for some organisations, such as those in the fitness industry. Regarding inseparability, Gummesson (2007) questions its applicability to all services situations, as it appears to be missing in some services situations as the customers' presence is not required (e.g., maintenance repair). Edvardsson, et al. (2005) argue that inseparability seems to be a characteristic based on the product and production-oriented paradigm, where there is a one-way direction of service delivery, i.e. the provider renders a service and the customer simultaneously consumes it. Where this is the case, the inseparability of production and consumption introduces several challenges for the supplier, including exposure to a reduction in quality assurance and quality control as the service cannot be pre-packaged. As the production is a highly visible activity it makes it very easy for customers to identify errors or inadequacies. Also, this interaction may not be limited to one customer and the supplier as customers may interact with each other and thereby influence other customers' perceptions (Ghobadian et al., 1994). Ultimately, these are processes that are overlapping in time and space, but not necessarily place, involving customers, employees and other parties in a co-production and co-consumption (Edvardsson et al., 2005). Due to these issues, a shift of focus from the provider-customer interaction to co-

production and co-creation, should be considered. Especially as the dynamic nature of services as activities, deeds, performances and experiences requires simultaneous production and consumption (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

3.3.2 Heterogeneity

According to Edvardsson et al. (2005) there are two ways of looking at heterogeneity, the first is that service providers and service processes tend to be heterogeneous. This describes an environment where there is an ever-changing nature of the service providers and service processes. In the fitness industry this is evident by the shift in providers and a much more dynamic and competitive industry. The second perspective is that the production within a given company tends to be heterogeneous due to employee-induced variation and variation among customers in terms of needs and expectations. Consistency may vary over time as a result of service role ambiguity (Edvardsson et al., 2005), the service provider's behaviour, their awareness of customers' needs, as well as the consumer's priorities and expectations (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015). Further considerations for the fitness industry could be staff recruitment (knowledge) and staff turnover, as organisations are reliant on their staff to understand the requirements of the consumer. The sheer number of variables in the service (time, staff, users, etc.) make consistency difficult to control. At fitness centres such as David Lloyd, brand standards are employed to try and enact some control. However, as the customer participates as a co-producer, any standardisation is further complicated as they bring a unique dynamic to the process. However, it should be noted that non-standardisation may be a goal and necessary for customisation. Edvardsson et al. (2005) believe this characteristic focuses on the provider perspective rather than on the customer and value-in-use perspective, which MacDonald et al. (2011) define as a customer's outcome, purpose or objective that is achieved through service.

3.3.3 Intangibility

Intangibility relates to the absence of the physical. As such it is difficult to develop output measures for providers to assess service quality performance and for customers to develop a clear understanding of the benefit and in turn its true value. Due to the degree of ambiguity, customers may seek information through different means such as reputation, accessibility and word of mouth. Edvardson et al. (2005) also identifies the challenge of communication, as the customer does not own anything tangible after the service is produced. However, customers may perceive intangibility of services as a tangible benefit or something tangible related to possessions. This could be a learned skill or even health and fitness which may feel very tangible, and last for a considerable period, but this also places greater responsibility on service organisation to deliver what they promise and to market the service adequately, as it could also have the opposite effect.

3.3.4 Perishability

As with Inseparability, Perishability implies that a service cannot be stored for later use, or sale, as is possible with goods. This creates a number of obstacles for providers to overcome, firstly operational capacity which can lead to supply and demand issues, such as space in an exercise class. It also requires the service to be correct first time and every time (Ghobadian et al., 1994). Like inseparability, organisations are exposed to the customer which practically removes any quality control. The characteristic is created through the producer's perspective and not from the customer perspective, which again, like inseparability, suggests it is a result of the former paradigm where services were defined in relation to goods or physical products (Edvardsson et al., 2005). Instead of using intangibility they suggest 'tangibilisers' which focus on how to manage the evidence and to create favourable and memorable customer experiences.

3.4 Service-Dominant Logic and Value Co-Creation

As established in the review of service characteristics, the traditional

dominance of IHIP in explaining services has been questioned (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). This is primarily due to the skewed focus which has traditionally been from the viewpoint of the provider. Edvardsson et al. (2005) suggests service should be considered as a perspective on value creation, with the focus coming from the customer, who through an interactive process co-create the service value. If, as Gummesson (2007) suggests, the traditional service characteristics are not sufficient for explaining services, then the 'new approach' (figure 3.1) considering aspects of value and the service dominant logic should be strongly considered. Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008) provided the foundations for this new approach, suggesting two viewpoints to consider, 'goods-dominant' (G-D) and 'service-dominant' (S-D) logic.

Table 3.1: Goods and service dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2008)

Goods logic	Service logic
Making something (goods or services)	Assisting customers in their own value-creation processes
Value as produced	Value as co-created
Customers as isolated entities	Customers in context of their own networks
Firm resources primarily as operand	Firm recourses primarily as operant
Customers as targets	Customers as resources
Primacy of efficiency	Efficiency through effectiveness

The initial article on S-D Logic (Vargo et al., 2004) suggested the underlying mindset prevailing in traditional marketing theory should be referred to as Goods Dominant (G-D), as it sees value as being inextricably linked to tangible outputs and the distribution of these as the purpose of exchange. One of the significant sub-disciplines on which the initial idea of S-D logic was built was service marketing, which had an implied logic that placed more emphasis on the exchange of intangible over tangible resources, collaboration over competition and relationships over transactions (Bridges and Fowler, 2020). S-D logic considers service as a process of utilising resources for benefit, in alliance with others. According to Gummesson

(2007), the S-D logic has more relevance and proposes service as the core concept replacing both goods and services. Therefore, a supplier can only provide a value proposition, and value actualisation only occurs through co-creation which is facilitated through the exchange of service between supplier and customer. While the initial S-D logic focused on the dyadic exchange between supplier and customer (Vargo et al., 2004), it was soon developed to account for value co-creation occurring within and among multiple actors (e.g. customer to customer) (Lusch et al., 2006; Vargo et al., 2008). This recognises that actors continually integrate resources from multiple sources (Lusch et al., 2014, 2016). Moreover, value is created through the integration of resources by multiple actors in a specific context, rather than manufactured and delivered (Vargo et al., 2008).

Regarding value for the customer, the prevailing thought in the S-D logic field, is the customer is always a co-creator of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), while the role of the supplier is also said to be that of a value co-creator (Lusch et al., 2008). Alves et al. (2016) believe from the S-D logic perspective, the service rather than the products should be the fundamental unit of exchange because services and products represent the only means to convey the service and to enable customers to benefit from the competences of the company (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo et al., 2008). Therefore, co-creation represents a fundamental component of this logic because collaboration allows markets to get supplies and to generate benefits (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

However, some have questioned the balance of value creation between these actors in regard to S-D logic (Gronroos, 2011). In this perspective, customers are responsible for creating value by combining their resources with those of the supplier within the scope of their daily activities and their value-creation processes. Hence, suppliers co-create value whenever customers allow them to interact as opposed to being a constant co-creator (Gronroos, 2008).

For the fitness industry, the presence of customers in the service production processes distinguishes services management from manufacturing management (Morris and Johnston, 1987). While fitness clubs do exhibit the general traits of the services such as intangibility, inseparability, perishability and heterogeneity, they have some distinguishing characteristics that are associated with the close involvement of fitness club members in the production and use of the service (Chelladurai, 1992). As the user is so inseparable to the service, to the point of 'value co-creation' (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Terblanche, 2014), it places extra emphasis on understanding who the consumer is, and how these users differ across the industry spectrum. Once the contemporary consumer is distinguishable through understandings of demographic and psychographic constituents, meaningful service quality analysis can take place for the different range of providers. For fitness providers offering classes, especially those sites that provide group only provision, value co-creation is a fundamental concept as customers can influence the satisfaction of others. However, the extent to which co-creation is effective in generating customer satisfaction has not been established.

3.5 Changing Interpretations of Quality

Quality has been used to describe a wide variety of phenomena and therefore has had many interpretations (Yong and Wilkinson, 2002; Harvey, 2007). Parasuraman et al. (1985), state that 'quality is subjective and difficult to define' whilst others have described it as an elusive and indistinct construct. Early work on quality originated in the manufacturing industry and in that context, quality was defined as 'fitness for use by the customer' Juran (1974), 'zero defects, conformance to specification' Crosby (1979) and 'continuous improvement' (Deming, 1986). As with the perspective of traditional service, the focus of these definitions are squarely with the provider and does not necessarily guarantee that customer needs have been met, only that the service has been delivered according to a prescribed specification (Williams and Buswell, 2003).

Despite this lopsided perspective, the research from the manufacturing industry does highlight the need to manage and measure quality which is equally important for service providers. Indeed, the comparison of service performance against a set standard became a basis for the appearance of service quality (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Yet, as Garvin (1984) noted, depending on the industry, service and stakeholders, quality can be interpreted differently and can therefore perform as an internal or external concept for an organisation (Seawright and Young, 1996). Although this is correct, quality improvement for organisations should be focused on having a customer centered approach, irrespective of whether they are internal or external (Williams and Buswell, 2003).

Quality can be seen differently across disciplines and Moullin et al. (2011) stated that the five approaches classified by Garvin (1984) are the best framework for the definition of quality. The first of these is the transcendent view which is synonymous with excellence or ubiquitous value level, which is based on people learning to recognise quality through experienced exposure. However, Moullin et al. (2011) suggest that it drives firms to focus on particular elements of the service while at the same time the experience becomes less novel as consumers become more experienced (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). The second is product-based, which sees quality as one dimensional, a precise and measurable variable (Moullin et al., 2011) which results in top quality costing the most. As such, distinctiveness is based on product offerings (Kasper et al., 1998), but this may be difficult as the human dimension is excluded (Kandampully et al., 2001) and some providers cannot differentiate based on their product offerings alone. The third perspective is the user-based definition, which is determined by the consumer, therefore quality means that the attributes of a product meet the customer's requirements (Dale et al., 2013). This recognises the subjective nature of the quality concept in which customers have different expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Fourth, the manufacturing-based approach which implies conformance to specification and focusses on the supply perspective as related to those early definitions of quality (Juran, 1974;

Crosby, 1979). The potential issue is that such specifications are likely to be linked to productivity and cost targets (Dale, 2003). In the fitness industry this is most heavily felt through under staffing, which can lead to poor customer experience. In such instances, the specification may meet the organisation's need but not the customer's. The fifth is value-based which is focused on cost and price (Garvin, 1984). Some customers will be willing to pay more for superior service and customer experience is a significant process for growth (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser and Schlesinger, 1994).

In attempting to consolidate the similarities and common directions of the five approaches by Garvin (1984) and associated literature (Crosby, 1979; Feigenbaum, 1983; Ishikawa and Lu, 1985; Deming, 1986), Alzaydi et al. (2018) listed the following:

- it is very important to control the process, not the outcomes
- inspection is never the answer to quality improvement, nor is policing
- the importance of human process is recognised
- quality is a long-term process and requires continuous development
- the advantage of quality outweighs the cost of it
- all parts of the organisation should be involved and participate in quality
- quality concepts are applicable to both services and industry
- education and training are extremely important.

While the design, control and improvement of service is evident, linking back to its manufacturing roots, the human dimensions are an unmistakable key aspect, including the internal customers (employees) who also play a leading role. Fundamentally, from a service perspective, quality is based upon the customer's experience with the product or service measured against his or her desires, outcome and knowledge. This can be conscious or merely sensed and technically operational or entirely subjective. That is

to say, customer expectations and perceptions are satisfied (Hoyer and Hoyer, 2001).

3.6 Service Quality

As has been evidenced to this point, the theories and concepts of quality developed in manufacturing were adopted and formed some of the first attempts to conceptualise service quality. However, a change occurred when such manufacturing theories proved difficult in fitting the differing characteristics of the service sector (Williams and Buswell, 2003). In the 1980s attempts to overcome these challenges began in the field of cognitive psychology as services characteristics were proposed (Churchill and Surprenant, 1982; Hoffman, 1986; Russell, Ward and Pratt, 1981). In the mid 1980's two schools of service quality emerged, the North American school (Zeithaml et al., 1990) and the Scandinavian (Gronroos, 1984). Despite differences with respect to data collection (quantitative vs. qualitative) on customer needs and satisfaction, there was agreement between these parties that it was necessary to know the needs of the customers and to draw on this when making decisions. This evolution of service quality theory can be seen over a greater time period for the wider service operations field in figure 3.2 (Chase and Apte, 2007), which included the development of service quality models aimed at measuring aspects of service delivery quality (Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry; 1985).

History of research in service operations: big ideas

Time period	Big ideas: theory and practice
1900–1950s	Application of scientific management to services Walt Disney: industrialized fantasy Holiday Inns: consistency in multi-site services
1960s	McDonald's: production-line approach to services Service economy and operations in health care
1970s	Industrialization of services Match supply and demand in services The customer contact model Data envelopment analysis
1980s	Classify services to gain marketing and operational insights Gap model of service quality and SERVQUAL Strategic service vision Unconditional service guarantee Psychology of queues Yield management
1990s	Service profit chain Using poka-yoke, or fail-safe, methods to prevent human errors in service systems Globalization of information-intensive services Emergence of experience economy
2000s	Using behavioral science in service operations Managing operations in information-intensive services Information technology in services and e-services Global business process outsourcing Service design

Figure 3.2: History of research in service operations
(Chase and Apte, 2007)

Indeed, the earliest models have had such impact that in recognition of the 10th anniversary of the publication of the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al., 1988), the Journal of Retailing, the Academy of Marketing Science sponsored a special session on the advancements in service quality assessment. In explaining the impact of this publication Grapentine (1998:1) stated that:

“in the early 1980s, three academicians boarded their service quality boat and rode the tide. And what a ride they had. Their work not only spawned numerous articles, books, conference presentations, and consulting engagements, but also significantly affected how many organisations went about measuring service quality”.

SERVQUAL is the most widely recognised model and has been adapted to a range of industries, including the leisure industry, with examples including ADVENTUREQUAL (Donne, 2009) and SQFS (Chang and Chelladurai, 2003). However, others have also provided advancement in the field and their influence, importance and applicability will be covered further in chapter four.

As previously mentioned, there is something of a consensus that the customer and their experience is central to understanding service quality, an approach originated by the Nordic school (Gronroos, 1984) looking at service quality from the customer's perception. Gronroos (1984) suggests that for an organisation to compete successfully, they must understand consumer perceptions of the quality and the way service quality is influenced. Managing perceived service quality means that the firm has to match the expected service and perceived service to each other so that consumer satisfaction is achieved. This aligns with the thinking of Parasuraman et al. (1985) who proposed that service quality is a function of the differences between expectation and performance along the quality dimensions, where perception of quality is the disconfirmation of their expectation and evaluation of services delivered. Therefore, service quality can be defined as the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service and if expectations are greater than perceived performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). This highlights two critical terms in the field, which deserve further exploration, perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. Yet,

it is not possible to observe consumer perceptions. Grapentine (1998) notes that constructs and terms such as "perception" and "satisfaction," do not have objective reality, they cannot be observed by researchers who want to measure them or by consumers whose minds create them. They are called a construct because researchers and practitioners construct them. They are ideas used to try to understand how humans think about things and how these thoughts affect behaviour. Due to this fact, Grapentine (1998) believes good definitions of such constructs are all the more important to understand the consumer and wider service quality field.

3.7 Perceived Service Quality

With the concept of viewing service quality from the customer's perspective (Gronroos, 1984), the field of service quality was able to jump forward and offer new avenues for service quality measures. A critical reason for this is due to the intangible nature of services, therefore, measurement of service quality can be more complicated. In order to measure the quality of intangible services, researchers generally use the term perceived service quality (Yarimoglu, 2014). Zeithaml et al. (1988) feels perceived service quality is defined as the customer's assessment of the overall excellence or service superiority. This is closely mirrored by others, who believe perceived service quality is a result of the comparison of perceptions about service delivery process and actual outcome of service (Gronroos, 1984; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). Yet, an established definition and agreed measure of service quality remains elusive. Due to this, different schools of thought on perceived service quality as a construct emerged (Akbaba, 2006; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990). Despite any differences in views, the importance of the 'perception' construct, is well-established and demonstrated by Sweeney et al. (1997), who found that service quality perceptions in the service encounter stage, affects consumers more than product quality.

A more traditional stance is that proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985),

that service quality is a function of the differences between perceived expectation and performance along the quality dimensions. Therefore, some experience with a service is required from which the customer can compare any expectations with actual service performance (Hernon and Whitman, 2001) and his or her perception is confirmed (if they match), negatively disconfirmed (if expectations exceed perceptions), or positively disconfirmed (if perceptions exceed expectations) (Oliver, 1976; Oliver and DeSarbo, 1988). However, Vavra (1997) regards the term 'positive disconfirmation' as confusing and prefers to use the words 'affirmed,' 'confirmed,' and 'disconfirmed'. As such, expectations are confirmed when perceived performance meets them; expectations are affirmed (reinforced by positive disconfirmation) when perceived performance exceeds them; and expectations are disconfirmed (failed by negative disconfirmation) when perceived performance falls short (Hernon and Whitman, 2001).

However, Cronin and Taylor (1992) found that measuring perceptions alone works as well as a difference score in predicting customers' overall evaluation of service quality. This was grounded in the psychometric difficulties of using a difference score (Carman, 1990; Babakus and Boller, 1992) which dispute the use of expectations and suggest that service quality is an attitude based only on evaluating service performance, thus only the 'perceived' construct is required. This has led to two conceptually separate approaches to perceived service quality, the expectation-performance comparison and performance-only evaluation. The performance-only evaluation line has been followed by researchers such as Haywood-Farmer and Stuart (1990), who have measured perceptions and weighted them with an importance score. In the fitness industry service quality performance-only evaluation has been used by Kim and Kim (1995) and Lentell (2000), who also included an importance score.

Although there is still much debate about the required constructs in measuring service quality, perceived service quality has yet to be

discredited and maintains its position as a critical measure. However, there is a growing consensus among marketing researchers that customer satisfaction and service quality are unique constructs that share a close relationship (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994; Patterson and Johnson, 1993), while satisfaction and perceived quality are highly intercorrelated (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994). It is also suggested any confusion over the relationship between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction can often be explained by the lack of definition between the two concepts as well as their operationalisation (Teas, 1993).

3.8 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a core business challenge which has attracted considerable research attention, with evidence that customer satisfaction is linked to increased profits (Heskett et al., 1997). It has been identified as an antecedent to retaining positive relationships with customers, which influences customer behaviour and retention (Cronin et al., 2000). In relation to services, satisfaction may be defined as an affective customer condition that results from a global evaluation of all the aspects that make up the customer relationship with the service provider (Severt, 2002; Zaibaf et al., 2013). Two perspectives to viewing customer satisfaction have emerged (Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar, 1999). The first perspective sustained by economic conditions, is transaction-specific, while the second considers the concept using more psychological factors over time, which is cumulative. Cumulative satisfaction reflects customers views about past, current and future service performance, it is understood as a global evaluation or attitude that evolves over time (Eshghi, Haughton and Topi, 2007). Therefore, cumulative satisfaction could prove more useful in identifying organisational performance (Johnson et al., 2002).

Satisfaction has been viewed as an emotional state that exists as the result of an evaluation of a service (Westbrook, 1981). Oliver (1980) describes the process by which satisfaction judgments are reached in the expectancy-disconfirmation framework. First, customers develop expectations of the

service prior to purchase. Secondly, consumption promotes a perceived quality level, affected by expectation. Third, perceived quality may either confirm or disconfirm prepurchase expectations. For Caruana (2002), service quality carries positive impact on customer satisfaction, this suggests that if an organisation gives excellent quality service, the outcome is positive customer satisfaction. This implies a relationship between the two constructs, with customer satisfaction achieved through a comparison between perceived outcome and previous expectations. Therefore, customers will be satisfied through positive disconfirmation and dissatisfied by negative disconfirmation (Bahia et al., 2000).

An alternative perspective on customer satisfaction is the asymmetric relationship or three factor theory (Kano et al., 1984). It proposes that customer satisfaction is a combination of perceived performance, perceived importance and the influence of service attributes. The service attributes are separated out into distinct factors. These are hygiene factors which reflect the minimum requirements a supplier must provide. These are likely to act as dissatisfiers if not offered, yet do not provide for high levels of customer satisfaction when they are (Matzler et al., 2004). This could be the gym temperature or studio lighting. Service performance factors or linear factors are the second group which provide a more equal customer satisfaction response, which may be high, with their inclusion. This could include gym equipment. Excitement factors or value-enhancing factors can create high levels of customer satisfaction, yet if they are not offered, it does not lead to dissatisfaction. This could include additional service features, such as additional paid for sessions with high level coaches. When service performances are high, the importance of the excitement factors increases, yet they become unimportant when their performances are low (Matzler et al., 2004). The three-factor theory has been applied to the fitness industry (Albayrak and Caber, 2014) alongside Importance Performance Analysis (IPA). Albayrak and Caber (2014) identified programme and workout facility attributes as basic factors, with locker room as a performance factor and staff as an excitement factor.

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that service quality has a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction (Ali and Raza, 2017; Cronin et al., 2000; Nunkoo et al., 2017). Added to this, Arora and Narula (2018) suggest most of the literature shows that a firm providing quality service is going to have satisfied customers, and further satisfied customers become the loyal ones (Caruana, 2002; Bharwana et al., 2013). This is supported by others (Osman and Sentosa, 2013; Cronin et al., 2000) who suggest service quality firstly impacts on satisfaction and in turn satisfied customers become loyal ones. Furthermore, Behnam, Sato and Baker (2021), found consumer engagement to be a key antecedent of behavioural loyalty and identify co-production and psychological involvement as a way of promoting behavioural loyalty at fitness clubs. For CrossFit specifically, García-Fernandez et al. (2020) identified a positive relationship between perceived value, satisfaction and fidelity in men and for women between customer engagement perceived value and customer engagement. Therefore, this demonstrates not just the broader importance of service quality for fitness centres, but the importance of the customer experience which has positive consequences for customer loyalty.

3.9 Chapter Three Summary

This chapter sets out the significance of the service sector to the national/global economy, yet its early theoretical development was restricted by the application of manufacturing quality theory. Specific characteristics were identified (IHIP) that aided in distinguishing between the tangible products and transitory services. However, despite their use for suppliers to consider the service offering and unique issues posed by the service concept, it failed to consider the customer perspective which would also be a fundamental issue for service quality measures as customer perception would become the central measure for understanding service quality performance. During the 90's, critique of products and services continued, with building evidence that IHIP was restrictive in making clear distinctions between the two. Therefore, Vargo and Lusch (2008) proposed

two perspectives on services - 'goods-dominant' and 'service-dominant' logic. The service dominant logic establishes that service should be considered as a perspective on value creation, with the focus coming from the customer. Via an interaction process, co-creation among actors will occur, of which supplier and customer is just one scenario. Organisations have gone from offering products to offering products/services and then offering solutions or value propositions.

The customer is central to understanding service quality and is often a critical component in the process of measuring service quality performance. The existence of the customer inside and even co-producing services, provides them with a position to perceive the service quality performance of an organisation. Perception is a construct created to measure service quality performance and has proved robust across service quality models. The second construct to be analysed was customer satisfaction which is closely related to perceived service and is known to be influenced by service quality. Satisfaction has been viewed as an emotional state that exists as the result of an evaluation of a service, by which satisfaction judgments are reached in the expectancy-disconfirmation framework. This raises the consideration of a third construct, expectations, which has received some criticism as it is suggested that service quality is an attitude, based only on evaluating service performance. As such, satisfaction has been defined in other ways such as the three factor theory. This would support a perception only perspective, yet further analysis of the expectation construct will be considered further in the following chapter on service quality models.

Regardless of the different dimensions (which will be picked up in the following two chapters) and constructs used, there are discrepancies in the service quality provided by organisations. This can be due to a difference in operational aspects, organisational culture and local culture (Harsono et al., 2017). In addition, the difference is also caused by the scope: local, domestic or international, as discussed in Chapter Two. However, Aroa et

al. (2018) highlight the importance in measuring service quality, suggesting that measurement allows for comparison before and after changes, for the location of quality-related problems and for the establishment of clear standards for service delivery. Edvardsson and Scheuing (1994) state that in their experience, the starting point in developing quality in services is analysis and measurement. With a deeper understanding of the service quality field, the following chapter will review key service quality models that have proved pivotal in developing service quality measures.

Chapter 4: Influential Service Quality Models

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will critically review prominent, service quality models which have significantly influenced the service sector and more specifically, the fitness industry (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Rust and Oliver, 1994; Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996; Brady and Cronin, 2001). The critique of established service quality models has driven on going reflection of the topic and aided the modification of existing models as well as the development of new ones, with greater relevance for various contexts (Polyokova et al, 2015). Seth, Deshmukh and Vrat (2005) agree, believing such studies can be of great use to researchers and practitioners in providing a direction on how to explore/modify the existing service quality concepts within the changing world scenario.

Focusing on the service concept as a means to gain marketing and operational insight has been present since the early 1980's. Service quality models soon followed and, commonly accepted as starting in the mid 1980's, they provided managers with the tools to make better business decisions about service quality. Ultimately, this development was due to organisations acknowledging that service quality had a sizeable impact on industry performance, customer satisfaction and profitability (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Chang and Chen, 1998; Gummesson, 1998).

The service quality models analysed are SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988); SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992); RSQS (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996); The Nordic model (Gronroos, 1984); Three component model (Rust and Oliver, 1994) and the Hierarchical model by Brady and Cronin (2001). These models deal with perceived service quality in a systematic way, providing justifications to the attributes measured and for some, identify 'gaps' in service quality performance. The models in this chapter have significantly contributed to the understanding of service quality models, yet, each provides a variation in approach and place different

importance on attributes. There is also ongoing debate about the dimensions of these models and their relevance to different industries, which this chapter will reflect upon. This will inform the development of a new model for the fitness industry and pose a selection of approaches for the model construction.

4.2 Service Quality Models

There is still much discussion about the specific service characteristics that sit within the service quality models and their relevance when considering different service environments. Even within a defined service environment such debate persists, as overtime, desires, expectations and perceived service quality can change. The fact there has been continued development and modification of service quality (SQ) models since the first appeared back in the mid 80's (Gronroos, 1984), demonstrates the continued importance of the topic to those operating in service environments. It is, therefore, essential to consider the relevance and applicability of such models and how they can inform industry specific measures especially since competition becomes more intense and environmental factors become more hostile, the importance for service quality grows (Asubonteng et al., 1996).

The most widely recognised and adopted measure of service quality is SERVQUAL, the instrument developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1988) and it is also one of the most adapted and extensively critiqued (Buttle, 1996; Carman, 1990; Karatepe et al., 2005). However, the North American model was not the only historically important model developed in the mid 80's, as the Nordic European model (Gronroos, 1984) was the first attempt to measure SQ and has proved pivotal in the advancement of SQ models over the past 25 years.

Advancing on from these early pioneers, numerous adapted models have followed, with some receiving more focus and being considered more important than others. Although there is no set method to identifying the rank

importance of the models in the past three decades, the frequency of reference and appearance in review papers of service quality models (Seth et al., 2005; Martinez and Martinez, 2010; Ghotbabadi, Baharun and Feiz, 2012; Arora and Narula, 2018) and primarily those considered to have influenced the fitness industry (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015) provides a good indication (table 4.1). It is noticeable that those models that appear across the range of reviews, are predominantly pre 21st century. It is suggested, around the turn of the Century, there began a greater focus on eservice quality more than traditional service quality, (Yarimoglu, 2014; Seth et al., 2005) with a shift from conventional personalised services to web enabled services. Therefore, the widely influential models for more traditional service quality, occurred before this point and most fitness industry specific models, would appear after this time (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

Table 4.1: Service quality model reviews

	author				
	Seth and Deshmukh (2005)	Martinez and Martinez (2010)	Ghotbabadi, Baharun and Feiz (2012)	Polyakova and Mirza (2015)	Arora and Narula (2018)
model					
Technical and functional quality model (Gronroos, 1984)	X	X	X	X	X
SERVQUAL: GAP model (Parasuraman et al., 1985)	X	X	X	X	X
Attribute service quality model (Haywood-Farmer, 1988)	X				
Synthesised model of service quality (Brogowicz et al., 1990)	X				
Performance only model (Cronin and Taylor, 1992)	X	X	X	X	X
Ideal value model of service quality (Mattsson, 1992)	X				
Evaluated performance and normed quality model (Teas, 1993)	X				

Three component model (Rust and Oliver, 1994)		X		X	X
IT alignment model (Berkley and Gupta, 1994)	X				
The Multilevel, Retail Service Quality Scale model (Dabholkar et al., 1996)		X	X	X	X
Attribute and overall affect model (Dabholkar, 1996)	X				
Model of perceived service quality and satisfaction (Spreng and Mackoy, 1996)	X				
PCP attribute model (Philip and Hazlett, 1997)	X				
Retail service quality and perceived value model (Sweeney et al., 1997)	X				
Service quality, customer value and customer satisfaction model (Oh, 1999)	X				
Antecedents and mediator model (Dabholkar et al., 2000)	X				
Internal service quality model (Frost and Kumar, 2000)	X				
Internal service quality DEA model (Soteriou and Stavrinides, 2000)	X				
The Hierarchical model (Brady and Cronin, 2001)		X	X	X	X
Internet banking model (Broderick and Vachirapornpuk, 2002)	X				
IT-based model (Zhu et al., 2002)	X				
Model of e-service quality (Santos, 2003)	X				
R-SQ-P model (Mukherjee et al., 2003)					X
Modified SERVQUAL model (Handrinis et al., 2015)					X

The review by Seth et al. (2005) identified 19 SQ models (table 4.1) and highlighted four research streams;

1. General service quality model developed with different types of service encounters.

Such as face to face interaction and remote encounters through eservices.

2. Refinement of these models with the new situations.

Such as live streamed fitness classes and home fitness.

3. Modelling based on new concepts (derived out of weaknesses /learnings from the existing models).

Continuous effort to propose a new/modified, more valid, based on learned weaknesses and strengths of current model/s.

4. Considering new variables/situations with existing models and remodel/ test the findings.

Continuous effort to propose and test a new/modified, more valid model by improving the existing service quality model- based on learned weaknesses and changing environmental circumstances.

These research streams are also evident in other reviews (Martinez and Martinez, 2010; Polyakova and Mirza, 2015). When analysing the following service quality models in this chapter, these four streams should be considered, in particular, point three which focuses on identifying strengths/weakness of current models, from which to build on. The six key service quality models, identified in table 4.1 and to be reviewed, include; Technical and functional quality model (Gronroos, 1984); SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985); SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992); Three Component (Rust and Oliver, 1994); RSQS (Dabholkar et al., 1996) and Hierarchical (Brady and Cronin, 2001). The research stream of these key SQ models is depicted in figure 4.1, demonstrating the development and refinement of models.

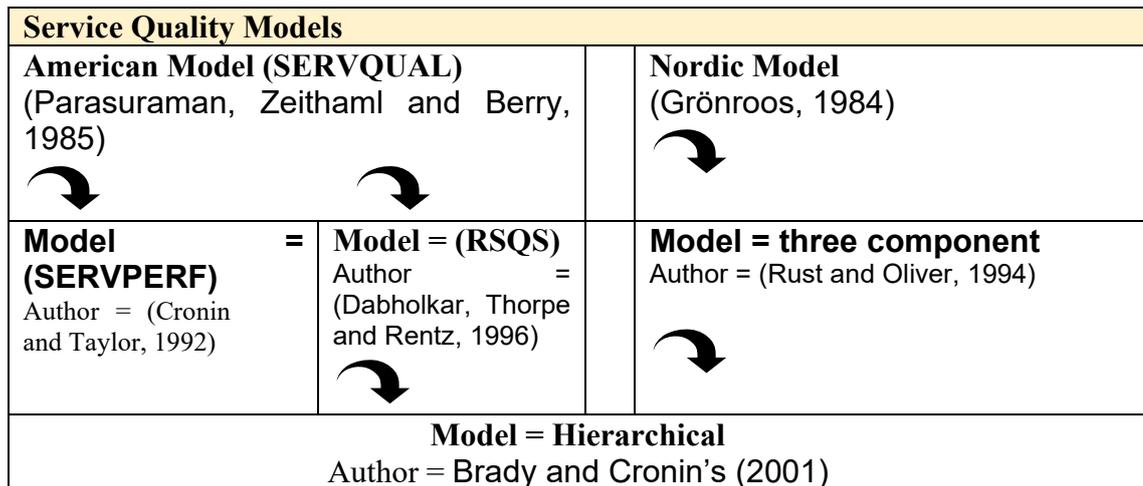


Figure 4.1: Influential service quality models

Figure 4.1 separates the models down the two different conceptualisations in service quality literature of American and Nordic model influence (Ganesh and Haslinda, 2014), which takes the field of SQ models back to its earliest roots. The American model (SERVQUAL), which will be discussed further in section 3.3, was first developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) posed the idea of measuring the discrepancy between expectation of service and perception of service through the ‘Gaps Model of Service Quality’ (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The Nordic model identified two service quality dimensions, the ‘technical quality’ and ‘functional quality’ (Grönroos, 1984, 1998).

Following the line of influence for SERVQUAL, SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) measured only service performance, as it was felt consumer expectation results were consistently high, thus less reliable. Then four years later (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996) created the Retail Service Quality Scale model (RSQS), in which service quality was viewed as a higher-order factor and underscored by two additional levels of attributes. The first level is made up of five primary dimensions and the second is represented by six sub-dimensions.

Succeeding the Nordic model, Rust and Oliver (1994) developed a three-component model which (a) amended the two service quality dimensions

with service delivery, comparable to the 'functional quality' and service product, comparable to 'technical quality' and (b) introduced service environment.

The most recent model in figure 4.1, combines the progressive developments by previous authors Rust and Oliver (1994) 'three components' and Dabholkar et al., (1996) 'multi-level dimensions'. Brady and Cronin (2001) suggested a hierarchical and multidimensional model consisting of interaction quality, physical environment quality and outcome quality, with three corresponding sub-dimensions. Therefore, in developing the hierarchical model, Brady and Cronin (2001) built on the work of others (Rust and Oliver, 1994; Dabholkar et al., 1996), or as Seth et al. (2005) describe, establish a concept, derived out of learnings from the existing models. In order to understand why this continued development occurred, it is important to identify the strengths/weaknesses of the influential models, which could also offer insight into fitness industry models. When discussing influential models, there is one which has had more impact above all others, which has permeated the service sector and been adopted by many industries; SERVQUAL, which has been used extensively in measuring service quality in marketing as well as operational contexts (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

4.3 American Influence

4.3.1 SERVQUAL

Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed the 'Gaps Model' (figure 4.2) through the concept of expectation and perception, arguing that service quality is a function of gaps between consumer expectations and service performance across quality dimensions. (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

The various gaps visualized in figure 4.2 represent;

Gap 1: Difference between consumers' expectation and management's perceptions of those expectations, i.e. not knowing what consumers expect.

Gap 2: Difference between management's perceptions of consumer's expectations and service quality specifications, i.e. improper service-quality standards.

Gap 3: Difference between service quality specifications and service actually delivered i.e. the service performance gap.

Gap 4: Difference between service delivery and the communications to consumers about service delivery, i.e. whether promises match delivery?

Gap 5: Difference between consumer's expectation and perceived service. This gap depends on size and direction of the four gaps associated with the delivery of service quality on the marketer's side.

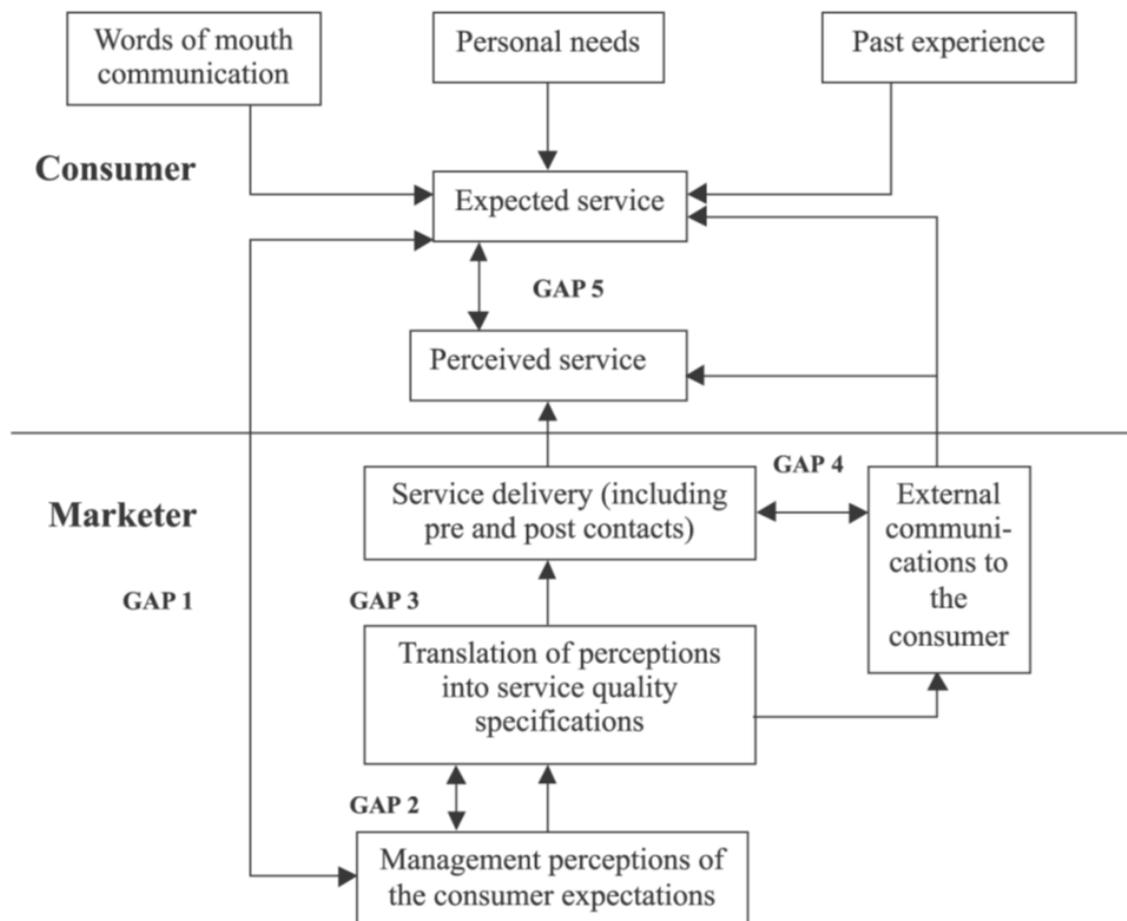


Figure 4.2: Gaps model
(Parasuramen et al., 1985)

The first proposed model had ten dimensions of service quality, listed as;

1. reliability; 2. responsiveness; 3. competence; 4. access; 5. courtesy; 6. communication; 7. credibility; 8. security; 9. understanding/knowing the customer; 10. tangibles. In order to assess the Gaps a survey with 97 items (questions) was created, covering the ten dimensions, with customers required to respond to both expectation and perception on service via a seven point Likert scale. This was later refined to five dimensions as seen in the SERVQUAL Model (figure 4.3), 1. Tangibles; 2. Reliability; 3. Responsiveness; 4. Assurance 5. Empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). For this, 22 item's (questions) were developed covering the five dimensions, (44 questions in total) with expectations and service performance measured (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

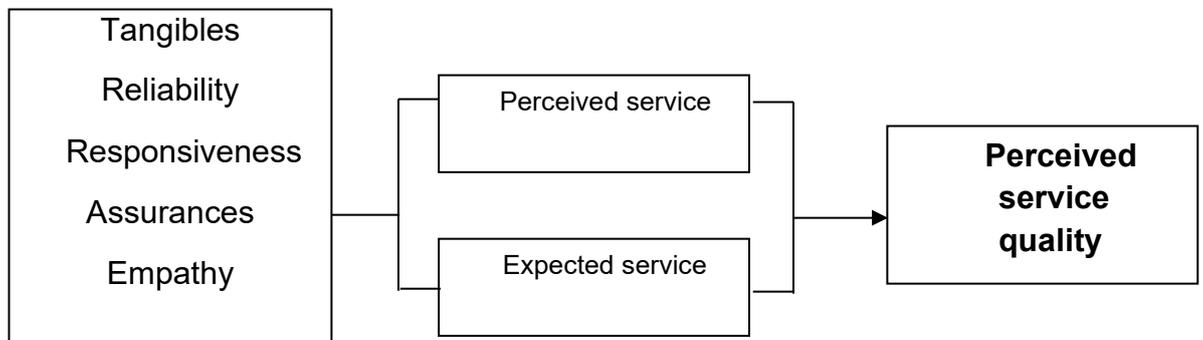


Figure 4.3: SERVQUAL model
(Parasuraman et al., 1988)

The development of RATER resulted in three original dimensions remaining and the remaining seven collapsing into two distinct dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This refinement of the dimensions for the SERVQUAL model is demonstrated in figure 4.4.

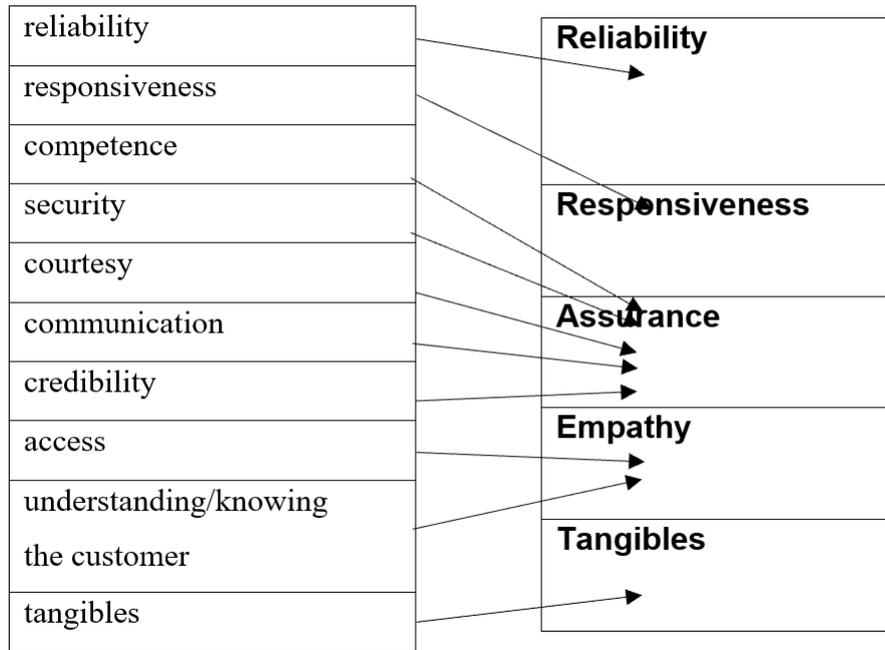


Figure 4.4: Development of RATER

(Parasuraman et al., 1988)

Despite this refinement, extensive and valid criticism of the model exists, mainly with the theoretical development of the instrument (Williams and Buswell, 2003), but issues of operational application also exist (Buttle, 1996; Carman, 1990; Karatepe et al., 2005). The first and most often cited issue with SERVQUAL is with the dimensions and the reclassification of ten to five, where it is felt a lack of discriminant validity between dimensions was identified (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015). As such, this has exacerbated overlap of some dimensions and is demonstrated by referring back to figure 4.4. Responsiveness is retained as an independent dimension, yet communication is merged into assurance. This supports Buttle (1996), who believes some of the conceptual definitions of some dimensions overlap. Further issues with dimensions have been suggested (Getty and Thompson, 1994; Lapierre and Filiatrault, 1996), primarily with empathy and reliability which were felt confusing. Due to the degree of cross over, it could be argued that SERVQUAL could be collapsed further into a more streamlined, effective model, with two or three dimensions, more closely

associated with the Nordic model (Kang and James, 2004; Kang, 2006). Furthermore, in a later review, Parasuraman et al. (1994) suggested findings warrant additional research on the dimensionality of the SERVQUAL items, and that overall findings reveal considerable interdimensional overlap, especially among responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

The use of 'expectations' as a measuring term has been highlighted by numerous authors, as having distinct flaws (Teas, 1993; Ladhari, 2008; Martinez and Martinez, 2010). Parasuraman et al. (1991) identified that the SERVQUAL 'expectations' measure was to intend 'normative expectations' and should be seen as similar to the ideal standard in the customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction literature. When seeking to clarify expectation, Parasuraman et al., (1991) put forward three definitions, which broadly reflect the idea of 'normative expectations'. These are; The wished for level of service performance (Miller, 1977); The level at which the consumer wanted the product to perform (Swan and Trawick, 1980); How a brand should perform for the customer to be completely satisfied (Prakash, 1984).

Yet, Teas (1993) identifies that despite indicating that expectations are similar to these definitions, they do not clearly articulate the specific interpretation of the ideal standard they adopt. It is evident that 'expectations' which is central to the model has not been clearly defined and therefore understood, especially as the description it is given is very broad. Terms used across the above standard, include 'ideal', 'wished', 'wants', 'should', 'adequate'. Therefore, those completing the questionnaire are likely to interpret the idea of expectation differently, thereby providing very different scores. SERVQUAL was revised twice (Parasuraman, et al., 1991, 1993) by replacing "should" with "would" to help with consistency. However, Teas (1993) believes one of six interpretations of expectations was still likely to be occurring, with; attribute importance; forecasted performance; ideal performance; deserved performance; equitable performance; and tolerable performance. Ultimately, Cronin and Taylor (1992) discuss the weakness of

consistency in customer expectations and believe there is little, if any, theoretical evidence that supports the expectations-performance gap for measuring service quality. Indeed, it could be that expectations are formed simultaneously with consumption, due to lack of prior knowledge or simply clouded by experience and the changing of expectations over time (Iacobucci et al. 1994; Buttle, 1996).

From a purely practical business perspective, Andersson, (1992) claimed that the work takes no account of the costs of improving service quality and a lack of examination of actual service performance limits examination from within an organisation (Kandampully, 2003). Following these critiques of SERVQUAL, previous authors have suggested that SQ should be measured through consumer perceptions only, as opposed to expectations minus perceptions (Boulding et al., 1993; Carman, 1990, Cronin and Taylor, 1992, McDougall and Levesque 1994). Such thinking led to the development of alternative models as previously demonstrated (figure 4.1), namely the SERVPERF model (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) which is a performance-only measure of service quality. According to Martinez and Martinez (2010), the model obtained a psychometrically superior assessment of service quality.

4.3.2 SERVPERF

As shown in figure 4.1, SERVPERF, as developed by Cronin and Taylor (1992) is an emergent model from the American Model, which seeks to build on SERVQUAL by overcoming some of the weaknesses, previously highlighted. The primary change in approach is the move to a 'performance only measure'. as numerous issues were highlighted with the inclusion of expectations, including its theoretical justification (Teas, 1993; Ladhari, 2008; Vasiliki, 2017; Martinez and Martinez, 2010). This led some to suggest (Babakus and Mangold 1992; Boulding et al., 1993; Cronin and Taylor, 1992) that expectations should be excluded with service performance being the true measure of service quality, for which Cronin and Taylor (1992) offered the first theoretical justification for discarding the expectations portion of SERVQUAL as demonstrated in the SERVPERF model.

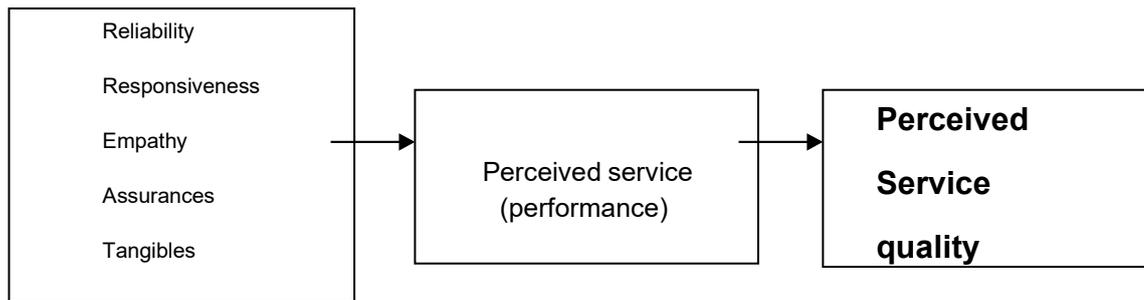


Figure 4.5: SERVPERF

(Cronin and Taylor, 1992)

In defense of SERVQUAL, Parasuraman et al. (1994) argued that the validity and alleged severity of many of the concerns were questionable. For instance, they question the criticism about SERVQUAL in regard to its attempts to measure attitudinal levels, as Cronin and Taylor (1992) only discuss this in the context of formation of attitudes, which is focusing on a different outcome. Also, in terms of its validity, after conducting a meta-analysis study, Carrillat et al. (2007) suggested that both scales (i.e. SERVPERF and SERVQUAL) are equally valid predictors of overall service quality and Rodrigues, Barkur, Varambally and Motlagh (2011) found the SERVPERF and SERVQUAL differ significantly in their outcomes and therefore should not be seen as a binary choice, but could be used together.

However, other criticisms against the SERVQUAL scale, was well supported as Cronin and Taylor (1992) provided empirical evidence for case studies across four different industries. These were, fast food, pest control, dry cleaning and banking, with the same five items as had been proposed by the Parasuraman, et al (1988), being applied. They found their approach to be superior to SERVQUAL, explaining more of the variance in an overall measure of service quality (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015). In a review of SERVQUAL and SERVPERF by Adil, Al Ghaswyneh, and Albkour, (2013), they support this position, stating the scale has been empirically tested and proven to be a better measure of service quality and go further, in suggesting that the marketing literature appears to offer considerable support for the superiority of simple service performance-based measures

of service quality. Further comparative studies which sit across different industries also found SERVPERF to be the superior performing model. These include Quester and Romaniuk (1997) who undertook an empirical study in the advertising industry and Mehta et al. (2000) who found that SERVPERF was better for a retailing context where the service element becomes more important. Brochado (2009) tested SERVQUAL, SERVPERF and HEdPERF (specific to HE) within the HE setting and concluded that SERVPERF and HEdPERF offered the best measurement capability. While in the fitness industry, Tawse and Keogh (1998) applied it to three leisure centres. An added operational advantage of the SERVPERF Model, is by removing the expectations segment, it halved the number of items to be measured, from 44 items down to 22 (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Babakus and Boller, 1992) providing a more streamlined measuring tool.

Ultimately, SERVPERF is seen to have positively advanced the 'American Model', as Martinez and Martinez, (2010:) concisely state, SERVPERF is;

“a psychometrically superior assessment of service quality in terms of construct validity and operational efficacy through its performance items and explained more of the variance in an overall measure of service quality than SERVQUAL”.

Although SERVPERF sought to amend SERVQUAL in a very specific way, there were others seeking to adapt SERVPERF, building upon the model and make other conceptual changes, such as Dabholkar et al. (1996).

4.3.3 Retail Service Quality Scale model (RSQS)

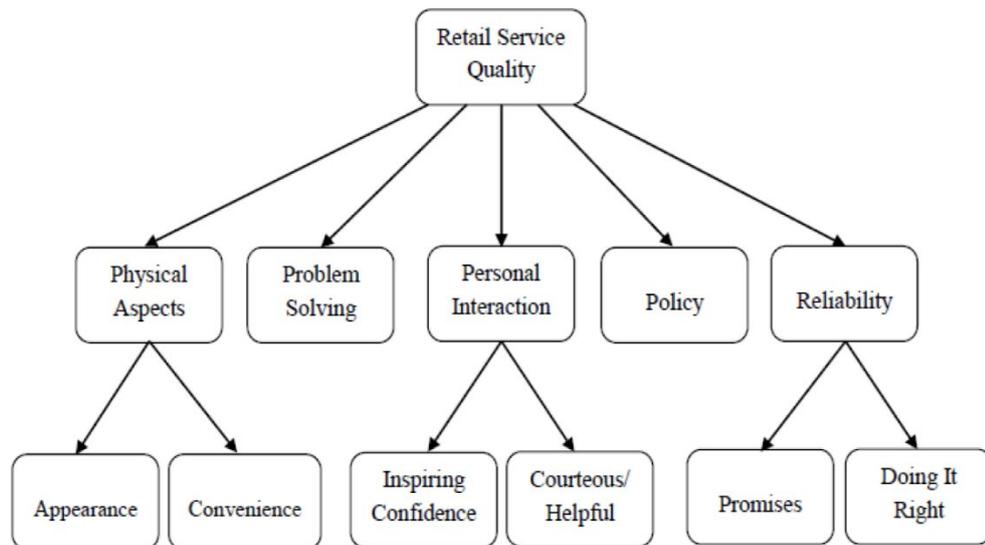


Figure 4.6: RSQS

(Dabholkar et al., 1996)

The Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS), also known as the multilevel model, has its roots in the American Model, adopting aspects of SERVQUAL. It progressed the field of study by adopting a multi-level approach, in which a hierarchical factor structure is proposed to capture dimensions important to retail customers. This is demonstrated in figure 4.5, where the higher order factor (RETAIL service quality) sits atop the dimensions and subdimension levels. Its development was for the pragmatic use as a diagnostic tool for retailers to determine which service areas needed improvement and where resources should be directed (Siu and Cheung, 2001).

Dabholkar et al. (1996) developed the RSQS model as a specific tool for retail as others had not been successful in applying SERVQUAL to the industry (Nadiri and Tumer, 2009). Finn and Lamb (1991) applied SERVQUAL in four different retail settings but were unable produce a good fit between their data and the five factor SERVQUAL dimensions. Thus, it was felt without some modification, SERVQUAL could not be used as a valid measure of service for the industry. Its development used both quantitative

and qualitative methods which produced a multi-item scale for measuring retail service quality in terms of five dimensions (Nadiri and Tumer, 2009; Kim and Jin, 2002). The scale includes 28 items (table 4.2), 17 of which are taken from SERVQUAL and the remaining 11 were derived from the qualitative methods, specifically, interviews, in-depth interviews and observations of customers (Dabholkar et al., 1996).

Table 4.2: Dimensions and items for RSQS

RETAIL SERVICE QUALITY SCALE DIMENSION	RETAIL SERVICE QUALITY SCALE SUB-DIMENSION		RETAIL SERVICE QUALITY SCALE ITEM
Physical Aspects	Appearance	P1	This store has modern-looking equipment and fixtures.
Physical Aspects	Appearance	P2	The physical facilities at this store are visually appealing.
Physical Aspects	Appearance	P3	Materials associated with this store's service (such as shopping bags, catalogs, or statements) are visually appealing.
Physical Aspects	Appearance	P4	This store has clean, attractive, and convenient public areas (restrooms, fitting rooms)
Physical Aspects	Convenience	P5	The store layout at this store makes it easy for customers to find what they need.
Physical Aspects	Convenience	P6	The store layout at this store makes it easy for customers to move around in the store.
Reliability	Promises	P7	When this store promises to do something by a certain time, it will do so.
Reliability	Promises	P8	This store provides its services at the time it promises to do so.
Reliability	Doing it Right	P9	This store performs the service right the first time.
Reliability	Doing it Right	P10	This store has merchandise available when the customers want it.
Reliability	Doing it Right	P11	This store insists on error-free sales transactions and records.
Personal Interaction	Inspiring Confidence	P12	Employees at this store have the knowledge to answer customers' questions.
Personal Interaction	Inspiring Confidence	P13	The behavior of employees in this store instill confidence in customers.
Personal Interaction	Inspiring Confidence	P14	Customers feel safe in their transactions with this store.
Personal Interaction	Courteousness/ Helpfulness	P15	Employees in this store give prompt service to customers.
Personal Interaction	Courteousness/ Helpfulness	P16	Employees in this store tell customers exactly when services will be performed.
Personal Interaction	Courteousness/ Helpfulness	P17	Employees in this store are never too busy to respond to customer's requests.
Personal Interaction	Courteousness/ Helpfulness	P18	This store gives customers individual attention.
Personal Interaction	Courteousness/ Helpfulness	P19	Employees in this store are consistently courteous with customers.
Personal Interaction	Courteousness/ Helpfulness	P20	Employees of this store treat customers courteously on the telephone.
Problem Solving	None	P21	This store willingly handles returns and exchanges.
Problem Solving	None	P22	When a customer has a problem, this store shows a sincere interest in solving it.
Problem Solving	None	P23	Employees of this store are able to handle customer complaints directly and immediately.
Policy	None	P24	This store offers high quality merchandise.
Policy	None	P25	This store provides plenty of convenient parking for its customers.
Policy	None	P26	This store has operating hours convenient to all their customers.
Policy	None	P27	This store accepts most major credit cards.
Policy	None	P28	This store offers its own credit card.

Dabholkar et al. (1996) also moved away from SERVQUAL by applying a performance-based measures only, akin to the approach in SERVPERF used by Cronin and Taylor's (1992) and unlike the direct application of SERVQUAL to the industry (Finn and Lamb, 1991), they found strong validity and reliability, identifying customers' perceptions on service quality in the retail environment (Nadiri and Tumer, 2009).

In a comparison study of SERVPERF and RSQS conducted by Mehta et al. (2000), based in Singapore, they found RSQS to be better suited to businesses with a higher ratio of goods to service (i.e. a supermarket), whereas SERVPERF suited businesses in which service is more important (i.e. fitness centre) (Simmons and Keith, 2005).

The RSQS has proved successful, operationally, and has been applied in a multitude of retail settings and across countries, including the USA, Asia and parts of Europe (Kim and Jin, 2002; Mehta et al., 2000; Siu and Cheung, 2001; Vazquez, Rodriguez-Del Bosque, Diaz and Ruiz, 2001). Although some studies found the RSQS less effective (Siu and Cheung, 2001; Ravichandran et al., 2008), it could be argued the RSQS has proved robust for its industry and had significant influence on the wider development of SQ models through its multi-dimensional concept. Dabholkar et al. (1996) also made comment on the direction of influence, suggesting that service quality is 'defined by and not formed by' several dimensions, which led to their model being quite different to those previous (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

4.4 Nordic Influence

4.4.1 Nordic Model

Unlike the dimensions posed by SERVQUAL, Gronroos (1984) proposed a more simplistic model (figure 4.6), placing emphasis on the technical quality (WHAT consumer receive) and functional or process related (HOW consumer receive the service) (Gronroos, 1984; 1988). These two qualities act as antecedents for the third dimension, which is corporate image (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015; Gronroos, 1988). Through the technical and

functional actions, consumers engage with the organisation and through this process the image is formed, along with other factors, including marketing communication, word of mouth, tradition, ideology, customer needs and pricing (Ghotbabadi, Baharun and Feiz, 2012).

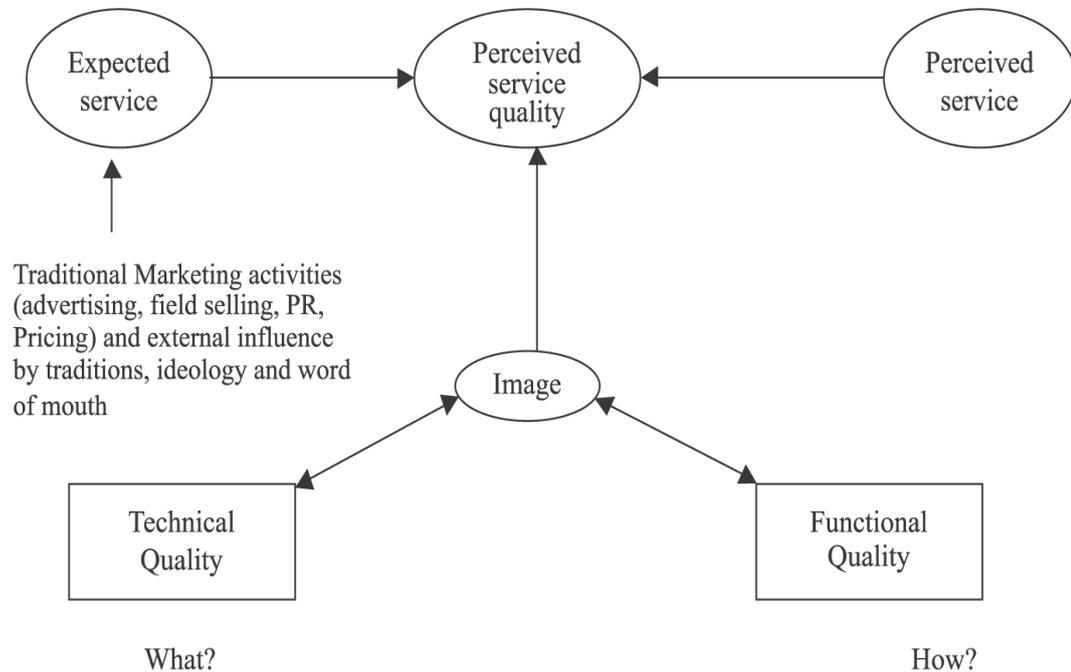


Figure 4.7: Nordic model
(Gronroos, 1984)

The model is based on the 'disconfirmation paradigm' by comparing perceived service performance and expected service. According to the disconfirmation paradigm, perceptions of a service encounter are defined by one of, 'confirmation' or 'disconfirmation' of expectation and proposes that dissatisfaction arises when service expectations are not met.

Gronroos (1988) identified six sub dimensions which are heavily weighted towards the functional, as can be seen in table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Sub dimensions (Grönroos, 1988)

Technical	Functional	Image
1. Professionalism and skills	2.attitudes and behaviour	6.reputation and credibility
	3.accessibility and flexibility	
	4.reliability and trustworthiness	
	5.recovery	

The model has aided in understanding and development of future service quality models, but as with SERVQUAL, it is not free from criticism. It has proven a reliable theoretical base, but being more conceptual, it lacks in practical application, with limited evidence for its validity and further sub-dimensions (Gronroos, 2001; Ekinci, 2002). Similar to SERVQUAL, there are limitations on actionable elements for managers as it does not provide detail as to the measurement of service performance compared to expectation level.

4.4.2 Three Component Model

The three component model is an extension of the Gronroos' model (1984) and delineates three influencers of service quality, yet it was not the first attempt to amend the technical and functional quality model, which sought to refine 'what' the service was and 'how' it was delivered (figure 4.7).

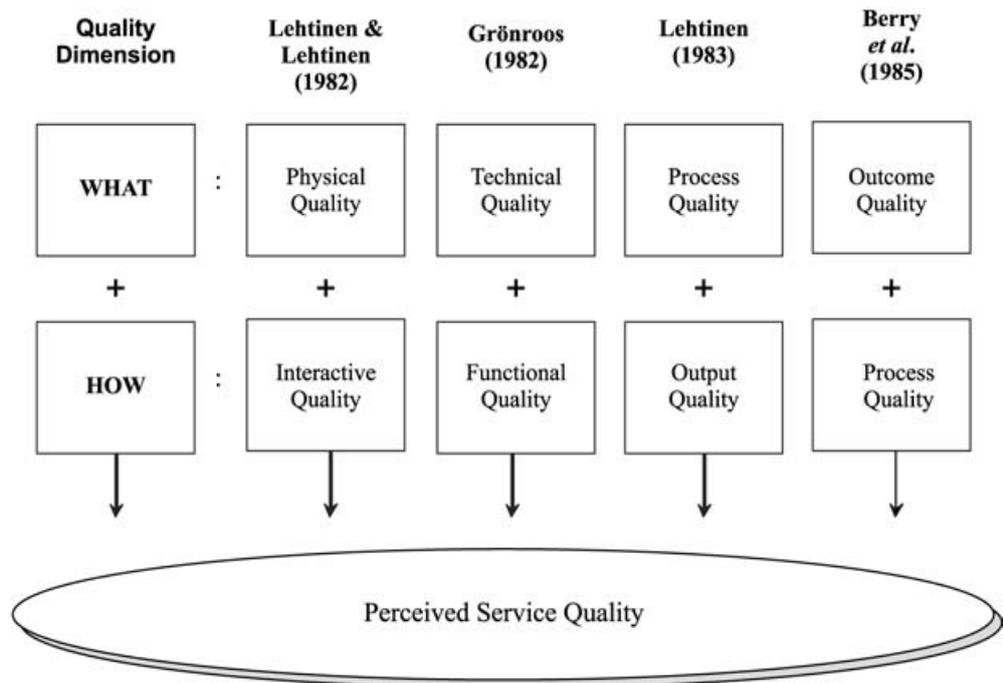


Figure 4.8: What and how of service

(Kang, 2006)

However, Rust and Oliver (1994) were the first to include the third dimension, service environment (figure 4.8)

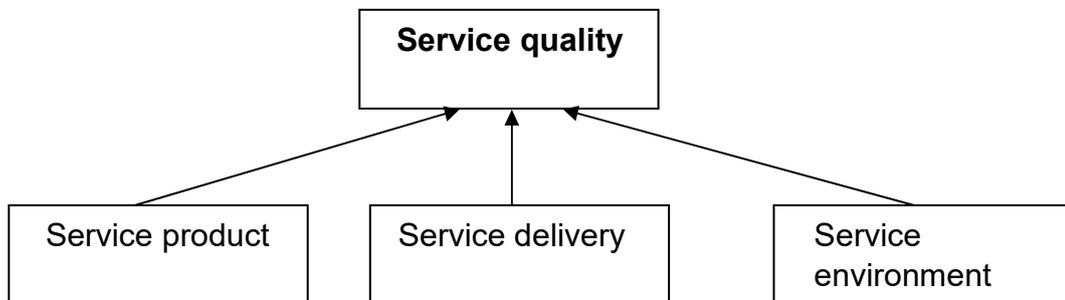


Figure 4.9: Three component model

(Rust and Oliver, 1994)

Gronroos (1984) had the ‘technical quality’, representing ‘what’ the consumer received which is represented by ‘service product’ in the three component model. ‘Service delivery’ reflects the ‘functional quality’, or ‘how’ the service is provided. The additional third dimension, ‘service environment’, accounts for the settings in which the service takes place. Although Rust and Oliver (1994) did not test their conceptualisation for the service quality dimensions, it was noted by Brady and Cronin (2001) that

support has been found for similar models in retail banking (McDougall and Levesque, 1994) and offered empirical confirmation in their research (Kang, 2006). Polyakova and Mirza, (2015) suggested that despite the evidence for application of the model in its original form is not available, it has influenced and enhanced models and equipped them with deeper theoretical understanding of the service quality concept, particularly with the addition of service environment..

4.5 Multidimensional and Hierarchical Model

According to Martinez and Martinez, 2010, Brady and Cronin's (2001) model (figure 4.10) is a significant contribution to the measuring of service quality, as the Multidimensional and hierarchical model of service quality overcomes several of the criticisms made of earlier models. Ghotbabadi, Baharun and Feiz (2012) point to as many as four earlier models being refined and combined within the Multidimensional and hierarchical model; 1. SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988); 2. RSQS (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996); 3. Technical and Functional Model (Gronroos, 1984); 4. Three Component Model (Rust and Oliver, 1994). However, others see its development more simply (Ko and Pastore, 2004; Polyakova and Mirza, 2015; Yarimoglu, 2014), aligning the two branches of service quality research, through the three-component model by Rust and Oliver (1994) and the multilevel conceptualisation of service quality by Dabholkar et al., (1996).

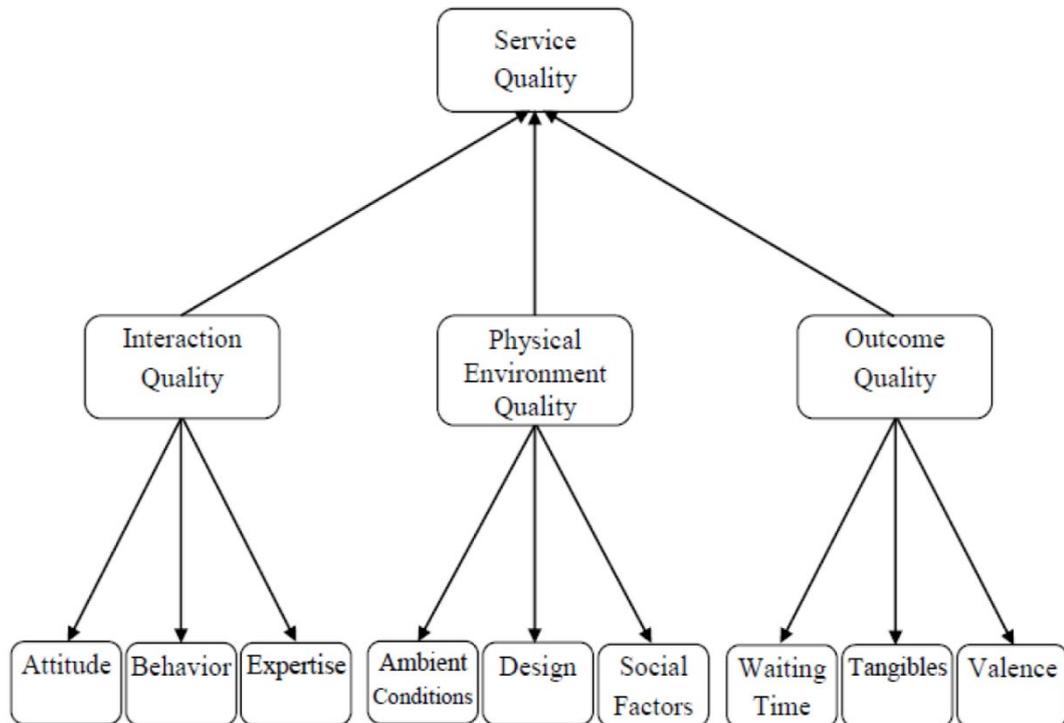


Figure 4.10: Multidimensional and hierarchical model

(Brady and Cronin, 2001)

As can be seen above, service quality is formed by three dimensions, which are 'interaction quality', 'physical environment quality' and 'outcome quality'. Below each of these are further sub-dimensions. Interaction = Attitude, behaviour and experience; Physical Environment = Ambient Conditions, Design and Social Factors; Outcome Quality = Waiting Time, Tangibles and Valence.

Through this conceptualisation, it is suggested that Brady and Cronin (2001) have improved service quality frameworks (Ko and Pastore, 2005; Martinez and Martinez, 2010; Polyakova and Mirza, 2015; Yarimoglu, 2014). It defines service quality perception, has a clear form of service quality measurement and identifies the importance of where the service experience happens (Martinez and Martinez, 2010). The model has proven effective across a range of service industries and it has the flexibility to have different factors depending on the changing organisations (Brady and Cronin, 2001). Chahal and Kumari, (2010) applied a modified model to the health sector, while Akter, D'Ambra and Ray (2010) adapted the model for four separate

sectors and Lui (2005) six different service areas. However, it should be noted that confirmatory factor analysis was not used in establishing the multidimensional and multi-level structures within these (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

Ghotbabadi, Feiz, Baharun (2015) believe the model is the most suitable and applicable model for service quality measurement to date. However, it requires adapting to different factors for specific service industries. The flexibility of the model allows the scope for further dimensions and sub-dimensions for those specific service industries. Indeed, Jones (2005) added an additional dimension (communications) into the multidimensional and hierarchical model and found the dimension to be significant in three out of four industries.

Despite the generally accepted position, on the importance of the model by Brady and Cronin (2001) there is debate on the direction of influence across the dimensions (Martinez and Martinez, 2010; Polyakova and Mirza, 2015), as the dimensions are variables that influence sub-dimensions, yet Brady and Cronin (2001:37) state;

“customers aggregate their evaluations of the subdimensions to form their perceptions of an organisation’s performance on each of the three primary dimensions. Those perceptions then lead to an overall service quality perception. In other words, customers form their service quality perceptions on the basis of an evaluation of performance at multiple levels and ultimately combine these evaluations to arrive at an overall service quality perception”.

As such, they feel this contradiction leaves room for uncertainty when interpreting the conceptualization of the model and any future adaption of the model by others Martinez and Martinez (2008).

To address the issue in Brady and Cronin's (2001) model, Martinez and Martinez (2007, 2008) attacked the problem in two ways. Firstly, the philosophy of the service quality measurement and secondly the causal

relationships between dimensions and sub-dimensions. Drawing from this, Martinez and Martinez (2007, 2008) proposed a third-order reflective hierarchical models for measuring service quality in different industries, which is more consistent with Parasuraman et al., (1988) definition of service quality as an attitude.

The dispute lies with the implicit assumption that dimensions are antecedents of service quality (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015), for which Martinez and Martinez (2007, 2008) believe the dimensions are not antecedents of service quality, only expressions of the complexity of the construct and service quality is a higher-order factor underlying the dimensions. Martinez (2010) also argues that there is a cyclic process in the consumer mind after the first service encounter and;

“while some causal processes act almost instantaneously in the consumers mind, other causal mechanisms are subject to a longer lag period. Therefore, causal relationships between variables that are measured at the same time, representing attitudes or subjective perceptions are not asymmetric but cyclic” (Martinez, 2010:98).

Therefore, a case could be made for a formative model (Brady and Cronin, 2001) or a reflective hierarchical model (Polyakova and Mirza, 2015). This demonstrates the uncertainty as to whether users will evaluate service quality attributes and overall service quality individually. This direction of influence is discussed further in chapter 7. Also, a key influence for the Brady and Cronin model (2001) was the hierarchical sub dimension model by Dabholkar et al. (1996). The multi-dimensional structure was developed primarily as a pragmatic diagnostic tool to determine areas of improvement and resource utilisation (Siu and Cheung, 2001). However, if additional items are included simply to confirm validity of a sub dimension, when only one item is needed, this perhaps makes the measuring tool (questionnaire) less pragmatic, especially if an additional unit of construct measure is being applied (e.g. expectations, importance). Therefore, the addition of sub dimensions is useful for managers to further target more specific service areas than the dimensions offer. Yet, this benefit should be weighed against

the impact on the measuring instrument, and number of items.

4.6 Service Quality Model Construction

The final model covered by Brady and Cronin (2001) has received a level of criticism, especially as to the direction of influence across the dimensions (Martinez and Martinez, 2010); Polyakova and Mirza, 2015). Despite this being the first measure synthesizing all major prior conceptualisations (Gong and Yi, 2018), it is considered a suitable and applicable model for general service quality measurement (Ghotbabadi, Feiz and Baharun, 2015; Dagger, Sweeney and Johnson, 2007) and an excellent basis for proposing the attributes of service quality (in specific industries) that can be measured (Martinez and Martinez, 2010; Polyakova and Mirza, 2015).

Taking into account the strength of Brady and Cronin's (2001) conceptualization with respect to earlier models and its operational weaknesses, Martinez and Martinez (2010:102) provide some informative criteria for designing instruments for measuring perceived service quality, which include;

- *Building specific context instruments, i.e., a tailored instrument for each specific sector or industry.*

This provides further support and justification to the notion of developing a fitness industry model. Although numerous fitness industry models have been developed (Chelladurai et al. 1987; Kim and Kim, 1995; Chang and Chelladurai, 2003) and an increased interest in the area over the past two decades, there are still issues with the notion of a truly specific tailored industry model, as covered in chapter one. Specially the national and regional influence on attributes, which in turn influence the model structure.

- *Using only service performance measures and not a discrepancy function between expectations and performance.*

Of the two separate approaches to perceived service quality measures, the expectation-performance comparison and performance-only evaluation,

Martinez and Martinez (2010) believe a service performance only measure is most effective. As covered in the previous chapter, the service performance only approach has significant support in the field (Haywood-Farmer and Stuart, 1990; Kim and Kim, 1995; Lentell, 2000). Lentell (2000) also used an importance measure when analysing service quality in the fitness industry, alongside service performance. The inclusion of an importance measure provided the data for the Importance–performance analysis (IPA) (Martilla and James, 1977) which is also suggested as an effective method of assessing perceived service quality (Martinez and Martinez, 2010) and is covered in greater detail in chapter 5. This has been utilised by some when analysing results from service quality tools (Gong and Yi, 2018), but not extensively. Lentell (2000) notes that Parasuraman et al. (1988) did not neglect customer views on the relative importance of the different service attributes on the SERVQUAL scale. In fact, these researchers developed a method of weighting the attribute difference scores by the importance customers ascribed to those elements of service. The importance scores were captured in a third section of the SERVQUAL instrument, yet not applied through an IPA. The significant benefit is it is useful for managers who are able to identify those attributes that are most in need of improvement or for possible cost-saving without significant detriment to overall quality (Martinez and Martinez, 2010). The result of the IPA comprises of a comparison between service performance and importance of each relevant attribute (Farmer and Stuart, 1988; Abalo, Varela and Manzano, 2007), with a two-dimensional IPA grid displaying the results of the importance and service performance of each relevant attribute (Abalo et al., 2007).

- *Identifying the attributes or factors of service quality that are susceptible to being evaluated, using qualitative research and literature revision, in the framework of Brady and Cronin's (2001) hierarchical and multidimensional model.*

The next chapter will therefore critically analyse fitness industry specific instruments, which will help inform the development of a proposed model for the fitness industry. Although these could identify specific service

attributes for the industry, this could be further developed through qualitative research as identified by Martinez and Martinez, (2010) and applied by Lam et al. (2005) who designed a fitness industry assessment scale of service quality consisting of the two stages. The first stage included a literature review and data taken from general service quality studies as well as studies of the service quality of fitness centres; the second stage included site observations, interviews and modified application of the Delphi technique (Vieira and Ferreira, 2018). Carman (1990) adds that following this, context customisation may be required, in the form of adding or dropping service quality dimensions and amending the service attributes considered to make those dimensions.

4.7 Chapter Four Summary

The significant models that have been analysed, offer an understanding of service quality progression and model development. The six critical models are considered to signify important alternative approaches, while other models mentioned offer an important contribution in the effective operationalisation and adaption of the new approaches across differing industries. On a methodological level, it has been noted that using qualitative research and literature revision in the model development is critical in creating a valid tool. The model itself should also consider the structural nature of Brady and Cronin's (2001) hierarchical and multidimensional model. Also, building on the service quality constructs in the previous chapter, the performance-only evaluation appears to represent the most effective and efficient measure of service quality performance. There is also the potential to apply this alongside an importance measure to create an IPA framework, to display results and actions more clearly, however this needs further reflection in the next chapter.

Regardless of the formation of dimensions used, what has also emerged is that important service attributes vary for different organisations. This can be due to a difference in industry, strategic and operational aspects and local culture. In addition, the difference can also be caused by the scope: local,

domestic or international (Harsono et al., 2017). When exploring the fitness industry, it is evident that similar diversity exists, from the glocal development of the sector, to the facility aims across the different category of provider and therefore potential for variations in key service attributes. Therefore, the development of a fitness industry specific model should reflect this. As such, further detail on service dimensions and critically the attributes should be gathered through critically analysing current fitness industry models in relation to the specifics of the thesis. Therefore, the following chapter will deal with fitness industry specific models.

Chapter 5: Service Quality Models for the Fitness Industry

5.1 Introduction

Building on the literature from the previous chapter, a critical review of the current literature around service quality models specific to the fitness industry will be undertaken, assessing the key influences from the wider service sector. A number of critical considerations emerged in the previous chapter that need further consideration. Firstly, the extent to which industry specific models have been tailored to the industry and if they have sought to consult the customer about service attributes as well as service perceptions. If so, consulting the pattern of attributes and dimensions for current industry models, may offer some direction. Such information on dimensions and attributes may also help to establish consistent terminology, which will inform the research, including a fitness industry framework and service quality model. Finally, identifying the use of performance-only evaluation in existing industry models and analysing any applications of an importance measure alongside an IPA framework should be considered.

5.2 SAFS

The first iteration of service quality modelling for fitness centres, was the 'Scale of Attributes of Fitness Centres' (SAFS) which was classified by primary and secondary services.

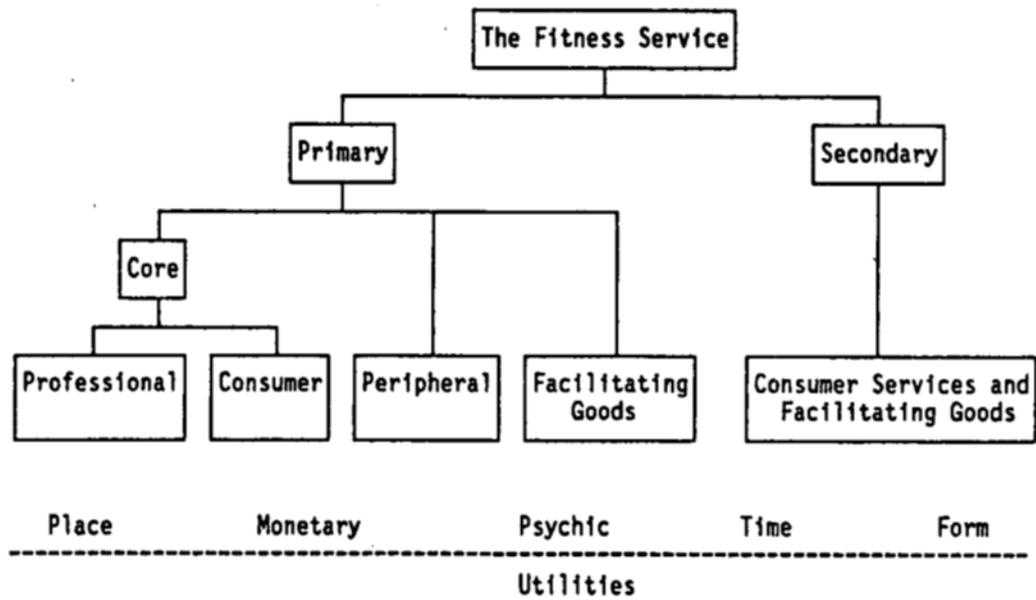


Figure 5.1: A modified model of fitness service dimensions
(Chelladurai, Scott, and Haywood-Farmer, 1987)

The SAFS includes 30 items in five dimensions, as seen in figure 5.1, of which four relate to the primary service -professional; consumer; peripheral; facilitating goods; and consumer services and facilitating goods related to secondary service. Of the dimensions measured, 'facilitating goods' was the most influential dimension, whereas 'secondary services' had the least influence. The SAFS was developed based on the input of "three professors of sport management, one university fitness instructor, and six staff members of a commercial fitness club" (Chelladurai et al., 1987:163) and item retention was determined by item-total correlations. However, Lam et al. (2005) suggest that the 'goods and services' dimension is not sufficiently related to fitness services.

Further models for fitness centres followed (table 5.1), as catalogued by Polyakova and Mirza (2016).

Table 5.1: Fitness industry models (Adapted from Polyakova and Mirza, 2016)

Authors	Model	Number of Dimensions	Dimensions
Chelladurai et al. (1987)	Scale of Attributes of Fitness Services	5 dimensions	professional; consumer; peripheral; facilitating goods; goods and services.
Kim and Kim (1995)	Quality Excellence of Sports Centres (QUESC)	12 dimensions, 43 items	employee attitude; employee reliability; social opportunity; programs offered; ambience; information available; personal considerations; price; privilege; ease of mind; stimulation; convenience.
Lentell (2000)	UK LA Leisure Centres Survey Instrument	3 dimensions 18 items	physical environment; staff; secondary services.
Chang and Chelladurai (2003)	Scale of Quality in Fitness Centres (SQFS)	9 dimensions, 3 stages	3 in the input stage (Service Climate, Management Commitment to Service Quality, and Programmes); 5 in the throughput stage (Task Interactions with Employees, Interpersonal Interactions with Employees, Contact with Physical Environment, Contact with Other Clients, and Service Failures and Recovery); one in the output stage (Service Quality).
Alexandris et al. (2004)	Modification of Brady and Cronin (2001) model	3 dimensions, 14 sub-dimensions	Interaction Quality (6 items); Physical Environment (3 items); Outcome Quality (5 items)
Lam et al. (2005)	Service Quality Assessment Scale (SQAS)	6 dimensions, 31 Items	six dimensions: personnel; program; locker room; physical facility; workout facility; and child care plus 31 items.
Ko and Pastore (2005)	Service Scale Quality in	4 generic	Four generic dimensions:

	Recreation Sport (SSQRS)	dimensions and 11 sub-dimensions	program quality; interaction quality; outcome quality; physical environment quality
Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2007)	Quality dimensions (Grounded-theory approach to a multiple-case study)	3 dimensions and 8 enablers: 2 “direct factors” and 9 “indirect factors”	Physical change; Mental change; Pleasure plus 8 enablers Technical competence; Relational competence Facilities; Training; Evaluation; Empowerment; Recruitment; Climate; Service design; Leadership; Organisational consciousness
Moxham and Wiseman (2009)	Service quality on the corporate level and the operational level	3 criteria	retention rates; adherence to professional standards; adherence to internal standards.
Yildiz (2011)	SQS-FC (Service Quality Scale for Fitness Centres)	4 dimensions, 25 sub-dimensions	Personnel; Physical Environment; Supporting Services; Program plus 25 sub- dimensions
Walker, Farren, Dotterweich, Gould and Walker (2017)	SQAS-19. Modification of Lam et al. (2005) Service Quality Assessment Scale	5 dimensions, 19 items	5 dimensions: Staff, Program, Locker Room, Physical Facility, and Workout Facility

In order to capture and catalogue relevant peer-reviewed articles that proposed new or adapted models, Polyakova and Mirza (2016) applied metasynthesis (Tranfield et al., 2003) and meta-interpretation (Weed, 2005) for their research synthesis. A list of key search terms was developed: service quality; model; scale; fitness industry; health and fitness; leisure club or centre; and recreational sport; and applied in combinations, for publications between 1980 – 2014. The resulting nine articles can be seen in figure 5.1 with a breakdown of dimensions. The table also includes two additional models, Lentell (2000) and Walker, Farren, Dotterweich, Gould,

Walker (2017). The SQAS-19 Model is included as a result of applying the same search criteria used by Polyakova and Mirza (2016) but adding the period 2015-19. Also, the UK LA leisure centres survey instrument by Lentell (2000) was one of the first in the UK, and an early influence for the development of this PhD.

There would be a seven year gap between the first and second industry models, however rather than coming from the traditional service quality regions of the USA or Europe, Kim and Kim would develop the QUESC model for the Asian market, more specifically, South Korea.

5.3 QUESC

Kim and Kim (1995) followed Chelladurai et al. (1987) with the creation of the QUESC (Quality Excellence of Sports Centers) instrument using EFA, which has 33 important customer needs that can be classified into 11 dimensions. These included, Ambience; Employee Attitude; Reliability; Information; Programming; Personal Consideration; Privileges; Price; Ease of Mind; Stimulation; and Convenience. QUESC, like SERVQUAL consists of a list of items, used by consumers to assess the service quality level, however, QUESC is designed to assess only the service performance. Therefore, Kim and Kim (1995) believe QUESC overcomes the weaknesses of SERVQUAL by applying a customer 'desirability', or importance-weighted evaluation of service performance for specific service dimensions and by being tailored to a specific industry.

Polyakova and Mirza (2016) and Lam et al. (2005) identified three of the eleven dimensions (i.e. price, privilege and stimulation) had only one item. Lam et al. (2005) challenged the statistical reliability of these items in QUESC and questioned the generalisability of the Model, due to the unique nature and context of the fitness centre industry in South Korea. Korean fitness centers can tailor more to young adults as the more elderly have a comparatively low acceptance of the importance of physical activities (Cho and Cho, 2002). This was supported by Papadimitriou and Karateroliotis

(2000) in Greece, as QUESC dimensions were found not to be representative, leading Papadimitriou and Karteroliotis (2000) to propose a four dimensional model. This included, Facility Attraction and Operation; Programme Availability and Delivery; and Other Services.

5.4 UK LA Leisure Centres Survey Instrument

Lentell (2000) investigated the contribution of different service elements to customers' overall satisfaction by sampling customers of seven local authority leisure facilities in the UK. According to Lentell (2000), the '3Ps' (physical evidence, process and participants) model suggested by Booms and Bitner (1981) can be used to outline the major service dimensions of sport facilities. Also, that the tangible elements of the service were thought by customers to be the most important elements. The items used in the questionnaire were loosely based on those of the CERM CSQ (Howat et al., 1996) as it had been developed for public sector leisure centres. However, discussions with two of the leisure managers and two pilot studies with customers were used to refine the draft instrument, with the final version consisting of 23 statements of importance and 23 of perceptions. As applied by others (Brady and Conin, 2001; Kim and Kim, 1995), the instrument used only perception as a service performance measure. Lentell (2000) also identified the usefulness of an importance score as used by others (Haywood-Farmer and Stuart, 1990; Kim and Kim, 1995) and measuring importance scores for each variable would assist evaluation and establishing validity of the instrument.

As well as the service performance scores, the importance scores were analysed through component factor analysis in order to validate the dimensions. However, the importance scores were not further utilised in informing managers which were the most important attributes and assisting in resource allocation. Yet, as a model developed in England, the attributes and dimensions may offer greater insight compared to those developed elsewhere (such as QUESC, by Kim and Kim, 1995), which can be unique in nature and context (Lam et al., 2005). However, this model was

developed for the public sector only and is two decades old, during which time public sector leisure has faced some of the biggest challenges and changes in its history (Ramchandani, Shibli and Kung, 2018).

5.5 SQFS

For the SQFS model, Chang and Chelladurai (2003) used aspects of SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, et al, 1988); RECQUAL, which measured quality in recreational services (Crompton and MacKay, 1991) and SAFS, the first conceptualized industry model by Chelladurai et al. (1987). Content analysis was then applied to these, by an expert panel (15 fitness experts and four faculty members), with their recommendations forming the dimensions for the proposed SQFS instrument. The initial 79 items derived by the panel, reduced to 35 items that measure nine dimensions: Service Climate; Management Commitment to Service Quality; Programmes from the input stage; Interpersonal Interaction; Task Interaction; Physical Environments; Other Clients; Service Failures/Recovery from the throughput stage; and Perceived Service Quality from the output stage.

Despite drawing on three models, the method drew some criticism, with Yiditz (2011) believing a weakness of the SQFS was that, despite employing fitness specialists and managers, it did not consider customers, as the recipients of the service in identifying attributes. Lam et al. (2005) supports this, suggesting the initial panel was restricted and a lack of statistical procedures to examine the factor structure of the SAFS (Polyakova and Mirza, 2016). Chang and Chelladurai (2003:80) also identify this as a potential weakness, stating that;

“Future research should involve fitness experts and managers as well as club members themselves to add additional relevant dimensions that might have been overlooked”.

5.6 Multidimensional and Hierarchical Model: adapted to fitness industry

Alexandris et al. (2004) sought to test the applicability of a simplified version

of the Brady and Cronin (2001) model in the context of a fitness centre. Alexandris et al. (2004) suggested the 'technical quality', first proposed by Gronroos (1984) had been an overlooked dimension for the fitness industry. This was critical, as according to Zeithaml and Bitner (2003), the technical quality is associated to customers' perceptions on outcome (Alexandris et al., 2004). Therefore, the model has three dimensions; interaction quality; physical environment quality; and outcome quality. The sub dimensions included; behaviour, attitude, and expertise of employees (interaction quality); design, ambient conditions, and social factors (physical environment quality): increase my energy, improve my health, improve my mood, improve my psychological well-being, improve my fitness level (outcome quality).

Having highlighted 'outcome' as a critical dimension, Alexandris et al. (2004) point to the literature, to support the inclusion of the defined sub dimensions (e.g. Kerner and Grossman, 2001; Markland and Hardy, 1993). However, Polyakova and Mirza (2016) note the removal of other sub dimensions from the Brady and Cronin (2001) without explanation. Further to this, no qualitative methods were employed during the study to identify new items of dimensions. Alexandris et al. (2004) noted limitations of the study, pointing to the sample size (175 users at a single site in Greece), thus suggesting it could be tested with both larger sample sizes and taken from a range of fitness centres. Ultimately, there would appear to be concerns with both its representative capacity and validity of the second-order factors (sub-dimension) (Polyakova and Mirza, 2016).

5.7 SQAS

Macintosh and Doherty (2007) believe the Service Quality Assessment Scale (SQAS), by Lam, Zhang and Jensen (2005) to be a promising development for fitness management. The model consists of 31 items and six dimensions, including personnel; program; locker room; physical facility; workout facility; and childcare. Howat, Crilley, and Mcgrath (2008:144) feel that SQAS is a;

“synthesis of previous general service quality models (such as elements of Parasuraman et al. (1988) SERVQUAL and other service-quality models found in the literature, as well as more specific models designed for sport and recreation contexts”.

The methodological design is extensive (Lam, et al., 2005) and included a wide-ranging literature review with both general and fitness specific service quality studies considered. Secondly, site observations, interviews with customers and staff and a modified application of the Delphi technique with 15 managers across ten sites was applied. With a well-developed methodology, Jasinskas, Reklaitiene, and Svagzdiene (2013) believe the model provides quality and specific criteria and a clear scale for evaluation by customers, which can be processed and quickly presented to managers. Yet, it is not without weakness, including its specific nature to sites with a wide range of service provision. Lam, et al. (2005) also recommend other researchers to revise the SQAS using different samples, to test its generality as the model is in its infancy (Yildiz, 2011). Studies have applied the model since, such as Albayrak and Caber (2014) who confirmed its dimensions in a Turkish context. However, Albayrak and Caber (2014) removed six items from the childcare dimensions as the majority of the participants did not use that service and Yu et al. (2014) dropped the Childcare factor entirely when using SQAS. As such, this raises doubt as to the significance of childcare within a fitness centre setting or suggests regional variations. Finally, Martinez and Martinez, (2010); Polyakova and Mirza, (2016) identified issues with the scale, suggesting it lacks a measurement for perceived service quality and that the important outcome quality dimension is absent (Polyakova and Mirza, 2016).

5.8 SSQRS

As well as being the basis for the model by Alexandris et al. (2004), the Multidimensional and hierarchical model by Brady and Cronin (2001) was partly used by Ko and Pastore (2005) in developing a specific scale for recreational services (Yildiz and Kara, 2012). Ko and Pastore (2005:85)

state that “the proposed model is based on a current conceptualisation of service quality, which suggests that service quality is a multidimensional and hierarchical construct”. Further items were reviewed from other models (Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Crompton and Mackay, 1991; Howat et al., 1996; Kim and Kim, 1995; Parasuraman et al., 1988) in developing the proposed Service Scale Quality in Recreational Sport (SSQRS). From this review, an initial set of 77 items that explained 11 subdimensions of service quality was developed, with the final instrument having a total of 49 items that reflected 11 subdimensions of service quality with a range of three to seven items per subdimension. The dimensions include programme quality, interaction quality, outcome quality and physical environment quality (Ko and Pastore, 2005).

Despite the name, Ko and Pastore (2005:90) only tested the model at the ‘Department of Recreational Sports at a large university located in the Midwest region in the US’, which may indicate a weakness with its generalisability for recreation outside of the higher education setting which could be perceived as being unique among recreational provision, with a small segment of society representing the majority of respondents. The instrument was supported by statistical tests and it has been argued that SSQRS fills gaps in service quality conceptualisation in the recreation industry (Polyakova and Mirza, 2016). However, Ko and Pastore (2005) do acknowledge further analysis of the items should be carried out in different fitness industries in order to establish reliability and validity of the scale, which would also allow for testing of the wider conceptual framework outside the educational setting (Polyakova and Mirza, 2016).

5.9 Quality dimensions (Grounded-theory Approach to a Multiple-Case Study)

Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2007) developed, what they described as a ‘tentative framework’ for fitness quality management with three dimensions identified to be ‘pleasure’, ‘mental change’ and ‘physical change’. Grounded

theory was applied across 15 case studies in order to generate information faithful to everyday reality and useful to practitioners (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Both staff and customers were interviewed, however, interviews were conducted by a range of students who had no fixed set of questions. It could be argued that such an approach will lead to inconsistencies across the case studies, diminishing the reliability of results. However, despite some criticism that the case study approach would impact generality (Polyakova and Mirza, 2016), it would appear an effective method of achieving that very thing. Rather than gathering data from a single site or organisation, having a range of different types of fitness providers from across the industry in Sweden, it allowed for industry wide data to be captured. Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2007) also suggest that because the research is exploratory in nature, future developments are required and expected.

5.10 Service Quality on the Corporate Level and the Operational Level

Moxham and Wiseman, (2009) focused on the development, implementation and control of service quality and the link from strategic to operational delivery, creating a tool for internal use as opposed to service users. Due to this, the dimensions are rather different than previous instruments and include retention rates; adherence to professional standards; adherence to internal standards. Unlike Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2007), the use of a single case study brings into question its generality which is noted by the authors. Despite the fact it does not seek to engage with 'what' the customer service attributes are, it provides a contextualisation of how to implement effective service quality within a fitness centre setting.

5.11 SQS-FC

Yildiz (2011) proposed the SQS-FC (Service Quality Scale for Fitness Centers) scale for fitness centers and examined its effectiveness using importance-performance analysis (IPA) (Albayrak and Caber, 2014) as proposed by Martinez and Martinez (2010). The model consists of 25 items, explaining four service quality dimensions; personnel; physical environment;

supporting services; and programme. The initial development of SQS-FS was taken from in-depth convergent interviews with consumers at a private Turkish fitness center. Following fourteen interviews, the service attributes most frequently mentioned by the participants in the process were identified and gathered in a pool, with 25 service attributes obtained, which formed the basis of the subsequent quantitative scale measure (Yildiz, 2011). As with the previous study (Moxham and Wiseman, 2009) the SQS-FC was developed using a single provider at a single site, raising questions as to how transferable the model is. Polyakova and Mirza (2016) also pick up on the 'emerging' nature of the Turkish fitness industry, which only detracts from its transferable capacity. Similar to previous models (Lam et al., 2005), the SQS-FS omits some critical dimensions of other studies, particularly outcome quality and the interaction quality. However, unlike Lam et al. (2005) this is due to an omission in the method of considering dimensions identified in past literature. The inclusion of an importance measure is similar to other authors (Kim and Kim, 1995; Lentell, 2000), however, unlike Lentell (2000), Yildiz (2011) does not test both measures using component factor analysis. In testing both sets of data, it would have enhanced the validity of the dimensions. Despite some highlighted weaknesses, what the method does contribute, is the applicability of IPA in evaluating service quality for fitness centers and will be reviewed in detail later in the chapter.

5.12 SQAS-19

The final contributor is the SQAS-19 (Service Quality Assessment Scale – 19) by Walker, Farren, Dotterweich, Gould and Walker (2017). Twelve municipal recreation fitness centre managers and three research faculty reviewed the 40-item and 31 invariant item (SQAS) by (Lam et al., 2005) and a proposed six-factor, and 28-item five-factor versions of the SQAS (Yu et al., 2014) which discounted childcare (the study was aimed at customers over 60). The group determined that a shortened version of the five-factor SQAS with only 19 items would provide adequate (Walker et al., 2017). These included; Staff; Program; Locker Room; Physical Facility; and Workout Facility. This model was only tested across two municipal facilities

in Texas and received 151 responses which represents a weakness with regards to its generalisability. Also, as with the SQS-FC model by Yildiz (2011) the instrument did not include customer interaction and outcome dimensions, which in large part is down to adapting the model solely from the SQAS. A positive focus of the study was to simplify an existing scale, as facilities need to continually monitor customer feedback, but limit the drop-out rate. Therefore, survey instruments need to be as short as possible (Fan and Yan, 2010). However, this process does run the risk of being self-fulfilling, and in turn diminishing the effectiveness of the model.

5.13 Applicability of the IPA

In reviewing the relevant fitness industry models, the unique IPA analysis applied by Yildiz (2001) proved compelling as an effective approach for exploring service quality within a fitness centre setting. Despite the fact some weaknesses were highlighted with the model's development, the IPA framework itself enables the researcher to identify the degree of importance of attributes at individual facilities and then produce pragmatic feedback for managers to action, based against service performance.

By bringing together service performance and importance measures, Yildiz (2011) employs the Importance Performance Analysis (IPA), first introduced by Martilla and James (1977), who evaluated the service performance of the automotive industry from the customer's perspective. The IPA framework is regarded as a highly useful and easy-to-use management tool for service sectors (Lovelock et al., 1998). This nontraditional approach has also been identified by Martinez and Martinez (2010) as a useful, analytical tool to measure perceived service quality, within different service settings. This is endorsed by its application in various fields, such as: travel (Wen-Hsien, 2011); tourism (Azzopardi and Nash, 2013); education (O'Neill and Palmer, 2004) and banking (Joseph et al., 2005) to name just a few sectors. Its application within the fitness industry is also supported (Yildiz, 2011; Polyakova and Mirza, 2015), yet it is not widely utilised.

The development of IPA was born out of frustration, in translating attribute research results, into actionable behaviour for marketing programmes. Martilla and James (1977), identify that management may struggle to interpret findings and the practical significance. This can be due to the complexity of the measuring tool and terminology deriving from the research methods. Despite how effective a tool may be at measuring service performance, if it is not practical for those using it, it becomes redundant. Therefore, the IPA matrix is useful for managers who are able to identify those attributes that are most in need of improvement or for possible cost-saving without significant detriment to overall quality (Martinez and Martinez, 2010).

The logic of the IPA is based on attributes or dimensions pertaining to a particular service being evaluated on the basis of how important each attribute is to the customer and how the service's performance is perceived relating to each of the same attributes (Sampson and Showalter, 1999). A comparison between the service performance and importance of each relevant attribute is performed (Sever, 2014; Varela and Manzano, 2007), resulting in a two-dimensional IPA grid displaying the results of the importance and service performance result of each relevant attribute (Abalo et al., 2007). Further to this, it is also possible to display the higher order dimensions in the grid, under which the attributes sit, providing a more general overview of the current status of service quality dimensions, such as physical environment. However, in order to utilise this, the creation of dual items is needed, only then can the customer evaluate the importance of each attribute. As such, the benefit of this approach enables the results to be graphically represented into an easy to understand quadrant, with the attributes falling into one of four sections; 'concentrate here'; 'keep up the good work'; 'low priority'; 'possible overkill'.

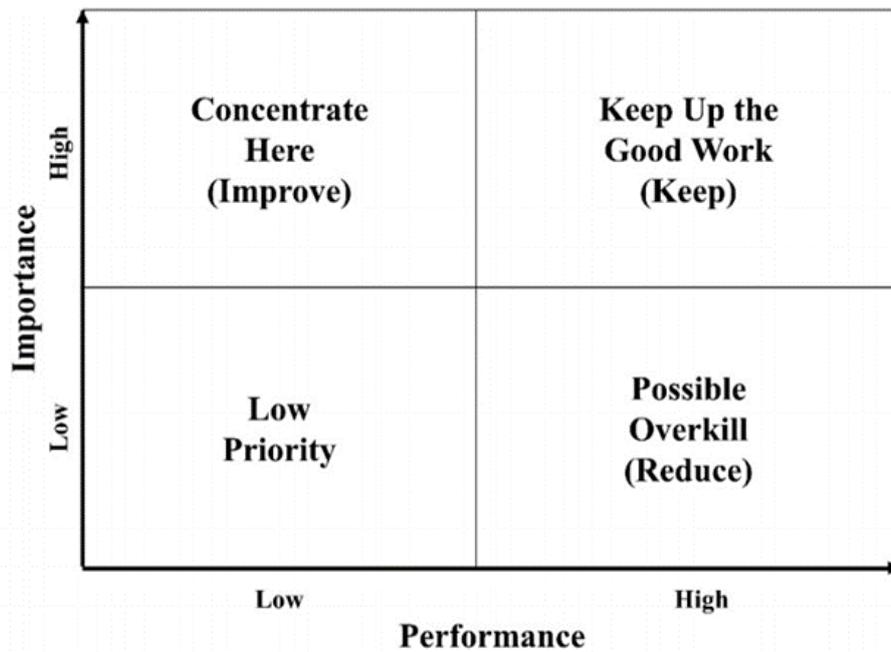


Figure 5.2: IPA framework
(Martilla and James, 1977)

Quadrant I is labelled as “Concentrate Here”. Attributes that fall into this quadrant represent key areas that need to be improved with top priority. Quadrant I is called “the area of urgent needs”. It is very important that the provider will focus special attention on them.

Quadrant II is labelled as “Keep up good work”. It is also sometimes called “the area of reasonable property of needs”. All attributes that fall into this quadrant are the strengths and pillars of the organisations, and they should be the pride of the organisations. Quadrant II does not require from the service provider any serious action, only those necessary to maintain the current level of services.

Quadrant III is labelled as “Low Priority”. Thus, any of the attributes that fall into this quadrant are not important and pose no threat to the organisations. If there are free resources, then the enterprise can consider to improve them.

Quadrant IV is labelled as “Possible Overkill”. It is often called “the area of

quality excess". It denotes attributes that are overly emphasized by the organisations; therefore, organisations should reflect on these attributes, instead of continuing to focus in this quadrant, they should allocate more resources to deal with attributes that reside in quadrant I.

(Ingaldi, 2018:56).

Having the service quality attributes and dimensions displayed in these four clear positions, provides managers with clear outputs from the data and offers a pragmatic basis on which strategies for decisions about service exchange can be made. Thus, scarce resources can be employed more effectively and efficiently by funneling efforts toward the important service attributes requiring improvement. The applicability of IPA would appear to make it an excellent choice for the theoretical framework of any new service quality model, yet some questions still persist (Sever, 2015), with the IPA framework.

5.13.1 Conceptual Issues with IPA

By applying the IPA framework, rather than a more traditional expectation/perception models such as SERVQUAL, it introduces new terms of measure. Service performance is the equivalent of perception, while 'importance' replaces expectations in this instance as a measure and seeks to overcome some of the previously mentioned ambiguity around expectations. Yet, similar to the expectation/perception models such as SERVQUAL, IPA also involves a subtraction between the two variables of service performance and importance (P-I). In the context of service quality, Polyakova and Mirza (2015) see service performance as a reflection of customer perceptions towards current service delivery, while importance is a representation of the relative value that customers assign to a service. Yildiz (2011) believes service performance refers to the customer perceptions about how a service is delivered, whereas importance is a manifestation of the relative value assigned by customers to a service. However, Sever (2015) suggests importance is not precisely and consistently defined in IPA literature (Dwyer et al., 2012; Oh, 2001) leading to its interchangeable use with expectations. To distinguish between the

two, Oh (2001) defines importance as a desired outcome and expectations as a tolerated outcome. Therefore, this demonstrates that the two are distinct as Oh (2001) identifies, and that the concept of value, tied to importance only solidifies this difference. Indeed, the fact that some authors fail to distinguish or correctly apply the terms, is not evidence in itself that the two overlap or do not represent distinctly different measures.

A potential issue for managers is what actions to take for attributes that sit within the same quadrant (Tarrant and Smith, 2002) and perhaps more specifically, those that are border line (Bacon, 2003) and therefore less unambiguous, as a small change in an attribute could place it in a different quadrant. Sever (2015) believes this could lead to unjustified uniformity of decisions, especially as different cut-off points could be used for positioning the discriminating thresholds, which are commonly scale means or actual means. In order to provide some greater clarity to managers, modifications and extensions of the IPA framework have been developed. A number of authors (Oliver, 2010; Ziegler et al., 2012; Azzopardi and Nash, 2013) propose a diagonal line as a discriminating threshold between satisfaction and dissatisfaction instead of the original vertical and horizontal lines, whilst others also suggest the inclusion of more dimensions (Mikulic and Prebezac, 2012). This has led to industry specific IPA frameworks which provide for more detailed outcomes and actions for managers. Yet, this does not truly address the initial issue, as the location of attributes can still be clustered in specific segments or sit at boundary lines. Also, in seeking to address the potential for uniformed outcomes, by expanding the framework and adding layers of complexity, it can begin to contravene its key reason for selection, which is its position as a useful and easy-to-use management tool (Lovelock et al., 1998).

A final significant issue is the selection of appropriate attributes, as this underpins the validity and reliability of results, which in-turn inform the management decisions, reliant on the information revealed from the set of selected attributes (Sever, 2015; Oh, 2001). Although undeniable as to its importance, it is not restricted to IPA analysis but is common for all service

quality measuring tools. Indeed, as covered in the past two chapters, the significance of industry specific attributes is evident and therefore any application of this framework should be preceded by the gathering of data that is reflective of the fitness industry and will inform on the critical attributes.

5.14 Fitness Industry Dimensions and Attributes

As exhibited in table 5.1 at the beginning of this chapter, there have been many studies dedicated to the development of service quality models for the fitness industry over the past two decades (Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007; Moxham and Wiseman, 2009; Yildiz, 2011; Walker et al., 2017). A critical component of the development for all of these is identifying the key attributes and dimensions. The identification and assimilation of key attributes and dimensions is critical for accurately representing all the main components of service quality in the fitness industry, thereby providing valid results for industry providers. Yet, despite the progression of the field over two decades, there is still no agreement in the literature as to what those dimensions are, with the nature and number of service quality dimensions (or attributes) differing depending on the approach of the various authors (Polyakova et al., 2016). Table 5.2 is adapted from Polyakova et al. (2016), with the addition of SQAS 19 (Walker, 2017) and Lentell (2000), highlighting the concentrated recurring dimensions from industry specific models. The dimensions of note include Personnel, Physical environment and Social environment, Programme, Supporting services and Outcome.

Table 5.2: Dimensions of service quality in various models
(adapted from Polyakova et al., 2016)

Dimensions	Authors
Personnel	Alexandris et al. (2004), Chang and Chelladurai (2003), Kim and Kim (1995), Ko and Pastore (2005), Lam et al. (2005), Lentell (2000), Walker et al. (2017), Yildiz (2011)
Physical environment	Alexandris et al. (2004), Kim and Kim (1995), Ko and Pastore (2005), Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2007), Lam et al. (2005), Lentell (2000), Walker et al (2017), Yildiz (2011)
Programme	Chang and Chelladurai (2003), Kim and Kim (1995), Ko and Pastore (2005), Lam et al. (2005), Yildiz (2011), Walker et al. (2017)
Social environment	Alexandris et al. (2004), Chang and Chelladurai (2003), Kim and Kim (1995), Ko and Pastore (2005), Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2007), Lam et al. (2005), Yildiz (2011)
Supporting services	Chang and Chelladurai (2003), Kim and Kim (1995), Ko and Pastore (2005), Lam et al. (2005), Lentell (2000), Yildiz (2011), Walker et al. (2017)
Outcome	Alexandris et al. (2004), Chang and Chelladurai (2003), Ko and Pastore (2005), Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2007)

Despite the lack of consensus on the key service quality dimensions for the fitness industry, table 5.2 provides a starting point from which to explore some of the potential important constituents of fitness centre service quality in the NW. This also provides some guidance as to possible consistency of terminology when identifying and categorising service quality dimensions and characteristics through the phases of data collection and provides indication as to which dimensions may begin to emerge, and therefore, the researcher should be alert to. However, these dimensions can themselves be made up of sub-dimensions, which are the attributes that users experience, and therefore, evaluate.

Despite some emerging similarities with the service quality dimensions, the attributes which make up these are somewhat disordered and provide limited consistency of terminology. For a selected dimension, there are numerous examples of attributes appearing in one or more model, but not

in others, while some attributes appear across models, yet sit under different dimensions. Also, when the same attributes appear across studies, they can have contrasting levels of detail or focus. Utilising 'accessibility' as a common attribute, it is possible to evidence these three variations across models. As an attribute, 'accessibility' is evident in SQS-FC (Yildiz, 2011), SQAS-19 (Walker et al., 2019) and QUESC (Kim and Kim, 1995) yet absent in the Multidimensional and hierarchical model: Adapted to Fitness Industry (Ko and Pastore, 2005). For the identified models where 'accessibility' appears, there is a difference in where it is located, as Kim and Kim (1995) have access situated within the 'convenience' dimension, Yildiz (2011) under 'physical environment' and Walker et al. (2019) 'physical facility'. As regards to its meaning within the model, Yildiz (2011) identifies 'accessibility of facility', whereas Walker et al. (2019) refers to 'accessibility to building', while Kim and Kim (1995) seek more clarity by inquiring about 'easy access to facility' and 'easy access by transportation'.

Another noticeable anomaly is the same attribute representing a dimension in some models while operating as a sub dimension in another. This is the case for a price related attribute which is a dimension in QUESC (Kim and Kim, 1995) and a sub dimension in SQS-FC (Yildiz, 2011), constituting part of the physical environment, which in itself is peculiar. However, rather than a theoretical or methodological criticism, the increasing entropy as models move from dimension to sub dimension, supports the case for regional variations in the importance of and demand for different fitness centre provision, and should be replicated in model development. Yes, there are some emergent overarching commonalities evidenced in the dimensions, but their inclusion and construction needs to be led by the particular attributes demanded at the local level.

5.15 Chapter Five Summary

Moxham and Wiseman, (2009:467) suggested;

"The health and fitness market has been described as blandly premium as there is little differentiation between service offerings

indicating that there is opportunity for competitive advantage to be achieved by focusing on quality”.

With the benefit of hindsight, these are prophetic words and encapsulated the industry at the time, and a sector on the cusp of change. Chapter two describes the rapid change in the industry around the time Moxham and Wiseman, (2009) discussed the ‘blandly premium industry’ which would quickly begin to differentiate between service offerings and, in the process, remold the industry into a dynamic, competitive environment. However, what also emerged was a more discerning consumer (IHRSA, 2013), which resulted in even the new budget providers focusing more intently on service quality.

This chapter has built on the conceptual and methodological approaches to measuring service quality in chapter four, and focused on key service quality models for the fitness industry and the challenge of measuring service quality. In so doing, it has provided some guidance as to terminology and possible dimensions to consider for a service quality model. However, the direction of influence for any new model needs to come from the attributes identified by the members, then the dimensions can be established through component factor analysis. Indeed, despite some consensus on dimensions, this chapter has highlighted the tangled web of attributes across models, and how they sit at different levels (dimension/sub dimension) and within different dimension classifications.

As discussed in the previous two chapters, the decision to use (or not use) expectations as a measure is hotly contested. However, there appears to be a growing preference for using service performance only, which is overwhelmingly used in the fitness industry models (Kim and Kim,1995: Lentell, 2000; Yildiz, 2011; Walker et al., 2019). Alongside service performance, a number of authors also apply an importance measure (Kim and Kim,1995: Lentell, 2000; Yildiz, 2011) which not only provides further confirmation for validity of dimensions, but can be used to create a simple,

practical and operational tool for managers who can identify areas for improvement based on the IPA framework (Martilla and James, 1977). As set out in the rationale (Chapter One), some early observations indicated a lack of UK based models, and for studies to be often based on individual or same category fitness centres. This leads to questions of transferability and applicability of models in different regions and whether or not such models are reflective of the wider industry, which has seen and continues to see considerable change. Therefore, after reviewing the literature in the field, data should be gathered from members of sites representing the wider industry for the region in which the study is taking place. However, before moving onto this, relevant case study sites need to be identified to ensure representation is met. This will be achieved by mapping the industry in the NW to achieve the objective of developing a more comprehensive and contemporary framework of fitness centres.

Chapter 6: Stage One Research

6.1 Introduction

The fitness industry should reflect the demands placed on it by the market. However, this has proven to be a difficult task for fitness centre operators, as customer requirements depend on needs, wants and expectations of each individual and, as Dagger and Sweeney (2007) suggest, these can vary amongst groups of consumers resulting in a diverse range of attributes (see chapter five). The consumers in the fitness industry have also become far more demanding (IHRSA, 2013), leaving clubs faced with the challenge of meeting these expectations. As such, the industry has developed into one of high competition, which has fueled a desire among providers to better manage service quality or get left behind. Due to this competition, the sector has evolved to offer services that can differ vastly among providers (see chapter two). Therefore, this increased variation poses some fundamental questions for researchers in this field. Firstly, consistency in terminology, identifying terms for the grouping of providers and individual sites that represent the focus and boundary of the study. Secondly, setting out what that boundary is. As discussed, the sector has become increasingly competitive and diverse, therefore the criteria and minimum requirements for a sites inclusion to the study need to be established.

In order to provide some clarity to the study, this chapter will seek to disentangle the terminology around the sector, establishing explicit terms and setting a boundary for site inclusion to the study. This will lead onto the first objective, *'To investigate the evolution of the 'fitness industry' within the North West of England. Thereby establishing what constitutes the fitness industry concept'*. Having explored the historical evolution of the industry and after establishing its boundary, it will be possible to offer up a proposed concept for the fitness industry.

The final stage of the chapter will be the method, results and discussion for objective 2a, *'Develop a more comprehensive and contemporary framework of fitness centres'*. Having set a boundary and criteria for site inclusion, the

data to be collected will be determined and the mapping of facilities across the NW can be completed. The results from this will provide a proposed fitness industry framework which can then be used to inform the case studies in the second phase of research.

6.2 Industry Boundaries and key Terminology

Up to this point the terminology used to denote the fitness facilities has been capricious, yet representative of the terminology used by authors in the field and the extent to which the chosen noun to describe the industry or part of the industry is interchangeable. However, this can and does lead to confusion. Sassatelli (2011:17) notes that since the 1970s there has been a marked increase in the number of 'exercise premises' presenting themselves in a new guise. In so doing, there has been a changing understanding of the gym. The gym or to give it its full name, 'gymnasium', as previously identified has ancient historical roots as a term arising from ancient Greek, roughly meaning 'to train naked'. The term gym is now used interchangeably to describe an array of different providers from leisure centres to hotels, who offer access often in the form of memberships, to a specific type of training area.

This extends the idea of early gym provision to include those sites that offer more than a gym space, with wider fitness options and the possibility of additional leisure services beyond that, which would encompass non-fitness provision. Although this does support an expansive range of providers, it offers the idea of a boundary for the industry. Woolf (2008) identifies the change from weight training facilities to more rounded, resort-style facilities since the turn of the century with support services including fitness testing, personal training, running groups and food and beverage. It may be argued that some of these are now a common feature of nearly all providers and only differ on their level of exclusivity. In identifying services provided at fitness facilities, Smith and Maguire (2008) found that a space for individual training which is commonly referred to as the gym area, houses various machines and free weights for both aerobic and anaerobic exercise. A

simple search on thefitmap (2017), lists what standard facilities could be expected, while on the Sport England website a detailed design guide for fitness and exercise spaces (2008) is provided. These provisions are compared in table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Fitness centre facilities

The Fit Map	Sport England
Swimming pools	Reception
Saunas	Office
hot tubs	Changing Rooms and Toilets
* <i>gymnasiums</i>	*Fitness Gym
* <i>aerobics</i>	*Studio(s)
tennis courts	Plant Room
outdoor volleyball	Storage
racquet ball courts	Staff Facilities appropriate to size
pilates	
martial arts	ADDITIONAL FACILITIES
boxing and other classes	Café and/or bar • Retail outlets or concessions • Swimming, training or leisure pools • Health spas, e.g. saunas, steam rooms and pools • Health and beauty treatments, e.g. massage, relaxation, alternative therapies, hairdressing and manicure • Crèche • Squash courts • Tennis courts • Physiotherapy/sports injury clinics • First Aid room

Describing the services/facilities put forward by thefitmap (2017) as standard is somewhat misleading, but it does highlight some of the additional services which are also established by Sport England. Sport England (2008) include core facilities such as a reception, yet the largest provider in the UK has made a conscious decision to remove this from their sites, putting greater emphasis on technology and the co-production of

members. There is some agreement as to core service with the gym and studio picked up by both. However, despite the rise in popularity of classes, the studio is not a fundamental aspect of a fitness facility, with many providers operating a gym only facility. Indeed, other than the gym area, the only other facility which could be described as core, would be toilets/changing room. However, these other facilities and services may be used to differentiate between providers, offering different choices to the consumer (Ehrman, 2006), with the minimum standard expectation being the gymnasium.

Therefore, any facility included in the study should have fitness training as a core element (as oppose to health or wellness which would better describe alternative objectives, which need not include a gym). As the gym is the central construct, it would rule out sports clubs and those sites whose focus is sport specific such as martial arts (however, exceptions could be made to include those that house a gym and offer gym only membership). It would also exclude some municipal provision, often listed under leisure. This could also include leisure centres that offer only sports halls. Such sites, along with local halls also offer different fitness classes, which again would be excluded from the industry. However, there are exceptions to class focused sites, such as CrossFit or women only providers such as Curves who offer anytime gym membership access, despite the business model being formed around group exercise.

In a study of motives for gym use, Crossley (2008) provides a wider perception of the term gym in contrast to 'health club'. Crossley (2008) states that despite using 'gym' to describe the provider, it is a contestable description, as for some, a 'health club' is different to a 'gym'. Gyms have a 'spit and sawdust' feel whereas health clubs are luxurious, and often cater for a more middle class and female clientele. Crossley, (2008:4) applies the term 'gym' for numerous reasons, because his study focused on the activities that took place in the 'gym' area of the club and because users did not use the proper name of the club or used an indexical expression (e.g.

'here'), to refer to 'the gym' rather than 'the health club' and partly because he found 'health club' a more awkward expression. The term 'fitness gym' has also been widely used (Rojek, 2000; Stebbins, 2009; Mirea, 2015; Andreasson and Johansson, 2014). Sassitelli (2010:21) identifies these providers as

'non-competitive environments aimed at providing recreational exercise to boost physical form and well-being..... In some respects, going to a fitness gym is a form of 'serious leisure' which allows the development of a project and to a degree a 'career' within one's own free time'.

This is not to say that all facilities require such devotion to a given fitness activity. Yet, in some environments (fitness gym) as described by Sassitelli (2010), there may be a greater likelihood of achieving an optimal leisure state, which is associated with the seriousness with which the activity is pursued (Elkington, 2011).

Sassatelli (2000, 2010) identifies that the contemporary meaning of gym has gained greater association with the idea of 'fitness', with the description evolving and being added to with a range of neologisms. Sassatelli (2010) identifies some neologisms as 'fitness centres', 'fitness clubs', 'health centres' and 'wellness clubs'. Such neologisms can be added to with earlier terms such as leisure centres (Roberts et al., 1988) which would commonly identify public provision. These terms have been adopted by authors trying to closely align the area of study with a best description across a wide body of research. For instance, in Scandinavia, the term 'fitness exercise' refers to a range of activities and specific bodily ideals, health ideals, or a combination of both (Steen-Johnsen and Kirkegaard, 2010). While Jiung-Bin (2009) uses 'fitness club' to identify the gym and fitness provision for the international tourist hotel. However, due to the diverse providers in the NW region of England, many of these terms appear restrictive and not fully reflective of the variation in sites.

In a wider sense, for studies on gym and fitness, authors refer to the 'fitness industry' (MacIntosh and Doherty, 2007; Andreasson and Johansson, 2014), which appears consistently across research disciplines when describing the industry for studies focusing on various aspects of gym fitness. This term best describes the industry boundary in which this study is focused, but does not provide the correct term for the individual sites that sit within this industry. Numerous terms have been explored, yet many do not capture the essence of the wider industry, including providers such as hotels. As mentioned, fitness centre is also a widely used neologism (Sassitelli, 2010) and would appear the best term to encompass the range of providers within the fitness industry and encapsulates the nature of the sites being selected and analysed in this thesis.

6.3 The Fitness Industry Concept

Having reviewed the relevant terms to describe the boundary of study, the fitness industry has been adopted as the relevant term, while the providers within it are referred to as fitness centres. As a concept for the study, the fitness industry is defined by its fitness centres, which should operate within a designated building, offering generic fitness training provision via a commonly accepted gym area, incorporating training equipment for aerobic and anerobic exercise, whose access is not confined to sport participants or group sessions.

This aligns with the idea that any facility included in the study should have fitness training as a core element as opposed to health and wellbeing which would better describe alternative objectives which may not include a gym. The class distinction is included to avoid the inclusion of stand-alone group exercise, which can take place in most spaces, such as schools or town halls. Although the service design for some operators is around classes, many also provide individual access to use the gym outside of those times and should therefore be included.

6.4 Method and Fitness Centre Philosophy

Having established the fitness centres to be included in the study, the next part of this chapter will consider the data to be collected for analysing the structure of the industry. As well as exclusivity, Andreasson and Johansson (2016) identify the variability between sites based on seriousness. In this way some providers become niche, focusing on weight training and body building or women only gyms. Sassatelli (2010) notes how such variabilities promote differing philosophies at fitness centres which attract different users. So, rather than focusing on service offering, the philosophy or beliefs for a given site may offer a clearer more attractive route to categorisation of modern providers. This is especially pertinent with providers from across the sectors having very different objectives. Public providers have a responsibility to offer a service to the whole community, not just high demand user groups or services that offered greatest financial return. However, as discussed, the drive to a more self-sustaining public sector does put pressure on this approach. The vision of sites such as CrossFit and how these feed into the business model, with members willing to forgo more exclusive facilities with greater amenities for the same price, largely due to the culture and training format, provides further justification for considering the philosophy of different providers. CrossFit has become a big contributor to modern day fitness, with some pointing to its cultural differentiation and potential categorisation as “extreme fitness” (Powers and Greenwell, 2016). Moreover, the combination of service elements and corporate values is significantly associated with member satisfaction and their retention (Macintosh and Doherty, 2007). However, the difficulty is many smaller facilities tend not to have a vision or mission for the business. This is not to say that clubs do not set out a philosophy or vision for potential users, with many providing information online either through their website or Facebook, in an ‘about us’ section. This information provides some detail on the philosophy of a given facility and offers a valid approach to comparing philosophy of providers, big and small within the fitness industry.

6.4.1 Content Analysis

After collecting the relevant statements from providers that best set out their philosophy, qualitative content analysis was used to offer a flexible and accessible approach to analyse the qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Through content analysis, it is possible to distil words into fewer content-related categories and it is assumed that when classified, words, phrases and the like share the same meaning (Cavanagh, 1997). Taking an inductive approach, the categories were derived from the data, however chapters two and five did offer some insight as to possible key characteristics that may develop priori themes that could be used. Also, from a conceptual perspective, having explored the dimensions and sub dimensions for service quality models (chapters four and five), it provided direction for coding and building of categories. In line with the Pragmatic philosophical position (see chapter seven), content analysis is a research method for making valid inferences from data, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, and a practical guide to action (Krippendorff, 2018). Also, as Pragmatism is focused on the objective as the driver in choosing the most effective method, content analysis would appear the logical fit for achieving objective 2a, a categorisation of the fitness industry. According to Elo and Kyngas (2008) the aim of content analysis is to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon and the outcome of the analysis is concepts or categories describing the phenomenon. When starting the analysis, the researcher must decide whether to analyse only the manifest content or the latent content as well (Elo and Kyngas, 2008). As it was secondary data being analysed and coming from statements online, only the manifest content was considered. However, in interpreting the statements some discretion was needed in identifying the characteristics that the provider believed important and represents their beliefs and philosophy. This contrasts with characteristics and sentences that reflect a wider position about fitness, health, engagement, facilities etc.

Although this was the primary method used to develop a categorisation, further details were needed such as location and name. Also, it was an

opportunity to collect extra data that may contribute to further insight as to the variation of providers and may be useful for further future research on the fitness industry. The first of these, which appears on the timeline (chapter two) and in the list of additional services, is exercise classes.

6.4.2 Additional Data Variables

Aerobics, developed by Dr Copper and brought to the masses by Jane Fonda in the 1980's has helped spawn an array of exercise classes, using training and exercise techniques from across the globe. Whether offered via class specialists, such as Les Mills or class centric providers such as CrossFit, the significance of classes in the industry is evident and offers an initial distinction between gyms, with those who offer classes and those that do not.

Another important provision that influences consumers when choosing a facility, are pools and wet areas. Adopted by the fitness industry in 1950's America from European health spas, services such as saunas, steam rooms and Jacuzzis are a common sight at many fitness centres today. It should be noted that public pools have been present in the North West of England for far longer, with many leisure centres created in the 1970's being built alongside Victorian municipal pools or replacing them. In a Sport England guidance document for swimming pools (2013) it identifies that there are approximately 4,614 swimming pools sites in England. Approximately 25% of this water area is provided by the education sector, 46% by local authorities (or trusts) and 26% by the commercial sector. Although there are significant numbers of pools across England, not all are linked to a fitness centre, with some stand-alone facilities and those from the education sector. Despite the popularity of swimming, with Sport England (2016) data showing 2.5 million people swam weekly in 2015-16, the decision to offer a wet site service is not a given, mainly due to the significant cost, resulting in an increased fee passed onto users. Therefore, providers will assess the cost to benefit ratio of providing this service with significant consideration of the target user. As with classes, the provision or non-provision of wet sites is a

significant variable when distinguishing between providers.

As discussed previously, after the most recent recession, the health and fitness industry in the UK saw a significant shift in the private sector. The explosion of the budget gym resulted in them creating their own designated classification (Mintel, 2014) among the private providers. Clearly price is of significance to any provider and will reflect the range of services (tangible and non-tangible) the facility wishes to provide. Traditionally, pricing would be seen as monthly membership in the private sector and a choice of pay as you go in the public sector. However, providers from either side of this divide have adopted either both pricing strategies or cafeteria style pricing policy, considering time/geography/service range/exclusivity. Sport England (2011) sought to distinguish the different access across the regions of England (Figure 6.1).

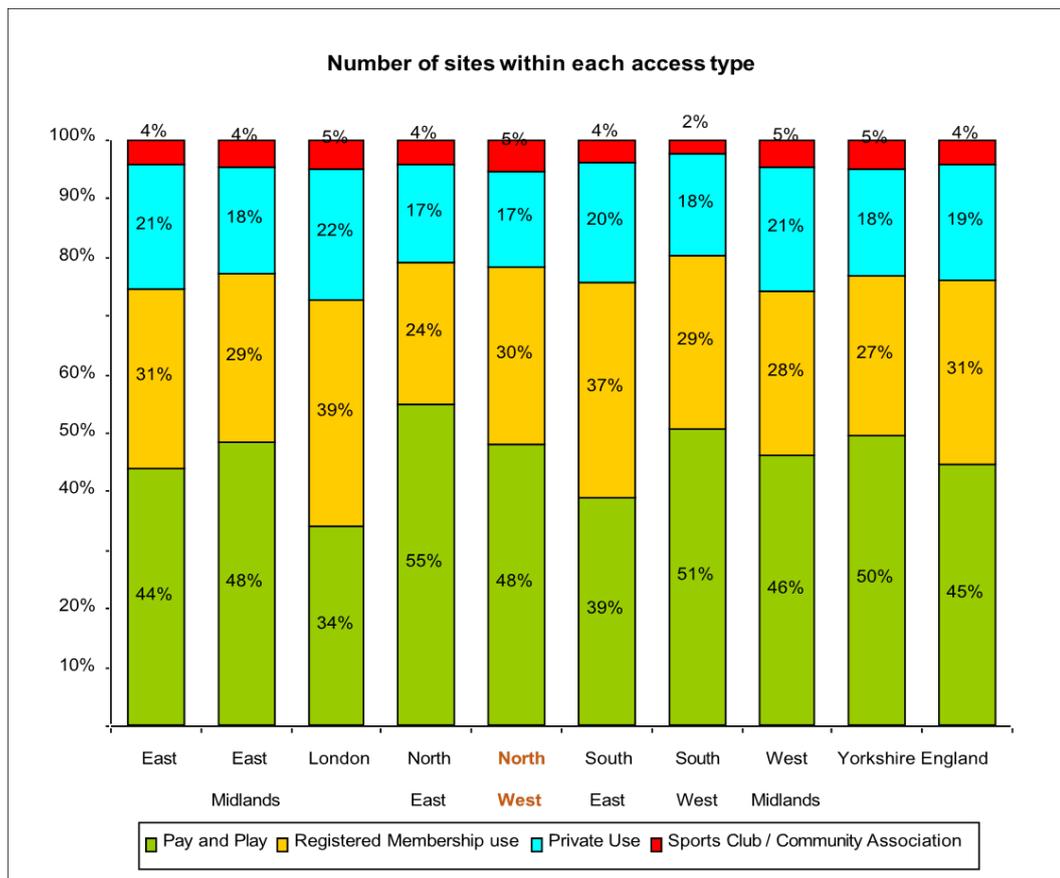


Figure 6.1: Site access

(Sport England, 2011)

The NW region is comparable to the other regions, with 48% choosing to pay to play for a given visit and 30% through a membership. The budget gym especially has challenged the orthodoxy of the annual membership contracts with monthly fees, which had been a constant complaint about the industry with members tied in for long periods. In an article by health club management, the CEO of The Gym Group, John Treharne, specifically identifies membership 'flexibility' as the driver behind the growth in youth membership. Budget providers started offering more flexible short-term contracts and even pay as you go, meaning greater choice and power for the consumer in choosing or changing provider. However, the membership is still dominant, as demonstrated by Mintel (2016) in figure 6.2.

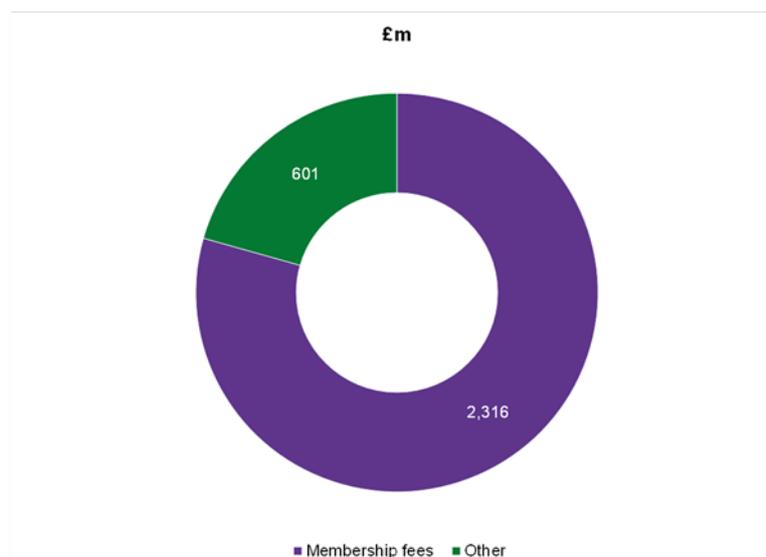


Figure 6.2: Consumer expenditure at private clubs
(Mintel, 2016)

As such, price is not easily comparable between providers with different membership options resulting in a greater range in pricing. Also, price at one site may include use of pool and access to classes, while at a competitor it does not, with extra services offered at an additional fee. Through the pricing strategy, facilities can also control ease of access (Smith and Maguire, 2008), with day passes, monthly memberships or a combination of the two.

Differing schemes can offer flexibility and opportunity to communities or just as easily can be used as a barrier to entry and exclusivity (Andreasson and Johansson, 2016). The two traditional pricing methods (pay as you go / monthly membership) still account for almost all forms of payment options (weekly membership is available at some gyms but are still rare) and so offer the most logical route for comparison. However, as stated, both options can result in further cost by using further services if not covered in the initial fee, while monthly memberships offer further complications with annual contracts and multiple site use. When comparing price across providers, it needs to account for these variable price setting approaches. As such, identifying single use fees, joining fee and identifying the membership that offers greatest access across services for each site was the most logical approach to achieving a valid and comparable range of prices, particularly for pay as you go.

The traditional approach to categorising providers has focused on sector of provision. Through analysing the changes in gym provision in the UK, it is evident the perception of public/private partition has shifted. Add into the mix the role public facility tendering, and what we mean by public sector starts to become more complex, as local authority facilities continue to alter in increasingly different ways, including trusts and delivery from the private and third sector. However, the significant level of public facilities across the NW, potentially offering a different philosophy on provision due to their social purpose provides reason to identify sector of provision. This can also be taken further, providing greater detail and clarity about each facility by separating out the structure of the facility. In the public sector this could mean trust or council run for example, and in the private sector we can distinguish between sole providers, large chains and hotels. Furthermore, in the private sector primarily, some providers have become niche and target specific segments of the market, such as weight training or women only gyms. One example is Curves, who operate women only facilities and represents an area of increasing growth and distinction. Therefore, as well as identifying the traditional sector and operating structure, the addition of

female-only provision was also captured.

The final variables collected are more obvious, including the name and any parent company of the provider and the location which included the county within the NW, district and post code. The final selection of variables is set out in table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2: Data variables for mapping

Location	County	district	Post code
Provider	Name	Parent company	
Sector	Sector	Structure	
Price	Joining fee	Membership fee	Guest fee
Wet/Dry	Wet/dry		
Classes	Classes		
Women only	Women only site or service		
Beliefs	Characteristics		

6.4.3 Data Collection: google maps as a research tool

Online maps have become an extremely useful tool for researchers across a range of disciplines including archaeology (Myers, 2010) and the social sciences (Vandeviver, 2014). They have opened the opportunity to test and explore in ways that would otherwise not be possible, due to limitations including cost, access, time and technological capability. Google maps is the most commonly used online map, being free and easy to use. The custom tabs also allow users to include layers of additional content such as places, labels and businesses and through the search function specific businesses can be located within a defined area. In a study on restaurant ratings, Mathayomchan and Taecharungroj (2020) searched on Google Maps for restaurants in the three biggest cities in the UK. Restaurants were

searched by using the key terms 'restaurant near [the name of the city]' to collect all available restaurants. Then, Google Maps was used to search by cuisine, therefore all types of cuisine were specified to collect restaurants that were not included in the first round of searching.

In order to complete the mapping of fitness centres across the NW a similar process was used. However, as the geographic area was not limited to specific cities a search using 'fitness centre near....' would not be appropriate. Therefore, after completing a test search for an area known to the researcher, it was decided that the only way to ensure all the NW was captured was by (approximately) focusing on one mile square zones (for high density areas this would increase to 200m square) and undertaking separate key word searches. Once the search was complete and findings noted, the map was moved across to the left of the search area and another search carried out. However, moving between the aerial and map images gave an indication as to the geographic area and allowed remote areas to be skipped. As terminology is not defined in the industry, a range of terms were developed to be used on each area, in order to improve reliability of locating all eligible providers. The three searches used were (1) gym; (2) fitness centre; (3) hotel. These searches proved most effective on the test area of pre-known sites. On identification of any result, the site would be ruled in or out based on the earlier refinement of what met the criteria of a 'fitness centre'. When ruled in, 14 data variables were gathered (where possible) through secondary data on each website and where relevant, their social media, providing an extensive data set of fitness centre providers in the NW. Analysis of the data was primarily quantitative in nature with a range of descriptive results produced. However, qualitative analysis was adopted to gain comparable data around the area of core beliefs for each site. This was conducted by accessing the providers mission statement, or more often, their 'aims' or 'about us' on their website or Facebook page where applicable.

6.5 Results and Discussion

On completion of the Google mapping exercise, 667 fitness centres were identified across five counties in 39 districts within the NW of England (appendix one). Descriptive statistics were produced for the additional data variables before conducting content analysis on the fitness centre statements. A breakdown of the traditional categorisation by sector compares favourably with analysis from Leisure Database (2017). The Leisure Database (2017) found a 60% (private) to 40% (public) split for the UK, which compared similarly to the findings for the NW of England which had 67.5% (private), 29.5% (public) and 3% (voluntary). Price has been used as a categorisation method by Oxygen Consulting (2020) while LeisureDB (2017) point to continued success of the budget gyms (less than £20 monthly membership) who hold 15% of the private market across the UK. The data for the NW puts the figure at 31% which can be explained by their continued expansion, especially across the NW.

Mintel also highlight the sudden rise in users taking up pay as you go options, which is reflected in the pay as you go/guest fee option offered at 41.5% of sites. A Sport England guidance document for swimming pools (2013) identified that approximately 46% of pools are provided by local authorities (or trusts), which marries up with the 50% of public sector wet sites identified in the NW. The data collected would appear to broadly align with other recent data sources relating to the fitness industry for the UK/England, providing confidence in the results and progressing with further analysis. Also, the significance of classes was strongly supported, with 97.5% of public facilities and 87.5% of private facilities offering this service.

As expected, for some sites it was not possible to capture constituent terms, with a total of 48 sites having to be removed from further analysis. This left 619 sites to be analysed and identify key constituent terms that the provider felt best identified them. On initial analysis there were 33 constituent terms, from which primary characteristics could be developed. One or two primary characteristics began to emerge for the vast majority of providers. However,

some sites initially coded many more characteristics as they tried to put across all aspects of their service, rather than providing a more thoughtful philosophy or description of what they thought was their core strengths. When testing these, it was found to break down the categorisations too far, making the categories so numerous as to be only representative of a tiny fraction of the providers. Therefore, further analysis of these statements was conducted with greater scrutiny placed on which constituents listed, were most important to the provider, rather than coding all constituents mentioned. After this, 11 primary characteristics were proposed, from which all fitness centres could be categorised by either one or two primary characteristics which are set out in table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3: Primary characteristics for fitness centre operators

<u>Primary Characteristic</u>	<u>Grouping of the Constituent Terms</u>
social environment	1 inclusive/friendly/fun/welcoming/family/members community
local community	2 local community
personalised	3 personalised
wellbeing	4 health/wellbeing
personnel	5 service/advice/coaching/experience
physical environment	6 equipment/facilities/tanning/clean/quality
training method	7 bodybuilding/powerlifting/weightlifting/ sport/functional
price	8 value/price/accessible/affordable
women	9 women/gender
luxury	10 relaxed/exclusive/
ethical	11 ethical

For the 619 sites a total of 1086 constituent terms were found and later aligned under their relevant primary characteristic. Of the 619 sites 152 could be categorised by a single characteristic, with the remaining 467 sites categorised under two primary characteristics as seen in table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Fitness centre characteristics

themes														
social environment	social env													
local community	20	local com												
personalised	8	0	person'd											
health & wellbeing	10	105	14	wellbeing										
personnel	14	1	7	0	personnel									
physical environment	27	6	2	1	20	phys env								
training method	14	1	0	1	0	3	train meth							
price	21	33	5	7	9	78	0	price						
women	9	0	1	2	0	4	0	0	women					
luxury	4	0	7	1	2	16	0	0	0	luxury				
ethical	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	ethical			
single item	36	3	21	11	12	23	23	8	5	2	8	single	Total	
TOTAL	163	183	65	152	65	180	42	161	21	32	22	152	1238	
							667-48= 619		(1238-152-152)/2 + 152 = 619					

Polyakova and Mirva (2016) analysed existing fitness industry service quality models and found the most common dimensions fell into six categories. Of these, most attention across the models is focused personnel, physical environment and social environment. On coding the constituent terms for sites in the NW, characteristics of personnel, physical environment and social environment all emerged. This would suggest that sites are aware of what consumer see as important and are looking to match this with their own strategies. Further critical analysis into the characteristics was undertaken by conducting cross tabulations, creating a multiple response set, which produced some clear patterns in the data. Of the 11 characteristics; social environment, local community, wellbeing, physical environment and price account for 77.2% of site characteristics (see table 6.5). These five characteristics provided three distinct categories, which mapped as, Wellbeing and local community 17% (105 sites); Physical environment and price 12.5% (78 sites); Social environment 6% (36 sites). These three discreet categories account for 35.5% of fitness centres in the NW.

Table 6.5: Significant fitness centre groupings by characteristics

<i>characteristics</i>													Total
social environment	social envi												
local com	20	local com											
personalised	8	0	person'd										
wellbeing	10	105	14	wellbeing									
personnel	14	1	7	0	personnel								
phys environment	27	6	2	1	20	phys env							
training method	14	1	0	1	0	3	train meth						
price	21	33	5	7	9	78	0	price					
women	9	0	1	2	0	4	0	0	women				
luxury	4	0	7	1	2	16	0	0	0	luxury			
ethical	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	ethical		
single theme	36	3	21	11	12	23	23	8	5	2	8	single	Total
Total	163	183	65	152	65	180	42	161	21	32	22	152	1238
no theme=48							667-48=619	(1238-152-152)/2 +152=619					

In seeking an alternative approach to framing the fitness industry in a way that is more accountable to its evolving variations was always going to be a challenge. Indeed, despite five characteristics representing over three quarters of providers, when this is refined down to discrete categories it represents just over a third. However, when this data was compared against the traditional sector of provision (appendix two) the same five dimensions were still evident, with a significant split between public and private sectors. In the private sector 'price/physical environment' was very significant in its relative response frequency of 77, which accounts for nearly all providers in this category. The 'Social environment only' characteristic was also notable accounting for 30 of the 36 sites overall. In the public sector 'local community/health' is very significant in its relative frequency response (99 compared to 105 sites overall). The public sector providers accounted for 90% of all sites that identified with 'local community'. This includes the 'local community/price' category (32 sites) and accounts for over 95% of the fourth highest category overall (see table 6.5 above, in yellow). As such, it was decided not to take this category forward as a case study as it was very similar to the highest frequency category, which was also made up by the public sector and was most heavily represented by trusts. Similar analysis was used comparing the characteristics against price and business structure (appendix two) it was found that budget gyms overwhelmingly accounted for 'physical environment and price' and would therefore be chosen as a case study. Social environment was a more confused

characteristic, however when analysed against business structure, it was found that affiliates and sole providers were the primary sites that identified with this. These sites were significantly represented by box gyms with limited services beyond a gym area. Importantly, the affiliates were all CrossFit providers who also accounted for 12 of the 14 total sites that identified with 'Social environment and Training method' and therefore, would be used as the third case study.

In finding a framework for the industry, there is a trade-off to be made. Firstly, a framework which offers a more simple, limited and discrete structure, also provides categories that are evasive in describing the true variation of fitness centres. Alternatively, the framework in this study is more fluid and complex than other categorisations such as using sector or price (Oxygen Consulting, 2020), but offers a more detailed and authentic reflection on the choice and variation in the fitness industry. Other authors have suggested categorising in other ways, such as Hill and Green (2012) who categorised health and fitness facilities into three main categories. These are, special purpose facilities (e.g. weight training, group exercise); single-purpose facilities (e.g. cycling, swimming); and multi-use facilities. However, the site should sit comfortably within its identified industry, as set out earlier in the chapter. This categorisation would appear to extend to sport specific facilities rather than health and fitness and may be better suited to describing defined services within a facility rather than between them. Clearly, using definitive categorisations with discrete boundaries fails to inform as to the complexity of the industry. Even though it could be argued that public sector provision (even with its multiple models of delivery) works as a category, it would be impractical to use private sector as another, as its varied provision was made evident in this analysis.

6.6 Chapter Six Summary

Moving from a sector to a characteristic categorisation, it became evident that key characteristics aligned with certain providers. Chain facilities (represented primarily by budget gyms) and trusts emerged as the most

predominant providers within the top two categories of 'local community and wellbeing' and physical environment and price'. As the two largest provider types in the industry (by membership), it is perhaps no surprise they emerged through the categorisation. A further category made up of distinctly different types of providers (primarily gym only sites, weighted towards the CrossFit affiliates) establishes the requirement for three case studies in total to be used in the next phase of research, which will provide a broad perspective of the fitness industry. However, the specific selection of the three case study sites will be covered in the following chapter.

Those fitness centres within the three emergent categories are also represented in other similar categories, (e.g. public sector trusts covering 'local community and wellbeing' as well as 'local community and price'). This shows that the category boundaries are more permeable than other frameworks, however this also means selecting specific case studies will still be reflective (to a greater or lesser extent) of further sites sat outside the three categories. As noted, the three discreet categories account for 35.5% of the industry, but the five characteristics accounts for 77.2%. Also, despite its weakness in not providing a simple more binary set of categories, it is superior in achieving the objective of developing a more comprehensive and contemporary framework of fitness centres. This objective has enabled the mapping of the fitness industry in the NW and has established three case studies to take forward, which are broadly reflective of this industry. However, before progressing onto the case studies, a closer examination of research philosophy is required as there is a need to apply other methods in order to explore the selected facilities and their members. Therefore, these issues will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Research Methodology and Methods

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will set out the philosophical research position underpinning the study, Pragmatism, which aids in deciding which data should be collected, analysed and used. The previous chapter has already exercised some research methods undertaking empirical enquiry, which itself is informed by earlier exploratory chapters. Specifically, the research sought a contemporary framework of fitness centres for the NW which was necessary before this point as it would inform the second phase of research, the case studies. Ultimately, the methodology is driven by the research aim, however, like a fitness centre manager striving for organisational improvement, this requires an ability to identify problems, to address these and search for potential solutions (Skinner et al., 2018). In seeking the best solution to the problems set, the research onion (figure 7.1; Saunders et al., 2009) which presents the layers of the methodological decisions for research and provides a range of options, has proved a useful tool in deciding on the research design. Therefore, the focus for of this chapter is to justify the choice of research design whilst considering the research objectives, research sample, data collection techniques and data analysis. However, before getting to the design stage, any researcher should first consider their philosophical position.

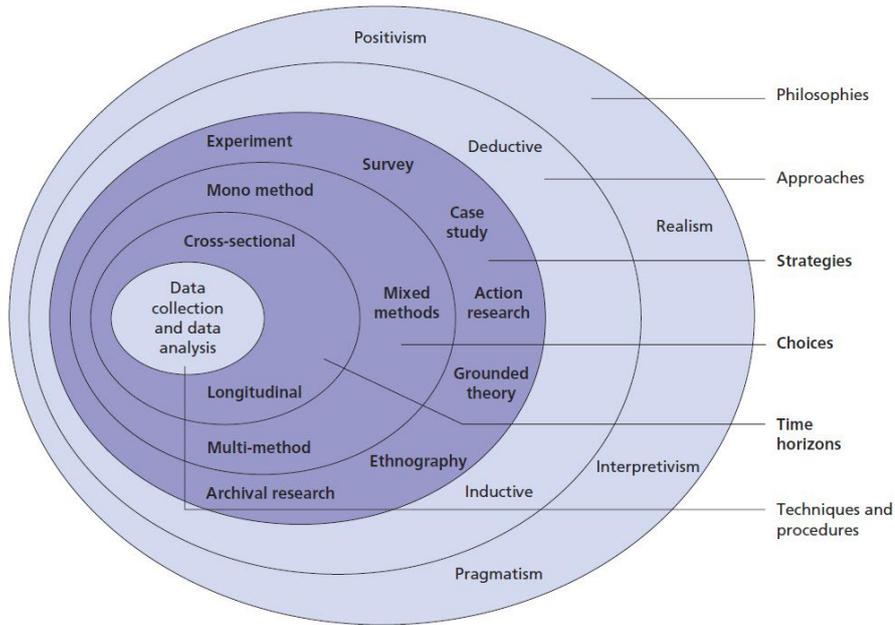


Figure 7.1: Research onion
(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009)

7.2 Research Philosophy

A primary objective in any study is establishing a philosophical position, as the philosophical research basis determines the research design, underpins judgement and provides reasoning for research methods (Proctor, 1998). The researcher's philosophy can be seen to provide clarity to the context of the study, a grasping of the problem and the need for problem-solving action (Giarelli and Chambliss, 1988). Yet, in so choosing a position it should not cause discrete boundaries of thought or discordant in the approach to conceiving the research. Rather, establishing a certain philosophy enables the researcher to better communicate their reasoning, as their position is set against traditionally accepted approaches. This helps not only the researcher, but the research community in providing better interpretation and reduce the effect of researchers talking past each other with criticisms formed without considering/knowing the philosophical position of authors. It may be argued that choosing a research philosophy is influenced itself by the specific research field in which a study takes place and in the social science field, a range of paradigms are adopted. In social research, the term

'paradigm' is used to refer to the philosophical assumptions or to the basic set of beliefs that guide the actions and define the worldview of the researcher (Lincoln et al., 2011). Therefore, without nominating a paradigm, there is no real basis for the developing of methodological research design. Skinner et al. (2014) believe that most sport management researchers have an intellectual framework that governs the way they perceive the world and their own place within it, even if they are unable to articulate just what that framework is.

7.3 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is used to describe the theoretical framework (Mertens, 2005) and influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted (Mackenzie et al, 2006). Cohen and Manion (1994:38) describe it as the "philosophical intent or motivation for undertaking a study". Guba and Lincoln (1998:200) suggest it represents a worldview which for the individual defines;

"The nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as for example, cosmologies and theologies do".

However, Biesta (2010) questions the very notion of a paradigm, in that it tends to bring with it a range of assumptions that do not necessarily have to go together. Such practice turns the notion of paradigm into a container concept and therefore a binary choice. This so-called 'incompatibility thesis' (Howe, 1988) demonstrates how rigid positions can be taken up. In breaking down the paradigm, Sandelowski, (2000:247) suggests paradigms signal;

"Distinctive ontological (view of reality), epistemological (view of knowing and relationship between knower and to-be known), methodological (view of mode of inquiry), and axiological (view of what is valuable) positions".

This is supported by Biddle (2015) who suggests four fundamental concepts

constitute a philosophy of knowledge: ontology (the nature of reality and how we understand what is), epistemology (the relationship between the knower and what is known; how we know what is), axiology (the nature of ethics and what we value), and methodology (our rationale for the tools we choose to interrogate these other concepts). This structure of a paradigm can be seen in figure 7.2.

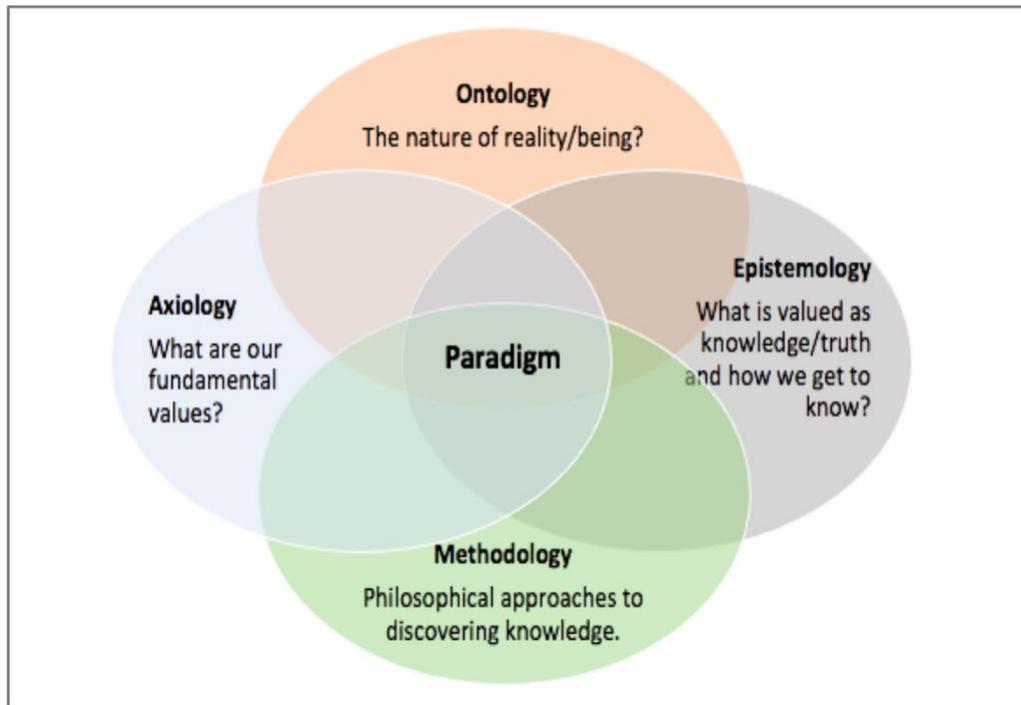


Figure 7.2: The basic elements of a research paradigm
(Henry and Macpherson, 2019)

For more than a century, the advocates of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms have engaged in ardent dispute (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), with the traditional (quantitative) approach consistent with what is commonly called a positivist philosophy (Ayer, 1959; Maxwell and Delaney, 2017). This approach is emergent from the natural sciences and therefore social observations should be treated as entities in much the same way that physical scientists treat physical phenomena and the researcher does not affect the entities that are subject to observation (Johnson et al., 2004). This fixed perspective helps set out a clear objective ontological position. It is possible to consider this through moral values; are

they real and independent of us (objective), or just a construct of human feelings (subjective). This begins to get to the core of a critical aspect of the research paradigm as highlighted previously, ontology. Grix (2010:59) believes it is;

“The starting point of all research after which ones epistemological and methodological positions logically flow”. It is the assumptions and beliefs we hold about reality and more specifically, about the reality that is the object of research (Biesta, 2010).

On the opposite side of the debate is the qualitative paradigm, which includes the constructivists and interpretivists, which is based on the idealist German tradition, which seeks to understand meanings rather than provide explanations. Considering the ontological position, it is subjective and socially constructed as objective reality does not exist. Johnson et al. (2004:14) states that;

“These purists contend that multiple-constructed realities abound, that time and context-free generalizations are neither desirable nor possible, that research is value-bound, that it is impossible to differentiate fully causes and effects, that logic flows from specific to general (e.g., explanations are generated inductively from the data), and that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality”.

Therefore, all understanding of reality or phenomena depend on the time, situation, complexity and individual. At times these two seemingly incompatible approaches have been divisive among some researchers, as each seeks to promote its superior position. The qualitative side, arguing for deep, rich observational data, while on the quantitative side have hard, generalisable data, yet some fail to see/accept the benefits of an alternative approach. However, in more recent times the social science field appears to have made a notable shift in this area, as demonstrated in figure 7.3.

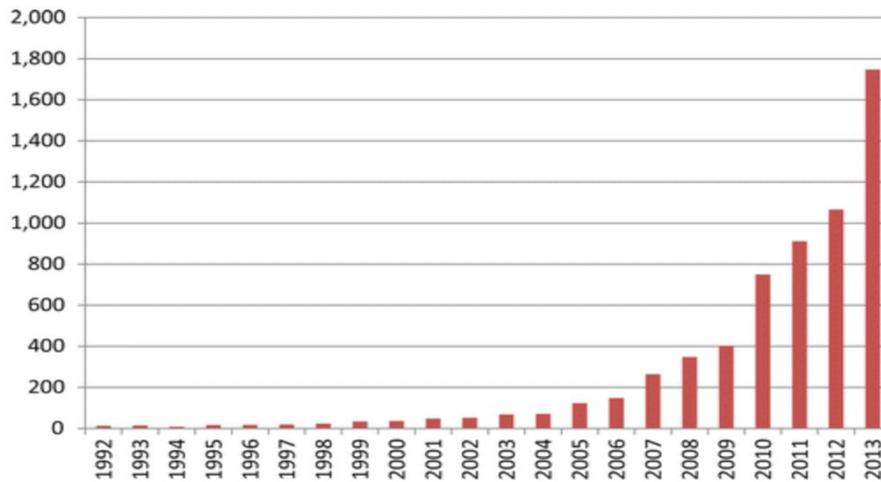


Figure 7.3: Increasing published social science mixed methods research
(Biddle and Schafft, 2015)

The growing application of mixed methods research in the wake of the “paradigm wars” of the 1970s and 1980s (Topping and Timmins, 2019) suggests a less rigid formation of researcher philosophy, especially from the ontological position. Yet, this is not to say mixed methods should replace either of these approaches but rather to accept and identify the benefits/weaknesses or these in a specific study. As a study sitting in the social science field, with a number of rather different objectives seeking meaning and explanation, mixed methods would appear the logical approach.

As previously highlighted, the epistemological position is a further fundamental concept of research paradigms, which considers the relationship between the knower and what is known, or, how we know what is. It is closely coupled with ontology but is more concerned about the most appropriate ways of enquiring into the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). Epistemology provides a philosophical grounding for establishing what kinds of knowledge are possible (Blaikie, 2007). Tronvoll et al. (2011) offer a concise, two-part description of epistemology for the researcher. Firstly, ‘how we know the world’ and secondly, ‘the relationship between the researcher and the research topic’.

Cunliffe (2006) highlights the inter-dependent relationship between epistemology and ontology, and how one both informs and depends upon the other. In resolving the ontological position, it informs as to a particular epistemological approach. Therefore, if you consider the nature of reality to be fixed, as fits a positivist position, then this would lead you to adopting an approach that attempts to discover an objective truth. If you deem reality to be ever-changing and evolving over time (interpretivists), then you would likely seek to understand the subjective nature of the reality from a variety of perspectives/individuals/groups. However, other paradigms offer a route out of this binary position.

Critical realism can hold an objective reality ontological position, but interpreted through social conditioning, while the epistemological approach relies upon observing the phenomena by using data but explaining the information within the context that has been generated (Bryman, 2012). This would lead to a quantitative and qualitative approach (mixed methods). The rise in mixed methods approaches to social research can be ascribed to adopting paradigms such as critical realism. However, there is no agreement as to what paradigms are correct for pursuing social research, instead various typologies of paradigms exist (Brand, 2009). The paradigm is used to prescribe certain ways of progressing studies, yet as demonstrated, paradigms may restrict the researcher's creative curiosity, limiting their sociological imagination (Feilzer, 2010). As such, others have suggested the important factors in selecting research approaches may well be the research problem, 'what one wants to learn suggests how one should go about it' (Trauth, 2001). It is noticeable and perhaps unsurprising that paradigms which overtly recommend mixed method approaches allow the question to determine the data collection and analysis methods, gathering quantitative and qualitative data and applying the data at different stages (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, the qualitative or quantitative position is immaterial, there should be no meaningful conflict and we should use whatever tools are best suited to assist us (Gummesson, 2003). This supports a further paradigm, which encourages mixed methods and has

growing support in social science, Pragmatism (Johnson et al., 2004: Pansiri, 2005; Biesta, 2010; Morgan, 2014; Biddle et al., 2015: Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). The terminology associated with Pragmatism is compared to other significant research philosophies in table 7.1 (Mackenzie et al., 2006). This provides some initial insight as to its differentiation and uniqueness as a research dimension and why it would be a logical selection when using mixed methods.

Table 7.1: Language associated with research paradigms (Mackenzie et al., 2006)

Positivist/ Postpositivist	Interpretivist/ Constructivist	Transformative	Pragmatic
Experimental Quasi-experimental Correlational Reductionism Theory verification Causal comparative Determination Normative	Naturalistic Phenomenological Hermeneutic Interpretivist Ethnographic Multiple participant meanings Social and historical construction Theory generation Symbolic interaction	Critical theory Neo-marxist Feminist Critical Race Theory Freirean Participatory Emancipatory Advocacy Grand Narrative Empowerment issue oriented Change-oriented Interventionist Queer theory Race specific Political	Consequences of actions Problem-centred Pluralistic Real-world practice oriented Mixed models

7.4 Pragmatism

The philosophical school of Pragmatism traces its roots back to the USA in the late 19th century, focusing on the practical consequences of social reality and as such, embraces plurality of methods. Its emergence came about as a challenge to the traditional assumptions about the nature of knowledge, truth and research inquiry (Biesta, 2010), a scepticism over the possibility of achieving perfect knowledge through positivist practice (Ormerod, 2006). Kaushik and Walsh (2019) state that the pragmatist philosophy holds that human actions can never be separated from the past experiences and from the beliefs that have originated from those experiences. Therefore, thoughts are intrinsically linked to action and

individuals take actions as a judgement of their probable outcome, then in turn use the results to predict the consequences of similar actions in the future. The idea of informed actions through experience and knowledge fits this study, which seeks to inform the stages of research through findings and outcome, to account for the changing fitness industry. This aligns with another aspect of Pragmatism, which is based on the notion that there is indeed such a thing as reality, yet, it is ever changing, based on our actions. So due to this paradox, attempts to find an enduring external reality are doomed to failure (Morgan, 2014). The concept of finding a reality outside of ourselves has been referred to by Dewey (1929: 40) as a 'spectator theory' of knowledge and goes on to say "we live in a world in process, the future, although continuous with the past is not its bare repetition". This supports the structure of the study and its objectives, seeking potentially new or changed meanings and explanations in a dynamic industry. In this way the study aims to avoid making assumptions about key aspects of the industry which guide the thesis and have direct consequences for a service quality model. This follows Hughes' (1955: 6) position, that "not change, but the dynamics of remaining the same is the miracle which social science must explain". In highlighting the focus on the nature of experience, rather than nature of reality as with other philosophies, Morgan (2014) identifies three shared ideas. First, that actions cannot be separated from the situations and contexts in which they occur; Second, that actions are linked to consequences in ways that are open to change; Third, that actions depend on worldviews that are socially shared sets of beliefs.

Perhaps the most important feature of Pragmatism is its rejection of the distinction between realism and anti-realism. That is to say, anti-realism dismisses the notion that the kinds of things which exist and what they are like are independent of us, and the way in which we find out about them. This places Pragmatism in something of a unique position, holding a middle ground between philosophical opposites, while benefiting from both (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism offers a specific view of knowledge, one claiming that the only way we can acquire knowledge is

through the combination of action and reflection (Tashakori et al., 2015). The importance of this is explained by Biesta (2009) through the work of Dewey (1929), who suggests that all human experience involves some amount of interpretation. Interpreting knowledge and beliefs leads to action and reflecting on actions leads to new ways of knowing and acting (Morgan, 2014). This reflection and interpretation of new or developed knowledge will inform research actions for the study, which themselves will be interpreted, to inform further actions such as the industry framework informing case study numbers and then case study selections. This is demonstrated in Dewey's model of enquiry in figure 7.4, to which Morgan adds a reflective action-based cycle (Morgan, 2014.) Different knowledges are simply the result of different ways in which we engage with the world; the consequences of different actions (Tashakori et al., 2015).

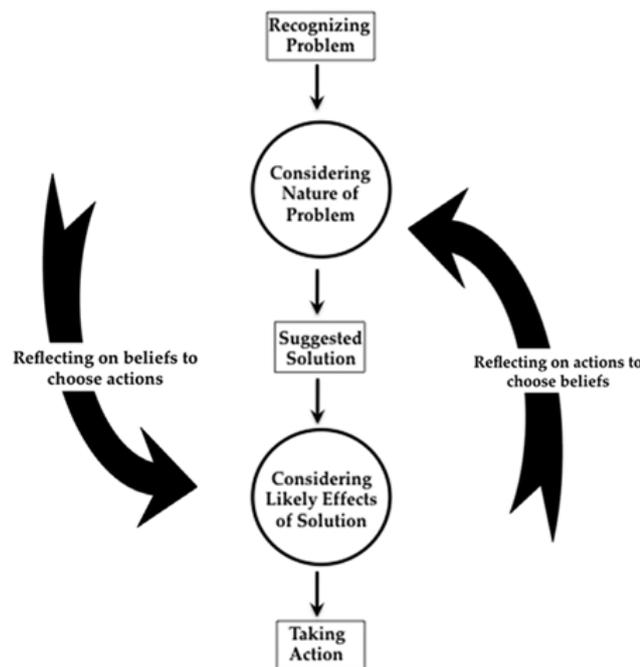


Figure 7.4: Dewey's model of inquiry
(Morgan, 2014)

Pragmatism views knowledge as useful in terms of its practical effect. It puts prime emphasis on objectives and what is useful in achieving them. The aim of the study is to produce a practical service quality model for use in the fitness industry and the objectives have been developed to best achieve

this. Therefore, the value of research methodologies lies in their usefulness in engaging with the real world (Guthrie, 2010). Pragmatism looks to consider the research question as the most important determinant of epistemology and ontology. This provides flexibility for a researcher to adapt the view that works best in the given context, or as Biddle (2015:16) suggests, “how research approaches can be mixed fruitfully”. Ultimately, the research approach should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions.

7.5 Axiology

A further element of the paradigm is axiology, which refers to the role of values and ethics within the research process. This incorporates questions about how we, as researchers, deal with both our values and those of our research participants. For example, positivists see research as a context and value-free phenomenon where the researcher maintains objectivity throughout the study (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). While the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm would argue that research is influenced by the participants' and researchers' values (value-bond) and that these cannot be detached. Therefore, axiology encourages the researcher to be cognisant of their values, attitudes and biases and recognise how these might play out in research practice in terms of what questions are asked or not asked; what type of data are or are not collected and the type of methods, measurement, analysis and interpretation that shape our understanding of the research (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Morgan, 2014). Depending on the research inquiry, this extends to whether the researcher will form a part of a group under investigation or not (insider or outsider) (Bryman, 2012).

However, there has been criticism of Pragmatism regarding axiological consideration. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009:90) state that although pragmatist researchers;

“Believe that values play a large role in conducting research and in drawing conclusions from their studies...they see no reason to be

particularly concerned about it".

As such, Biddle (2015) notes the emphasis on an interpretation of pragmatist philosophy as "what works" in pursuit of an inquiry often tends to overshadow the questions of "what works for whom"? Yet, for a pragmatist, values can play a significant role in interpreting results, as the researcher may adopt both a subjective and objective points of view (Bryman, 2012). Although this should be an ongoing process through the research journey, an effective way to start can be through reflexive practice and creating a narrative. Chase (2005) suggests creating a narrative involves retrospective meaning and reflecting upon past events helps us to develop a better understanding of our motivations and intentions. For myself, that is pertinent, as the reason for the study is born out of my past experiences and active engagement within the study area.

After completing post graduate study in Sport Business Management, I went to work in the fitness industry, undertaking roles in administration and operations management, primarily for David Lloyd Chorley. I really enjoyed the challenges and working in an environment that was mostly upbeat and happy. Working in operations management was the most challenging and most rewarding role, and was where I directly encountered service quality. This was one specific criteria for which my service quality performance was measured on and one I become fascinated with. Understanding customer needs, developing relationships, having engaged, trained staff and turning complaints into opportunities (to name a few), become priority and would eventually show results as figure 7.5 shows.

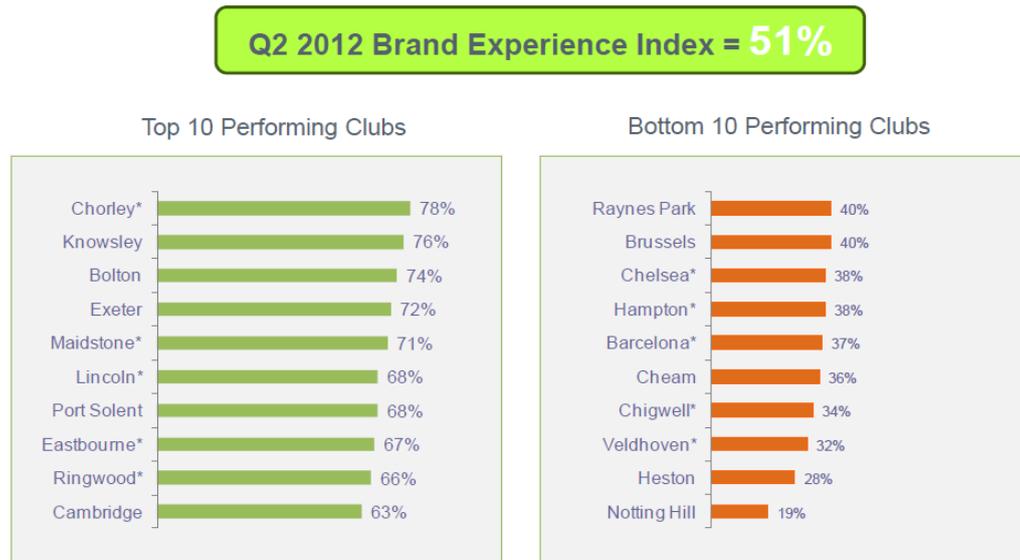


Figure 7.5: Brand experience index

I also developed a meaningful understanding of ‘satisfiers’ and ‘dissatisfiers’, where customer expectations could be met or exceeded and utilising resources to achieve an optimum service.

I happened to work there during the last period of rapid upheaval for the industry, just after the global economic downturn in 2008 as discussed in chapter one and two. Therefore, I saw first-hand the sudden explosion in budget gyms, the sell off and demise of other seemingly well-established providers and new entrants offering a different fitness experience. The competition changed and the industry which Moxham and Wiseman (2009:1) described as blandly premium, with “little differentiation between service offerings”, had completely changed. Service quality grew in importance for the industry, as the customer became more discerning and their expectations had increased. I left the industry after a few years, but I left with fond memories and an understanding on managing service quality in the fitness industry.

As such, the research study in the fitness industry was not by coincidence and therefore my values, attitudes and biases played a key role in forming

ideas for the thesis and moulded the research objectives. A desire to explore the fitness industry concept and better understand the industry structure is born out of my observations of a changed industry and different competition. Also, as I progressed through the study, my approach changed from wanting to produce a service quality model for providers in the NW, to creating a model that had more meaningful application for those managers on the front line. Again, this is perhaps no coincidence and represents my reflections on what would be 'good', or of value based on experience as much as it was on analysis of the literature. Perhaps the most curious acknowledgement during the research, was an appreciation for my fortunate position at David Lloyd. I realised that I worked for an organisation that had the skills and resources to undertake service quality research (even if it lacked practical application), whilst many in the industry had no such process. Therefore, an industry wide model for the region would be most beneficial for those small or medium enterprises (SME's) as opposed to large operators who can produce organisation specific measures (although these often fail to account for regional difference). I believe this process has helped in answering the question 'who is it for'? However, further axiological consideration will be needed regarding the research methods and data collection.

7.6 Research Methodology and Mixed Methods

The research methodology ties the research philosophy to data collection and analysis process, and therefore guides the researcher in the selection of methods (Table 7.2). Mckenzie et al. (2006) sees methodology as the overall approach to research linked to the paradigm or theoretical framework, while the method refers to systematic modes, procedures or tools used for collection and analysis of data.

Table 7.2: Paradigms, methods and tools (Mackenzie et al., 2006)

Paradigm	Methods (primarily)	Data collection tools (examples)
Positivist/ Postpositivist	Quantitative. "Although qualitative methods can be used within this paradigm, quantitative methods tend to be predominant . . ." (Mertens, 2005, p. 12)	Experiments Quasi-experiments Tests Scales
Interpretivist/ Constructivist	Qualitative methods predominate although quantitative methods may also be utilised.	Interviews Observations Document reviews Visual data analysis
Transformative	Qualitative methods with quantitative and mixed methods. <i>Contextual and historical factors described, especially as they relate to oppression</i> (Mertens, 2005, p. 9)	Diverse range of tools - particular need to avoid discrimination. Eg: sexism, racism, and homophobia.
Pragmatic	Qualitative and/or quantitative methods may be employed. Methods are matched to the specific questions and purpose of the research.	May include tools from both positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Eg Interviews, observations and testing and experiments.

According to Kelly and Cordeiro (2020), for most doctoral projects, the research design stage involves significant decision-making around establishing the research objective, framing the research problem and choosing a methodology. The choice of Pragmatism as an overarching position has been established and is strongly influenced by a desire to contribute useful and actionable knowledge to the fitness industry based on respondent knowledge, and in turn be of practical use to the case study organisations. The pragmatic paradigm provides an opportunity for "*multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study*" (Creswell, 2003:12). According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006), the practicalities of mixed methods involves collecting, analysing and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon. Following the pragmatist approach, the objectives of the study have significantly informed the methods and the mixed method approach is embraced, using a multilevel sequential mixed design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). Different methods were used to inform and supplement each other, not only because they addressed different aspects of the study (or different layers of the

phenomenon), but also because they are taken from different research strategies. As discussed below, methods were mixed to produce a more complete picture, to avoid the biases intrinsic to the use of monomethod design (Feilzer, 2010) and as a way of building on initial findings.

As established, Pragmatism is a significant proponent of methodological pluralism (Gill and Johnson, 1991). The use of two or more different techniques is validated by several writers (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Veal, 1992) and aligns with the idea of applying the most appropriate method to achieve specific objectives. In the first phase, online map searches were used and content analysis applied. Bryman and Bell (2015) suggest both qualitative and quantitative methods are valuable for differing stages, and that both methods can be employed in isolation or together, which is evident in the first and second phase. As seen in figure 7.6 a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches will be applied to both achieve specific objectives and inform next phases of research.

Therefore, the principal methods used for this thesis were secondary data analysis via google maps, semi-structured focus groups and interviews and an on-site survey questionnaire at the selected case studies. Therefore, by applying an integrative method into this study, the research was able to inform and build on each other, achieving the objectives in a way any single approach would struggle to achieve for this study. As such, the methods used are set out in figure 7.6, which separates the study into two distinct parts. In the first stage, the mapping exercise was conducted using google maps to locate providers and draw data from their online sources to identify the constructs providers aligned themselves with. The second phase comprised of semi structured interviews with site managers and focus groups of members from each of the case studies, in order to understand key attributes and user preferences. The final method employed was a questionnaire at each case study and shifted from an inductive approach to an abductive approach. The tool was developed from the qualitative data in stage two, which was then tested at the case studies and service quality

model proposed.

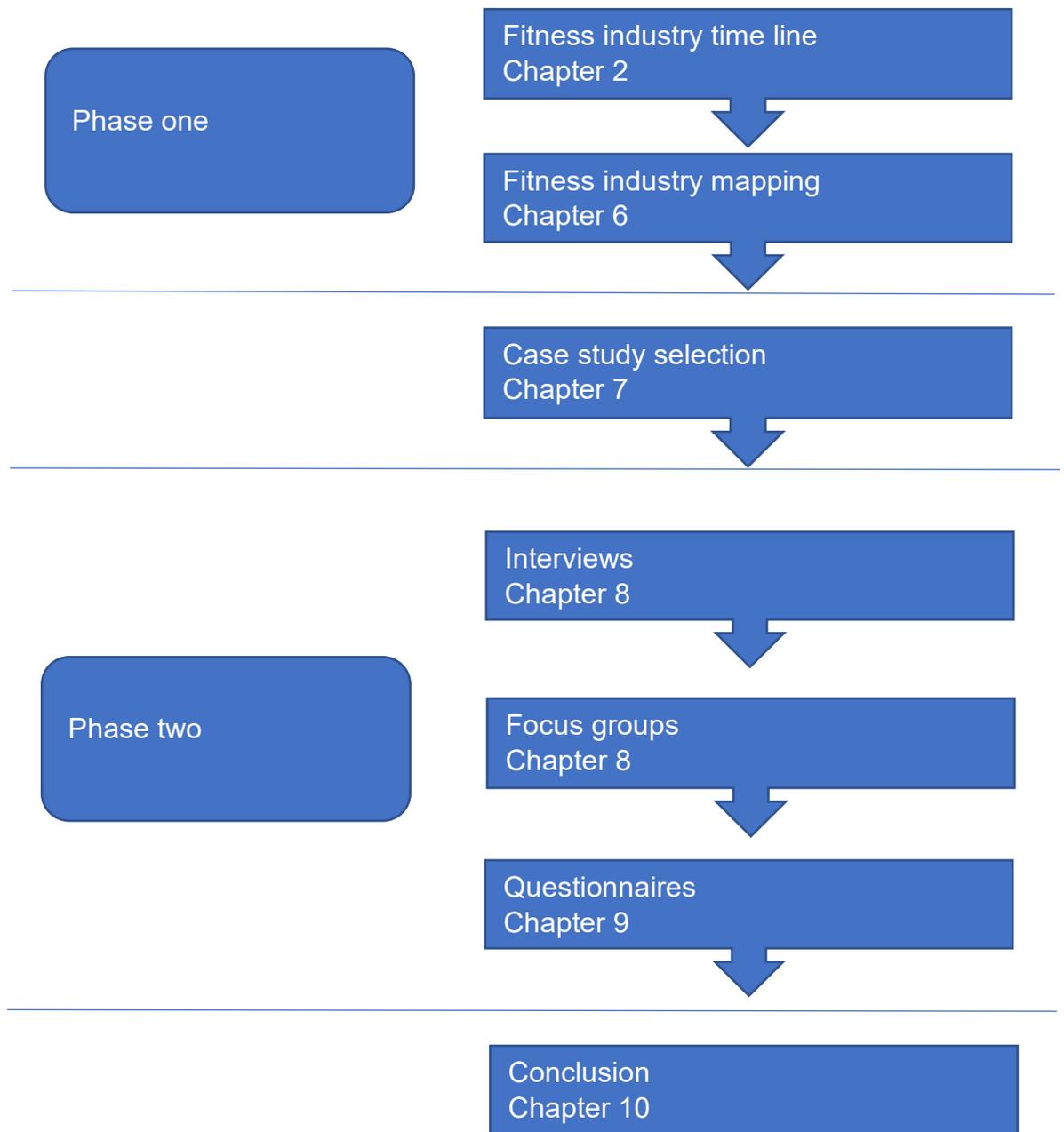


Figure 7.6: research method design

7.7 Phase One and Secondary Data

As was covered in section 7.4, as the researcher my past experiences, biases and beliefs have to some degree formed the study. Despite this being a strength, there is a need to develop a more meaningful theoretical and conceptual understanding of service quality and the fitness industry, beyond

that of the practical. Indeed, from a philosophical position the nature of the industry and therefore the management of service quality within it, is not a fixed reality. Rather, we live in a world in process, with the present and future aligned with the past, but not a direct reflection of it. Therefore, knowledge of service quality in the industry should move with industry changes, (including my own) to reflect the current field of study, as opposed to the field a decade ago.

This is reflected in the objectives, as this study takes a step back from the focused nature of previous fitness industry studies and revisits some of the fundamental questions. As critically, how can a valid service quality model for the industry be developed if it is based on knowledge of what that industry was, instead of what it currently is? A first step to resolving this, as suggested by Bryman and Bell (2015), is that secondary resources are investigated and literature can be obtained from many sources. Accordingly, the first stage of research consulted an array of secondary sources including academic literatures, organisational, governmental and market research websites. Although this process covers the first five chapters, the first two provided the foundations for the first phase of research, surrounding the fitness industry and its current structure, as covered in chapter five. The exploration of the origins and legacies of key changes in the industry through secondary data offered some transparency to the complexity of the fitness industry and was the sole method for developing a fitness industry concept. However, during the exploratory research process, the emerging complexity in the industry became ever clearer, and it was felt this stage would benefit from being displayed through a fitness industry timeline. This fits the philosophical position on interpreting knowledge, which leads to action and reflecting on actions leads to new ways of knowing (Morgan, 2014). Visual images offer ways to communicate ideas to others. Timelines are constructed based on consolidated patterns in the data and the impact of underlying factors, such as location, but primarily time (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and there is scope to capture hidden meanings and complex ideas that may be difficult to express in words (Rhodes and Fitzgerald, 2006).

The data gathered from this secondary research also informed the final step in phase one, the mapping of the fitness industry in the NW. With a refined knowledge of the industry and the fitness centres in it, an online search for providers across the NW region began, using key word searches. The mapping led to the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data and was partly processed through content analysis (covered in chapter five). As such, phase one methods developed with the objectives forming the primary influence and moving beyond the secondary data, it shifted into the mixed methods approach. This fits the philosophical position of the study and has been referred to as methodological pluralism (Gill and Johnson, 1991). The research was divided into two phases as phase one directly impacts and informs on the direction of phase two, through the selection of relevant case studies which reflect the contemporary fitness industry in the NW. This also acted as a natural transfer phase from MPhil to PhD.

7.8 Phase Two and Case Studies

A critical decision at this juncture was the criteria for the choice of case studies. It is suggested that case study selection does not need to be restricted by systematic sampling (Yin, 2009; Stake, 2013). Rather, it is paramount that the case studies provide access to learn, with Stake (2013) suggesting finding 'balance and variety' in the case studies as a way to best achieve this. Yin (2009) however, believes in a more purposeful method of selecting case studies and that theoretical generalisations can be developed where a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the results of the study. As such, the case studies selected were chosen using the phase one research, identifying fitness centre providers that fit within the three emergent provider groups from the industry categorisation. Alongside examining if the propositions derived from that categorisation were demonstrated in the cases, the key attributes identified from existing industry models were investigated. Each case study was analysed individually and conclusions drawn, those conclusions were then compared across the case studies and from this a service quality model

could be proposed, before testing in the final phase of research. This process is illustrated in figure 7.7 from a process depicted by Yin (2009).

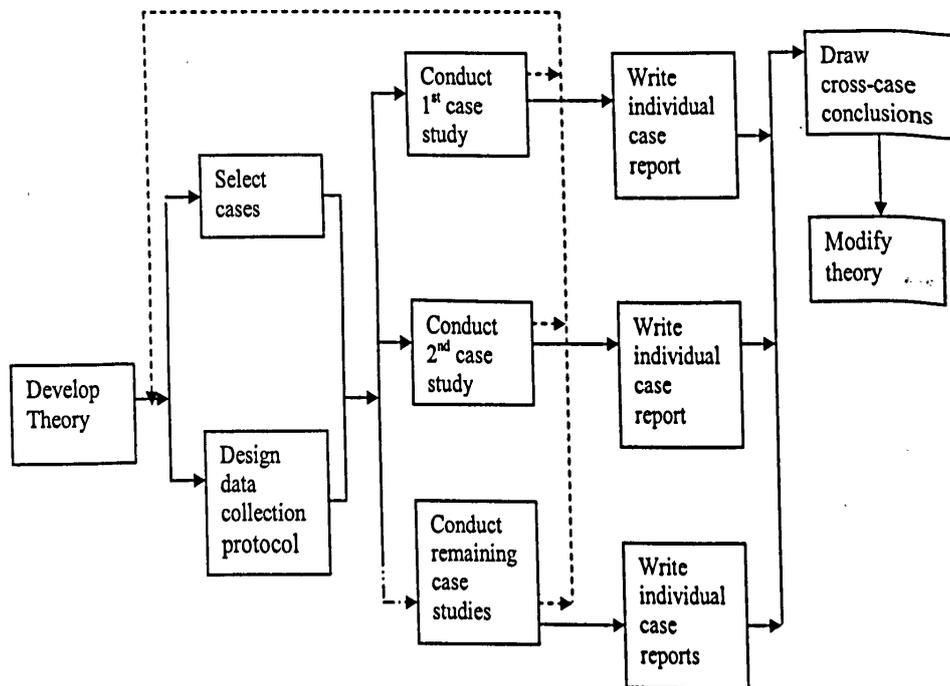


Figure 7.7: Case study method
(Yin, 2009)

In applying this approach, a significant consideration is the number of case studies. Easton (1995) believes this approach can lead to quantity over quality, with some researchers believing more case studies will increase the exploratory power. As mentioned, three case studies were used in this study, which is informed from prior research of the industry. Ultimately, the objective was to have sufficient case studies to represent the wider industry and as discussed in chapter six, three was sufficient. Furthermore, the three cases had to meet the criteria set out by the industry categorisation. The fitness centre case studies for this study were, therefore, selected for the following reasons. After conducting content analysis on the organisational statements for the fitness centres, three notable clusters of provider emerged and provided a rational starting point for selecting case studies that would be broadly reflective of the range of provision seen in the NW. These were community and health, price and physical environment, and

social environment. At this point, it was a matter of identifying facilities that fitted the criteria of the three emergent clusters and seek access to three corresponding sites. The next step was selecting sites where the management were willing to take part, and most importantly not look to restrict or influence findings. Agreement with the providers would include access and honest engagement with staff, specifically a relevant senior manager at each site as well as access to their user base, and in turn a request for ethical approval of the study at those sites was required from the University (see section 7.9).

The three categories identified in the first phase, left a total of 105 (community/health); 78 (price/physical environment); 36 (social environment) to select from. It was decided that it would be preferable to be within a 45-minute drive from the researcher's home, to control for time and cost. Also, the three different sites should be in different areas of the region, to avoid having participants who attend more than one of the case study facilities, even though the likelihood of this was minimal. However, this placed three criteria on each site, which made the process of seeking and agreeing access more difficult. Yet, this proved not to be a significant challenge due to existing networks within the industry. Having worked in different capacities in the fitness industry, contacts were established with preferred sites through existing networks, before more formal meetings took place to set out the study, explaining the importance and applicability of research, as well as the benefits provided to the site from the findings. Agreement with three sites was confirmed, with a Community Trust (community/health); a PureGym (price/physical environment) and a CrossFit (social environment).

7.8.1 Interviews and Focus Groups

In order to analyse the focus groups and interviews an audio recorder was used and the audio transcribed using a simple orthographic transcription method (Wilkinson 2004), where only the words spoken were recorded and not the way they were spoken. A thematic analysis was then carried out

where patterns and themes were systematically identified across the groups using a coding system in NVIVO 11. This was initially informed by the characteristics from the industry framework (chapter six) and attributes from the literature (Chapter five), but the nodes were developed further through the analysis process. Quotations from the transcript were then listed under the relevant codes. It is noted that the researcher is the main research tool in interviews and focus groups, steering the conversation/discussion in a purposeful direction, gaining insight to the relevant study area (Jones, Brown and Holloway. 2013). Therefore, a semi structured approach was taken, to ensure key topics were not missed and a similar form of questions were conducted on each occasion, reducing the effects of bias. However, this also allowed the discussions to develop without restricting new lines of enquiry or serendipitous detail. The guide sheets for the interview and focus groups can be seen in appendix four.

The first method applied within the case studies was a semi structured interview with a relevant manager from each site. It was not stipulated as to the role, as each site follow a different business model, being of different sizes and, therefore, different roles at these sites are responsible for service quality. At PureGym the general manager was interviewed, for the Community Leisure Trust (CLT) the regional manager, and at CrossFit it was the owner. The first two of these were conducted on site in the manager's office, providing a quiet, comfortable and familiar environment in which to talk. The third was done over the phone which can lead to misinterpretation as body language is lost (Seymour, 2001). Also, the recording of a telephone interview can be more challenging, however this was done from an empty office space and the call conducted on speaker phone, making the recording far easier. The focus of these semi structured interviews was to build on the knowledge of critical service attributes identified earlier in the study and gain an insight as to the target market for these different providers. The three interviews were conducted in June 2019 and took between 40 and 50 minutes, with the approach permitting flexibility in the questioning process, ensuring questions were understood, answered

thoroughly and where relevant, additional probing could take place (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This can produce rich and unexpected detail that was perhaps unknown, and allowed for new lines of enquiry to be pursued. This was evident at each site, notably at PureGym as the first 15 minutes were spent discussing the entrance in relation to physical environment (layout), accessibility (swipe entry) and staff (minimal). The fact there was no reception was intriguing, as my previous experience led me to see it as a critical point of contact for users and fundamental to framing a positive perception of service quality.

Focus groups were organised with the help of staff at each site. According to Wilkinson (2004), focus groups involve engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion which is focused on a specific topic or related issues. After discussions with the staff, they asked for participants on my behalf. As it was the responsibility of staff at each facility to source willing participants, the institution acted as a gatekeeper (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). This put them in a position to hand pick members who would be positive and offer similar perspectives. If so, this may have created a bias, as they may have chosen their supportive members. The focus groups were conducted in August 2019 and took between 45 minutes and an hour to complete. At the PureGym and CrossFit sites, four members attended, while at the CLT six members were in attendance. The semi-structured interviews also provided some guidance for the questioning in the focus groups, as the range of service provision for each site and an insight into the type of users and demands that had begun to be established by the managers. However, this was in addition to the requirements of meeting objectives three and four of the study. As such, a list of questions for each focus group was drafted to serve as a guideline for each session. The focus groups took place at each of the fitness centres in a separate room/studio away from the disruption of other users and the noise of the gym. They were conducted in a casual rather than a structured format, allowing for the group to develop responses, encouraging spontaneous responses and this freed the researcher up to observe the ongoing interactions. However, the groups

were managed to avoid the discussion drifting, and to prevent individuals from dominating. This allowed for an understanding of complex behaviour without imposing the researcher's own biases on participants that could potentially limit participants' responses (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

7.8.2 Constructs

As with the first phase of research, phase two was informed by an exploration of secondary data, which covers chapters three to five. These three chapters covered service characteristics and service quality models. These models themselves have developed and changed, yet can be described as multidimensional constructs providing a measure of service quality (Martinez and Martinez, 2010). However, the primary measuring unit for the differing dimensions, 'perception', is itself a theoretical construct (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000). Social scientists may seek to measure certain behavioural or emotional phenomena that are accepted as real by wider society, yet fundamentally terms such as 'perception' are constructed to describe the source emergent phenomena. The fact that such constructs are visualised by name only can lead to greater variation in the awareness and interpretation of researchers and the individuals studied (Messick, 1981). Indeed, perception could be seen as not existing in a real sense, but only in thought, as interpretations of constructs cannot be made without human knowledge and thought (Peter, 1992). Alternatively, such relationships constitute an auxiliary theory that connects abstract theoretical constructs to observable phenomena (Costner, 1969) and, therefore, responsive to empirical research. Ultimately, accepting the relationship between constructs and their measure is a pragmatic one. However, in accepting such a relationship, deciding on its direction of influence is important (Edwards, 2011). In this study the measure is seen as formative, such that measures form or induce an underlying latent variable. Formative measurement is consistent with principal component analysis (Jolliffe, 2002) and will be employed during the final stages of analysis.

7.8.3 Questionnaire Construction

At this stage of the study, consideration turned to proposing and most importantly, testing a service quality model. Therefore, a questionnaire needed to be developed to collect the required data. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, firstly establishing individual profiles and some overall measures, such as a member recommend question or net promoter score and covered eight questions. Secondly was a set of questions seeking to elicit a response on the perception of the service performance, covering the attributes which emerged from the previous phase of research and covered 23 questions. The final section mirrored section two in its questions, but sought a response in relation to its importance to the individual member. This took the total number of questions to 54, with 52 being closed and multiple choice, leaving only two open questions, which were gender and ethnicity. As Bryman and Bell (2015) state, it is critical the questionnaire is user friendly and the structure including the type of question is logical, clear and easy to respond to. Therefore, it was vital that the questions asked, covered the issues that emerged from the previous research phase, yet was not so long as to lead to unanswered or guessed responses, which may arise from the respondent being bored from a lengthy questionnaire (Rowley, 2014). As such, the format and number of questions kept the survey time to under ten minutes over four pages (two sheets of A4 paper: Appendix seven). A critical decision in creating the questionnaire was its measure, as several issues need to be considered in using a Likert scale. According to Hartley (2014) there is no evidence for superiority of scales with a specific number of scale points over any other, but each have their own strengths and weakness. Dilman et al. (2014) also stress the importance of layout, keeping consistency in order to avoid confusion. For studies reviewed in chapter five, the five and seven point scales were most often applied (table 7.3) with a similar level of preference.

Table 7.3: Likert scales in past fitness industry model research

Likert Scale's	Author's
5	Kim and Kim (1995) Afthinos et al. (2005) Yildiz (2011) Wilson et al. (2017)
6	Alexandris et al. (2005)
7	Chelladurai et al. (1987) Lentell (2000) Chang and Chelladurai (2003) Lam et al. (2005) Ko and Pastore (2005)
N/A	Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2007) Moxham and Wiseman (2009)

Ultimately a five-point Likert score was applied with five representing strongly agree and one representing strongly disagree, with the ability of the user to interpret a meaningful difference between each number on the ordinal data scale being a key influence. For the importance questions the same scale was applied, with five representing very important and one representing unimportant.

7.8.4 Questionnaire Pilot

The questionnaire was piloted with 15 members at the PureGym site, who were not included in the final roll out of the survey. According to Veal (2011), a pilot test should be conducted with a limited group from the sample to check whether the questions are clearly understood to the intended audience and whether accurate data will be gathered. As Saunders et al. (2016) suggest, the questions need to be checked within the context they were written as opposed to in the abstract. Resulting from this process some amendments were made. Question four, relating to length of attendance was clarified to stipulate less than a defined period, rather than between. The scale for importance was amended from not important to unimportant. Question five, which asks for ethnicity is changed to an open question after it was noted the categories did not provide a relevant option for some

members. After reviewing the broader ethic groupings on gov.uk (2020) the most practical solution was changing the question format.

7.8.5 Questionnaire Administration

Due to the 2019 COVID pandemic and restrictions in place across the industry, it was extremely challenging to agree time periods to undertake the surveys onsite. A possible solution was emailing to members, however such access had not been agreed and for the smaller CrossFit facility it would more likely have resulted in a minimal response, as the member base was much smaller than the other two sites. It is widely accepted that undertaking questionnaires in person increases the response rate and the quality of the results (Wagner and Kemmerling, 2010). A convenience sampling method was applied across the sites and the response rate was at approximately 70% of those asked, with a final sample of 331 (PureGym 103; CT 144; CrossFit 84). Yet, the issue is not necessarily about the response rate but whether there is a possibility of bias in the sample. This is considered in more detail in chapter nine, presenting the demographic break downs across the sites. However, it should be noted that the customer survey was not interviewer completed due to time restriction and social distancing, therefore this increases the likelihood of misinterpretation. However, the researcher was in attendance to deal with potential questions of interpretation. The questionnaires were administered in a window of opening for the industry in December 2020, with each site visited over two days. More specifically, it was conducted between December 15th and the 28th, with CrossFit and the CT being covered prior to Christmas closing and PureGym after. Each site was visited over two days, with members asked if they would undertake the questionnaire. It is acknowledged that the validity can be compromised using a convenience sampling method, however this was the most obvious approach, as no preconditions on the sample were in place, except for participants being over 18, so as to meet the requirements of the ethics approval. Also, as it was conducted in a limited time frame during a pandemic, some users may have stayed away. It is difficult to know if this was the case, but it could be that a younger sample than usual where in

attendance, as catching Covid appeared to be less detrimental for them: therefore, this would cause a bias in the data. The questionnaire also included a covering letter (Appendix three) setting out the purpose of the study and their guaranteed anonymity, which is reaffirmed at the top of the questionnaire itself to encourage truthful responses. Once the questionnaire had been completed, it was returned to the researcher on site.

7.9 Ethical Considerations

The methodological process involved acquiring ethical approval, which was given on the 04 February 2019 from the institution (Appendix three). Some initial considerations of the committee included age of participants. It was decided to restrict the sample to over 18's, for practical and conceptual reasons. It was considered the decision to attend for most children would be overwhelmingly influenced by guardians and, therefore, it would be easier to remove them from the sample. The next consideration was on anonymity. After discussions with providers, it was decided anonymity was needed in order to engage fully in the process, while providing the same to members would more likely elicit greater engagement. This would require writing and presenting the data in such a way as not to provide clues such as locations, or distinguishing features (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

According to Saunders et al. (2009), ethical consideration is not a single stage process and issues can arise during the research. The pandemic and social control measures were significant changes in the research environment and caused pause for thought. The questionnaire was the only data collection method interrupted by this event and its method of operation needed further consideration. A possible safe approach was emailing to members at each site, however there was not agreed access to this. Physical copies of the questionnaire could be left at critical locations at the sites for members to complete and collected at a later date. However, due to the lockdowns there was a time dimension to consider and this approach would likely lead to a muted response rate. Therefore, it was decided to still

undertake an in-person approach, however, members would be asked to take part then they were left alone to complete the survey, but still knowing that any queries could be answered. This method allowed for an acceptable onsite approach, but still met all social distancing guidance.

7.10 Data Analysis

7.10.1 Qualitative Analysis

The interviews and focus groups were analysed through NVIVO using a thematic analysis method. Some authors have suggested that thematic analysis is not a separate method, but a process, or an assist to researchers (Holloway and Todres, 2003; Ryan and Bernard, 2000). However, critiquing the method in this way would leave many other research methods open to inquisition, as many methods are processes that can be used in differing contexts. Therefore, many other authors maintain that thematic analysis should be considered a method (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Thorne, 2000; Nowell et al., 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest it is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing and reporting themes in a data set which can produce insightful findings. Taking the priori themes from the industry framework, these were added to with the dimensions from chapter five literature analysis and were used as a starting point for data analysis. These were modified with new ones added and some removed as the transcripts were read and analysed. This was done four times for each of the six transcripts, with nodes and sub nodes created in NVIVO. Relevant quotes for each node were coded, assigned and linked making recovery of these easier during writing up. Each case study was then written up based around the main attributes of the fitness centre (Yin, 2009). Further to this, comparative analysis across studies (chapter eight) was conducted using the analysed data drawn from the case studies, introducing quotes from the relevant nodes/attributes during the discussion. This data method derived the attributes to be taken forward to the questionnaire and set out the typology of user at the distinct case studies.

7.10.2 Quantitative Analysis

The questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 27), Excel and AMOS 27. The closed questions were coded and the data entered into SPSS 27. The open questions were also assigned codes as the questionnaires were analysed. It has been suggested (De Vaus and De Vaus, 2013) that coding open questions in this way can lead to the researcher imposing their own order on the data. However, for the two open questions, the responses were consistent and limited in variation, making the process more objective. To start, frequency analysis is used to set out the demographic breakdown of the sample and see if the sample is broadly representative of their population.

The analysis then moves through five further stages, beginning with exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Exploratory factor analysis is one of several multivariate statistical methods that seeks to identify the smallest number of hypothetical constructs that explain the covariation observed in a set of data (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black, 1998). This is achieved by using eigenvalues, which are a special set of scalars associated with a linear system of equations (Marcus and Minc, 1988). It is suggested that EFA requires a minimum of 200 to 300 respondents to be effective (Comrey, 1988), which was acceptable in this study (331 responses). This process provides details of the eigenvalue for each component and patterns of higher scoring components emerge, suggesting potential dimensions. For this study, a factor loading equal to or greater than .30 was kept for further analysis. At this stage items not scoring highly and failing to align with emerging dimensions could also be eliminated.

Third, principal components analysis (PCA), with an orthogonal factor rotation (varimax rotation) was performed, in line with other model methods (Yildiz, 2011). This orthogonal factor rotation is used to simplify the factors, minimising the number of factors needed to explain a variable, as it assumes data are not well correlated. This shows the factor loadings for each of the service attributes in the questionnaire, representing a measure of the proportion of variance in the responses to that item, which can be accounted

for by each factor (Lentell, 2000). However, it was also decided that both service performance and importance scores would be analysed in order to ensure greater internal validity of the dimensions as applied by Lentell (2000). This was also done for each provider in order to identify any discrepancies in the dimensions between providers. Following Kline (2014), factor loadings were considered to be high above 0.3 and very high above 0.6. At this stage further analysis is provided with a table of rotation sums of squared loadings for each test given, which indicates the cumulative variation explained in the responses by the dimensions identified. Finally, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is given, which indicates the proportion of variance in the variables that might be caused by underlying factors. A score between 0.7 and 1.0 is considered very good.

The next step is a test of internal reliability, via a reliability coefficient, which for this study is a test of reliability for the dimensions. This was achieved using Cronbach Alpha results in line with Cronbach's (1951) suggestion that if a questionnaire has subscales, alpha should be applied separately to these dimensions. The generally accepted value of 0.70 is appropriate for this type of analysis (Ko and Pastore, 1995; Lentell, 2000) and is supported by Kline (2014).

The fifth stage is the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), used to confirm the factor structure of the scale and to test the validity of the model (Hunter and Gerbing, 1982). This is undertaken in AMOS 27, which is an application for model development. In explaining this method, a basic example model is provided below (figure 7.8).

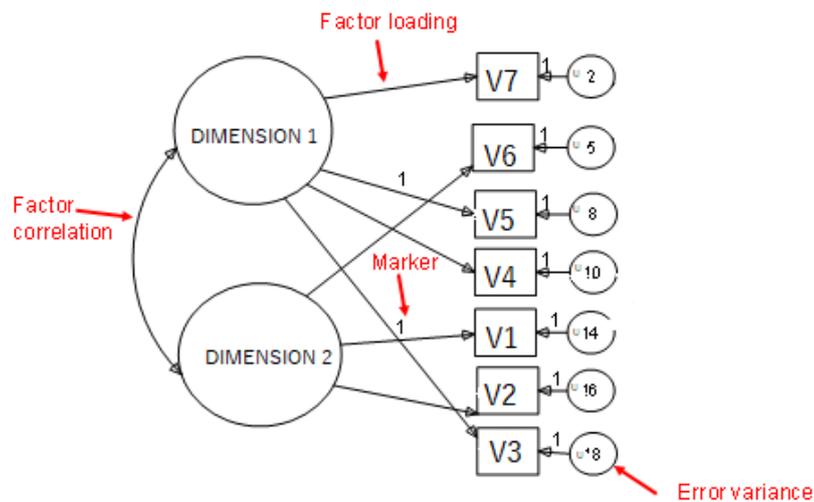


Figure 7.8: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model

Cabrera-Nguyen (2010) provides useful detail on interpreting CFA structures, as detailed below.

Error Variance

Error variances are the portions of variance in each measurement that do not covary with the latent factor

Factor Loading

Factor loading shows the variance explained by the variable on that particular factor. A score of 0.7 or higher factor loading represents that the factor extracts sufficient variance from that variable.

Marker

A marker is required in order to set an internal scale against the dimensions. Therefore, a factor loading for each dimension, or the dimension itself, can be set to 1.00 in order to achieve this. Without this a CFA test will not run.

Factor Correlation

This represents the correlations between the factors. The coefficients for the linear combination of the variables.

Further common absolute measure fit indices are also provided. Absolute fit indices measure the average size of variation between the residuals of the observed covariance matrix and the hypothesized model (Barrett, 2007). There are many tests which can be applied for this purpose, however a number of these are consistently used within the field (Chang and Cheladru, 2003; Walker, 2017; Albayrak and Caber, 2014; Alexandris, 2004; Ko and Pastore, 2004). The most common relative fit index used to interpret model fit is comparative fit index (CFI), which compares the observed covariance matrix with the null model's covariance matrix while taking sample size into account (McDonald and Ho, 2002). Values of the CFI range from 0 to 1.00, with values larger than .90 indicating an acceptable fit, and values greater than .95 indicating a good fit (Bentler, 1990; Marsh, Balla and McDonald, 1988; Steiger, 1990; Hooper et al., 2008).

The next is the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Steiger and Lind, 1980). Byrne (1998) suggests values for the RMSEA of less than .05 indicate a very good fit, and values up to .08 indicate reasonable errors of approximation in the population. MacCallum, Browne and Sugawara (1996) suggest the values of between .08 and .10 indicate mediocre fit, and those greater than .10 indicate poor fit. The chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) ratio is also a preferred measure (Wheaton, Muthen, Alwin, and Summers, 1977). For this, a ratio of under two indicates a superior fit between the hypothesised model and the actual data (Cole, 1987). The Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Bentler, 1995) ranges from 0 to 1.00 and in a well-fitting model this value would expect to be .05 or less (Byrne, 1998).

The sixth and final stage of quantitative analysis on the questionnaire is the creation of the IPA matrix for each case study, which will be completed in EXCEL. As discussed in chapter five, the logic of the IPA is based on attributes/dimensions, pertaining to a particular service being evaluated on the basis of how important each attribute is to the customer and how the service's performance is perceived (Sampson and Showalter, 1999). A comparison between the service performance and importance of each

relevant attribute is performed (Sever, 2015; Varela and Manzano, 2007), resulting in a two-dimensional IPA grid displaying the results of the importance and performance result of each relevant attribute (Abalo et al., 2007). The matrix lines are created by using the corresponding mean averages of the items for service performance and importance scores.

7.11 Researcher actions and reflections

By undertaking a mixed methods study, underpinned by the pragmatist approach, I had many moments of trepidation as to what would be discovered and therefore inform and drive further research activity. Having an operations background, I had always created a plan and worked through the stages step by step in order to achieve a set goal, with minimal deviation. The research method design in figure 7.6 indicates this, but also highlights the inner conflict between developing and maintaining a preplanned route to completion and fully embracing the pragmatist within. I accepted deviation and changes to the preplanned action's, acknowledging it would lead to a more accurate and accomplished study, however it was something that only developed through the course of the study. Although figure 7.6, and this chapter more broadly, indicates the thought and effort that went into planning the study, the reality of undertaking research in the social science field, often means those plans need to change.

Early on in the study, when I was establishing search criteria for the mapping phase, I had the realisation that I did not know what specific data would actually provide a framework to categorise providers. I had established a rationale for focusing on the philosophy or beliefs for a given site, but what if this didn't work? I therefore changed my approach to data collection and gathered a range of other variables (price, pool, etc). However, how do you then map these and gather the relevant information? The answer, google maps, was taken from studies outside of my field. This was the first time in the study I had to look further afield, beyond the comforts of the topic area to answers for my research problems, which I had been tentative about, as I felt moving away from the norm exposed me to greater scrutiny as a

researcher. However, it was the most logical approach providing the most effective way to map 600+ sites.

Three categories emerged through the mapping exercise as discussed in chapter six. However, I did have some inner turmoil, that the exclusive end of the industry was not represented. Was this because of the method of data collection and analysis, or was it a regional variation? In part perhaps, but more than this, it exposed the complexity of the industry. Simply using price would maybe better reflect such providers, but what about the box gyms and providers such as Crossfit, with similar pricing? I did tentatively approach some exclusive providers, but ultimately decided to follow the data to inform the next stage of research. I felt there was strong justification for this as just adding a fourth provider type without sufficient reasoning, in some ways undermined the mapping process. It also felt more feasible, as the extent of data collection and analysis involved in the study was already considerable. If needed it was something I could return to at a later date through further research.

The interviews were the first step in primary data gathering. The plan was to interview the general manager at each site for consistency, however, by the first interview this had changed. I realised what I really needed was the individual who was primarily responsible for managing service quality. So, I started with an area manager at the CLT, while at the CrossFit, there was no GM. It was a really informative interview, but I realised I had assumed greater knowledge of the participant so needed to provide greater context to help understanding and better define terms. This was consistent through the three interviews and I got better at framing the questions and quickly identifying when the participant was drifting from the topic onto irrelevant issues. However, I was also guilty of this at times, by focusing too much and for too long on specific areas out of personal interest. The best example of this was the lack of reception at Pure Gym.

I was also unable to arrange a time to undertake an in person interview at

the final site (Cross Fit), so I decide to complete it over the phone. It was disappointing that I could not control the method, so that all interviews were conducted in the same way, however, it became a practical point, in getting the data needed and accepting that things change and undertaking research in social science will often mean adapting to a changing environment.

As well as gathering data from the supply side, to better understand the service attributes and characteristics, it also informed the questioning for the members focus groups. For example, service attributes not common in the literature such as parking emerged as key complaints in the interviews and were carried into the focus groups. The big issue at this stage was recruiting participants, which was done through the managers. This opened the possibility of selecting supportive members to provide a biased positive position. However, I felt this was the most practical approach and provided more certainty in recruiting participants and being able to organize at specific times. I was also aware that the three case study sites used were well run providers, which was probably the reason they were comfortable participating in the first place. This could also have potential for skewed results. However, I had to accept there was a limit to achieving balance and representation in a small sample of the industry.

The analysis of the qualitative data was probably the first point in the study that I really felt progress, despite having over come a number of hurdles already and achieved a lot. I think this was because I could start to see what the finish line was and how the data was coming together to inform the model and questionnaire. This gave me added confidence and motivation to drive on. However, when I was completing the proposed model and developing the questionnaire the pandemic had arrived and lockdown within the fitness industry was particularly stringent. I did give thought to alternative approaches to get the questionnaire out but felt the response rate would be exceptionally low in that climate, if I was not onsite to distribute in person. I did have discussions with the research time about providing only a proposed model given the circumstances. However, I was adamant if at all possible to

get into each site to complete as planned as would also need the data not just to test the model but also produce the IPA graphs for each site. There appeared to be a reduced number of over 60's, which was especially noticeable at the CLT, and could have skewed the results, however given the circumstances I don't think I could have done more to collect a sufficient number of responses that were as representative as possible.

The process I went through to get from fitness industry timeline to tested model and IPA graphs is mapped out in figure 7.9 on the following page. This hopefully depicts the sometimes-messy nature of the research process and despite the best laid plans, it is very rarely straight forward with the researcher meandering through unexpected challenges and adapting as the research progresses. I also came to understand this was much the same for the thesis itself, which is not written in a linear process but constantly moving back and forth, sometimes with chapters emerging.

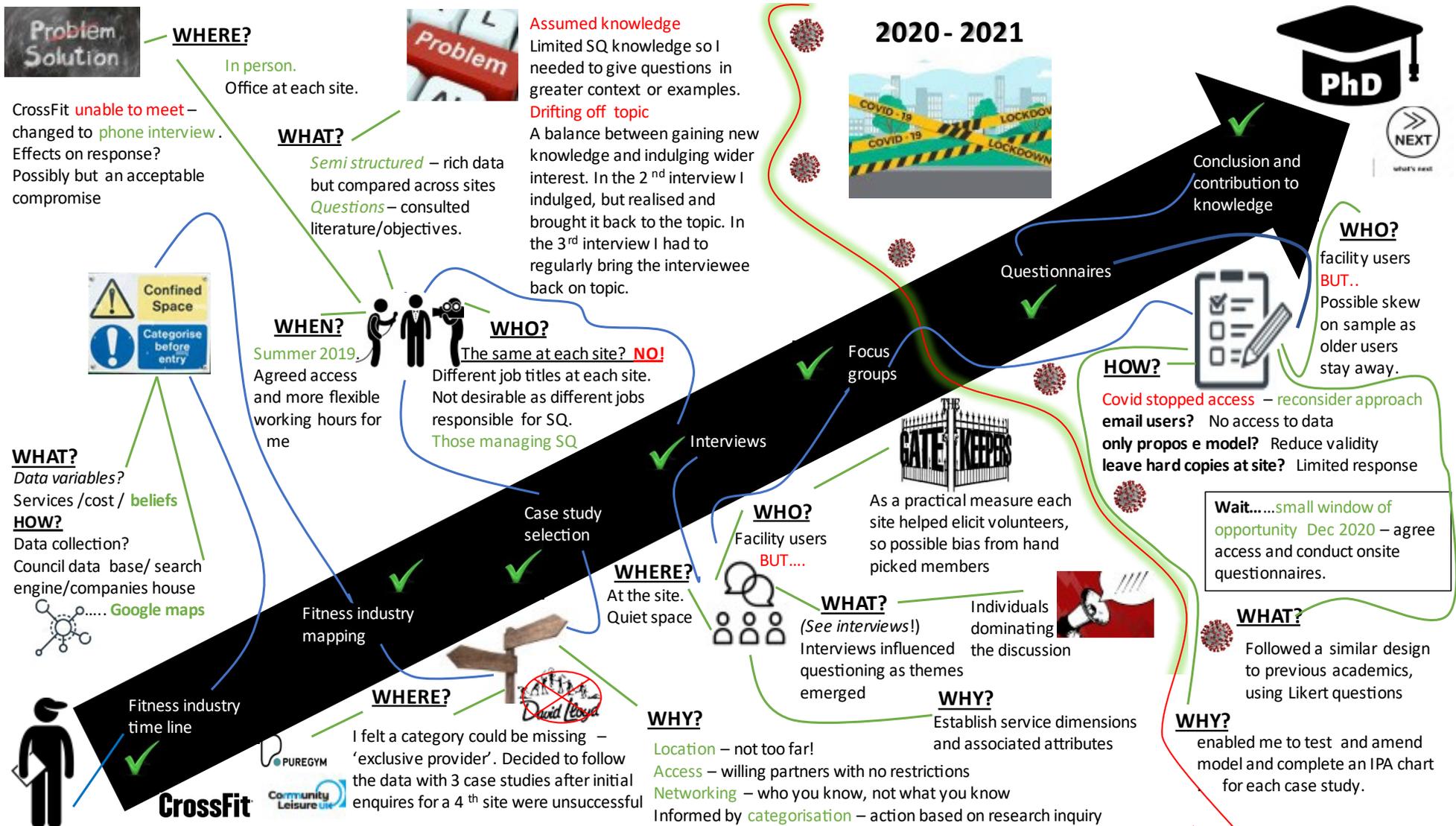


Figure 7.9: Researcher Activity

7.12 Chapter Seven Summary

This chapter acts as a framework for the thesis, setting out approaches, justifying actions and identifying methods of processes. A critical tenant of the chapter is establishing the philosophical position, which is that of Pragmatism putting prime emphasis on objectives and what is useful in achieving them. This leads to further consideration of the objectives, which in themselves follow the model of enquiry (Morgan, 2014). Different knowledges are simply the result of different ways in which we engage with the world; the consequences of different actions (Tashakori et al., 2015). The actions and knowledge from one objective informs and influences further action to be taken, always considering the most effective way of achieving the next objective. In order to further the literature, by providing a contemporary, practical service quality model for the NW, a mixed methods approach was adopted in order to apply a range of research methods, mainly through case studies (second phase of research). Indeed, Gummesson (2003) describes how case study research can be inductive where the case provides data for theory generation, which is the case in this study. However, this switches from an inductive to an abductive approach, as a model is proposed (chapter eight) and tested (chapter nine). Further philosophical discussion was had as to the use of constructs and their application in measuring tools and its implication on model development. Also, a comprehensive review of the methods and analysis used was provided, which also sets out the step-by-step approach to the model development. However, before progressing to the service quality model, chapter eight analyses and discusses the qualitative data.

Chapter 8: Analysis and discussion of Case studies

8.1 Introduction

In order to address the aim and objectives of the study this chapter will provide a more detailed analysis of the three case studies; it will particularly focus on objective two B: *develop a fitness consumer typology, classifying the key demographic and psychographic determinates of fitness centre users*. It will do this by drawing on and analysing the interviews and focus groups from the case studies. This will enable the identification of specific determinants for each case study, and provide evidence of variation between core users of the three fitness facilities. Analysis of this same data will also inform objective three: *develop a service quality model suitable for use by fitness centres, in order to assess any gaps in their product and service offerings*. The data will be analysed, first as individual case studies, identifying important service attributes for the users of each site. Following this, these findings will be further scrutinised, identifying overarching service quality characteristics which will form the dimensions for a Service Quality Model. Therefore, both a user typology and service quality model for the fitness industry in the NW will be proposed, before the model is tested in chapter nine.

8.2 Case Study Sites

8.2.1 Case Study One: Community Leisure Trust (CLT)

*Working in partnership to inspire the **people and communities** of XXXXX to be **active, creative and healthier**.*

This case study is based at a multipurpose site and is one of seven leisure sites run by the CLT which is headed by a board of local trustees. The trust has been in day to day control of the local leisure facilities for seven years while the local authority is responsible for maintaining the buildings. It has a town centre location with adjoining community health services, free parking and employs a team of over 100 staff, paying the UK Living Wage. There are seven membership options (segregated by time, location,

demographics, wet or dry) with joining fees. The facility has a gym with Synrgy 360 equipment and free weights; two glass-back squash courts; a dedicated cycling studio; dance studio; two sports halls; a 25-metre pool and training pool; sauna; steam room and spa area. The aim for the site is to create quality, engaging and rewarding leisure experiences that benefit its customers' individual wellbeing and the wider community. They also continuously seek partnerships locally and nationally to grow activities, while investing profits back into the services for the community. It is open 6.30am-10pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 7pm at weekend.

The interview was carried out with the area manager who oversees service quality for the seven sites. They considered service quality to be;

CLT01: "Something that the consumer wants, to a particular standard, something that they can't get anywhere else. So, in terms of the quality, it's having the quality offering that other providers can't provide... I feel that everybody has a perceived quality in a different model, so it is trying to understand what that perception of quality is and meet that at the same time which is a challenge".

This aligns closely with the service quality definitions critiqued in chapter three and was reassuring for the validity of the rest of the interview, that their understanding of service quality was not amiss. However, despite this knowledge, there was not currently any process for measuring and managing service quality perceptions of users;

CLT01: "Other than service and feedback forms not particularly. We do a lot of outreach work, going out to the community and trying to find out what people are doing, where they're training. Also, local schools and colleges and trying to build up those networks then trying to see what provision people want".

As a charitable trust, whose local authority funding was due to be cut to £0, it is understandable that developing a service quality measure has not been

a priority investment. However, with increased competition and a need to be more commercial, it would clearly be an advantageous tool.

The focus group was carried out with six willing participants who are members of the site and are described in the table below.

Focus group for location 1.
CLT11: white British male 50's
CLT12: white British female 40's
CLT13: white British male 60's
CLT14: black African/British male 30's
CLT15: white British male 40's
CLT16: white Asian/Korean female 50's

Table 8.1: Coding for participants at case study one

The CLT was the first interview and first focus group following all interviews. What was most illuminating from this focus group, was the value placed on staff. I expected staff to be important, however, there was a distinction between the level of influence of other members, who impacted experience and staff who impacted the decision to attend. As such, I asked about this distinction at the following focus groups and found a similar response. On reflection, the actions of the provider to pay a minimum 'living wage' to all staff and offer unique incentives moves beyond the ethical, which is how it was framed, to being a sensible business decision. What was less obvious was the future plans to branch out, providing CrossFit style box gyms. I saw this as the CLT looking outwards to the industry and following a trend, rather than focusing inward and understanding their market. The user base at the CLT were more focused on the range of facilities, health and staff engagement, which is not the basis of a box gym.

The agency of the provider was embedded in community provision, which aligned to its public sector position. However, with the removal of central funding it would be easy for the provider to curb many of the community

engagements it provides, but the members did recognise the value of these, despite not always benefiting from them. This demonstrated how community as a term was used to represent different groups, both being a wider (external) group, who can still have agency in the CLT without being a member and the member base (internal) with more specific demands and greater influence on the provider. Therefore, the value of the CLT should not be judged solely on its financial returns as it can provide services and utility to the wider community and is valued by the community. The CLT can act as a hub for the community, offering support for those in difficulty (physical, mental, financial) and its position is perhaps not truly represented in this study as many of its actions move beyond the boundary of the study. The service quality model seeks to measure the perceptions of the users of the facility, not those outside of it and is something I would inform the managers to be mindful of.

8.2.2 Case Study Two: PureGym

*We believe everyone should be able to keep fit and healthy. That's why our goal is to bring you world class **fitness equipment** at an **affordable price**.*

This case study is based at a PureGym, which is typically seen as a low-cost provider (Oxygen Consulting, 2020). Their aim is to be the UK's favorite gym, providing low-cost flexible memberships and quality gym equipment and classes. There are six membership options (separated by time, multisite access and classes) with no joining fee. The facility is typical of all PureGyms, in that it is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It houses a spin and class studio; ladies only area and a fully equipped gym. It is in a town centre location with direct access to a multistory car park (free for two hours). There is a range of membership options, including non-contract memberships. The staff team is limited with set hours when no staff are onsite as seen below.

Unstaffed hours
Friday - 8PM-10PM
Saturday - 6AM-8AM, 4PM-10PM
Sunday - 6AM-8AM, 4PM-10PM

Table 8.2: Unstaffed hours at case study two

The interview was carried out with the general manager who oversees service quality for the site. He considered service quality to be;

PG02: "The interaction with members... the biggest thing for us is based around the gym floor because there is no reception desk. We do not have a reception desk which means as soon as the member comes through the pod they have not spoken to anyone. So the interaction from the staff, PT, management, having the door open in the office is so that the staff are approachable at all times. So, yes the big thing here is having staff that are approachable and staff that approach and interact with members. Just communicating".

This was interesting, as the perception was that service quality focused on staff customer interaction. Although he goes to some lengths to identify the strength of this, it is in contrast to the focus of the site, which is on cost and equipment, not customer interaction. This is evident through the absence of a reception and unstaffed hours during the weekend period. This focuses in on a common attribute, but a limited snapshot, of the overall function of service quality. Further discussion enabled wider, more site-specific service quality attributes to emerge, demonstrating his knowledge of service quality at the site and perhaps implying the initial focus on interaction was an unconscious acknowledgement of an area of weakness. However, this is not to say it is 'bad' but perhaps less important for the site. Also, as part of a much larger multi-site organisation, there exists some central processes to measure, compare and manage service quality;

PG02: "A lot of that is above us as we have got a huge team above the gym manager and the GM and improving quality is related to job roles in the company that are based solely on improving service, on

improving the offer in the facilities and so we are doing surveys on a regular basis with the members and one thing that we are doing across Pure Gym at the minute is adding functional areas in to most gyms and that is an area that has come from surveys”.

PG02: It works on a net promoter score so they get sent a survey asked certain scores for questions 0 to 10 and we find out what they have scored and It highlights certain words and they have said certain areas that they have mentioned that is not good and at the end of the month we will get all the data that tells us what has not scored well that month and what maybe needs to improve and obviously individual feedback because anybody can write an individual note and let us know anything that's perhaps going on in the club or things that are broke or things have not been identified.

This indicates that the larger providers have the resources to create specific tools to track customer perceptions and the service quality performance of the sites. Therefore, they can analyse current site-specific data and form local/regional strategies to suit, either to react to changes in demand or implement measures for sites registering poor service quality performance.

The focus group was carried out with four willing participants who are members of the site and are described in table 8.3.

Focus group from location 2.
PG021: white British female 50's
PG022: white British female 20's
PG023: black British/Asian male 40's
PG024: white British male 30's

Table 8.3: Coding for participants at case study two

I felt the focus group at Pure Gym was the most limited due to the participants involved. By the very nature of the provider and the type of

member it attracted, it was very much about being individual and being left alone, minimal engagement and input from others, particularly staff. This was reflected in those at the focus group who were the ones who attended classes and want to engage, socialize and felt greater affinity to the site. This had me questioning how representative the group was, but I was reliant on the staff to gather willing participants and these were the obvious choice. I therefore had to be careful in my questioning and ask not only their opinions, but if they differed from other at the site, or what was the wider consensus, or typical user opinion.

It was in the focus group where I first realised the members saw price as a service in and of itself, not a measure of quantity or quality. Up to this point I would not have considered price as an attribute as I saw it only as a measure, as discussed in the literature. I found this enlightening, especially as the GM was very careful about terminology when discussing membership cost. Similar to the CLT there was strategy in place to develop box gyms, but again the consumer attracted to Pure Gym and its providers primary service did not align with box gym users and the culture formed around them – quite the opposite. Indeed, the affinity of the members to the facility and their level of agency was limited compared to the other providers, where greater levels of social engagement occurred.

8.2.3 Case Study Three: CrossFit

*CrossFit XXXX is a high energy, no-nonsense facility that is your alternative to large commercial gyms. We focus on **relationships with our clients and building community** to help you reach your goals faster.*

This case study is based at a CrossFit, which is typically seen as an expensive provider operating primarily via classes, in a basic facility (often storage or factory units). Although independent providers, CrossFit facilities are part of an affiliate model, linking them to a central CrossFit organisation. CrossFit describe themselves as a 'lifestyle' characterised by safe, effective exercise for all in a supportive community. A range of classes are available,

yet the central theme is high intensity training. The site is in the centre of the city and offers no formal parking. Its provision includes one gym with a range of equipment more suited to aerobic training. It is open 6am-9pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 1pm at weekend. There are approximately six membership options (distinguished by time) and no joining fee.

The interview was carried out with the owner who oversees service quality for the site. He discussed his ideas of service quality in context with the business ;

CF03: "We offer a service which is programming, coaching and personal side of someone's physical development and we don't on paper offer things like nutrition and mindset and things like that. But because of the community aspects of what we offer we incorporate that into it, for whatever helps somebody needs on the side. we deal with the customer needs so if somebody had a different expectation than what we put on paper then that's the most important thing as long as the customer feels as though they are getting value for money because we are more expensive than a lot of standard gyms".

This encompassed a range of service quality considerations and fits with the definitions discussed in chapter three, demonstrating a good understanding of service quality. An example of this was the point made about meeting expectations and customer needs. He also touched on the service dominant logic, talking about value for money (value proposition) and delivering on non-formal provision through the 'community', of PT's and members (value co-creation). This links to Gummesson's (2007) concept of value proposition, that providers have gone from offering products to offering products/services and then offering solutions or value propositions. The manager had a very clear idea of what it was they offered and the environment in which it was delivered, which is a noticeable trait of CrossFit, who also actively promote the idea of being the outsider of the industry and not like your normal gym. This would develop further in the interview, as the

notion of who it was for, changed from everyone to those that understand this very prescriptive approach. However, there was no formal process for measuring service quality, which is not surprising as they are a small independent provider, as identified by the owner;

CF03: "Because we are small-scale we do not really have that, I would say the only thing we have in place that our coaches have complete freedom of expression as to what they can do at a higher level so with program and running the business all of the coaches and members have input into that should they want to and some people are more vocal than perhaps they should be. Some people come up with rubbish ideas which just won't wash and ultimately me and (co-owner) are the people that run the business. In terms of quality, it is a complete open forum so someone with a coaching staff or member are happy with something I think it could be improved in a certain way then we will always look at it, we are open to any kind of suggestions".

Despite the fact there is no formal process for measuring service quality, he implies some feedback on perceptions is received through informal communication. However, it appears ad hoc and personal suggestions are somewhat dismissed. A more formal approach would benefit both user and provider in this instance, as data could be analysed objectively, while members stay anonymous, allowing more meaningful feedback from all users not just those that shout the loudest.

The focus group was carried out with four willing participants who are members of the site and are described in table 8.4.

Focus group from Location 3
CF031: black African male 30's
CF032: white British male 40's
CF033: white British male 20's
CF034: white British female 20's

Table 8.4: Coding for participants at case study three

The CrossFit facility proved a really fascinating case study and the one I was least versed in as a fitness centre. I had previously not fully appreciated the value created and where that value lied, which demanded high prices and basic physical infrastructure. There was a genuine culture of community between members and provider, and clear evidence of value co-creation born out of that culture. This gave the members a greater sense of agency when training there, which sometimes manifested itself in members becoming staff. The members didn't just feel they were listened to, but recognised the value of each other to the service they were consuming. However, despite being a clearly positive thing and the source of value in the service, it could create issues for the provider as highlighted in the interview with the owner, as some members see themselves as having equivalent power in decision making to staff. It also spills over into wider social engagement between member and staff outside of the facility which enhances the bonds of loyalty, but also creates significant social drama if individuals fall out.

There was an authenticity to member engagement not seen at the other facilities which makes such box gyms unique and therefore very difficult to replicate. On reflection I feel the level of agency that members perceive and the degree to which this is recognised by the provider helps distinguish all the three case studies, but it is at CrossFit where this is most emphasised.

An initial individual site analysis has already been completed (example in appendix six) exploring the key attributes across the case studies. This section will discuss and compare the key attributes from across the three sites. These will be included and set out under suggested relevant dimensions for the emergent attributes, which will inform the items for the questionnaire.

8.3 Cross Case Study Analysis of Service Characteristics

8.3.1 Programming

The programming, which encompasses the timetable of activities and opening times was significant across the three sites. Although it was not a fundamental characteristic for the industry framework, it is identified in numerous industry models (Kim and Kim, 1995; Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Lam et al., 2005; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Yildiz, 2011). At the trust there was agreement among the focus group about the importance of classes;

CLT15: Classes for me (most important provision) if they did not do the classes I would not come.

CLT11: I would agree with that.

However, it should be noted that all the group did attend classes and they acknowledged that for others it may be less important, such as those that attend on a swimming only membership. Yet, the demand for classes was significant which was confirmed by the regional manager;

CLTO1: Another challenge is our group ex because our group ex is so fantastic and there is only limited space, we've got online bookings and people will be sat at the portal at 12 at night waiting for seven weeks in advance and they will check it and put everything in they want.

This demand was not unique to the trust though. Even at the PureGym site which opened with a primary focus of providing for those that only want to use a gym area, found rising demand for classes. As the general manager indicates, the group exercise is now a key component of what the organisation stands for, as attendance has ballooned and they have had to improve in the face of competition;

PG02: So ten to 15 years ago, a gym was a gym, it had treadmills it had your normal resistance kit, few classes and things have completely changed and the customers changed within the fitness industry.

PG02: Group exercise offering is something that we see as competitive across any other fitness provider.

This demand for classes was evident from responses in the focus group, with all four attending classes;

PG023: Personally, I think the classes, the classes and the people who you meet there and around the gym for me the big thing is the classes...having a different session we have the different spin classes and other classes as well.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, at CrossFit the programme was a key attribute, as the primary service is delivered through class-based sessions as confirmed by the members;

CF032: The quality of the training and the programme the way they put the programme together is really important as ultimately with CrossFit that's what it is

CF033: Well, I had been told by word of mouth so I did know what to expect and I knew it was small but yeah in terms of the sessions they were really really good which is what I was told but yeah they definitely met my expectations

When discussing the classes with the manager, he had an interesting

response, stating that there does not need to be a range of classes to suit different users. Instead, the class should be scalable to everyone;

CF03: I feel the user is irrelevant because everyone can do everything to a scalable level that we offer, so it does not matter if we have got novices, if we have got advanced people or a mixture of both in the class. We scale to all abilities and it is useful to know that beforehand, so we have a system that we ask people to book on of who will be in the class and we also have people trying with us who have disabilities, and again we manage their goals and scale that to their needs.

The idea of less choice but greater focus on the 'personal' within a class setting is something that perhaps sets CrossFit apart and offers some insight as to the demand for what may appear at surface level, a basic service offering but at a premium price. There is more focus on 'outcome' and achieving personal goals. This contrasts with PureGym where there was more focus on quantity, however the general manager sees the classes as being tied to developing a social environment, encouraging interaction between members;

PGO2: I think with the classes there are 50 classes and more at other Pure Gyms do more than 50 a week. The class for me they are trying to make it a community because they are free, don't have to pay for them and here we have people that have good friends that come in and might be shy but go and come back with three friends and it is nice to see as well because you do see people that come in that are very quiet and shy and they turn to something and speaking to someone else they open up a bit more and they will come in and they will feel like they can talk to you and yes I think definitely there is that community here.

This in itself could be classified as an outcome as members at the facility do attend to meet others and engage socially;

PG23: I think the classes (are most important) and the people who you meet.

However, trying to promote a more social environment by providing greater choice at a budget facility will always be challenging and lead to dissatisfaction from users who expect to pay little but receive good service;

PG021: I did my first keep fit class 40 years ago and so I have been through a lot of classes and a lot of different trainers and to be quite frank some of the trainers here are not up to the job and I think that is fairly evident by if you look at which classes are popular you will find the good trainers

The number of classes is also a critical attribute at the CLT trust and its importance as a hub for social interaction is also noted, yet the programme is being squeezed with competing demands;

CLT01: It's the group ex that they will regularly come to. perhaps doing three classes and dinner time class and actually having it as a destination, having more of a community or social base. That for us is great.

CLT01: One of the biggest challenge is pilates it is absolutely packed and people want it more and more on the programme but we can't fit it on the programme anymore than it already is because you have got to have a wide variety on your programme.

Despite the competing demand across the community base, for those

attending classes it is important there is variety for them as individuals;

CLT011: If you do five classes you want to be doing five different classes a week

Ultimately the class programme is seen as fundamental to achieving an organisational objective of making the site more of a community-based destination, however the challenge of catering to the community is significant. This also includes the timing of classes on the programme. For example, the other sites do not need to cater for children, yet at the trust;

CLT01: We are heavily into the family training and family membership making sure that people come and keeping healthy as a family it is packing it in and putting activities in with the restrictions we've got because of the physical building so if somebody wants to do a boot camp what can we put on for the kids at the same time so the kids have something. So now people are bringing kids to the boot camp session but it is what else can we put on at different times so parent and baby Sessions are going on.

Therefore, when considering the importance of the programme, there are wider questions to be asked, including the number of classes, the variety of classes and the time of classes on the programme. However, the opening hours are also a significant consideration for the overall programming of the facility. The opening hours have been explored in the overview of each facility which shows CrossFit being open the least with significant reduction in opening over the weekend, while the CLT trust is open more consistent hours through the week and PureGym is 24 hours. PureGym was a pioneer in changing the industry and the adoption of a 24/7 service was unique. With social changes towards a more 24-hour society PureGym can cater for this. As the largest single provider in the sector this attribute cannot be ignored and when discussing the reasons for selecting Pure Gym, the responses

supported this;

PG023: Yes it's the price and it's open 24 hours and you see where people will come to the gym after work have a shower and go home and no one else offers what this place offers.

PG022: Here you don't have that problem that you don't have to be in one hour before it closes you can just turn up whenever you want and it's a relaxed feeling and it can be nice at that time when you come late at night it's really quiet but I've only been a few times

The General manager adds to this, by identifying it as a USP;

PGO2: We have always been unique and others have followed us as we were one of the first 24-hour providers so that was a big thing that has been our unique selling point for a significant time and a lot of the gyms have started that in the UK.

8.3.2 Physical Environment

Physical environment is consistently present as a service dimension among service quality models for the industry (Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Alexandris et al, 2004; Lam et al., 2005; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Yildiz, 2011), while a key attribute (equipment) was also present in the industry framework. Again, physical environment was highlighted across the facilities, however, as with programming, there were variations in the feedback from members and managers. As gym equipment was a characteristic used to categorise PureGym, it was unsurprising to receive positive responses in this area;

PG022: Also, I look in the establishment what equipment they have what gear they have. I came here because the equipment was better than the equipment at the gym I used to go to.

PG023: Whichever gym you go to the equipment is going to be having an impact, you're going to have to focus on it and some don't have it some are really bad there are some gyms that have 1950s equipment that's really old metal stuff that's really all but you have to move with the times.

Yet, even at PureGym there has been some reflection as to the demand for what amount of equipment is needed on the gym floor, and what purpose does the gym area serve. There has been a trend in reducing the level or cardio equipment on gym floors, due to changes in training methods and increase in class attendance. While the influence of CrossFit and similar box gyms has not gone unnoticed by others in the sector;

PG02: One thing that we are doing across PureGym at the minute is adding functional areas into most gyms and that is an area that has come from surveys. We are increasing the number of gyms and making small box gyms. So that PureGym local which is the smallest size different concepts to a normal gym, which bases is it all on a functional area space, so you still have a few treadmills and you have a large rig area with more functional equipment and again that is one area that they have been looking into to improve our offering.

This adoption at some sites of a more basic gym only set up, is a reaction to CrossFit and similar providers. As the CrossFit concept is a strength and conditioning workout that is made up of functional movement performed at a high intensity level, there is minimal equipment needed, especially the banks of CV equipment present in other facilities. It has also been looked at by the CLT trust who seek to extend their provision by opening a smaller site in the model of a CrossFit as they see the demand for more functional, personalised training and also the social engagement of those providers;

CLT01: We have mentioned CrossFit where they have got that interaction with their members and they feel part of something.

A user at the trust also considered the gym equipment through a value-in-use perspective (Buswell et al., 2017), when comparing the membership to a previous provider he was a member with;

CLT014: The quality of the kit was excellent and it was very exclusive and expensive to join the membership was very expensive over £500 a year and this was a long time ago and I just thought there was no value to it for what I was paying there was no value for money whereas I can pay £33 a month and I can do basically anything.

Although there was limited discussion about equipment in the CLT trust focus group, this may have been because as a group, they were happy with the provision, or, although important it was not the most critical factor for them;

CLT013: It's got Everything for everybody

CLT015: The variations immense

CLT012: The Range is very wide

However, for other users who primarily only use the gym area this is likely to be different. The equipment is acknowledged as being a critical resource for the organisation, so much so it is listed in the business plan;

CLT01: There is a business plan set in place to ensure that we are keeping up with the latest trends so new pieces of kit that come through on an annual basis. We tend to look at the five year mark in replacing the entire kit but other than that it is every six months we

want to refresh if possible new bits of kit on the gym floor.

The equipment was a source for disappointment for some at CrossFit, but after engaging in the session, this was tempered by other more important attributes to those users;

CF031: I was a bit surprised when I first came I thought there will be more equipment

CF032: I really did not know what to expect when I came and when I did get here I don't think it was what I would have expected but it turned out to be great

CF034: I was a bit underwhelmed at first just by the facilities but to be honest after the hour had gone I had such a good time such a good laugh with all the other people that I couldn't wait to come back.

However, when discussing complaints, the manager identified equipment as a theme but suggests it is not a significant issue;

CF03: I would say it would be around resources so perhaps why don't we have a running machine and stuff like that but that's just not CrossFit but it might be that we are short on something but it's very very rare most people don't complain about stuff.

Added to the feedback from the members and managers across the other sites, this raises two points to consider, the number of and range of equipment in the gym area. Further discussion about competition with the manager, came back to awareness of the service product as identified in the focus group;

CF03: I think awareness is our competition because once they know what we are... If it's cheap and they want to go round the treadmill that's entirely up to them it's cheap but if they want to pay that and do that they may achieve results but most of the time they do not achieve those results and they really will never.

Ultimately, although many facilities offer lots of gym equipment, it is not what CrossFit do. Another noticeable difference between CrossFit and the other sites, is the environment in which it often sits (old factory or retail units), which can provide an impression of being underwhelming or unmaintained, especially with limited equipment;

CF034: I was a bit underwhelmed at first just by the facilities.

This trait makes these providers more comparable to the early pre 20th century gyms or due to the limited light, the 'dungeon' facilities in the mid 21st century. Although this bucks the trend in the industry, it is not to say the facility is not clean which is also a consistent and important attribute often found within the physical environment dimension (Kim and Kim, 1995; Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Lam et al., 2005; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Yildiz, 2011). There was minimal discussion on this attribute at CrossFit, however, that may simply be because they are happy with it. At the CLT there was agreement on the importance of cleanliness and beyond the more overt reasons for cleanliness, it was also noted that cleanliness can act as an indicator for other operational practice at the site;

CLT014: I would look at the cleanliness and the toilets, are they clean. If it's not cleaned that's a sloppy environment and if that's sloppy probably or possibly the rest will be sloppy so looking at the general cleanliness in the first place and work from there

The managers at the trust and pure gym supports its importance, saying;

CLT01: I would say cleanliness was one (main complaint) but now they're quite understanding, however we can always keep improving in this area.

PG02: Standards is obviously a big one so cleanliness standards and gym maintained.

The attribute of cleanliness is often ranked as one of the most important attributes (Freitas and Lacerda, 2019) and closely linked with maintenance as highlighted in the user and management responses. A clean shower or working treadmill is unlikely to exceed expectations yet acts as a significant dissatisfier if not managed properly. Therefore, the cleanliness and maintenance of the facilities and their equipment should be considered. However, for some providers this is made more challenging as the facilities do differ significantly in size and service offering;

CLT01: You have got a team of five staff on to make sure the facility is clean, keeping the areas clean and free, that you can do and two minutes later because of footfall it is a mess again.

However, the wider service offering beyond the gym can be a critical attribute, even if they do not always use a provision, having the choice is important. The largest of the sites is the CLT (site description at the beginning of this chapter) which is primarily due to its public sector position and requirement to offer provision to the wider community population;

CLT012: If you have the money you may be willing to pay more for a pool and a health suite because it seems more appealing. Sometimes with a class you are not motivated or to go in the gym you can always have a swim

CLT016: And a lot of people just come to swim

It also became evident that provision was not seen in silos, but the users identified the benefit of having a multi-purpose site and how value could be added by linking these. A specific example was GP referrals from the same site, with a referral indicating what provision to use to aid recovery;

CLT012: I think the pools good as well if you have injuries so you have an alternative place if you can't do the classes every week.

CLT015: I think the building itself it has got a medical component in it so the two things go together they're trying to get you fit physically and mentally with ailments and then you look at the physical side to carry on. I've got a bad back now and when I had one before is how I came to be a member here was through my GP because he referred me to the facility here which started the process basically and so the facility as a whole is in my opinion really good.

For some, this process linking the service offerings was the reason they joined and the effects of other attributes (community/ social) led them to stay. This approach of joined up provision is clearly linked to outcome, with physical and mental health at the core;

CLT012: So you could be sent back to your GP and get a referral just to sort gentle exercises if you've been injured or health problems and once you've got into the environment you get to know people and you start to mingle and when that ends that GP referral and you think you know what, I enjoy it here.

What also became clear is that it was not just about quantity, but the quality of provision;

CLT011: I think they're trying to compete with the other local gyms in the area and I think some of the improvements that have been recently seen have been trying to raise the level the cycling for example I don't know where you can go to get one better and better class I just get the impression it's been driven by that there's lots of the gyms around here and they want to be the best.

The other two providers in the case study provide a much-reduced range of service offering due to their business models. As a budget facility, PureGym seek to strip out any service offering beyond the necessary. This limits the site to gym area, studio and changing facilities, even excluding reception. There are practical reasons for this as identified by the manager, however cost control is critical to this decision;

PG02: We probably don't have that reception area because you're not here 24 hours as managers and PT's we will be here till ten so having a reception area but not managed it looks unprofessional.

Among the members there was an acceptance of tradeoff between cost and service offering, taking a value in use perspective (Voss, 2004). However, classes were seen as an important further service offering and some still liked the idea of additional services;

PG021: I think the only downside is there is no pool so if you want to swim as part of the membership you cannot do that, were as with the local authority it is a little bit more expensive and I would have probably done local authority but because it was me and a friend both looking to join and this is in the middle it either meant if we both came halfway and to be honest I would not swim that often.

PG021: And if you are not going to use all those of the things like a steam room or sauna then you're actually paying for nothing you're paying it for the name

There was a similar view at CrossFit, that further facilities would be welcome, but not a priority as the fitness outcome was more important;

CF032: I mean it would be good to have like a pool in a steam room and a sauna but realistically I left facility that had that in the past and even though it was nice it wasn't really what I was using the gym for

CF031: Yeah it's great to have some of that luxury stuff but really it's about the training environment and the instructors because when you go to the gym you want to go there to get results and you will get results if you committed to doing that here so that's why we come

The service offering across sites in the fitness industry is very different and through price discrimination memberships at a single site can have a significant impact on what service is provided to different users. This is a significant issue when deciding which site to join and appears to have a lasting impact on user perceptions as the demand can change over time. As such, the range of further services should be included. However, this attribute is a prime example for the inclusion of an importance score when seeking to create an industry model, as service quality performance scores at some sites are likely to be low, yet their business model accounts for this, so only by knowing its importance to the user can its context to that site be shown.

8.3.3 Interaction

Within service settings, quality staff interaction is a critical component of achieving high levels of service quality (Behnam, 2021). As well as staff

engagement the interaction between users has achieved more recent prominence as a key attribute, notably in relation to value co-creation. These interactions make the experience heterogeneous to users and goes some way to forming their individual perceptions. These interactions were explored in the case studies and indicated both were of importance and that staff could lead to users leaving/joining while other users would impact perceptions of specific visits or activities. Indeed, no prompting was needed when discussing the importance of staff;

CLT013: I used to be a member of Xercise4Less and I just thought it was rubbish. The classes were not as good and the staff (where not as good as) here it was just not organised and I think you need to be organised and be driven

More specifically, some themes began to emerge as to staffing and was evident across all sites. These were knowledge, helpful and friendly. Perhaps unsurprisingly, due to the importance of classes and the social environment fostered at CrossFit, the staff were seen as friendly and helpful;

CF033: For me the variety of training and the staff great staff and trainers that really make it engaging

CF034: Yes, the staff make it really great and they're almost like friends

The notion of positive, friendly and helpful staff was present at the other two sites;

CLT013: I find the staff know what they're talking about and they're very helpful and I will ask them a question and if they don't know then another staff member will and they will put you on to them. Whereas I think, not that I go to other gyms, but I think you are left to your own how to train and you are not really sure about technique which then

you can hurt yourself

CLT012: It is down to staff as well if you have good staff their energy and the vibrance of staff if they are positive and they're up for it and it's their passion you get that from them and you get that motivation to do more definitely it is down to the staff

PG024: When it was explained by particular instructor what I should be doing what I should be looking for and then you can go round and help people out it really benefits and encourages us to stay but not all the trainers do that.

However, the unique dynamic at CrossFit is explained further by the owner;

CF03: A lot of our members end up converting into coaches or getting involved with staff and social stuff like birthday parties and things like that because maybe they feel an obligation, I don't know but it's again that kind of environment that we try to drive.

With this cross over and engagement moving outside of the facility, there is perhaps less of a distinction between the staff and members at this type of facility, which helps remove a 'them and us environment', which also fosters greater loyalty among members (Fernandez et al., 2020). While there was a more distinct boundary at the other two sites, the managers both highlighted the importance of staff;

CLT01: As a business our staff being the highest priority, as people want to speak to people.

PGO2: We have been trying to be as open team as possible where they can come and ask anything. I think a lot of people say that Pure Gym members of staff are approachable.

PGO2: People is a big one. Progression. Career progression is a big one within the company as a big one at the minute because I say that as we have just had at a GM meeting and that was a big focus on improving people and keeping people happy.

While staff being visual and engaging are seen as imperative, the fundamental reason for them being there is their knowledge. This was highlighted across the board as being very important;

CLTO1: I am a true believer in staff attending all the classes from the cleaner to myself, we will attend all classes so we can go and experience it and you are using your locker, you are using the changing rooms and getting that experience.

CF03: From our coaches we expect a certain level of athlete or level of member analysis on their movement practice and on their mindset as well.... ultimately that is what gets results and that is what gets them (members) through the door on daily basis .

CLT015: It is highly skilled though, so 20 people could do a class with and they could all be challenged and that's 20 different sets of challenges isn't it so it is quite difficult it is quite a skill I think to do it and they seem to do it really well here.

CF031: Yeah, the quality and the consistency of the instructors really.

That staff knowledge was found to be important is perhaps no surprise, however the relationships fostered between members and staff was. The staff were seen as so critical by members, that in each focus group, they could and have been a source for not attending or even leaving their

particular provider;

CLT011: I think that is going back to the other point that not many of them leave but if they did, I think that would be quite a test if suddenly two or three main instructors who have been here left.

CLT015: You do get some that one certain instructor on a holiday some members won't come.

PG021: A lot to do with the instructors and if some left I would perhaps follow them or leave but I wouldn't ever join one of the other big chains.

PG021: I actually dropped a membership at a local authority gym because the guy he did the circuit class that I loved he set up on his own and I left the gym and followed him, honestly I am not making it up.

CF033: The influence of the instructor is more important and if you have a bad instructor it's going to have more of an impact on people's behaviours and motivations and decision to attend than if you had a bad member.

The last statement from the focus group at CrossFit specifically compares staff and other member influence and firmly places staff as more significant. Further support of this position was provided by others;

CF034: It's a huge part of why I attend that it's a really good socially engaging atmosphere and I really enjoyed being part of the group.

CF032: If you mean would it influenced me to attend no but does it

make a difference to how much I enjoy it then definitely yeah you know sometimes it's not always great sometimes you get someone annoying you so that can also play it's part as well but it would not stop me coming.

This is consistent across the other two sites, who see other members as influencing their experience, but not to the same degree as staff;

PG022: It does make it better walking in and seeing the faces and you making certain friends gym friends that you don't see any right.

PG023: Yes, the members can make the gym.

PG022: You wouldn't not come because your friend wasn't coming it be better if they did but you still come.

PG024: Yeah, I don't go just because you guys are there although it does make it better.

CLT014: It is good to do in a group and that's important isn't it but I don't only do it because other people did it if I wasn't wanting to do that I would do it.

CLT012: It pushes you not to stop were if you're on your own you know I'll just finish.

CLT014: Not for me -other members influence you and your behaviour.

CLT015: I don't think so -other members influence you and your

behaviour.

Although the effects of staff and member interaction are slightly different, their importance is evident. The degree to which value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) is an integral aspect of the industry cannot be understated and is indicative of its inseparable nature. That some members not utilise the services, but seek to actively engage in its design and delivery is a significant issue, especially for CrossFit. Providers should focus on co-creation, but widely the idea of agency and how they can utilise this to achieve common goals. Added to the themes of helpful, friendly and knowledgeable staff, the proximity and friendliness of other members should also be further considered.

8.3.4 Accessibility

As an attribute, location is less prevalent in the literature than many of the attributes identified so far. At the trust, its central location was noted;

LA014: It's not in the middle of nowhere but I suppose you have to make the effort to come anywhere really if it's providing a need.

But, its accessibility become a wider discussion point;

CLT01: So sometimes transport can be a problem so we may put buses on for people too and get them to our facilities and so more and more showcasing of events.

CLT016: The up and active I think a lot of people benefit from that because then they started using up and active to be introduced to all types of societies and at whatever facility was available and it changed their lives and then they started coming regular and getting membership and said this is what I want to do.

Although the initial point was not specifically geographic, it does indicate the importance of a central location that is accessible to all the community and without financial barrier. If this was not the case, they would not have attended and therefore would not be a current member. Geographic importance is acknowledged by the manager, who highlights the initiatives to combat the geographical issue. This fundamentally links back to a core characteristic in the industry framework, 'community';

CLTO1: We have partnered with an organisation that has a central hub within one of the areas of the ethnic community for the ladies who don't want to come in. So we have a pocket on a Sunday from five till seven but then they want more than that, so it is trying to support those areas and parts of the community and we have assisted and help them purchase gym equipment and setting up the procedures and the training so people are able to do that in their local community then hopefully we can convert and get them to come to us.

Clearly the aims and objectives for the CLT are somewhat different to the other sites which brings with it greater consideration for access. However, the two other providers are centrally located and came across as important;

PG021: Accessible, it can't be miles away and it's got to be accessible for when you need it.

PG023: I think for all because it is central and because it is local for all of us go to the town centre and for me I only live up the road and I can come walking so it is the location.

PG021: It was in the middle of the two of us and that is why we eventually came here.

Being easy to access was important with a mix of drivers and public transport users, while at CrossFit a similar pattern emerged but with a focus on its proximity to work, home and its city centre location;

CF031: Its location too, because it's very close to the city centre and it's easy to access, yeah the parking is not great but in terms of its central location it's really easy to get to from work.

CF034: Yes, I'd agree for me it's really easy to get to from home as I only live around the corner.

However, the manager took a more strategic view of location, considering the socio-economic effects of an area its fixed costs;

CF03: It's a slow-growing asset but first thing is first and that's to be the best format CrossFit gym in the area and I believe that we have kind of achieved that and letting that reputation grow which you know our CrossFit gyms are very difficult. If you are a city like Manchester, Bristol, London. They have a lot of disposable income and around this area there's not as much disposable income, so we are constantly fighting.

CF03: Extortionate city centre business rates, that was a big factor and where we are in central XXXX and though we inherited the gym it is in a great location for traffic but for parking and for paying large rates and rent it is not ideal because we could have a place a lot bigger in an industrial estate outside of XXXX so I think it is a big factor with us and why our growth has not been what it could have been to be honest.

Location is a challenging attribute as it is fixed and not something that can be easily affected. In many ways the changes are outside the providers

control (moving home or job), however as the trust demonstrated actions can be taken, by not being restricted to the physical facility. Access can be further considered by what transport provision is available and as indicated in a number of comments this closely ties to parking. At the CrossFit facility parking was perhaps the biggest negative among the group;

CF034: Really good value for money even though some people may think it's expensive, especially with the lack of parking.

CF032: Good location and it would be nice to have better parking.

CF031: Yeah, the parking is not great.

The parking is such an important attribute that the manager considers it a restriction on growth as noted in the quote at the end of the previously discussed attribute, location. It is also a main source of complaints, which is replicated at the CLT, which has parking, yet it is limited and often full at peak hours;

CLT01: Better car parking is one and in terms of cleanliness I would say cleanliness was one but now they're quite understanding, however we can always keep improving in this area.

As mentioned in the site description, PureGym members have access to two-hour free parking in a large multistorey, which was mentioned;

PG021: We get free parking for two hours which is probably just enough and that's just right for us.

However, one of the group did make mention of the free parking and suggested without it, they may not be a member;

PG021: My sister said oh my son uses the PureGym and came here but I thought by the time I came here and paid for parking it would not be worth it.

As an attribute, parking is infrequently seen in service quality models for the industry, yet in my previous practical experience, this was always one of the top issues for members. Parking emerged across the focus groups and was highlighted as a source of complaint by the managers (excluding PureGym). A further attribute that receives attention, is price. Price has previously been mentioned via location and more latterly in parking. When it came to price, the focus group at the trust understood price could be a barrier and therefore important;

CLT012: If you're unemployed you can get a bit lazy, I can't be bothered to look for a job I am sick and doing that bloody blah but the fact that you can come and get your exercise cheaper it keeps your energy going and your motivation higher and it helps motivate you to find a job.

However, there was a deeper appreciation as to the value of the service they were receiving rather than a simply making a price judgement. In this sense it was a more considered value proposition (Gummesson, 2007) with a focus on total cost to benefit as opposed to just a membership fee. Service Dominant logic has more relevance and proposes service as the core concept replacing both goods and services. The supplier provides a value proposition, and value actualisation occurs through co-creation which is facilitated through the exchange of service between supplier and customer.

CLT016: You've got lots of options so you know whether it's swimming or using the gym you can use the group exercise the health suite and I think it's such good value for money.

CLT015: I think cost is an issue for people but what we lose sight of is a lot of people went to gym4less and a lot of people left and now they're starting to come back and they went and left because of cost but it didn't work out.

While those at the CLT considered price against the wider service offering, the focus group at CrossFit perceived the price in relation to the staff and linked it to outcome;

CF032: You pay for a PT which again sometimes can be hit and miss whereas this is far better where you're getting the equivalent of a PT on a regular basis through the week but you're able to do it with a load of mates.

CF034: It's worth it because I've spent £20 £30 £40 on gym memberships in the past but I didn't always go here it may be a little more expensive but at least I'm coming all the time so I'm actually getting use out of it and I'm getting results so it's far better for me so yeah definitely value for money

However, there is an acknowledgement that it is not for everyone, as with the cost does not come guaranteed results, but a need to commit;

CF034: Perhaps they don't see the value of it in the same way people who are committed to it do, because you will get results much quicker much more effectively than if you go to other facilities but you have to be prepared to put the work in so people who are prepared to do that will get results and I think that's really the typical type of member a CrossFit.

This is also clearly understood by the manager;

CF03: We have cheap 15 - 20 pound a month gyms around us as well, but for a lesser service and we've never dropped our price to compete with them because we're just a different outlet,

This type of cheap gym would include PureGym, for whom the price was a fundamental characteristic for this provider type in the industry categorisation. As previously mentioned, PureGym changed the industry with tight margins and rock bottom membership prices and it is a significant attribute for the membership base. However, it was also telling that they also discussed total prices as opposed to membership price and compared other facilities when considering its value in use;

PG024: The local one for me and cost was a reason because it was only £10 but then I paid more because I could get in to the classes.

PG023: Yes, some other gyms they are about £9 a week and really which have a gym you go to it is you who is pushing yourself isn't it. Here the extra added part for that £15 is you get classes.

PG024: We get good value from this one place and we use it much more. However, if we went to a local authority one you will be paying for it and not necessarily using it.

What was also revealing, when discussing price and value was the use of terminology at pure gym, as the GM was conscious about using the terms affordable or value, as opposed to budget or cheap due to the implied meaning of such words and their impact on member expectations;

PG02: When PureGym first opened, it was known across the industry as the cheap gym and we do now move away for that because it's about affordable fitness and people are getting massive value for

what they pay and we try to focus on that.

PG02: We interviewed an individual and that particular individual mentioned the word cheap. The person who was interviewing alongside me who was higher in the organisation kept marking him down because they were using the word cheap and I think going back towards five or six years ago it was possibly the terminology that that was used and it was what was focused on whereas now it has changed massively to the point that the word cheap it is not what we use, it is about value and affordable.

Price clearly plays a significant role in drawing perceptions, even the terminology is considered to influence members. The UK Health and Fitness Industry structure devised by Oxygen Consulting (2020), is segregated via price range. However, this perhaps fails to grasp the complexity of the industry and the price variations within facilities when considering total as opposed to membership cost. Ultimately, it is difficult to dismiss price as a key attribute when analysing the interviews and focus groups, from which came a concise yet powerful statement from a member at the trust;

CLT013: How can you put a price on the value of keeping fit.

An attribute that principally evolved out of the interviews was information. At the trust facility the manager provided detail on how information was provided and its importance;

CLT01: The challenge of how do we get that person aware of what they can experience if they haven't come through the door in the first place. So that is done through social media videos.

They are also aware of getting information to different users can be best achieved in different ways and on different platforms, however the

messaging needs to be authentic;

CLT01: We have used Facebook and Instagram but from going through and talking to them (younger users) and through surveys with them that is the preferred medium (snapchat) and what they would use.

Yet the ability for such platforms to provide a range of detailed information is limited and the website is the main source of information. However, as discovered in the mapping phase of research, for many providers they do not have websites. Also, despite being very efficient at disseminating information, online platforms can have their problems;

CLT01: We had feedback about being able to book onto classes, technology is great but when technology does not work it is a nightmare. So we are building a new system at the time and we're having a few challenges with that the website in terms of the bookings has been down and we got absolutely slaughtered.

Online information is of particular importance at budget facilities as this is likely to be the first encounter and is the primary point of engagement, including the sales process;

PG02: Yes, that's on the website and it is a big focus because ... for example when I come to Pure Gym there was no reception. The first thing I saw was there's no reception desk you have no interaction.

For the focus group, there was little engagement with the website which was surprising as it is the primary platform for class bookings. However, this is likely due to their regular attendance, therefore they are well informed as to what is happening. As there is considerable disparity as to online presence and capability across sites and because the managers expressed its

importance, accessibility of up-to-date information should be included.

8.3.5 Outcome

A further emergent dimension, which has been proposed in previous service quality models (Bradly and Cronin, 2001; Ko and Pastore, 2005) is that of outcome. When analysing other attributes, outcome has often been mentioned, more precisely in three forms which are fitness, health/wellbeing and social. Aspects of these were discussed during all the focus groups. Health and wellbeing were most significant at the trust;

CLT015: Health and fitness to manage my weight and sometimes if I've had a hard day at work, I can come in with stress relief.

CLT012: It's mental wellbeing as well, it comes from the mental for me.

Due to the structure of the site, with health facilities attached it was likely this attribute was more prominent in the minds of the group, with the direct link to health at the site and use of GP referrals. The social element was raised as previously discussed and was covered in more depth at pure gym;

PG02: Little friendship groups and things like that there is definitely here, something more than the past but we have that more now with friends here.

However, although this theme followed into the focus group, there were some clear divides;

PG024: For them (Asian populous) it is the price and the social.

PG023: We all get together for the social part but it's different they do the gym we doing the classes.

PG024: They come in groups as friends.,

PG022: Yes, but they're coming in groups with the friends and train at various different times where perhaps we meet together in the class we didn't come as friends and you know we have done well.

The social engagement is clearly an important factor, but this exists in two spheres, the first being those who come with existing friends and use the gym area (mainly British Asian men). The second group are those who attend and make new friends, mainly through classes (predominantly white British). The making of new friends also appeared to take on further importance at CrossFit, as the social dynamic extended beyond the facility;

CF034: It's a real Social environment and we do things for charities and we do birthday's so a motivation is it's part of our life.

CF033: I couldn't imagine leaving the gym this gym now it is part of my life and actually my circle of friends is formed around the gym so I think my motivations to stay at the gym is central to what I do.

Although this social tie can bring added value and more loyal members, the manager takes a broader perspective;

CF01: When it comes to things like the Social and community side, I see that at two levels because I used to run another gym, which had a very good community group but that comes with problems as well it comes with cliques it comes with relationships it comes with dramas and within a CrossFit community like I said in the previous question people can be a little bit more vocal.

CF01: My main objective is for people to feel like they are comfortable in a community environment but not too comfortable that they want to spend half their lives there because that's when in my opinion issues start arising.

As mentioned alongside other attributes, the other providers see the social aspect of CrossFit as a significant strength and seek to emulate that. However, it also has its challenges and needs to be managed. The most obvious of the outcomes is training/fitness which again was evident at all the sites and significant at CrossFit;

CF034: Well I get results, I think I've had a more effective training regime and a better fitness level since I've been at CrossFit than I've ever had in the past so if that's the case why would I want to leave.

CF033: Yeah I'd agree, you stay because you know you can get fit putting on muscle, it's a really enjoyable way to train.

CF031: So I really enjoy coming that's my motivation to stay at the gym and again getting good results so I'm staying fit and it's not a hardship for me.

As a dimension, outcome is gaining more attention and the analysis of the focus groups and interviews supports this. The data would suggest three distinct attributes need to be considered, fitness, wellbeing and socialising. However, with the extension of the social aspect of CrossFit and the interest from other providers, a further item covering social life should be included.

8.4: Proposed Service Quality Model

By utilising NVIVO and following the process proposed by Yin (2009), each

case study has been analysed individually, enabling key service attributes to emerge. This data has been further analysed between the case studies, resulting in the identification of broader service characteristics. These five characteristics of interaction, physical environment, outcome, programme and access have been labelled using the established terms ascertained in chapter five (5.14). In turn, these characteristics form the dimensions of the service quality model, which is proposed in figure 8.1. The dimensions of physical environment, (Lam et al., 2005; Lentell, 2000; Walker et al 2017; Yildiz, 2011) Programme, (Chang and Chelladurai 2003; Ko and Pastore 2005; Lam et al, 2005; Yildiz, 2011) and outcome (Alexandris et al., 2004; Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007) have all been used previously as primary dimensions for fitness industry models. The interaction dimension has also been applied previously by Ko and Pastore (2005) as an alternative to personnel, when both staff and other user attributes are captured under the same dimension. Accessibility appears in service quality models across the fitness industry literature, SQS-FC (Yildiz, 2011), SQAS-19 (Walker et al., 2019), QUESC (Kim and Kim, 1995), but as an attribute making up a core dimension. However, as discussed in chapter five, there is no agreement on its positioning. The proposed model (figure 8.1) positions accessibility as a key characteristic in its own right, encompassing emergent associated attributes from the data of location, parking, price and information.

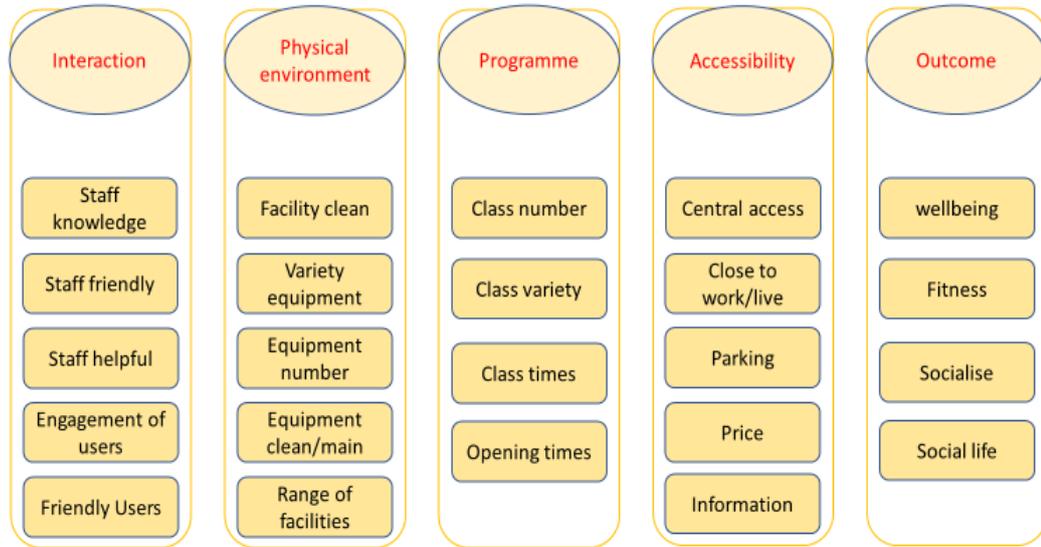


Figure 8.1: Proposed service quality model with attributes

At this point a questionnaire was developed using the data that formed the proposed model, with a list of questions linked to the itemised attributes under each dimension of the model, therefore making the model operational. The questionnaire was then deployed across the case studies in order to test the model's validity and reliability in the field. In total 54 questions were included, the first five of which covered demographics and the following three covering overall considerations of the facility (appendix seven). The following 23 questions covered the members perceptions of specific attributes and the final 23 mirroring the previous questions but asking about the level of importance of the attribute.

8.5 Cross Case Study Analysis of Demographics

All the managers when asked about target groups or if members fitted a particular type of user, suggested there was no target audience;

PG02: We don't specifically target an audience I would say that everybody is welcome

However, when pushed further on the subject all agreed there was certain characteristics that made up the core membership but did not explain all users. These demographics of users at the trust turned out to be quite different to the other sites;

CLT01: Our fitness offering, we are probably looking at 12 months ago would be different to now because we are trying to get more into the children's market and family market. It used to be generally 14 upwards to 80 years.... We have a synergy piece of kit in there, that life Fitness did a case study on us and we can train people with a child on it next to a 80 year old or first time user on it so because we are catering for so many never mind the demographics of the community.

CLT01: What we tend to find in terms of frequency of use in terms of number of visits tends to be predominantly female aged from 35 to 55.

The child end of the fitness industry is somewhat limited, due to the additional resources needed to satisfy the health and safety requirements and provide services for different age groups of children. Therefore, most providers start memberships from 16+ as noted at PureGym and CrossFit;

PG02: Yes over 16 and again that is more of a health and safety thing because we're not manned at certain times and no specific gym instructor.

CF03: We would like and do want a mixture of (people), we want it as inclusive as possible with a range is going from about 16 through to 60.

David Lloyd are a provider that offers family and child memberships, while other larger providers such as Bannatyne and Virgin offer restricted access with adult supervision. As a local authority provider there is also a requirement to consider the needs of all in the community, however, fortunately for the trust, it appears this is becoming a growth area and one the facility is putting its resources into. It is noticeable that there is a step jump to the largest frequency user group (35-55) and just as interesting, is the fact it is the female members who dominate this group, which bucks the industry norm. While having more balance among the genders is an evident strategy at the trust, focusing on increasing female users is also a goal at PureGym;

PG02: We have perhaps tried to adapt.... like putting in a ladies only sections to try and target the female population however we've still not managed to do that but we would like to, but we do a women only times as well to try and Influence.

However, the gender imbalance is still an ongoing challenge as clearly illustrated by a member;

PG021: I do not believe I am typical as a female.

Yet, at the trust there is still a significant number of males 25-41 and students 18-25 year old's, which may suggest it is not so different;

CLT01: Student is quite big and has been growing, but is perhaps within that area of those who also want to go to the budget gyms from 18 to 25. That is actually our second highest age group and males from 25 to 41 is our highest memberships, but it is that change now because again we are coming and moving towards the family concept.

As these are the largest group of users by demographic across the industry as a whole (Mintel, 2021), it perhaps explains their presence and if compared to other sites, the percentage of total memberships for the site, from this segment, would be somewhat smaller. This is further supported through the interviews and focus groups at the two other sites;

CF03: I would suggest it is 22 to mid 30's males (predominant demographic of members) and there are people who are fairly fit or have done sport in the past.

CF033: I guess so even though we do have a range of all people coming there is more males probably around 20-30s so yes I'd say that I am typical.

PG02: I would say the dominant demographic of user here is young from teenage Muslim male that is our gym is busy with 60 to 70% of the people in here now are young 18 to 25 year old Muslim male and that is our regular user. Again we focus our sales in those areas residentially.

PG023: I believe certainly that there is probably I think it is 65% for 20 to 30 year old males who have Asian background.

As there is an increasing move towards family memberships for the trust, the resources will continue to shift to favor the needs of that demographic, which may mean a reduction in the 18 to 30 male segment. However, this segment continues to provide the bulk of membership for the other type of providers. Yet for the specific pure gym site used in the case study, this demographic is further distilled down to British Asian males from 18-30. Clearly this is a micro influence and is a direct result of the demographics of the local area, as discussed by the GM when asked about geographic influence;

PG02: Massively, in terms of a comparison I have come to this gym from a previous gym both PureGyms and they are completely different demographics, it could not be more different, here the demographic is 70% male and I think 60% Muslim, whereas my previous facility was completely different it was 50 50 male female and so your demographic has completely changed.

As discussed in the outcome dimension, the demands of this group of users tended to be similar, and distinctive to the white British population;

PG022: However, what we see is they (British Asian populous) don't tend to come in the class.

PG024: They come in groups as friends

PG022: They're coming in groups with the friends and Train at various different times

Yet, despite also being in an area of mixed ethnicity, the trust struggles to penetrate ethnic minority groups and does outreach activities to try and overcome this;

PG01: The demographics, we have got quite a lot of ethnic variation who are not coming into our facilities.

This supports the notion of regional and local variations in fitness trends, with demographics likely being a significant cause, meaning providers need to be aware of local factors as they are ultimately reliant on that market;

PG02: Every person or anybody of any fitness level is welcome at

PureGym and it is completely dependent on the demographic of that area.

PG023: You see that is because it is only right around the corner for this area and this Asian area around XXXX is quite extensive.

A further significant aspect of regional variation which can have ties to differences in ethnic populations, is income and is highlighted as an issue at all three sites;

CLT01: We need to be aware that we are in one of the most deprived areas of the UK so that has a significant impact on us and that is why we are doing projects and active projects and we're doing it at a low-cost rate and that is a big issue.

CF03: I would say quite a lot, in terms of the wealth of the area I think that has a big kind of a big factor to play in it and looking at the other gyms in the area so.

At PureGym there was agreement among the focus group that 'social class' played a role in identifying a user type for the site, which may be better seen through the socio-economic lens, as it related to price and affordability;

PG023: They are not hitting the rich people they're hitting you know the middle class and perhaps that's why they're working well.

PG021: Well I think working class me.

PG023: We are all working class the right way but it is that isn't it down to price.

PG023: I think for the people (that) are coming through the door you're not really going to get the guy who's coming through on the Rolls-Royce.

Price was a key characteristic during the industry mapping, for which PureGym and other low-cost providers aligned with. This emerges through the focus group at PureGym with members both explicitly and implicitly suggesting due to price the site attracts less affluent users. However, it may be better classified as those who are 'price sensitive' (psychographic) than a socioeconomic characteristic. Indeed, this is supported by the investor report from 2018, which identified price and value for money as two of the top three reasons for selecting the gym (Pure Gym, 2018). Although the site has a significant British Asian membership base, this is a site-specific variable, unlike the age range which is predominantly 18 to 30. This deviates from the trust, who have a far more varied user base that includes not only the traditionally 18-30, but also families and users 35 years and upwards. It therefore encompasses all ages. However, despite having a range of members of different ages, the CrossFit membership base was predominantly those aged 22 to 35. This is likely due to the higher price which leads to less individuals of student age.

8.6 Cross Case Study Analysis of Psychographics

Psychographics encompass individuals' values, attitudes and lifestyles (Barber, Kuo, Bishop and Goodman. (2012) and will build on the demographic analysis of the case studies. Some key psychographic data has already been drawn out in helping to inform the service quality model and questionnaire, however, this can also be used to identify differences in personality and preference between the members of the three case studies. The first observable difference between the sites is the difference in range of facilities. At the CLT, there is far greater variety of services offered and this appears to be a distinctive draw for the members, even for those who only use a limited range of service, having the option is critical;

CLT013: It has got everything it is got swimming pool.

CLT012: The range is very wide.

CLT012: I think if the place has got a pool it's always a more appealing it is for me.

CLT014: Just the size of the site shows.

CLT016: You've got lots of options so you know whether it's swimming or using the gym you can use the group exercise the health suite and I think it's such good value for money.

Having access to a range of resources including a pool and sport specific areas was a dominant talking point for why they and other members used the site. As previously mentioned, price appears to be a key characteristic for most users at the PureGym site, however, the notion of value was a more common theme at the CLT. Rather than seeking the lowest price or most exclusive facility, the members considered value for money, or receiving the most choice for the price paid;

CLT015: I would look at the variation of activity what can I get out of my £33 a month and that I think that is where this gym it's not got any competitor anywhere compared to it.

CLT016: If you're willing to pay a bit more you want a bit more.

CLT012: If you have the money you may be willing to pay more for a pool and a health suite because it seems more appealing. Sometimes with a class you are not motivated or to go in the gym you can always have a swim.

At CrossFit, value as opposed to price was also highlighted. However, being the most expensive site, with the least number of services may appear a poor value proposition. Despite this, the owner expanded on where he thought the value was in CrossFit;

CF03: We are not cheap but we are cheaper than having a personal trainer three or four times a week or even perhaps once a week but we are more expensive than other gyms and there's a reason for that so we need to measure expectations and control expectations. I know some people get it and some people don't, some people will moan and you can't always please everyone.

The focus group agreed, identifying the training and regular use of membership as reasons for it being better value than past memberships at different facilities;

CF034: So really, it's value for money really good value for money even though some people may think it's expensive.

CF031: Compared to getting a PT once a week and really not getting much from it this is far better and ultimately far cheaper.

CF034: It's worth it because I've spent £20 £30 £40 on gym memberships in the past but I didn't always go here it may be a little more expensive but at least I'm coming all the time so I'm actually getting use out of it and I'm getting results so it's far better for me so yeah definitely value for money.

However, the most compelling reason for being a member was the focus on the training delivered by the staff and in turn the fitness outcome;

CF034: Well I get results, I think I've had a more effective training regime and a better fitness level since I've been at CrossFit than I've ever had in the past so if that's the case why would I want to leave

CF033: Yeah I'd agree, you stay because you know you can get fit putting on muscle, it's a really enjoyable way to train as well I it's much better than just going on the treadmill or just hitting the weights in the gym which is what I did in the past.

The achieving of a fitness goal was a common value across the interview and focus group, however in order to do that it required commitment, which meant members tended to be resilient and motivated as they would be pushed by the trainers in a way that was not present at the other sites. The owner and members emphasized the hard work required and the strong mindset needed for members to push themselves;

CF03: Who are not shy of hard work and you see that if you are shy and they're not prepared to put the hard work in you will not last long in CrossFit if you want to go and sit on the exercise bike and watch Netflix it's just not the right place for you.

CF032: I'd say it's less about the typical member than the typical mentality of the member it's somebody who enjoys really making an effort and getting in there with the physical activity but also somebody who does enjoy having a laugh and a joke and perhaps does not take themselves too seriously.

CF034: It's not really for some people if they're not committed to it and they stuck just don't get results then they won't keep coming because it is more expensive than other facilities but perhaps they don't see the value of it in the same way people who are committed

to it, because you will get results much quicker much more effectively than if you go to other facilities but you have to be prepared to put the work in so people who are prepared to do that will get results and I think that's really the typical type of member a CrossFit.

The CrossFit provider therefore, suits those who are resilient, but also work better in a group environment where they have others to push them on;

CF03: CrossFit I think you're aware attracts a type of breed of people who are not confident enough to maybe go and work with a personal trainer or perhaps work in an open environment and do their own thing and keep motivated.

In many ways CrossFit is the very definition of value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Terblanche, 2014) in the fitness industry, with the members also being a significant part of the experiences and reason for achieving successful outcomes. To meet the business aims and values for CrossFit, recognising and supporting member agency is critical as it requires members to work with the provider, to achieve mutually recognised goals. This was explored further by the focus group;

CF033: It's a big part of what it is at CrossFit it's that motivation encouragement from others training in part of a group it really pushes and motivations very easy to train with a group than it is to try and train on your own.

CF034: I could see why it might be a bit daunting for somebody new but I would hope that with doing a taster session they would really get a feel for the place and the people and understand why we love it so much so I would hope that we would influence others as well as the instructors and the classes that they do.

Yet, the social group mentality often stretched beyond the class as discussed as part of the outcome attribute. For many it moved from social engagement while training to being their social life;

CF033: Absolutely I would agree to that I couldn't imagine leaving the gym this gym now it is part of my life and actually my circle of friends is formed around the gym so I think my motivations to stay at the gym is it central to what I do.

CF034: It's a great place to share ideas and you know that's what that value comes from there were like a family rather than an organisation.

CF033: Yeah the social side and it's really welcoming really friendly and the members tend to really get on well there isn't too many problems and really it goes beyond just the gym it becomes more of an external social thing so we all start to go out together or some of us do to socialize two meals of the cinema and things like that.

Therefore, members at CrossFit are far more likely to be resilient and social, with a preference for group-based training. However, Classes or group exercise, was an emergent attribute across all the case studies. Indeed, the most frequent users at the trust were those attending classes. For some in the focus group the classes were the most important provision and also provided social engagement;

CLT015: Classes for me if they did not do the classes I would not come.

CLT011: Probably just studio classes.

CFT015: I think I won't go tonight but when you go you get there it's absolutely fine that's what happens and the social environment if you don't know people well some amazing classes and people they come and they've not come for a while and you wonder where he is and people ask questions about each other so it is a bit of a relationship things as well.

However, despite classes emerging more recently as a critical attribute at pure gym, there is still a more significant number of members who attend to use only the gym, on their own or with people they knew before attending the facility as discussed by the GM;

PG02: There's no reception desk you have no interaction and I think that's best on looking at the demographics, looking at the type of member who uses the gym and there is seeing the potential market for a lot of members that actually do just want to come in don't want to speak to anyone just put the headphones in and work out and taking that reception desk away thinking that they there it would not have that much negative impact.

This suggests that the typical user of this type of site is more introverted, preferring less social interaction and an individualised approach. The PureGym environment is set up for this, from joining online through a self-administrative process, to attending whenever it suits without having to engage or rely on staff or other members. However, as the gym area is the single service for many, there is more focus placed on equipment as discussed in the focus group;

PG022: Also look in the establishment what equipment they have what gear they have I came here because the equipment was better than the equipment at the gym I used to go to.

PG023: Whichever gym you go to the equipment is going to be having an impact you're going to have to focus on it and some don't have it some are really bad.

At the CLT, gym equipment was also important, but the greater focus for members was on the variety of services as previously identified. However, similar to CrossFit there was also significant emphasis placed on outcome, especially for health and wellbeing;

CLT016: A gym without and you get the health suite and lot of places don't have it.

CLT012: It's mental wellbeing as well, it comes from the mental for me.

CLT016: I feel physically and mentally stronger coming to do the exercises seeing a meeting nice people.

This may be explained by the demographics, as there is greater spread in the age of the membership, not just concentrated around 18-30 (primarily) male. With a greater proportion of older users and families, the desired outcome is health and wellbeing as oppose to fitness and body image, which is further fueled by the health centre attached to the site, which is the source of GP referrals.

8.7 Proposed User Typology

Other key attributes that emerged as important, such as location and cleanliness, were more ubiquitous across the industry and despite their importance did not distinguish the different user groups. Moreover, Polyokov (2016) identifies motivations for participation in exercise across the industry

may revolve around similar broad desires, including physical, psychological, social and generic well-being benefits (Alexandris et al., 2004; Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007). However, Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) suggested that psychological factors such as an individual's motivations as being a distinct driver which was seen as unique at CrossFit as those attending needed to be motivated to train hard. Due to the environment at such a facility, there is no place to hide, no option of an easy session, as other users will push you on. As suggested by the owner, those not of a particular mindset will soon drop off. Furthermore, by way of contrast, users at PureGym could be described as co-producers and at CrossFit co-creators. Ballantyne and Varey (2006) suggest that although the desired result of co-operation between the customer and the supplier in both cases is the same (unique value), the two terms are not connected because co-creation is based on collaboration and dialogical interaction, whereas meaningful co-production is possible with certain prerequisites (e.g. resources, capabilities). The type of value created and or desired by the bulk of users at these sites is uniquely different with CrossFit nurturing an in-person engaged atmosphere, while members at PureGym utilise the resources provided by PureGym, producing their own value without the need for personal engagement.

Ultimately, what emerged from the data were key variables by which each case study could be segregated. These were age, value, engagement, outcome, classes and importance. Although all sites had a wide range of users by age, for PureGym and CrossFit, the significant proportion of members fitted the 18-35 age range. The users also see the value of their membership differently, with CLT users seeing the value of membership through the range of service offerings, whilst at CrossFit the value was aligned with the knowledge and engagement of the staff. At PureGym the value was simply seen in the price itself. The engagement of the users was also an emergent variable with PureGym users being more individual, having minimal interaction with staff and members. For CrossFit, high levels of engagement with staff and other users was a fundamental part of attending while at the CLT there was also a social aspect to attending, even

though this was not as critical compared to CrossFit. The outcome objective from using the facility proved useful in segregating the CLT where the focus was very much on wider health and wellbeing, whilst the users at the two other case studies were more specific, in seeking fitness. Classes at the sites elicited a different response and were very important for those at CrossFit, which is perhaps unsurprising as they are the foundation of the service at the site. At PureGym they were not important which is perhaps explained by the individualistic nature of the core group of users. For the CLT, classes were important, but it was acknowledged that with a wider range of services on offer not everyone engages with these. Finally, what was important to the users when attending was markedly different, which the range of services being important at the CLT while the gym equipment was most important for the users at PureGym. For CrossFit the social engagement emerged as important which aligns with the focus of the provider and the categorisation of the case study. The comparable typology of users is seen in table 8.5 below.

Table 8.5: Typology of users for three case studies

Typology of users for the three case studies			
	Community and Wellbeing	Price and Equipment	Social
Age	All ages and families	18 to 30	20 to 35
Value	Quantity	Price	Staff
Engagement	Social	Individualistic	Social
Outcome	Health/Wellbeing	Fitness	Fitness
Classes	Important	Not so important	Very important
Importance	Range of service	Gym equipment	Social

However, despite the differences, what is noticeable, is the many similarities between users across the industry. Those attending fitness centres across the UK only account for 15.9% (Leisure DB, 2019) of the population, which is something of a select group to start with and it could be suggested these

individuals have some shared commonalities that distinguishes them from the rest of the population. Yet, drawing together the demographic and psychographic data, it is possible to distinguish some diversity between members at the various case studies.

8.8 Chapter Eight Summary

This chapter covers the final stages of qualitative data analysis from interviews and focus groups from the case studies. In so doing, two of the objectives have been executed and drawn upon, one being objective 2b) *Develop a fitness consumer typology, classifying the key demographic and psychographic determinates of fitness centre users*. This objective is important, as it enables managers to gain a better understanding of the core user base, which can be useful for both marketing and managing resources. Through thematic analysis of the case studies both demographic and psychographic data was sought, leading to the emergence of six key variables which provided a structure to distinguish between the core users at each site. The variables were age; value; engagement; outcome; classes; and importance. Through these variables, what became most apparent was the alignment between the users of the site and the categorisation of the provider (objective 2a). The characteristics used to distinguish the providers were born out in the typology of users, for instance, at PureGym (price and equipment), users valued the budget price and identified gym equipment as the most important concern when attending. Despite identifying divergence between users, it was also noted that there were many similarities, which could be explained by fitness centre users being a distinct group to begin with. These similarities were more closely considered in association with the next objective.

The final objective, was objective 3. *Develop a service quality model suitable for use by fitness centres, in order to assess any gaps in their product and service offerings*. From initial thematic analysis of the data, key service attributes were identified from each case study and then critically analysed against each other to formulate the five service dimensions. These

dimensions consisted of interaction; physical environment; outcome; programme; and access which constitute the proposed service quality model for the NW as seen in figure 8.1. However, in order to test the model and make it a pragmatic data collection tool, a questionnaire was developed covering the five primary characteristics, with individual questions drawn from the attributes that had been previously identified as important. The questionnaire included duplicate questions covering service performance and importance as set out in chapter seven (7.8.4). The results from the questionnaire which was circulated at all three case studies are presented in the next chapter, which not only provides feedback for the site through the IPA framework, but tests the validity and reliability of the model structure, thereby achieving the aim of the study.

Chapter 9: Questionnaire Results and Discussion

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyse the results from the final empirical data collection. Therefore, the corresponding research aim is: *To produce a tentative service quality model, which shows the characteristics of the contemporary fitness industry in the North West of England, that will provide managers with a pragmatic and functional tool, which is easy to interpret.* The originality of this thesis therefore, lies not only in the development but also the testing and application of a service quality model, thereby advancing knowledge and understanding of service quality management approaches in this sector. As such, this chapter presents the empirical results and findings of the questionnaire, analysing results from each case study separately, before combining them in order to establish the attributes and dimensions of an industry specific model. A range of methodical research processes were undertaken in sequential order as set out in chapter seven, in order to ensure the final model is robust, after being tested for structure, validity and reliability. Further data analysis is provided in appendix eight, while some results are grouped for clarity of presentation. After the model has been rigorously challenged, the final piece of analysis in the chapter will be the evaluation of service quality attributes through importance-performance analysis (IPA). From this, an IPA framework for each case study will be provided and discussed before a summary of key findings.

9.2 Participants

The total sample consisted of 331 responses across the three case studies. With the largest sample coming from the CLT (Table 9.1). This, is understandable, being the largest site with the greatest number of members. Furthermore, the second largest (PureGym) also provided the second largest number of responses with CrossFit third. However, as a percentage of total membership CrossFit is significantly high, having only a few hundred members.

There was approximately a 2/3 to 1/3 split across gender (table 9.1) which again was not a surprise, with sites all closely aligning to the gender splits as noted by the managers. Indeed, all sites had more male responses, with CrossFit having a distinctly dominant male presence.

Table 9.1: Respondents by gender

	male		female		total
CrossFit	67	79.8%	17	20.2%	84
Trust	81	56.3%	63	43.8%	144
Pure gym	64	62.1%	39	37.9%	103
Total	212	64%	119	36%	331

The age of respondents is shown in Table 9.2 with 74.3% of respondents being between 18 to 40. However, as age was restricted no one under 18 is represented. It was expected for CrossFit and PureGym, however, a greater sample of those over 40 would have been expected from the CLT. Possibly due to the pandemic, this category was less visible across the service landscape, with them placing greater importance on isolating. This was different for those younger (primarily under 30) who were seen as being at less risk and wanted to use the gym, before they went back into lockdown.

Table 9.2: Respondents by age

Age	CrossFit		Trust		Pure		Total	
18-30	33	39.3%	34	23.6%	67	65%	134	40.5%
31-40	40	47.6%	42	29.2%	30	29.1%	112	33.8%
41-50	7	8.3%	24	16.7%	6	5.8%	37	11.2%
51-60	4	4.8%	21	14.6%	0	0	25	7.6%
61-70	0	0	23	16%	0	0	23	6.9%
71+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The sample was heavily weighted along ethnic lines, however as with the

other demographic frequencies, this is not unusual for the industry. However, an area of note is the Asian (British) representation at PureGym. This was discussed with users and the GM during the focus groups and interview respectively and to some degree was born out in the sample.

Table 9.3: Respondents by ethnicity

Ethnicity	CrossFit		Trust		Pure Gym		Total	
white	71	84.5%	124	86.1%	42	40.8%	237	71.6%
Asian/ British	4	4.8%	9	6.3%	44	42.7%	57	17.2%
Black/British	6	7.1%	9	6.3%	14	13.6%	29	8.8%
Mixed ethnicity	2	2.4%	2	1.4%	3	2.9%	7	2.1%
Other	1	1.2%	0	0	0	0	1	0.3%

Those using the gym two times or more per week, represented over 80% of the sample. Again, this may be a consequence of the pandemic with those most keen to return being the regular users. Also, the validity of the question was rather watered down due to the pandemic as for over six months the gym had been mostly closed or heavily restricted. However, studies in sport (Verplanken and Melkevik, 2008; Jekauc et al., 2015) suggest participation frequency needs to be considered in studies for better understanding of behaviour. However, with such a significant proportion being regular users, this was not considered problematic for the sample.

Table 9.4: Respondents by attendance regularity

Attendance	CrossFit		Trust		Pure Gym		Total	
1x per week	17	20.2%	23	16%	15	14.6%	55	16.6%
2 x per week	37	44%	65	45.1%	41	39.8%	143	43.2%
3 + per week	30	35%	51	35.4%	47	45.6%	128	38.7%
<1x per week	0	0	5	3.5%	0	0	5	1.5%

It is surprising to see 86.7% of responders being members for over six months. However, as discussed, this data was gathered during a brief spell between lockdowns in the fitness industry with fewer new members than usual, as there was no opportunity to use the membership (fully) or people wanted to stay away, as with the age demographic.

Table 9.5: Respondents by length of attendance

Membership	CrossFit		Trust		Pure		Total	
1-3 months	9	10.7%	3	2.1%	3	2.9%	15	4.5%
3-6 months	7	8.3%	8	5.6%	14	13.6%	29	8.8%
6-12 months	20	23.8%	29	20.1%	19	18.4%	68	20.5%
1-2 years	25	29.8%	56	38.9%	42	40.8%	123	37.2%
2+ years	23	27.4%	48	33.3%	25	24.3%	96	29%

The demographic data suggests that the sample is broadly representative of the population of users across these sites and therefore the wider industry. Therefore, the data set of 331 was retained and further analysed with exploratory factor analysis.

9.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis

As set out in chapter seven, EFA seeks to identify the smallest number of hypothetical constructs (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black, 1998). This process provides details of the eigenvalue for each component and patterns of higher scoring components emerge, suggesting potential dimensions. An example of the analysis is seen in table 9.6, the results of EFA for PureGym service performance scores. For this study, a factor loading equal to or greater than .30, was kept for further analysis as seen in table 9.6. At this stage items not scoring highly and failing to align with emerging dimensions can therefore be eliminated, which was the case for some of the items. The results from EFA across all case studies for importance and service performance excluded two questions, which were removed before the next phase of analysis. After all initial analysis across all sites, it was found two items to be consistently below 0.3 and they did not consistently align with

specific dimensions. These account for two of the components in orange, 'the facility is a central part of my social life' and 'the facility is close to where I live or work' (the further tests across the case studies can be found in the appendix eight). In seeking to establish if the data has a simple structure, an iterative process of identifying very high loadings (eigen value above 0.6) in the components (units in green) for the service performance scores of the PureGym. Components with high loadings of between 0.3 and 0.6 were also identified (units in orange), while items with low loadings were dismissed (units in red, below an eigen value of 0.3). From this process dimensions began to emerge, with some complex variables loading across dimensions. Further components in orange, 'information'; 'helpful staff' and 'opening hours' were retained, even though 'opening hours' falls below an eigen value of 0.4 in this test. As this was the PureGym, they have 24 hour opening, therefore, its score was exceptionally high compared to other programme related components. Three other components have a score of 0.3, however, the same items also had a corresponding component score above 0.6 within another dimension, therefore components with the very high eigen value were selected. Also, the five dimensions as proposed in chapter eight were supported in this early analysis. The next step was to conduct principal component analysis on the remaining items, developing greater confidence in the emerging structure.

Table 9.6: Pure Gym: Component matrix performance scores

	Components				
	1	2	3	4	5
The staff are knowledgeable	.808	.080	.023	-.095	-.064
The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment	.796	.015	.059	.249	.138
The other users are friendly and supportive	.792	.084	.039	.250	.186
The staff are friendly	.753	.115	.009	-.008	-.130

The staff are on hand and helpful	.575	.040	-.068	-.097	-.271
There is a sufficient variety of equipment	.251	.762	.111	.253	.022
The facility is clean and maintained	-.002	.743	-.024	.152	-.128
Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of facilities (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	.301	.732	.128	.205	.022
There is a sufficient number of each equipment	-.030	.696	.178	.300	.056
The equipment is cleaned and maintained	-.043	.676	.024	-.137	-.046
Information is easy to access and up to date	.318	.407	.186	-.118	.146
The opening hours are convenient	.356	.377	-.349	-.106	.071
There is sufficient variety of classes	.058	.053	.941	-.111	-.045
There is a sufficient number of classes	-.097	.124	.896	-.065	-.019
The class times are convenient	.169	.097	.851	-.126	-.019
Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing	.052	.157	-.116	.808	-.046
(name of facility) is a good location to socialise	.219	.353	-.164	.767	-.190
Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals	.114	.281	.028	.731	.024
(name of facility) is a central part of my social life	.137	.115	.059	-.422	.144
The facility is centrally located and easy to access	-.081	.158	.050	.047	.727
The cost, is a significant reason for choosing the facility	.036	-.124	.004	.200	.727

There is Parking available with sufficient spaces	-.081	.043	.138	-.087	.652
The facility is close to where I live or work	-.070	.027	.251	.158	-.429

9.4 Principal Component Analysis

To identify if any dimensions were present in the data an orthogonal rotation (for uncorrelated data) is used to produce results which are easier to interpret. For this study a varimax with Kaiser normalisation was used, which is a commonly used approach in other such studies (Yildiz, 2011). In order to better display the results, the remaining rotated component matrix tables exclude eigen values below 0.3. This is displayed in table 9.7 which is again taken from PureGym, however, this time analysing the importance data. Some complex variables loading across dimensions are still evident, such as ‘the other users are friendly and supportive’. However, one of the component eigen values is very high .774 and the other only .344, therefore the high loading component should be taken. In the remaining PCA tests these attributes were consistent in registering a significant eigen value and aligning with a regular set of components. There were no cases of very high eigen values for the same item appearing in corresponding components (Table 9.7). Therefore, no further tests using Cronbach Alpha to investigate correlations between items within each of the five constructs for importance and perception was needed. However, Cronbach Alpha scores would be taken to test for internal consistency of the model, namely for the individual dimensions.

Table 9.7: Pure Gym: Rotated component matrix importance scores

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Staff are friendly	.890				
Staff are on hand and helpful	.826				
Staff are knowledgeable	.784				

The other users are friendly and supportive	.774		.344	
The presence and positive engagement of other users	.663		.345	
The range of facilities beyond the gym/studio. (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	.393			
The class times are convenient		.957		
There is sufficient variety of classes		.956		
There is a sufficient number of classes		.935		
The information is easy to access and up to date		.674		
A facility is clean and maintained			.906	
The equipment is cleaned and maintained			.870	
A facility has a sufficient number of each equipment			.825	
A facility has a sufficient variety of equipment			.824	
The cost is a significant reason for choosing a facility			.738	
The facility is centrally located and easy to access			.735	
Parking is available with sufficient spaces			.582	
The opening hours are convenient			-.403	

I improve my general wellbeing						.830
I can achieve my fitness goals						.717
I am able to socialise						.706

The remaining PCA tests were completed and results compared in table 9.8. Again, very high scores above 0.6 are in green, with those items not having any eigen value above 0.6 but between 0.3 – 0.6 in orange. Some of those in orange have multiple scores which represents alignment across more than one component. The table data is also coded, which represents the different emergent dimensions and indicates which items were grouping together. Table 9.9 explains these codes.

Table 9.8: PCA comparative Results

item	Dimension	Pure Gym		Trust		CrossFit		Total	
		P	I	P	I	P	I	P	I
1	The facility is clean and maintained	D2	D2	D2	D2 .560	D2	D2	D2	D2
2	There is a sufficient variety of equipment	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2
3	There is a sufficient number of each equipment	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2
4	The equipment is cleaned and maintained	D2	D2	D2	D2 .513	D2	D2	D2	D2
5	Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of facilities (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	D2	D1 .393	D2	D2	D2	D2 .471 D1 .308	D2	D2 .510
6	The staff are knowledgeable	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1 .563	D1	D1	D1
7	The staff are friendly	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1 .526	D1 .551	D1	D1

8	The staff are on hand and helpful	D1 .589	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1
9	The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1
10	The other users are friendly and supportive	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1	D1
11	The facility is centrally located and easy to access	D5	D5	D5	D5 .594	D5	D5	D5	D5
12	The cost, is a significant reason for choosing the facility	D5	D5	D5	D5	D5	D5	D5	D5
13	There is sufficient parking available with sufficient spaces	D5	D5 .582	D5	D5	D5	D5	D5	D5
14	There is a sufficient number of classes	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4
15	There is sufficient variety of classes	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4
16	The class times are convenient	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4 .590	D4	D4
17	The opening hours are convenient	D1 .383 D4- .310	D5- .403	D4	D4	D4	D4 .581	D5 .350 D4 .314	D4 .509
18	Information is easy to access and up to date	D1 .312	D4	D4	D4	D4	D4 .552 D3 .446	D4 .560	D4
19	(name of facility) is a good location to socialise	D3	D3	D3	D3 .441	D3	D3	D3	D3 .528
20	Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing	D3	D3	D3	D3	D3	D3 .581 D5- .411	D3	D3
21	Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals	D3	D3	D3	D3	D3	D3	D3	D3

Some items were less consistent for individual case studies for both service quality performance and importance measures. However, the decision on where to place these was aided by reviewing the same item at corresponding sites and totals. Those scoring above 0.5 were consistent with the majority of other results for the same item. Indeed, the only questionable item, as to its dimension, was opening hours. As previously discussed, opening hours, although significant at PureGym did not align very well due to this. However, across the other sites this was more consistent, sitting in D4 – Programme. Yet, on two of the tests for this item some association with Accessibility was found, which suggests that this attribute explains part of the variance across more than one dimension. One noticeable attribute move from the original proposed dimension is Information (18) which emerged as a construct under Programme, after initially being placed in Accessibility.

Table 9.9: Key for dimensions

Dimension	Name
D1	Interaction
D2	Physical Environment
D3	Outcome
D4	Programme
D5	Accessibility

This process ensured the dimensions were broadly reflective of the industry and applied across providers. As noted, opening hours at PureGym did not fit the chosen dimension, however this was due to its significantly high score as a 24-hour facility.

Alongside the PCA results, the squared loadings were also produced describing the amount of variance in the data set, explained by the five dimension model, with a break down as to the level of loading for each dimension. Examples are provided for PureGym, giving both service quality performance (table 9.10) and importance results (table 9.11). the remaining squared loading data can be found in the appendix eight.

Table 9.10: Pure Gym: Rotation sums of squared performance loadings

Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.526	16.791	16.791
2	3.318	15.798	32.589
3	3.233	15.394	47.983
4	2.021	9.623	57.606
5	1.879	8.950	66.556

The PCA supports the five-dimension structure for service quality performance scores at PureGym and the five dimensions explain 66.56% of variance in response for service quality performance scores and 63.48% for importance.

Table 9.11: Pure Gym: Rotation sums of squared importance loadings

Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.300	15.712	15.712
2	2.974	14.162	29.874
3	2.734	13.019	42.893
4	2.499	11.899	54.792
5	1.825	8.690	63.482

The final piece of data at this stage is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, which indicates the proportion of variance in the variables that might be caused by underlying factors. A score between 0.7 and 1.0 is considered very good. The KMO for PureGym perception data was 0.698, which is on the border of a very good fit. The KMO for importance was 0.712, which indicates valid dimensions for this site. However, this was conducted across the other sites and combined to ensure the dimensions were consistent across the industry and the measuring tool. The remaining KMO scores can be seen in appendix eight, however, of the six further tests,

three scored above 0.7 and three above 0.6, therefore, given all the statistical evidence, the emergent five-dimension model was accepted at this stage.

What is noticeable, is that the five service quality dimensions held under testing, with four of these (interaction, physical environment, outcome, programme) appearing regularly across similar studies (Martinez and Martinez, 2010; Polyokov; 2016). Therefore, this study broadly aligns with others in the field, supporting the idea that there are some similarities around service quality provision across all fitness centres, regardless of regional variation. The next stage was the internal validity of the dimensions.

9.5 Dimension Reliability - Cronbach Alpha

The test for internal reliability of the dimensions was conducted using Cronbach Alpha. The generally accepted value of 0.70 is appropriate for this type of analysis (Ko and Pastore, 1995; Lentell, 2000) and is supported by Kline (1999). The findings for each case study and totals are set out in the table below (table 9.12).

Table 9.12: Cronbach alpha test of internal reliability

Dimension	Pure Gym		Trust		CrossFit		Total	
	P	I	P	I	P	I	P	I
Interaction	.814	.862	.882	.809	.754	.753	.856	.856
Physical env	.811	.786	.765	.702	.960	.830	.905	.771
outcome	.844	.633	.757	.645	.771	.598	.829	.643
programme	.689	.861	.856	.847	.780	.620	.796	.876
Access	.628	.531	.704	.753	.914	.854	.850	.708

Overall the results were positive for the model, with 80% of results above 0.70 threshold. However, for the service quality performance results, it was found that for the 'Access' dimension at Pure gym, if price is removed it moves to 0.726 and for programme, if opening hours is removed, it moves to .780. Again, this perhaps indicates these items are informing more than

one dimension as discovered in earlier analysis. Again, opening hours appeared and also price, which was another significant attribute for this site, from the qualitative data.

For importance results, outcome was clearly the most disturbing dimension, which was a surprise as it had proved robust up this point. However, the scores were not significantly low (around 0.6 or above) and the service quality performance scores were high. Considering the service quality model is primarily about the measure of perception, this would be the preferred high scorer for Outcome. Ultimately, for total importance for outcome, the removal any three items does not lift it beyond the threshold. However, removing the social item would lift it to .651, likewise for CrossFit, which would take it to .671. At the CLT, removing the social outcome would lift it to .503 and at PureGym, it would lift above the threshold (.705) with the same item removed. Finally, the removal of any item would not improve the score for Programme (importance) at CrossFit. After analysing these results, the weight of evidence still supported the emergent model and so the model structure was accepted. At this stage the applicability of the model structure was demonstrated to be effective across case studies and, therefore, the industry. Also, the importance measures were supplementary in order to see if the dimension structure was consistent as to importance, while the service quality performance score is the primary function of the model. Therefore, the final confirmatory tests of overall model validity were conducted on the total service quality performance scores for the sample across the case studies (331 responses).

9.6 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to confirm the factor structure of the scale and to test the validity of the model (Hunter and Gerbing, 1982). The goodness of fit indices used to test the perspective five-dimension model are set out in table 9.13.

Table 9.13: Results of the confirmatory model test

RMSEA	CFI	NNFI	χ^2/df	SRMR
.067	0.95	.094	1.35	.064

Together, these results indicated that the emergent service quality model for the NW fitness industry, with five dimensions and 21 items had good model fit (Hooper et al., 2008). The RMSEA score of 0.67 does not suggest a very good fit, but is a reasonable fit (Steiger, 1990; Byrne, 1998), while the CFI result of .95 does indicate a good fit (Bentler, 1990; Hooper et al., 2008). The NNFI used by others in the field (Alexandris, 2004; Albayrak and Caber, 2014) indicates an acceptable level of fitness (Byrne, 1998). The chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) ratio is at 1.35, easily under 2, indicating a superior fit between the hypothesised model and the actual data (Cole, 1987). Finally, the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), as used by Alexandris (2004) and Walker (2017) produced a result of 0.64, which is acceptable, but in a well-fitting model it would be expected for the value to be .05 or less (Byrne, 1998). Although not all scores reached an optimum level of acceptability, this is not unusual. This is also not surprising when considering the data is deliberately taken from across the industry, making the responses less uniform than if the study was completed at a single provider or at a distinct group of fitness centres. Also, as discussed at different stages of the study, research in the social science field offers unique challenges and measuring constructs that are not stable, will lead to some variance, therefore perfection should not be the enemy of the good. Ultimately the model has proven robust against established quantitative analysis and offers a pragmatic, easy to implement tool for assessing service quality in a fitness centre and provides guidance as to which areas resources should be targeted. Therefore, this study is able to affirm the NWFC service quality model and offer it up as a measuring tool for fitness centres in the NW.

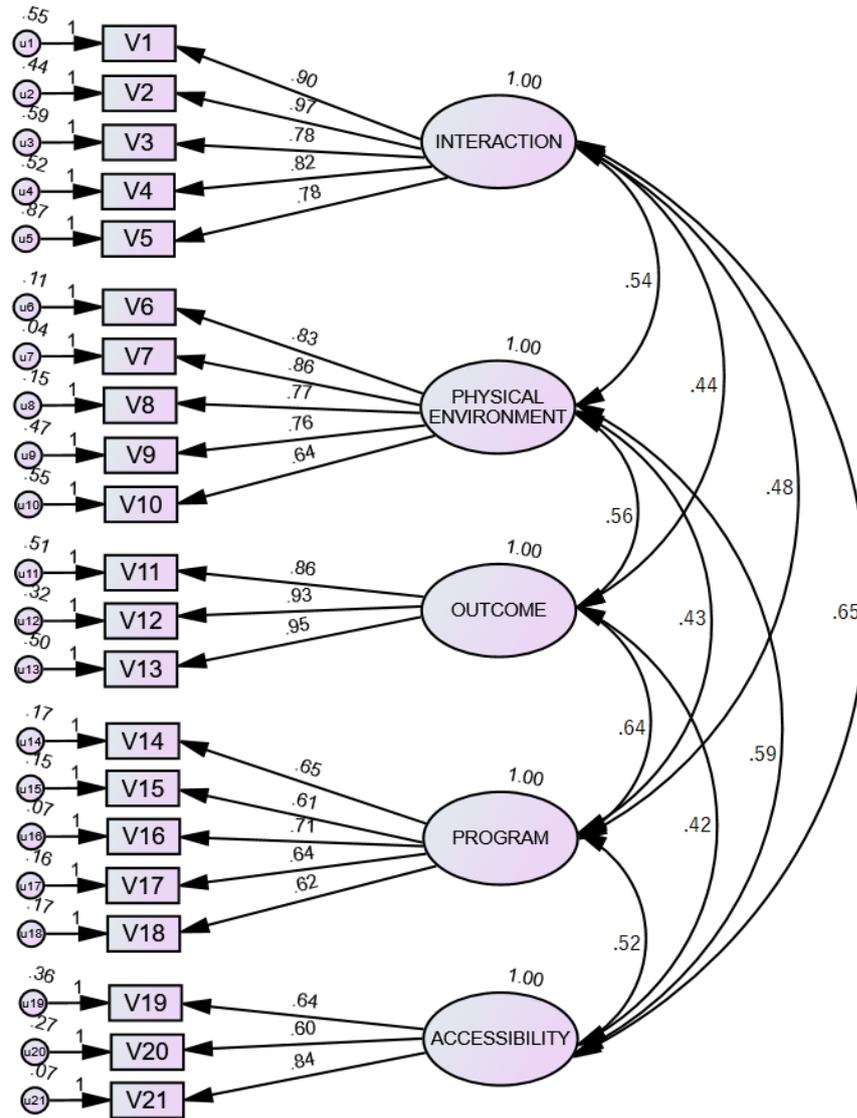


Figure 9.1: The NWFC model confirmed by CFA

The CFA analysis model is shown in figure 9.1 and as set out in chapter seven, provides further data as to error, variance and loading across the variables and dimensions. Figure 9.1 displays inter factor correlations, factor loading and error variance. An examination of the factor loadings revealed that all loadings were statistically significant based on the .50 standard (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The error variance across the variables was acceptable, however V5 'other users are friendly and supportive' is high. Also, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) the dimensions proved stable

based on the .70 standard for the construct reliabilities. These figures were covered in table 9.12, however the specific total service quality performance figures (representing the data used for the CFA) is set out below (table 9.14).

Table 9.14: Cronbach alpha results

	Dimension	Pf
1	Interaction	.856
2	Physical env	.905
3	Outcome	.829
4	Programme	.796
5	Access	.850

The NWFC model of service quality (figure 9.1) indicates a five-dimension model covering Interaction; Physical Environment; Outcome; Programme; and Access. This model affords an effective measuring tool for service quality performance of fitness centres across the NW and its design allows for clear interpretation of results, with guidance for managers who need to consider where and how resources need to be deployed to improve service performance. Its wider deployment on a national or international level should be done with confidence in its valid construction but with vigilance as to its specific regional development.

While the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data confirmed the NWFC model, it also led to some changes from the original proposed model in chapter eight (figure 8.1). Firstly, two attributes were removed after EFA was completed, as their factor loadings were consistently below 0.3 and they did not align with any specific dimensions. These were;

- Accessibility – **‘close to where I live or work’**
- Outcome – **‘social life’**

The remaining attributes were tested for positionality through PCA, to confirm their grouping with other attributes under discrete dimensions. It was at this stage that one item, ‘information’, was shown to emerge as a

construct under Programme, after initially being placed in Accessibility.

- Accessibility – ‘information’ → Programme – ‘information’

These changes are shown more clearly in figure 9.2. and maps the evolution from the proposed model (figure 8.1) to the confirmed model (figure 10.1).

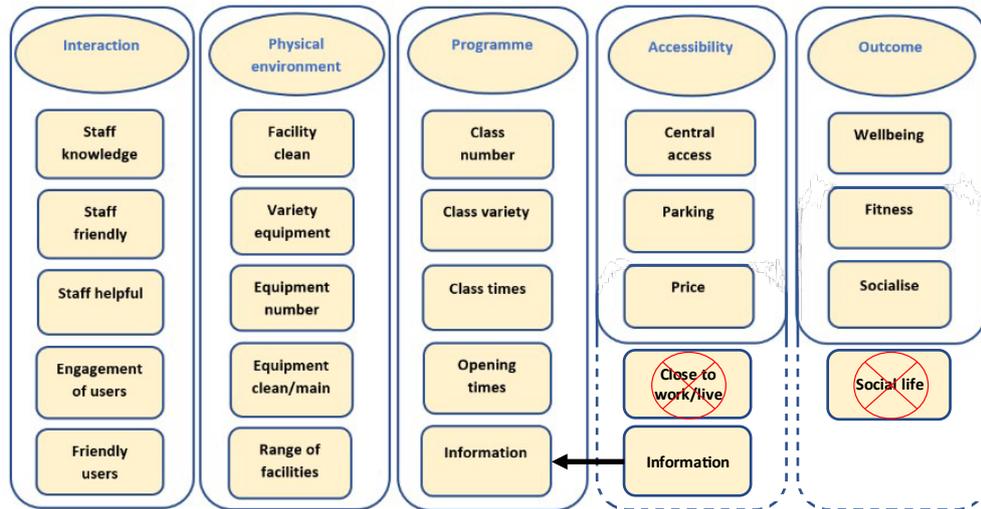


Figure 9.2: The NWFC model evolution

As noted previously, the model is operationalised through a questionnaire, which is created and distributed among users of a given fitness centre. The questions are taken directly from the attributes that sit under the five dimensions and this can be seen in the questionnaire for the study, in appendix 7, based on the proposed model. However, due to the changes demonstrated in figure 9.2, the question on ‘Information’ being easy to access and up to date would be grouped with the other attribute questions under the Programme dimension. Questions on the facility being close to where a user lives or works, and the facility being a central part of their social life would be removed entirely.

What is also evident in appendix 7, is that two sets of questions are asked in respect of the attributes. These are firstly in the context of perception of service quality performance of the facility, and secondly, importance of the

attribute to the individual user. As discussed previously, (chapter 5.13 and chapter 9.7) these two sets of figures are needed to operationalise the IPA model for fitness centre managers. The mean scores for service quality performance and importance are taken and plotted together for each attribute on a graph, resulting in a two-dimensional IPA grid (Abalo et al., 2007). With the model established, it was possible to complete the IPA frameworks for the case studies, providing an indication to the site managers as to where to focus their energies and resources.

9.7 IPA Framework

The logic of the IPA is based on attributes or dimensions pertaining to a particular service being evaluated on the basis of how important each attribute is to the customer and how the service's performance is perceived, relating to each of the same attributes (Sampson and Showalter, 1999). A comparison between the service performance and importance of each relevant attribute is performed (Sever, 2015; Varela and Manzano, 2007), resulting in a two-dimensional IPA grid displaying the results of the service quality importance and performance result of each relevant attribute (Abalo et al., 2007). The individual questions are in blue and numbered accordingly with the supporting table of mean scores, while the dimensions are in orange and numbered in line with figure 9.14. The results for each case study are provided, beginning with PureGym.

An important point to remember when reviewing the IPA results for the case studies, is that cross site analysis is not meaningful. As the quadrants are formed using site specific results, a question or dimension score that is the same across sites may be found in differing quadrants. The aim of the IPA is to focus on continuous improvement and effective working for the specific site. The framework does not represent a common end goal that all sites seek to achieve.

9.7.1 Pure Gym

The results for PureGym indicate an effective service quality performance with the majority of results. While program dimension performance score is low compared to the other four dimensions, it sits in the 'low priority' quadrant so this should not take precedence for improvement. Instead, focus should be given to accessibility and interaction, which sit just inside the 'concentrate here' segment. Specifically, cleanliness/maintenance of the facility, which is perhaps understandable as cleanliness has been a significant attribute across studies and its position has been emphasised in the current climate. The worst scoring question in the key segment for improvement was 21, 'achieving fitness goals'. A possible action would be to employ more effort in finding the 'real' reason for members attending and provide not only a training plan but facilitate ongoing measurement of achievement.

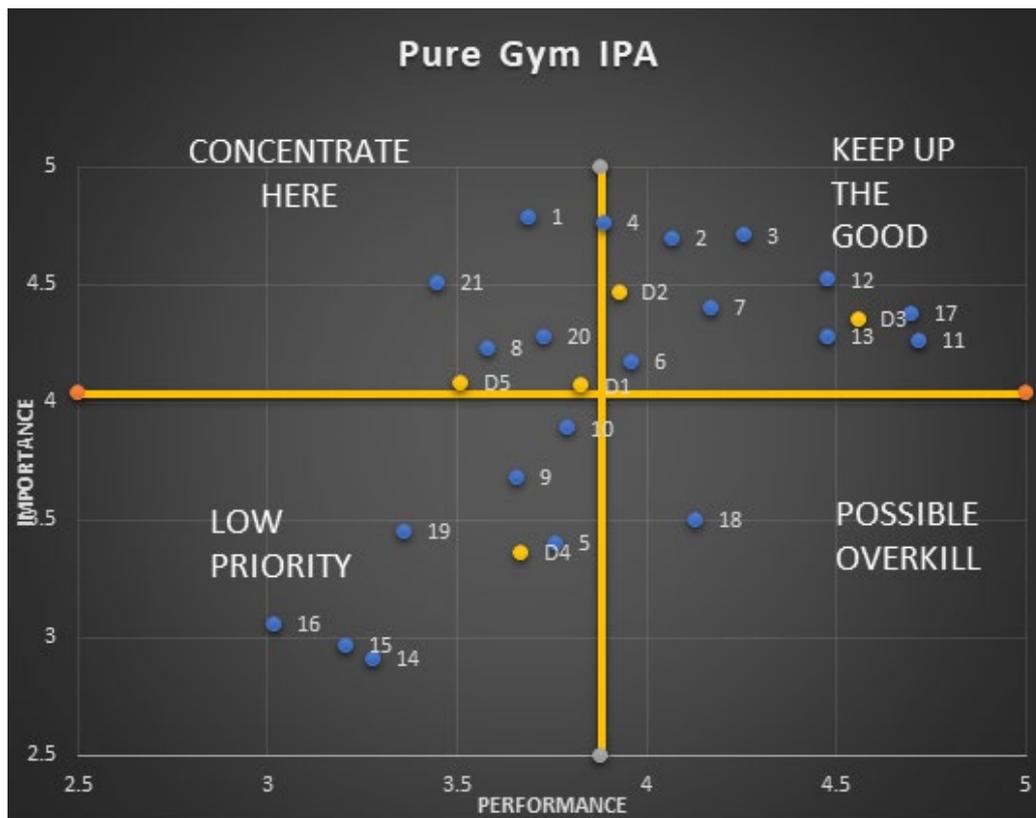


Figure 9.3: Pure Gym: IPA grid

Table 9.15: Pure Gym: Mean scores

Number	Item	P Mean	I Mean	P-I
1	The facility is clean and maintained	3.69	4.79	-1.1
2	There is a sufficient variety of equipment	4.07	4.7	-0.63
3	There is a sufficient number of each equipment	4.26	4.71	-0.45
4	The equipment is cleaned and maintained	3.89	4.76	-0.87
5	Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of facilities (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	3.76	3.4	0.36
6	The staff are knowledgeable	3.96	4.17	-0.21
7	The staff are friendly	4.17	4.4	-0.23
8	The staff are on hand and helpful	3.58	4.23	-0.65
9	The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment	3.66	3.68	-0.02

10	The other users are friendly and supportive	3.79	3.89	-0.1
11	The facility is centrally located and easy to access	4.72	4.26	0.46
12	The cost, is a significant reason for choosing the facility	4.48	4.52	-0.04
13	There is Parking available with sufficient spaces	4.48	4.28	0.2
14	There is a sufficient number of classes	3.28	2.91	0.37
15	There is sufficient variety of classes	3.21	2.97	0.24
16	The class times are convenient	3.02	3.06	-0.04
17	The opening hours are convenient	4.7	4.38	0.32
18	Information is easy to access and up to date	4.13	3.5	0.63

19	(name of facility) is a good location to socialise	3.36	3.45	-0.09
20	Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing	3.73	4.28	-0.55
21	Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals	3.45	4.51	-1.06
	Mean	3.88	4.04	

9.7.2 Community Leisure Trust

The CLT is performing well, whilst dealing with the highest average importance scores of the three case studies. There are currently three specific areas for focus with 'achieving fitness goals' being the priority for improvement. Similar to PureGym, putting effort into finding the 'real' reason for members attending and provide not only the training plan but facilitate ongoing measurement of achievement. The highest scoring question for importance was 'cleanliness/maintenance of equipment' and is an area to concentrate on. Again, the effects of the pandemic have crystallised this attribute as a significant factor of service quality management in the fitness industry.

4	The equipment is cleaned and maintained	4.22	4.88	-0.66
5	Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of facilities (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	4.75	4.78	-0.03
6	The staff are knowledgeable	4.41	4.63	-0.22
7	The staff are friendly	4.49	4.65	-0.16
8	The staff are on hand and helpful	4.49	4.63	-0.14
9	The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment	3.97	4.39	-0.42
10	The other users are friendly and supportive	4.15	4.35	-0.2
11	The facility is centrally located and easy to access	4.31	3.81	0.5
12	The cost, is a significant reason for	4.01	3.85	0.16

	choosing the facility			
13	There is Parking available with sufficient spaces	4.23	4.45	-0.22
14	There is a sufficient number of classes	4.24	4.19	0.05
15	There is sufficient variety of classes	4.15	4.17	-0.02
16	The class times are convenient	4.08	4.29	-0.21
17	The opening hours are convenient	4.24	4.35	-0.11
18	Information is easy to access and up to date	4.35	4.41	-0.06
19	(name of facility) is a good location to socialise	4	3.83	0.17

20	Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing	4.27	4.54	-0.27
21	Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals	4.05	4.78	-0.73
	Mean	4.29	4.45	

9.7.3 CrossFit

The IPA results for CrossFit reveals a fitness centre that is focusing on the right areas for its members and therefore balancing its resources accordingly. The clustering of the results suggests the users of the site have a very similar outlook to their provider. This has led to two distinct clusters fitting in the 'keep up the good work' quadrant and 'low priority' quadrant, which is what any provider would want to see. As none of the data landed in the 'concentrate here' segment, the managers would be advised to focus on the three questions that sit just outside this area. As with the first two sites, two of the questions come under the cleanliness attribute, while the third is related to 'sufficient variety of equipment'. Although the site is restricted by its floor space, as to the amount of equipment it can hold, the manager may want to consider trends in the CrossFit community and if their current range of training equipment could be added to or updated.

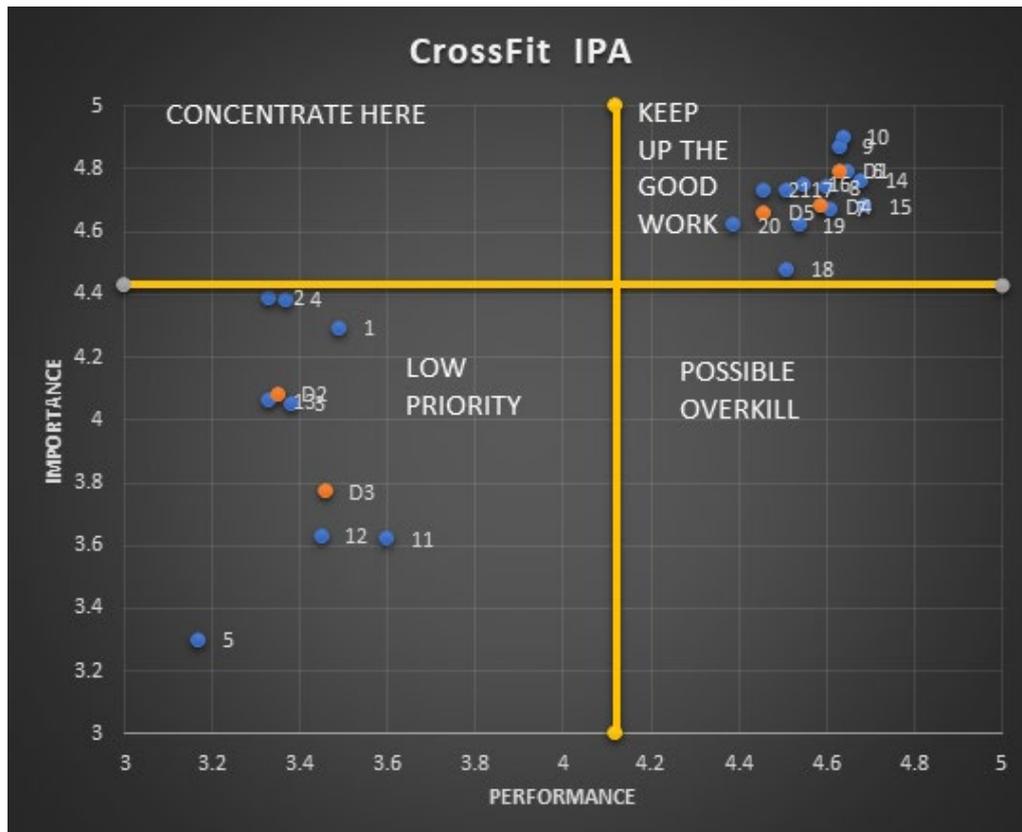


Figure 9.5: Cross Fit: IPA grid

Table 9.17: Cross Fit: Mean scores

Number	Item	P Mean	I Mean	P-I
1	The facility is clean and maintained	3.49	4.29	-0.8
2	There is a sufficient variety of equipment	3.33	4.39	-1.06
3	There is a sufficient number of each equipment	3.38	4.05	-0.67
4	The equipment is cleaned and maintained	3.37	4.38	-1.01

5	Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of facilities (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	3.17	3.3	-0.13
6	The staff are knowledgeable	4.65	4.79	-0.14
7	The staff are friendly	4.61	4.67	-0.06
8	The staff are on hand and helpful	4.6	4.74	-0.14
9	The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment	4.63	4.87	-0.24
10	The other users are friendly and supportive	4.64	4.9	-0.26
11	The facility is centrally located and easy to access	3.6	3.62	-0.02
12	The cost, is a significant reason for choosing the facility	3.45	3.63	-0.18
13	There is Parking available with sufficient spaces	3.33	4.06	-0.73

14	There is a sufficient number of classes	4.68	4.76	-0.08
15	There is sufficient variety of classes	4.69	4.68	0.01
16	The class times are convenient	4.55	4.75	-0.2
17	The opening hours are convenient	4.51	4.73	-0.22
18	Information is easy to access and up to date	4.51	4.48	0.03
19	(name of facility) is a good location to socialise	4.54	4.62	-0.08
20	Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing	4.39	4.62	-0.23
21	Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals	4.46	4.73	-0.27
	Mean	4.12	4.43	

9.8 Chapter Nine Summary

The focus of this chapter was twofold; the primarily intent was to systematically analyse the quantitative data to test the proposed model and therefore establish a new, tentative service quality measuring tool for fitness centres in the NW. Secondly, it was to demonstrate the simple yet practical

function of the tool in providing not only information as to service quality performance, but what actions should be taken for improvement. Therefore, the first aim is fundamental to the thesis while the second ensures meaningful contribution to practice. As discussed in chapter seven, the motives of the study have changed while traversing the research process. The initial aim of wanting to develop a legitimate service quality model shifted to wanting to create a model that had more meaningful application for those managers on the front line. In particular, for those small or medium providers who would most benefit. The IPA framework for each case study shows how it is able to inform managers on where to focus future actions in a very straightforward way. Perhaps not surprising in the current climate, it was found all three sites would be advised to focus resources on cleaning/maintenance. The visual nature of the matrix and its evidently simple construction from the mean averages would enable the smallest of fitness centres to have access to an effective service quality measuring tool.

Any manager utilising the NWFC would not have to concern themselves with the analysis of the model itself, yet this process was critical in establishing its structural validity and reliability for others to use. The process of testing the model was partly about 'trampling old ground' and using established methods and process. It was also part 'standing on the shoulders of giants', by taking the methods of other academics and seeking to go further. A prime example of this was in establishing the dimensions. As someone who had used service performance and importance measures in their study, Lentell (2000) tested both sets of data through component factor analysis. This was done to further validate the dimensions and what was emerging from the service quality performance data could be verified itself. Other studies use only the service quality performance data to confirm dimension structure (often this is the only data collected), while Yildiz (2011) uses only the importance score data for the SQS-FC. This study used both sets of data scores across three distinctly different providers to ensure validity of the dimensions for the wider fitness industry. This process was followed through the three stages of exploratory factor analysis, principal component analysis

and cronbach alpha tests. The dimensions were found to be stable, however the question on 'location to home/work' did not emerge under any dimension and was removed. Also, 'opening hours' showed an association with accessibility, which suggests that this attribute explains part of the variance across more than one dimension. 'Information' emerged as a construct under the programme dimension, after initially being placed in accessibility. Therefore, some changes were made to the proposed model, specifically around the accessibility dimension. This was perhaps to be expected as a newly introduced dimension for which past literature offered little guidance as to associated attributes. Overall, the critical results from the CFA indicate an adequate to good fitting model, with the RMSEA score of 0.67 suggesting a reasonable fit (Steiger, 1990), the CFI result of .95 indicating a good fit (Hooper et al., 2008), the chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) ratio of 1.35 indicating a superior fit (Cole, 1987) and the SRMR at 0.64, indicating an acceptable fit (Byrne, 1998). This confirms the NWFC meets the accepted criteria for a new service quality model and further adds to knowledge in the field which sits alongside other contributions from this study and is explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

The original premise for the thesis, was driven by first-hand experience of the rapid changes in the fitness industry. It was based on a desire to explore the changing fitness industry and develop a pragmatic service quality tool to help operations managers understand the service quality performance of their facility. The work of others supplemented the idea of a changing and increasingly competitive industry, driven by market forces (Lentell, 2000; Martinez and Martinez, 2010; Yildiz, 2011; Polyokov; 2016; García-Fernández and Gálvez-Ruiz, 2021), whilst helping to highlight where further knowledge was needed to effectively develop a pragmatic service quality tool for fitness centres in the NW. It may be argued that well established service quality models already exist and this extends to fitness industry specific models. However, in accepting that; firstly, the fitness industry can vary on a regional level; Secondly, it has seen considerable recent change; and thirdly the model should show the characteristics of the wider industry. It became apparent that some potential improvements could be made when focusing on providers in the NW. However, in order to develop any improvements, knowledge of the field needed to be expanded and this formed the initial objectives. These objectives focused on fundamental questions of the fitness industry, which sought to avoid assumptions and past beliefs of what the fitness industry is, its structure, and what the market wants.

In revisiting some of the fundamental tenants of the fitness industry in the literature review, it highlighted the need for greater clarification in a number of areas. Perhaps surprisingly, what terminology should be applied, as it became evident over time, more terms to describe the industry had been added to the vocabulary, yet they were applied interchangeably or used to mean different things. For the purpose of this thesis, the fitness industry was used with fitness centers applied to individual sites. Undertaking this conceptual process was also important from a practical sense as it also aided in establishing boundaries for what constituted a fitness provider

operating in the fitness industry, which again had received little in the way of consideration. For the thesis, this was critical for the industry mapping exercise because it informed as to which sites should be included or excluded and, therefore which sites the thesis shows the characteristics of. It was also evident from the literature that there was limited research around service quality modelling for the UK fitness industry, and an absence of a proposed and tested model, certainly for the NW.

Hence, the overall aim of this thesis, was to produce a tentative service quality model, which shows the characteristics of the contemporary fitness industry in the North West of England, that will provide managers with a pragmatic and functional tool, which is easy to interpret.

In developing an effective industry wide tool, it was important to revisit some of the fundamental facets of the industry, starting with its historical development, identifying key changes and influences that have shaped fitness centres on an international, national and regional level. It is evident that the fitness industry has broadly traversed or been heavily influenced by the three phases of globalisation as identified by Andreasson and Johansson (2014). Additionally, it is clear some significant domestic influences in developing the contemporary market, such as the legacy of voluntary sports clubs and public provision. Therefore, the evolution of fitness in the UK drove the 'sector' image of the industry with providers offering similar established services at similar prices. This classification started to break down around 2008 as a global recession hit, which led to a more discerning market; budget providers; established providers collapsing/merging and challenges to local authority funding. These changes helped to drive greater variation between providers, with a distinctive classification being price. Yet, it is evident price itself does not offer a conclusive categorisation, as it fails to account for the range of service offering or the focus of the providers. Therefore, neither the traditional sectors or price, establish the wider variations between providers and more importantly, where the individual providers believe their value lies.

As the variation in providers has grown, Sassatelli (2010) notes how this promotes differing philosophies at fitness centres which attract different users. So, rather than focusing on sector, price or even service offering as the primary categorisation, the philosophy or beliefs for a given site offered a clearer more attractive route to categorisation of modern providers which could encompass all those previously mentioned categories where relevant. However, in adopting such an approach it does lose the more simple, objective and discrete categorisation offered by sector or price. Nevertheless, the categorisation approach in this thesis offers a more detailed and authentic reflection on the choice and variation in the fitness industry, despite being more fluid. Importantly for this study, using previous definitive categorisations with discrete boundaries would have failed to inform as to the complexity and variation of the industry, and therefore would not provide a valid framework from which to work from. This is fundamental, as previously stated, the service quality model should show the characteristics of the wider industry and the new categorisation approach better achieves this, identifying three distinctly different groups of providers based on their philosophy and priorities. Importantly, this study went on to support and inform the whole thesis. The study provided clear evidence that the fitness industry had evolved and diversified with providers having very different focuses which was expressed on their media platforms. As such, three case studies were selected on the basis of this study and used to inform on similarities and differences between the users of these distinct sites and what service attributes they saw as important.

Most key attributes that emerged through the qualitative analysis, such as location and cleanliness were ubiquitous across the industry and despite their importance did not distinguish the different user groups. Indeed, this supports the idea that motivations for participation may revolve around similar broad desires, including physical, psychological, social and generic well-being benefits (Alexandris et al., 2004; Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007; Polyokov, 2016). In the UK, fitness centre users only account for 15.9% (Leisure DB, 2019) of the population, which is something of a select group

to start with and supports the notion that these individuals have some shared commonalities that distinguishes them from the rest of the population.

However, some variations in psychographics and demographics did emerge that distinguished the users at the three case studies. Results from the CrossFit site supported Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) suggestion that psychological factors such as an individual's motivations act as distinct driver. It was evident from the focus groups and interview at the site, that engagement in mind and body was a non-negotiable, with those not of a particular mindset dropping off. Also, analysis through the lens of Service-Dominant Logic Theory and the interpretations of Ballantyne and Varey (2006), indicated users at PureGym could be described as value co-producers and at CrossFit value co-creators. The type of value created and or desired by the bulk of users at these sites is uniquely different, with CrossFit nurturing an in person engaged atmosphere, while members at PureGym utilise the resources provided by PureGym, producing their own value without the need of personal engagement. These intriguing findings helped to form the proposed typology of users displayed in table 8.6.

The key attributes from the data also established the dimensions for the proposed model and in turn, the questionnaire, whose development and labelling were also influenced by existing literature. These included Physical Environment (Kim and Kim, 1995; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Lam et al., 2005; Lentell, 2000; Yildiz, 2011); Programme (Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Kim and Kim, 1995; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Lam et al., 2005; Yildiz, 2011); Outcome (Alexandris et al., 2004; Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007); Interaction (Polyakova and Ramchandani, 2020); and Accessibility. In testing the proposed model, the dimensions held, however the question on 'location to home/work' and '..... is a good location to socialise' did not emerge under any dimension and were removed. At the principal component analysis stage, under two of the tests, 'opening hours' showed an association with 'Accessibility', which suggests that this attribute explains part of the variance across more than

one dimension, however it proved to be more strongly associated to 'Programme'. One noticeable attribute move from the original proposed dimension was 'Information' which emerged as a construct under 'Programme', after initially being placed in 'Accessibility'. Therefore, the proposed model (figure 8.1) has been updated to account for these amendments and is set out in figure 10.1.

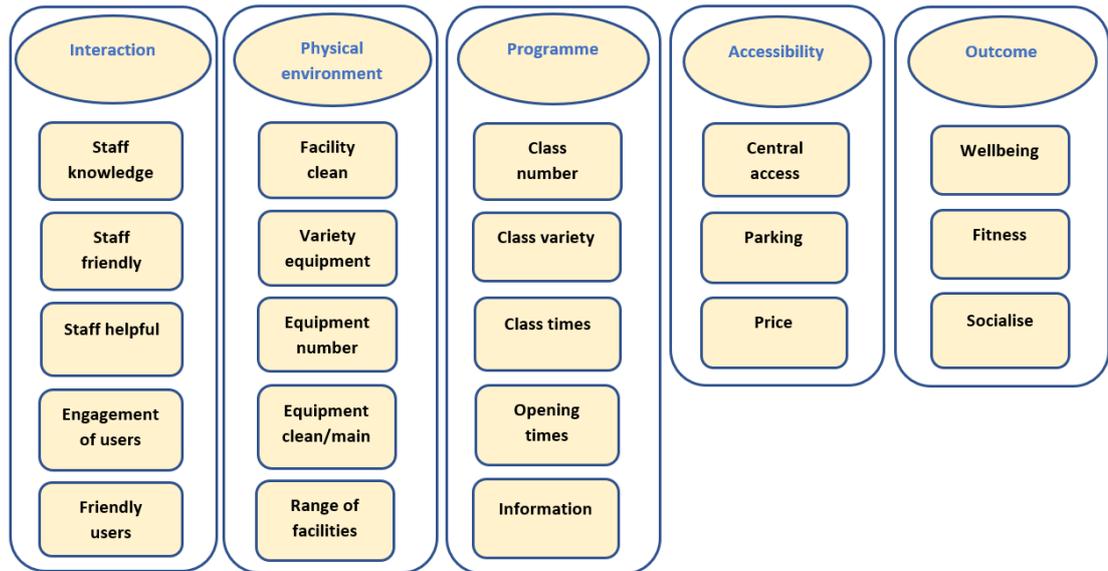


Figure 10.1: Confirmed North West Fitness Centre (NWFC) Model

With a rigorous, informed research design having been followed, the final North West Fitness Model (NWFC Model) was established via a final stage of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). This was used to confirm the factor structure of the scale and to test the validity of the model (Hunter and Gerbing, 1982), with the goodness of fit indices set out in table 9.13. The final part of the aim however, was to provide managers with a pragmatic and functional tool, which is easy to interpret. Therefore, with the model established, it was possible to demonstrate the simple process a manager needed to go through, from completed questionnaire to a fully developed IPA framework (importance performance analysis) for their site. Although the data from the importance questions in the questionnaire were useful in further establishing the model dimensions, their primary inclusion was for the IPA. A comparison between the service quality performance and

importance of each relevant attribute was performed (Sever, 2015) resulting in a two-dimensional IPA grid displaying the results of the importance and performance result of each relevant attribute (Abalo et al., 2007). The visual representation of this for each case study can be seen in chapter 9, providing an indication to the site managers as to where to focus their energies and resources.

10.1 Contributions of the Study

On completing each objective of the study, further critical knowledge was gained at each stage of the research, which not only informed the development of a new model but provided further original contributions. As such, this thesis provides original contribution and knowledge to the literature in many ways. In particular, the research has achieved the following contributions:

- Newly established description for the fitness industry and fitness centre concepts, providing elucidation for further research.

- A new framework of fitness centres, providing the most up to date view of the industry structure, devised through a unique method procedure.

- Development of a new user typology, acknowledging the agency of consumers and reflecting the market forces for key segments of the NW fitness industry.

- Development of a new tentative service quality model for the fitness industry in the NW, to be used in conjunction with IPA to measure and manage service quality.

In a changeable industry, experience can prove to be a hinderance as much as a help, with decisions based on previously established knowledge and assumptions. Therefore, this study refrained from moving straight into the model research, data collection and design phase and instead, sought to re-establish key principles and knowledge of the industry. As such, the exploration of the fitness industry shows the extent to which the UK has been influenced by shifting market forces over the past decade.

Critically analysing the literature assisted in establishing the concepts of fitness industry and fitness centre for this study, while the terminology itself was explicitly reviewed to assist in the clarification of the concepts. Primarily, this process was undertaken to avoid assumptions and misappropriation of terms for the study, as the vocabulary across the literature proved to be inconsistent and vague in its meaning. Therefore, the critical review of these terms and concepts would be useful to the wider research field, especially as the fitness industry continues to transform and widen into areas such as home fitness.

A critical point of the study was the mapping of the fitness industry in the NW and the method to be used. Utilising online maps is becoming an extremely useful tool for researchers across a range of disciplines including the social sciences (Vandeviver, 2014). The application of google maps in particular, has proven effective as custom tabs also allows users to include layers of additional content such as places, labels and businesses and through the search function, specific businesses can be located within a defined area. Although online maps have been used to gather surface level information (Mathayomchan and Taecharungroj, 2020), this study exploited the further functionality of google maps, using it as an access point to collecting multiple data variables from the media platforms linked to the goggle map location. As such, a real strength of this method and why it can prove effective for others is its ability to over comes two common barriers to research, time and cost. This unique method, alongside the refinements of search terms and changing geographic field of focus, offers a blueprint for

others, including researchers in different disciplines.

Key academic literature in the field of service quality (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Seth et al., 2005; Ladhari, 2008; Martinez and Martinez, 2010; Ghotbabadi, Baharun and Feiz, 2012; Polyakova and Mirza, 2015; Arora and Narula, 2018) underscore the importance that in developing an effective tool for measuring customer perceptions, the specific industry context needs to be accounted for. As the most widely used model, SERVQUAL has been a useful tool for many industries and informed the development of new models. However, it does not account for the specific nature of the fitness industry, which in itself hosts a range of different providers. Academics providing fitness industry specific models (Chelladurai et al., 1987; Kim and Kim, 1995; Lentell, 2000; Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Lam et al., 2005; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Yildiz, 2011) have contributed to filling this gap in the literature. However, as the industry-specific attributes and relevant service-quality dimensions are affected by geographic region (Johansson, 2014), time (García-Fernandez and Gálvez-Ruiz, 2021) and variation in the industry, this study acts as an important addition to the field, accounting for the given variables, primarily in the NW. A critical aspect in this process was underscoring the importance of the service dominant logic concept and analysing the significance of value co-creation in the industry. Furthermore, it has highlighted just how fundamental the engagement of the consumer is in creating the service for some providers. Therefore, rather than fully prescriptive provision, all providers need to recognise the autonomy and value that members bring in achieving (common) goals. As such, alongside the concept of value co-creation, the idea of agency has been posed as a way to better describe and understand the position, power and input of a range of actors who have vested interest at a given fitness centre.

Finally, its contribution moves beyond scholarly impact and into the operational environment of fitness centres. Managers can follow a simple process, producing not only site-specific data, but a framework of service quality performance which indicates where resources should be utilised

through the IPA. This means a practical service quality performance measuring tool is available to the industry in the NW, specifically those SME sites and (traditional) public sites who do not have the resources to develop site/chain specific measuring tools. However, even for the larger chains who utilise their own measuring tools, the NWFC model could prove useful. Data from customer satisfaction surveys can often be tied up with the organisations KPI's (Polyakova and Ramchandani, 2020) rather than focusing on the customer, which this model is not conflicted or constrained by.

10.2 Limitations of Research

In seeking to provide a framework of providers in the NW, from which case studies could be drawn, the more exclusive providers did not emerge as significant. Yet, David Lloyd (DLL) alone was the 3rd largest provider in 2019 (Mintel, 2019) with 570,000 members across the UK, but the framework measured the number of centres and DLL listed only sixth on this, with only nine situated in the NW. Also, many hotel gyms were likely missed during the mapping stage as they did not actively promote or advertise memberships and therefore failed to show up in the research. Gym memberships would clearly not be the priority and, even when such sites were identified, it was often difficult to gather relevant data related specifically to the gym department within the hotel. However, the three discreet categories from which the case studies were drawn, directly account for 35.5% of identified fitness centres in the NW, while their characteristics (social environment, local community, wellbeing, physical environment and price) can be associated with 77.2% of sites. Although it would be preferable to represent all provider categories through additional case studies, from a practical perspective, this would be unrealistic and ultimately the case studies did broadly show the characteristics of the industry.

Secondly, the pandemic created a difficult environment for the case studies, as sites closed or had restrictions placed upon them. This may have skewed

the sample of respondents in the questionnaire, particularly at the trust. Due to very real concerns of the additional risks to older people at the time, it is likely that many of those who would otherwise have been in attendance stayed away, while those also at higher risk or living with higher risk individuals would have done the same. It is difficult to know the true effect this had on the data, but it would appear that new and older users may not have been adequately represented.

Despite the industry returning slowly to its pre pandemic position, and Covid benefactors such as Peloton suffering from this bounce back (Stankiewicz, 2021), the pandemic itself could prove to be a marker in the evolution of the industry and would fit with the 15-year cycle (García-Fernandez and Galvez-Ruiz, 2021). Having been forced to seek out and invest in alternative service methods, often through the adoption of technology to provide effective remote provision, it is highly unlikely providers will just abandon it. Therefore, change and evolution of the industry which was the reason this study was first considered, also supports the need for further research.

10.3 Future Research

The logical progression for research would be in the refinement of the model. Through this study much work has been put into revisiting fundamental cornerstones of what the fitness industry is and how this has evolved. The model has been proposed and tested, however, at this stage it is still tentative in nature, as further application is required among different fitness centres that align with the three categories explored in the study. This should be followed with further case studies touching on areas of the industry which were not strongly represented in the model development, specifically those exclusive providers such as hotels and David Lloyd, who, although represent a limited percentage of providers, do represent a more significant proportion of consumers in the fitness industry market. These two steps will bring further validity to the model and confidence in its application.

A third step would be taking the model outside of its regional boundary and testing it nationally, thereby making its adoption of providers more attractive, as a significant proportion of the sector is represented by a small number of providers who operate on a national level.

Also, the turmoil of the pandemic has supercharged change in the fitness industry once more. According to Jason LaRose, the CEO of Equinox Media, (part of Equinox Group) who are a leading luxury gym operator in the USA; "The future is a blend of digital and physical... consumer demand is booming as people aim for a balance between mental and physical health, stakes are higher now." (Davalos, 2021:2). If this is the case, providers need to think beyond fitness centres who offer a similar service as being the only threat and consider who else is eating into their market. In response, Equinox, have launched Variis a streaming app that offers on-demand fitness content and SoulCycle-branded exercise bikes, as it seeks to compete with the new range of home fitness like Precision Run, Mirror and Peloton. In the UK Pure Gym have partnered with Fitbit in order to enhance its online workout videos.

As the home fitness and fitness industry markets continue to assimilate, establishing the industry structure becomes more important. As noted, some major providers have already started to act through horizontal integration and partnerships. Yet, further implications for the wider fitness industry needs to be explored providing managers with relevant and affordable solutions. Therefore, a future study could consider the importance of 'remote fitness' as a part of the service and explore what impact this has on customers' satisfaction. Current service quality models for the fitness industry are aligned to the key characteristics of physical sites. However, future members may be equally influenced in the remote offering, while rarely, if ever, visiting the fitness centre, preferring to train remotely, which raises questions about established service quality dimensions. This also further establishes the concepts of value co-creation as being allied to the fitness industry and therefore service-dominant logic should be more

deliberately considered in any related research.

In keeping with that idea, the final area of development, which moves beyond the model and its application, focuses on the theoretical area of value co-creation which has been ever present through the study. Further research into the links between value co-creation, stakeholders and agency within the industry could prove to be an impactful study. As a term, agency has had minimal use in the field, yet may better describe the engagement of consumers, further exploring the levels of interaction, the desired outcomes and how both providers and consumers can best manage their agency to achieve common goals. The findings from such social research, could provide significant knowledge, not only the fitness industry, but the wider socio-cultural field.

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**Appendix 1 - Cross Section of
Data Set: mapping of the NW
fitness centres.**

Appendix 1 - Cross Section of Data Set: mapping of the NW fitness centres.

Appendix 1 - Cross Section of Data Set: mapping of the NW fitness centres.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	county	district	sector	structure	name	parent company	price	joining	single gym	wet	class	w	post code	themes 1	themes 2
570	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	JD Gyms Liverpool	jd sports	19.99	10.00	999.00	dry	yes		L2 4TH	affordable	quality
571	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	the gym liverpool	the gym	12.99	999.00	999.00	dry	yes		L1 8LT	affordable	wellbeing
572	merseyside	liverpool	private	sole	No Limits Strength & Conditioning Centre	non	25.00	999.00	3.00	dry	yes		L1 0NB	body building	
573	merseyside	liverpool	private	sole	The Training Station	non	18.75	999.00	3.00	dry	yes		L15 2JJ	body building	
574	merseyside	liverpool	public	education	sport liverpool	university of liverpool	30.00	999.00	999.00	wet	yes		L69 7ZN	community	facilities
575	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	Lifestyles Millennium	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	dry	yes		L1 6JD	community	wellbeing
576	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	lifestyles croxteth	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	dry	yes		L11 0BS	community	wellbeing
577	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	Lifestyles Walton	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	dry	yes		L4 9XP	community	wellbeing
578	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	Lifestyles Ellergreen	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L11 2XY	community	wellbeing
579	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	Lifestyles Cardinal Heenan	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L12 9HZ	community	wellbeing
580	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	Lifestyles Peter Lloyd	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L13 0BQ	community	wellbeing
581	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	lifestyle aquatics centre	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L15 4LE	community	wellbeing
582	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	Lifestyles Garston	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L19 6PE	community	wellbeing
583	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	LIFESTYLE AUSTIN RAWLINSON	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L24 0TR	community	wellbeing
584	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	lifestyles Alsop	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L4 6RW	community	wellbeing
585	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	Lifestyles Everton Park	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L5 5PH	community	wellbeing
586	merseyside	liverpool	public	council	Lifestyles Park Road	liverpool city council	30.00	999.00	6.60	wet	yes		L8 6QH	community	wellbeing
587	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	pure gym liverpool central	pure gym	16.99	999.00	999.00	dry	yes		L1 1QE	equipment	affordable
588	merseyside	liverpool	private	sole	GYM 21	non	38.00	15.00	3.90	dry	yes		L7 0EY	equipment	
589	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	davidlloyd speake	davidlloyd				wet	yes		L24 8QD	ethical	
590	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	sports direct liverpool	sports direct	19.99	20.00	999.00	wet	yes		L18 8AG	facilities	affordable
591	merseyside	liverpool	private	hotel	ark spa and fitness	raddison blu			5.00	wet	yes		L3 9BD	facilities	friendly
592	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	TMAS Health & Fitness ST HELENS	TMAS Health & Fitness	22.50	999.00	999.00	dry	no		L9 6AN	fun	inclusive
593	merseyside	liverpool	private	sole	Fitness for all	non	31.25	999.00	5.00	dry	yes		L25 5NH	fun	relaxed
594	merseyside	liverpool	private	affiliates	crossfit liverpool	cross fit	70.00	999.00	7.00	dry	yes		L3 7DD	internal com	functional
595	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	marriott Liverpool City Centre	marriott			999.00	wet	yes		L1 1RH	personal	relaxed
596	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	xersize4less speake	xersize4less	19.99	20.00	5.00	dry	yes		L24 9GB	price	facilities
597	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	xersize4less liverpool	xersize4less	19.99	20.00	5.00	dry	yes		L25 2RF	price	facilities
598	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	easy gym liverpool	easy gym	16.99	999.00	6.99	dry	yes		L1 1QR	quality	affordable
599	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	DW liverpool	DW fitness	38.00	999.00	999.00	wet	yes		L24 9GQ	quality	value
600	merseyside	liverpool	private	chain	Ben Dunne Gym innovation park	Ben Dunne Gyms	11.58	999.00	999.00	dry	yes		L7 9NJ	welcoming	affordable

**Appendix 1 - Cross Section of
Data Set: mapping of the NW
fitness centres.**

Appendix 2 – Data Analysis of Fitness Centres in NW

Total wet and dry sites

		wet/dry					
Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent			
	wet	295	44.2	44.2	44.2		
	dry	372	55.8	55.8	100.0		
	Total	667	100.0	100.0			

Total Providers by Sector

		sector					
Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent			
	private	450	67.5	67.5	67.5		
	public	197	29.5	29.5	97.0		
	voluntary	20	3.0	3.0	100.0		
	Total	667	100.0	100.0			

Characteristics of Provider Separated by Sector

sector		social envi	local com	personalised	health	personnel	phys env	training method	price	women	luxury	ethical	one theme	
private	social envi													
	local com	1												
	personalised	7	0											
	health	4	3	14										
	personnel	13	0	7	0									
	phys env	23	1	2	1	19								
	training method	14	1	0	1	0	2							
	price	14	1	5	6	9	77	0						
	women	9	0	1	2	0	4	0	0					
	luxury	4	0	7	1	2	16	0	0	0				
	ethical	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
	only one theme	30	0	21	11	12	20	23	8	5	2	8		
		822	119	7	64	43	62	165	41	120	21	32	8	140
	public	social envi												
local com		15												
health		4	99											
personnel		1	1		0									
phys env		4	2		0	1								
training method		0	0		0	0	1							
price		7	32		1	0	1	0						
ethical		0	14		0	0	0	0	0					
only one theme		5	1		0	0	1	0	0			0		
		380	36	164		104	3	10	1	41			14	7
voluntary	social envi													
	local com	4												
	personalised	1	0											
	health	2	3	0										
	phys env	0	3	0	0									
	one theme	1	2	0	0		2							
		36	8	12	1	5		5					5	

Total Providers by Monthly Membership Fee

Valid	monthly fee group				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
	1.00	272	40.8	40.8	40.8
	2.00	198	29.7	29.7	70.5
	3.00	126	18.9	18.9	89.4
	4.00	30	4.5	4.5	93.9
	5.00	41	6.1	6.1	100.0
Total		667	100.0	100.0	

Characteristics of Provider Separated by Monthly Membership Fee

monthly fee group	social envi	local com	personalise health	personnel	phys env	training me price	women	luxury	ethical	only one theme				
<£20	social envi													
	local com	5												
	personalise health	6	0											
	personnel	2	13	8										
	phys env	5	0	5	0									
	training me price	7	3	1	0	4								
	women	0	1	0	0	0	3							
	luxury	17	3	3	6	2	48	0						
	ethical	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
	only one theme	0	0	6	0	1	7	0	0	0				
		11	1	11	5	6	18	16	5	4	2			
		60	26	40	34	23	91	20	84	11	16	79	242	
£20-£30	social envi													
	local com	4												
	personalise health	1	0											
	personnel	6	52	2										
	phys env	2	1	0	0									
	training me price	2	2	1	1	11								
	women	2	0	0	1	0	0							
	luxury	4	24	2	1	4	8	0						
	ethical	2	0	0	0	0	4	0	0					
	only one theme	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0				
		13	1	5	0	2	2	5	3	1	0	0		
		37	98	11	64	20	33	8	46	7	4	14	32	187
£30-£40	social envi													
	local com	11												
	personalise health	0	0											
	personnel	1	40	4										
	phys env	0	0	0	0									
	training me price	11	1	0	0	3								
	women	1	0	0	0	0	0							
	luxury	0	4	0	0	3	22	0						
	ethical	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	0					
	only one theme	6	1	3	2	1	3	0	0	0				
		31	57	7	47	7	44	1	29	5		16	122	
£40-£50	social envi													
	local com	0												
	personalise health	0	0											
	personnel	1	0	0	0									
	phys env	6	0	0	0	1								
	training me price	0	0	0	0	0	0							
	women	0	2	0	0	0	0	0						
	luxury	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0					
	ethical	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0					
	only one theme	4	0	1	4	2	0	1	0	0	0			
		14	2	1	7	5	8	1	2	2	4	12	29	
£60>	social envi													
	personalise health	1												
	personnel	6		2										
	phys env	1		0		1								
	training me price	11		0		0	0							
	women	0		1		0	0	0						
	luxury	0		1		0	2	0	0					
	ethical	0		0		0	0	0	0	0				
	only one theme	2		1		1	0	1	0	0	8			
		21		6		10	4	12	1	3	8	13	39	

Characteristics of Provider Separated by Business Structure

		social env	local com	personalised	health	personnel	phys env	training method	price	women	luxury	ethical
affiliate	social envi											
	personalised											
	personnel	5										
	training method	12										
	women			1								
	only one theme	3				1		1				
		20		1		6		13		1		
chain	social envi											
	local com											
	personalised											
	health			10								
	personnel	3										
	phys env	11	1			9						
	price	6			5	8	70					
	women	5			2							
	luxury			3								
	ethical											
	only one theme	4		1	3	1						8
		29	1	14	20	21	91		89	7	3	8
council	social envi											
	local com											
	health	4	27									
	phys env	3										
	price	7										
	only one theme	5										
		19	27		31		3		7			
educator	social envi											
	local com											
	health	1	5									
	personnel	1										
	phys env	1	1			1						
	price		1		1		1					
	only one theme		1				2					
	3	8		7	2	6		3				
franchise	social envi											
	personalised	1										
	health			3								
	price	4										
	women									1		
	only one theme											
	5		4	3				4	1			
hotel	social envi											
	personalised	3										
	health											
	personnel	2		2								
	phys env	1				3						
	price			1			1					
	luxury	1		4	1	2	16					
	only one theme	1		1			3					2
	8		11	1	9	24		4		26		
sole	social envi											
	local com	1										
	personalised	3										
	health	4	3	1								
	personnel	3		5								
	phys env	11		1		7						
	training method	2	1		1		3					
	price	4	1	4	1	1	6					
	women	4					4					
	luxury	3										
	only one theme	22		19	2	10	16	22	6	4		
	57	6	33	12	26	48	29	23	12	3		
trust	social envi											
	local com	19										
	personalised	1										
	health	1	70									
	personnel	1										
	phys env		4	1	1							
	price		31									
	ethical		14									
only one theme	1	2		6		2						
	22	141	2	78	1	8		31			14	

Appendix 3 – Ethics Confirmation and Application

Confirmation Letter



04 FEBRUARY 2019

CARLEY SUTTON/ DENIS PRESSLER

SCHOOL OF SPORT AND WELLBEING UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE

DEAR CARLEY / DENIS

RE: BAHSS ETHICS COMMITTEE APPLICATION

UNIQUE REFERENCE NUMBER: BAHSS 623

THE BAHSS ETHICS COMMITTEE HAS GRANTED APPROVAL OF YOUR PROPOSAL APPLICATION 'THE EVOLUTION OF THE FITNESS INDUSTRY: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE KEY CONSTITUENTS OF SUPPLIERS AND CONSUMERS TO FACILITATE A SUITABLE MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY EXPECTATIONS'. APPROVAL IS GRANTED UP TO THE END OF PROJECT DATE.

IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THAT

- THE PROJECT IS CARRIED OUT IN LINE WITH THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE FORMS YOU HAVE SUBMITTED
- YOU REGULARLY RE-CONSIDER THE ETHICAL ISSUES THAT MAY BE RAISED IN GENERATING AND ANALYSING YOUR DATA
- ANY PROPOSED AMENDMENTS/CHANGES TO THE PROJECT ARE RAISED WITH, AND APPROVED, BY COMMITTEE
- YOU NOTIFY ETHICSINFO@UCLAN.AC.UK IF THE END DATE CHANGES OR THE PROJECT DOES NOT START

SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS THAT OCCUR FROM THE PROJECT ARE REPORTED TO COMMITTEE

A CLOSURE REPORT IS SUBMITTED TO COMPLETE THE ETHICS GOVERNANCE PROCEDURES (EXISTING PAPERWORK CAN BE USED FOR THIS PURPOSES E.G. FUNDER'S END OF GRANT REPORT; ABSTRACT FOR STUDENT AWARD OR NRES FINAL REPORT. IF NONE OF THESE ARE AVAILABLE USE E-ETHICS CLOSURE REPORT PROFORMA).

YOURS SINCERELY

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Duncan Sayer'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'D' at the beginning.

Ethics application form



**UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE
Ethics Committee Application Form**

PLEASE NOTE THAT ONLY ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION IS ACCEPTED

This application form is to be used to seek approval from one of the three University e-Ethics Committees (BAHSS; PSYSOC & STEMH). Where this document refers to 'e-Ethics Committee' this denotes BAHSS; PSYSOC & STEMH. These e-Ethics Committees deal with all staff and postgraduate research student project. Taught (undergraduate and MSc dissertation projects) will normally be dealt with via School process / committee.

If you are unsure whether your activity requires ethical approval please complete a [UCLan Ethics Checklist](#). If the proposed activity involves animals, you should not use this form. Please contact the Research Development and Support Team within Research Office – roffice@uclan.ac.uk – for further details.

Please refer to the [notes for guidance on](#) completion of the form.

If this application relates to a project/phase which has previously been approved by one of the UCLan e-Ethics Committees, please supply the corresponding reference number(s) from your decision letter(s). ONLY REQUIRED FOR PHASED PROJECT SUBMISSIONS		
Previous e-Ethics Approval Ref No		
1.1 Project Type:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Masters by Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Taught Masters
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Project	<input type="checkbox"/> MPhil Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Undergrad Research
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PhD Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Internship
	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Doctorate	
1.2 Principal Investigator:		
Name	School	Email
Carley Sutton	Business	CSutton1@uclan.ac.uk
1.3 Other Researchers / Student:		
Name	School	Email
Denis Pressler	Sport and Wellbeing (Social Science areas only)	dpressler@uclan.ac.uk

Sue Minten	Choose an item.	s.minten@liverpool.ac.uk
John Minten	Choose an item.	jminten@uclan.ac.uk
1.4 Project Title:		
The evolution of the Fitness Industry: An investigation into the key constituents of suppliers and consumers to facilitate a suitable model of service quality expectations.		
1.5 Proposed Start Date:		
03/01/2019		
1.6 Proposed End Date:		
16/02/2019		
1.7 Is this project in receipt of any external funding (including donations of samples, equipment etc)?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No		
If Yes, please provide details of sources of the funding and what part it plays in the current proposal.		
1.8 Project Description (in layman's terms) including the aim(s) and justification of the project (max 300 words)		
<i>Give a brief summary of the background, purpose and the possible benefits of the project. This should include a statement on the academic rationale, context of the activity and justification for conducting the project.</i>		
<p>The project will examine the structure and evolution of the fitness industry within the North West region of England, investigating the characteristics of its users and service quality expectations. It is anticipated that by conducting this research a much needed user typology for the fitness industry will emerge and provide a framework for suppliers to readily distinguish those customers.</p> <p>The aim of this research is to establish a framework for the service providers and a typology of user will offer a credible basis for suppliers to begin analysing and understanding their service offerings and users, as will a contemporary framework of fitness providers. Building off of these, the development of a suitable service quality model provides a full range of suppliers to assess any gaps in service. Thus, clear and practical advancement, through a range of updated and new frameworks will be provided.</p> <p>Therefore, to fulfil the aim of the research the following objectives of the research are:</p> <p><u>Objectives</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. To investigate the evolution of the 'fitness industry' within the North West of England. Thereby establishing what constitutes the fitness industry concept. i. Distinguish key constituents of providers and users within the fitness industry;. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Develop a more comprehensive and contemporary framework fitness provider framework. 		

b) Develop a fitness consumer typology, classifying the key demographic and psychographic determinates of fitness centre users

i. Develop a service quality model suitable for the fitness industry in order to assess any gaps in their product and service offerings.

1.9 Methodology Please be specific

Provide an outline of the proposed method, include details of sample numbers, source of samples, type of data collected, equipment required and any modifications thereof, etc.

The study will adopt a case study approach through a pragmatism research philosophy. three gym sites will be used as case studies, linked to the categorisation of providers. The categorisation of providers was developed through a mapping of all eligible gyms (related to study parameters) across the NW of England from google searches. From this, the mission of each gym was analysed and categorised across 12 key service objectives. This resulted in 3 significant category of providers being identified. As such it was decided 3 distinct case studies would be used.

These case studies will seek to provide informative data from the perspective of providers and the users, focusing on their interpretation of what is needed/wanted in regards to service quality provision at these sites. A mixed methods approach will be used, as such an approach is typical of studies conducted in the field of service quality in the sports sector and in wider service sectors.

Thus primary research will be a mix of qualitative and quantitative data providing perspective from the supplier and customer as to the importance and provision of service quality. These include interviews with operations managers or GM's, focus groups with users and finally a questionnaire, to be completed by users.

The case study sites have been confirmed as xxxxxx Pure Gym, xxxxxx Crossfit, xxxx Leisure ST. Interviews will take place with a relevant operations/site manager at each site, discussing aspects of service quality and their understanding of their user's expectations and demands. These will be audio-recorded and transcribed, while contemporaneous notes will also be taken during the interviews. Interviews will be undertaken at the gym facility, for practical reasons and ensure a more comfortable environment for the interviewee. Considerations for the specific location within the facility will be considered and discussed with the interviewee.

Further focus groups, with 4-8 users, will then be undertaken, to gain a deeper understanding of the psychographic aspects of the users. Approaches and considerations identified for the interviews will also be adopted for the focus groups. Key areas to be covered during the focus groups will be information on use of the facility as well as expectations and priority for service quality. In addition, site observation will be undertaken to provide the researcher with an understanding of the site specifics of the facility.

Finally, questionnaires will be undertaken at each site, to understand the demographic and some psychographic aspects of the user groups. The findings from these questionnaires will provide a basis to develop a typology of user as well as going a long way to aid in the development of a service quality model.

At this point all the relevant data will have been gathered to assess any gaps in delivery at each of the sites and to finalise a service quality model that accounts for each type of provider in the industry.

1.10 Has the quality of the project been assessed? (select all that apply)

- Independent external review
- Internal review (e.g. involving colleagues, academic supervisor, School process) transfer approval to PhD completed 14/12/2017
- Research Programme Approval gained on 26/08/2015 (*Please note that RPA is a prerequisite for Research Degree Student, including Prof Doc, projects to be able to submit for ethics*)
- None
- Other

If other please give details

1.11 Please provide details as to the storage and protection of your physical /electronic data for the next 5 years – as per UCLan requirements – or whichever archive period is appropriate

The identity of the organisations and individuals will be protected. Pseudonyms will be used and measures proposed in terms of protection of data, abiding by the GPDR (2018) legislation, will be adhered to in the interests of protection from identification. The aim will be to anonymise all organisations and individuals.

Data will be stored on the UCLan server, protected by password. Audio files and other relevant documents will be uploaded and also stored securely. Hard copies of consent forms and questionnaires will be stored in a secured locked cabinet within a restricted university office.

1.12 How is it intended the results of the project will be reported and disseminated? (select all that apply)

- Peer reviewed journal – hard copy or online
- Internal report
- Conference presentation
- Other publication
- Written feedback to research participants
- Presentation to participants or relevant community groups
- Dissertation/Thesis
- Other

If other, please give details

1.13 Will the activity involve any external organisation for which separate and specific approval is required (e.g. NHS; school; any criminal justice agencies including the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Prison Service or Probation Service)?

- Yes No

IF YES, BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH THIS FORM, click [here](#) to CHECK WHEN, HOW AND WHAT IS REQUIRED

If Yes, please provide details of the external organisation and attached letter of approval

Appended document

See appended documents (A) for external organisations, confirming agreed access and engagement. Three organisations have been selected as identified above, after completing a categorisation process of the industry. From this initial suitability to the research, the process of choosing which specific site consisted of practical approaches (access) and significance to the industry (largest providers that fit within the categorisation). Additionally, to avoid potential conflicts of interest, such as users who may attend more than one gym and the obvious issue of market competition between providers, all are located in geographically separate areas.

**1.14 The nature of this project is most appropriately described as research involving:-
(more than one may apply)**

- Behavioural observation
- Questionnaire(s) – *please provide a copy of the questionnaire / survey*
- Interview(s) – *please provide a list of questions to be asked, or if semi-structured the topics*
- Qualitative methodologies (e.g. focus groups) - *please provide the questions/topics to be covered*
- Psychological experiments
- Epidemiological studies
- Data linkage studies
- Psychiatric or clinical psychology studies
- Human physiological investigation(s)
- Biomechanical device(s)
- Human tissue(s)¹
- Human genetic analysis
- A clinical trial of drug(s) or device(s)
- Lab-based experiment – *please provide relevant COHSS / RA forms*
- Archaeological excavation/fieldwork
- Re-analysis of archaeological finds/ancient artefacts
- Human remains analysis
- Lone working or travel to unfamiliar places (e.g. interviews in participants homes) - *please provide relevant risk assessment form*
- Other (please specify in the box below)

If 'Other' please provide details

1.15 Human Participants, Data or Material – the project will involve:-

Please select the appropriate box(es)

- Participants [proceed to next question 1.16]
- Data [proceed to question 1.29]
- Tissues / Fluids / DNA Samples [proceed to question 1.30]
- Remains [proceed to question 1.32]

1.16 Will the participants be from any of the following groups:

¹ Please email roffice@uclan.ac.uk if any project involves HT

(tick as many as applicable)
<input type="checkbox"/> Students or staff of this University ² <input type="checkbox"/> Children/legal minors (anyone under the age of 18 years) <input type="checkbox"/> Patients or clients of professionals <input type="checkbox"/> Those with learning disability <input type="checkbox"/> Those who are unconscious, severely ill, or have a terminal illness <input type="checkbox"/> Those in emergency situations <input type="checkbox"/> Those with mental illness (particularly if detained under the Mental Health Act) <input type="checkbox"/> Those without mental capacity <input type="checkbox"/> Those with dementia <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners <input type="checkbox"/> Young Offenders <input type="checkbox"/> Adults who are unable to consent for themselves <input type="checkbox"/> Any other person whose capacity to consent may be compromised <input type="checkbox"/> A member of an organisation where another individual may also need to give consent <input type="checkbox"/> Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes <input type="checkbox"/> Other vulnerable groups (please list in box below)
If 'Other' please provide details
1.16a Justify their inclusion
<i>Ethical approval covers all participants but particular attention must be given to those in a vulnerable category. Therefore you need to fully justify their inclusion and give details of extra steps taken to assure their protection.</i>
adults who are members/users of the chosen gym and consent to take part will be included in the focus groups and survey. managers at each site will be interviewed.
1.16b Is a <u>DBS</u> – Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly CRB – Criminal Records Bureau) check required?
<i>Certain activities and/or groups of individuals require DBS (formerly CRB) clearance. If unclear please seek advice.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please advise status of DBS clearance (e.g. gained; in process; etc)
1.16c All staff should be aware of <u>UCLan's Policy and Procedures on Safeguarding and Prevent</u>. Please confirm that, where relevant to your project, the appropriate training has been undertaken (please give date).
<i>Please refer to UCLan's Safeguarding Children, Young people and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Prevent guidance.</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please give details and dates of relevant training session – external or internal
Level 1 17 th Feb 2016 (internal)

² Where staff or students of the university are being used please explain how this is not convenience sampling

<p>1.17 Please indicate exactly how participants in the study will be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?</p>
<p>If an advertisement and/or information sheet is being used, please attached</p>
<p>Each site has been selected through a previous categorisation process and access agreed (appendices A). Email contact was made and further telephone conversation, to the general manager of those sites.</p> <p>Interviews of the managers will happen first, after an initial site visit when the study will be explained further and information sheet/consent forms given. Interviews will happen at least 2 weeks after this and on the same day the researcher will approach and ask adult users at the site (face to face) if they would be willing to take part in a focus group. Information sheets/consent forms will be given with focus groups taking part 2 weeks after. Potential participants may confirm their consent on the same day or confirm via email to the researcher in the following 2 weeks before a focus group would take place. Forms will not be left at the site so as to allow for a two week window to decide participation and allow some to facilitate any further support of participants.</p> <p>For the questionnaires, members will be approached in the gym, a few weeks after the focus group taking place. They will be provided with an information sheet and if agreeing to take part, invited to complete it on the same day. The participants in the focus group may take part in the questionnaire but the two pieces of research are not related in reference to individual participants. Whether focus group members participate in the questionnaire will simply come down to the fact of whether they are in the gym facility on the day the questionnaire is undertaken.</p>
<p>1.18 Will consent be sought from the participants and how will this be obtained?</p>
<p>If a written consent form is being used, please attach</p>
<p>Yes (see appendices E). A written consent form will be provided to each participant (focus group and interview) and their consent and signature will be sought. The information sheet for questionnaire will identify that, by completing the questionnaire, it will be taken that consent has been given.</p>
<p>1.19 How long will the participants have to decide whether to take part in the research?</p>
<p>Consent for the sites has already been given. For interviews and focus groups participants will have at least two weeks to decide. For questionnaire participants, they will need to complete the questionnaire on the same day. So they have the time taken from entering to exiting the gym facility to consider taking part (approx. 1 hour).</p>
<p>1.20 What arrangements have been made for participants who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information, or who have special communication needs?</p>
<p><i>Gives details of what arrangements have been made (e.g. translation, use of interpreters, etc).</i></p>
<p>There are no known disabilities at this moment in time, but should a consenting adult come forward who are in need of further arrangement of support, this will be facilitated in conjunction with the subject, the facility (which they already attend and thus already receive relevant support) and myself. During recruitment and research phases, a researcher will be onsite offering greater accessibility for further support and explanation.</p>

<p>Those who may require a translator or interpreter in order to engage with the research will be supported with this and suitable arrangements made. Such arrangements are stipulated in the information sheet (appendices D). Again this, will be in conjunction with the individual, the site and the researcher in order to facilitate the most appropriate arrangement.</p>
<p>1.21 Payment or incentives: Do you propose to pay or reward participants?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>If Yes, please provided details</p>
<p> </p>
<p>1.22 Will deception of the participant be necessary during the project?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>If Yes, please provide justification</p>
<p> </p>
<p>1.23 Does your project involve the potential imbalance of power/authority/status, particularly those which might compromise a participant giving informed consent?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>If Yes, please detail including how this will mitigated <i>Describe the relationship and the steps to be taken by the investigator to ensure that participation is purely voluntary and not influenced by the relationship in any way.</i></p>
<p> </p>
<p>1.24 Does the project involve <u>any</u> possible distress, discomfort or harm (or offense) to participants or researchers? (including physical, social, emotional, psychological and/o aims to shock / offend – e.g. Art)</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>If Yes, please explain <i>Describe the potential for distress, discomfort, harm or offense and what measures are in place to protect the participants and/or researcher(s). Please consider all possible causes of distress carefully, including likely reaction to the subject matter, debriefing or participant upset.</i></p>
<p> </p>
<p>1.25 Does the activity involve any information pertaining to illegal activities or materials or the disclosure thereof?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>If Yes, please detail <i>Describe involvement and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place.</i></p>
<p> </p>
<p>1.26 What mechanism is there for participants to withdraw from the project, at what interval(s) and how is this communicated to the participants?</p>
<p>Instruction on withdrawal will be written and included as part of the consent process. Possible participants will be informed as to the project through the information sheet and for those that want to participate (focus group / interview) they will be emailed possible date/time, in</p>

order to complete the data collection. The date will be at least two weeks ahead and will stipulate that participants can drop out at any point in this time. However once the data has been collected and anonymised, the opportunity to withdraw will not be available as stipulated in the information sheet (appendices D)

1.27 What are the potential benefits of the research?

The research will offer contemporary understanding as to the structure of the gym industry and begin to identify the key service demands for the different providers to consider. Ultimately it is hoped a more practical service quality model can be developed that such sites can adopt.

1.28 Debriefing, Support and/or Feedback to participants

Describe any debriefing, support or feedback that participants will received following the project and when.

Each site will receive feedback on how their members perceive the service quality of that site once analysis is completed and been given an opportunity to consult about what changes could be made at the site. Additionally, any individual participant will be able to contact myself and ask for a transcript of their anonymised data. Furthermore, upon production of the research, they can also request a copy of the findings and conclusions should this be of interest (as identified in information sheet, appendices D)

1.29 Will the project involve access to confidential information about people without their consent?

Yes No

If yes, please explain and justify

State what information will be sought, from which organisations and the requirement for this information.

1.30 Confidentiality/Anonymity - Will the project involve:

	Yes	No
a. non-anonymisation of participants (i.e. researchers may or will know the identity of participants and be able to return responses)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. participants having the consented option of being identified in any publication arising from the research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c. the use of personal data (i.e. anything that may identify them – e.g. institutional role – see DP checklist for further guidance)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If yes to any please attach completed [Data Protection \(DP\) checklist](#)

1.31 Does the project involve human tissue? ³ See [Human Tissue Act \(HTA\) Supplementary list of Materials](#) to check what is classified as human tissue.

Yes No

³ Until such time as the University gains its own HTA Research Licence, human tissue that is for a ‘scheduled purpose’ and not sourced from a BioBank or part of an NREC approved project can only be stored for a maximum of 5 days.

If no, please skip to question 1.32 If yes, please provide full details and answer questions 1.31a-c
1.31a Who is sourcing the human tissue? (e.g. a tissue bank governed by its own HTA licence)
1.31b Will the human tissue be stored at UCLan? (please note restrictions on storage) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, please state how long and in what form - cellular or acellular (DNA extracted) <i>Please note – if human tissue is only kept for the purpose of DNA extraction rendering it acellular the HTA storage regulations may not apply. If holding for DNA extraction, please state the length of time the tissue would be stored pre-extraction.</i>
1.31c Is the human tissue being used for an activity listed as a ‘scheduled purpose’ under Schedule 1 Parts 1 and 2 of the Human Tissue Act 2004? (click here to see list of HTA ‘scheduled purpose’ activities) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
1.32 Does the project involve excavation and study of human remains? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, please give details <i>Discuss the provisions for examination of the remains and the management of any community/public concerns, legal requirement etc.</i>

DECLARATION

This declaration needs to be signed by the Principal Investigator (PI), and the student where it relates to a student project (for research student projects PI is Director of Studies and for Taught or Undergrad project the PI is the Supervisor). Electronic submission of the form is required to roffice@uclan.ac.uk. Where available insert electronic signature(s) – alternatively, provide an email in lieu from appropriate party.

Declaration of the:
<input type="checkbox"/> Principal Investigator
OR
Director of Studies (please check as appropriate)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I take full responsibility for it. I have read and understand the University Ethical Principles for Teaching, Research, Knowledge Transfer, Consultancy and Related Activities. I have read and understand the University’s policy and procedures on Safeguarding and Prevent.

Appendix 3 – Ethics Confirmation and Application

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I undertake to abide by the ethical principles underlying the Declaration of Helsinki and the University Code of Conduct for Research, together with the codes of practice laid down by any relevant professional or learned society. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the project is approved, I undertake to adhere to the project plan, the terms of the full application of which the e-Ethics Committee* has given a favourable opinion and any conditions of the e-Ethics Committee in giving its favourable opinion. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I undertake to seek an ethical opinion from the e-Ethics Committee before implementing substantial amendments to the project or to the terms of the full application of which the Ethics Committee has given a favourable opinion. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I understand that I am responsible for monitoring the research at all times. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If there are any serious and/or adverse events, I understand that I am responsible for immediately stopping the research and alerting the e-Ethics Committee within 24 hours of the occurrence, via roffice@uclan.ac.uk. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in the future. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application will be held by the University and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I understand that the information contained in this application, any supporting documentation and all correspondence with the e-Ethics Committee relating to the application, will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. The information may be disclosed in response to requests made under the Act except where statutory exemptions apply. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved in the project, and that it is my responsibility to ensure that they abide by them. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For Principal Investigator: I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of ethical and other guidelines as set out by the University Policies and/or professional standards. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For Supervisor/Director of Studies: I understand my responsibilities as Supervisor/Director of Studies, and will ensure that the student investigator abides by the University's Policies on Research Ethics at all times. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the Student Investigator: I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of ethical and other guidelines as agreed in advance with my Supervisor/Director of Studies and understand that I must comply with the University's regulations and any other applicable code of ethics at all times. 	
<input type="checkbox"/> Signature of Principal Investigator:	

* e-Ethics Committee refers to either BAHSS, PSYSOC or STEMH

<p>or</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Supervisor or Director of Studies</p>	
Print Name:	Dr Carley Sutton
Date:	27/10/2018
Signature of Student Investigat or:	 
Print Name:	Denis Pressler
Date:	27/10/2018

Potential topics and questions for research

- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

Interview

Staff

What is your perception of service quality?

What are staff priorities to the function of the company?

What is the process for improving quality?

Site aims health / local community / price

What are the key objectives or aims of your organisation?

What are the key service characteristics?

What are the key external challenges facing the organisation? Has this changed?

How do you differ from other providers?

How much does the geographic area influence business approach to service quality?

Users

Do you have a target audience? If so How would you describe it?

Is there a predominant type of user?

Has the target group changed in recent time?

Do you feel service should be provided to users, or should users be seen as part of the service product?

What do you see as the customers role?

What are the common motivations of users?

What are the predominant demands from users?

What are the most common complaints?

Current service method

Do you currently adopt any form of service quality model?

How is this implemented?

how is it utilised, and Is there any potential for improvement is this?

How do you measure user expectations & perceptions?

Focus group

Are you members of other gym facilities. Other sports clubs. Go to other classes?

Have you been in the past, why did you leave?

Why did you choose to use this facility?

What are your motivations to stay at the gym?

Would you describe yourself as a typical member?

What do you feel are the key service characteristics of this organisation? What are the key aims and values?

Do you align with these?

How does the gym fit into your lifestyle?

What are your demands for a gym facility?

Participant Information Sheet for Interview



School of Sport and Wellbeing

Denis Pressler MA BA (Hons)
Lecturer Sport Business Management
email: dpressler@uclan.ac.uk

Dear staff member,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The research title is The evolution of the Fitness Industry: An investigation into the key constituents of suppliers and consumers to facilitate a suitable model of service quality expectation's. As someone who has worked within the fitness industry and observed the significant changes that have occurred in the last decade, I wanted to better understand how the industry is now made up and how the consumer base fits within it. If we can better understand this, then it provides the opportunity for organisations to better meet demands and service expectations. This in turn should mean an improved perception of service for the users of the facility. As such it is important to gather data directly from gym users and get their perspective on what they see as important service and why they use specific facilities.

The study is taking place at three distinct sites and will involve interviewing managers, holding focus groups with gym users and finally the completion of a questionnaire by gym users across the three sites.

As a manager of one of the selected sites, your insight and experiences of the day to day service provided is of high value to the project, for the research will look to gain a deeper understanding of the internal motives of the users and priorities of demand. Key areas to be covered will be information on use of the facility as well as expectations and priority for service quality. *Your participation in the research project is entirely voluntary and it is your decision as to whether or not to take part.* If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep for your reference and you will be asked to sign a consent form. Any involvement in the research will be sincerely appreciated, but you can withdraw at any stage prior to the anonymization process taking place and no reason needs to be provided. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time before the interview and without giving a reason.

Interviews will take place at your gym at a time of convenience to yourself. This should last between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on responses to questions. The intention is to make an audio recording in order to help subsequent transcription and interpretation of data. Should you not consent to being recorded it will not be possible to participate. All data will be anonymised at the transcription process and you can ask for a copy of this. Furthermore, upon production of the research, feedback of findings will be presented to the facility. Each participant for the interviews will be coded individually to ensure confidentiality of information and to protect identification. Should you be in need of further arrangement of support, (for example an interpreter) this will be facilitated in conjunction with the club, to ensure you can contribute to the study. Please ensure you inform the researcher prior to the study, (in person or via email) if any specific support is required so that suitable arrangements can be made. During the recruitment and research phases, a researcher will be onsite offering greater accessibility for further support and explanation if needed.

Appendix 3 – Ethics Confirmation and Application

In the past decade the landscape of the fitness industry has drastically changed, resulting in greater competition for providers and more choice for users. Numerous studies conducted on service quality in the fitness industry have highlighted a range of important service provisions based on the expectations and perceptions of users. It is hoped this research project can add to existing knowledge in this area, especially as changes in the environment have happened so quickly and so recently. While it is acknowledged that neither clubs nor participants will gain any personal advantage or benefit from involvement in the research, it is hoped that the research will make a positive contribution to our knowledge and understanding of this element of the sport sector.

The results of the research will be used as part of a professional doctoral thesis submission. You can request a copy of this upon final publication by emailing the researcher directly (Denis Pressler email included above).

While no direct risks to participation are anticipated, there being no intention whatsoever to distress or discomfort participants, it is accepted that opinions and ideas may engender positive and/ or negative feedback or even disagreement; this being a typical occurrence within human interactions and, therefore, any participant has the option to withdraw at any stage in the interview. Additionally, all opinions and information provided will be anonymised and stored securely according to the University's policy. Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity and the data will be kept securely in electronic form for 5 years from the end of the project.

Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet. If you would like to take part in the interview then please inform me (dpressler@uclan.ac.uk) and complete the consent form provided, which will be taken at the time of the interview/focus group. You will then be contacted to arrange a time for interview (or membership of the focus group).

Should you have any concerns or require any further information please contact myself. Furthermore, should you have any subsequent concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the University Officer for Ethics (OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk).

Your participation is greatly appreciated and highly valued so can I thank you in advance for your support and assistance.

Yours faithfully,

Denis Pressler



Denis Pressler Lecturer for Sport Business Management
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Participant Information Sheet for Focus Group



School of Sport and Wellbeing

Denis Pressler MA BA (Hons)
Lecturer Sport Business Management
email: dpressler@uclan.ac.uk

Dear member,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The research title is The evolution of the Fitness Industry: An investigation into the key constituents of suppliers and consumers to facilitate a suitable model of service quality expectation's. As someone who has worked within the fitness industry and observed the significant changes that have occurred in the last decade, I wanted to better understand how the industry is now made up and how the consumer base fits within it. If we can better understand this, then it provides the opportunity for organisations to better meet demands and service expectations. This, in turn, should mean an improved perception of service for the users of the facility. As such it is important to gather data directly from gym users and get their perspective on what they see as important service and why they use specific facilities.

The study is taking place at three distinct sites and will involve interviewing managers, holding focus groups with gym users and finally the completion of a questionnaire by gym users across the three sites.

As a user of one of the selected sites, your insight and experiences of the day to day service provided is of high value to the project, for the research will look to gain a deeper understanding of the internal motives of the users and priorities of demand. Key areas to be covered will be information on use of the facility as well as expectations and priority for service quality. *Your participation in the research project is entirely voluntary and it is your decision as to whether or not to take part.* If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep for your reference and you will be asked to sign a consent form. Any involvement in the research will be sincerely appreciated, but you can withdraw at any stage prior to the anonymization process and no reason needs to be provided. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time before the focus group and without giving a reason.

Focus groups will take place at your gym at a time of convenience to yourself and in the case of focus groups, other participants. This should last between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on responses to questions. The intention is to make an audio recording in order to help subsequent transcription and interpretation of data. Please note as your involvement is as part of a focus group, it is not possible for participants to withdraw their data, based on the group nature, but the above procedures regarding recording, withdrawal at any stage, anonymization and confidentiality will still apply. Should you not consent to being recorded it will not be possible to participate. If your involvement is by way of focus group all data will be anonymised at the transcription process and you can ask for a copy of this. Furthermore, upon production of the research, you can also request a copy of the findings and conclusions should this be of interest. Each participant for the focus groups will be coded individually to ensure confidentiality of information and to protect identification. Should you be in need of further arrangement of support, (for example an interpreter) this will be facilitated, to ensure you can contribute to the study. Please ensure you inform the researcher prior to the study, (in person or via email) if any specific

Appendix 3 – Ethics Confirmation and Application

support is required so that suitable arrangements can be made in conjunction with yourself and the club. During the recruitment and research phases, a researcher will be onsite offering greater accessibility for further support and explanation if needed.

In the past decade the landscape of the fitness industry has drastically changed, resulting in greater competition for providers and more choice for users. Numerous studies conducted on service quality in the fitness industry have highlighted a range of important service provisions based on the expectations and perceptions of users. It is hoped this research project can add to existing knowledge in this area, especially as changes in the environment have happened so quickly and so recently. While it is acknowledged that neither clubs nor participants will gain any personal advantage or benefit from involvement in the research, it is hoped that the research will make a positive contribution to our knowledge and understanding of this element of the sport sector.

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Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet. If you would like to take part in the interview/focus group then please inform me (dpressler@uclan.ac.uk) and complete the consent form provided, which will be taken at the time of the interview/focus group. You will then be contacted to arrange a time for interview (or membership of the focus group).

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Participant Information Sheet for Questionnaire



School of Sport and Wellbeing

Denis Pressler MA BA (Hons)
Lecturer Sport Business Management
email: dpressler@uclan.ac.uk

Dear member,

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The research title is The evolution of the Fitness Industry: An investigation into the key constituents of suppliers and consumers to facilitate a suitable model of service quality expectation's. As someone who has worked within the fitness industry and observed the significant changes that have occurred in the last decade, I wanted to better understand how the industry is now made up and how the consumer base fits within it. If we can better understand this, then it provides the opportunity for organisations to better meet demands and service expectations. This in turn should mean an improved perception of service for the users of the facility. As such it is important to gather data directly from gym users and get their perspective on what they see as important service and why they use specific facilities.

The study is taking place at three distinct sites and will involve interviewing managers, holding focus groups with gym users and finally the completion of a questionnaire by gym users across the three sites.

As a user of one of the selected sites, your insight and experiences of the day to day service provided is of high value to the project, for the research will look to gain a deeper understanding of the internal motives of the users and priorities of demand. Key areas to be covered will be information on use of the facility as well as expectations and priority for service quality. *Your participation in the research project is entirely voluntary and it is your decision as to whether or not to take part.* By completing the questionnaire, it will be taken as consent to partake in the survey. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep for your reference Any involvement in the research will be sincerely appreciated.

It is estimated that completion of questionnaire will take 10 minutes and is to be completed on site at the gym. The Questionnaire is available to any user (from the researcher), who, after reading the information sheet is willing to participate. On completion of the questionnaire please return to the researcher. Should you need support in completing the questionnaire, this will be facilitated where reasonably practicable, to ensure you can contribute to the study. Please ensure you inform the researcher if any specific support is required so that suitable arrangements can be made. Upon production of the research, you can request a copy of the findings and conclusions should this be of interest.

In the past decade the landscape of the fitness industry has drastically changed, resulting in greater competition for providers and more choice for users. Numerous studies conducted on service quality in the fitness industry have highlighted a range of important service provisions based on the expectations and perceptions of users. It is hoped this research project can add to existing knowledge in this area, especially as changes in the environment have happened so quickly and so recently. While it is acknowledged that neither clubs nor participants will gain any personal advantage or benefit from involvement in the research, it is hoped that the research will make a positive contribution to our knowledge and understanding of this element of the sport sector.

**Appendix 3 – Ethics Confirmation
and Application**

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Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet. If you would like to take part in the interview/focus group then please inform me (dpressler@uclan.ac.uk) and complete the consent form provided, which will be taken at the time of the interview/focus group. You will then be contacted to arrange a time for interview (or membership of the focus group).

Should you have any concerns or require any further information please contact myself. Furthermore, should you have any subsequent concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the University Officer for Ethics (OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk).

Your participation is greatly appreciated and highly valued so can I thank you in advance for your support and assistance.

Yours faithfully,

Denis Pressler

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Pressler', enclosed within a simple oval border.

Denis Pressler Lecturer for Sport Business Management
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Same day Information Sheet for Focus Group

As someone who has worked within the fitness industry and observed the significant changes that have occurred in the last decade, I wanted to better understand how the industry is now made up and how the consumer base fits within it.

If we can better understand this, then it provides the opportunity for organisations to better meet demands and service expectations. This in turn should mean an improved perception of service for the users of the facility.

As such it is important to gather data directly from gym users and get their perspective on what they see as important service and why they use specific facilities.

The time required to complete this will be approximately 30 minutes

Why the focus group is important and what it wants to achieve.

Focus groups, with users will be undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the internal motives of the users and priorities of demand. Key areas to be covered during the focus group will be information on use of the facility as well as expectations and priority for service quality.

Are the aims, objectives and motivations different between users of different facilities, are they similar or is there a significant range of users across all sites?

Other types of questions to be included are:

Are you members of other facilities?

Have you been in the past, why did you leave?

Why did you choose to use this facility?

What do you feel are the key service characteristics of this organisation? What are the key aims?

Would you describe yourselves as typical members?

Anonymity is assured.

However, in the unlikely event any future questions or clarifications are needed, and you would be happy to be contacted about this, please provide a contact email. Again, such details will be kept confidential as per data protection policy.

Please find my contact details on the consent form, and feel free to email with any questions.

CONSENT FORM

The evolution of the Fitness Industry: An investigation into the key constituents of suppliers and consumers to facilitate a suitable model of service quality expectations.

Please read the following statements and initial the boxes to indicate your agreement

initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet, for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

I agree to take part in the above study.

I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.

I understand that it will not be possible to withdraw my data from the study after final analysis has been undertaken

I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation being audio recorded

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

Name of Participant _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Name of Researcher _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Contact: dpressler@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix 4 – Background to Case Studies

Community Leisure trust

Established in 2014, the trust operates the majority of leisure facilities in the borough formerly managed by the Council's sport and culture services. Working in partnership with the Council, the trust is responsible for the operation, management and development of sport and leisure facilities, a theatre, arts development, health and wellbeing, and sport and play development. Since its existence, the CLT has overseen a growth of leisure and cultural offerings and now incorporates hospitality; arts & culture; golf facilities; health & fitness.

Located in one of the most deprived towns in the country, the CLT seek to create quality, engaging and rewarding leisure and cultural experiences that benefit their customers' individual wellbeing and the wider communities. They are innovative and seek new business opportunities and partnerships locally and nationally to grow activities, while investing profits back into the services for the community, to which they are accountable. They want to become a leading organisation in the market with a national reputation for quality services, staff and facilities. It is an award-winning charitable trust providing health, wellbeing, sport and culture experiences to enrich lives and communities. The quality, innovative and well positioned services and partnerships also enhance life-skills, social cohesion, employment and learning opportunities.

PureGym

The fitness centre is located in one of the most deprived towns in the country. Founded in 2008, the PureGym Group is one of the largest gym and fitness chains in Europe, with no frills, low cost membership clubs. It is Britain's largest gym chain by membership, with over 1,600,000 members registered to their gyms and in 2015, they acquired all gyms from rival UK fitness chain LA Fitness. As of December 2021, PureGym had 307 gyms, making it the largest operator of gyms across the United Kingdom.

They have a powerful and highly disruptive customer centric proposition that is differentiated from traditional gym operators and appeals to a broad range of customers. The key elements of the proposition include affordable membership fees, no fixed term contracts, and "24x7" access to high quality gyms.

CrossFit

The fitness centre is an affiliate of CrossFit and is located in a small city. CrossFit is a branded fitness regime that involves constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity. It is promoted as both a physical exercise philosophy and a competitive fitness sport, incorporating elements from high-intensity interval training, Olympic weightlifting, plyometrics, powerlifting, gymnastics, kettlebell lifting, calisthenics, strongman, and other exercises. Defined by its community, people encourage and motivate each other in every class as they work toward their goals.

Appendix 5 – Community Leisure Trust Focus Group Transcript

Focus group transcript for Community Leisure Trust.

Focus group for CLT

CLT11: white British male 50's

CLT12: white British female 40's

CLT13: white British male 60's

CLT14: black African/British male 30's

CLT15: white British male 40's

CLT16: white Asian/Korean female 50's

Int-D: Is anybody a member of another gym facility perhaps specific gym or sports club or do you perhaps go somewhere else to do other classes

CLT11: I'm a member of a running club yes

CLT12: Yes me too

Int-D: So sports specific, so you go specifically for that or is it the exercise

CLT11: Well yes it's the running the sport side of it. I'm a keen runner so I joined the running club to run it's not just the exercise and I came here to Cross train

CLT12: Yes that's the same for myself to

Int-D: So looking previously then have you been in the past a member of another facility and if so why did you leave

CLT13: I used to be a member of Xercise4Less and I just thought it was rubbish the classes were not as good and the rest of the staff here it was just not organised and I think you need to be organised and be driven when you come to the gym also it was really cold

CLT11: I think one thing that all sportsmen like is routines so if you're cross training you will build a program and it is important that the provider maintains consistency and it's to a standard and where I fell out with establishments in the past the classes may be cancelled at the last minute and you built that into a program for that week or for that month and it's just not acceptable and you have to try and do something else

Int-D: So there's perhaps two things reliability and consistency in quality

CLT14: Yes You need to think about suitability Factor as well for what you want to do and what you want to achieve as I was a member at an exclusive fitness club that I thought was pathetic from the point of view of fitness as there wasn't really anything fitness wise as there was just a bit of weight work and a treadmill and it was really expensive and I just I thought it is not really what I want to be doing I want to be doing other things try and get fitter and that is why I joined here

Int-D: So is that class specific or a gym.

CLT14: that was the general gym or perhaps Fitness Centre as they didn't like the word gym

Int-D: I suppose the question then is what is the key influence. Whether or not it is classes that motivates, the kit or something else

CLT14: The quality of the kit was excellent and it was very exclusive and expensive to join the membership was very expensive over £500 a year and this was a long time ago and I just thought there was no value to it for what I was paying there was no value for money where as I can pay £33 a month and I can do basically anything

Int-D: So where do you see the value where do you see the value of being a member of this facility

CLT14: It's results best for me

CLT11: I think you get two different types of people who have goals related to a sport perhaps and people do it as a hobby or lifestyle, if you've got goals you will measure it by results so it doesn't really matter the cost or what the facilities are in terms of physical environments decoration it's whether you get the results that you want is it speed flexibility whatever

Int-D: So results-driven as in fitness and keeping fit would people agree with that not anything

All yes

CLT13: How can you put a price on the value of keeping fit and everybody should keep fit I do not understand why people do not as it makes you feel good it makes you look good it makes you eat better and sleep better keeping fit as got everything going for it if you're not keeping fit it's got nothing going for it there are more people dying on couches then coming down running or cycling or training or whatever.

CLT15: I think cost is an issue for people but what we lose sight of is a lot of people went to gym4less and a lot of people left and now they're starting to come back and they went and left because of cost but it didn't work out in regards to the choice you have here it's not posing and a lot of people started coming back as a lot started realising the classes were better here people were friendly and that there was more choice

P012: It is down to staff as well if you have good staff, their energy and the vibrance of staff if they are positive and they're up for it and it's their passion you get that from them and you get that motivation to do more in a class and to do more classes definitely it is down to the staff

CLT13: I find the staff know what they're talking about and they're very helpful and I will ask them a question and if they don't know then another staff member will not and they will put you on to them weere as I think not that I go to other gyms but I think you are left to your own how to train and you are not really sure about technique which then you can hurt yourself

Int-D: So that links to that motivation to carry on if you're not being engaged with and not being educated to what is a practice

CLT15: it is highly skilled though, so 20 people could do a class with and they could all be challenged and that's 20 different sets of challenges isn't it so it is quite difficult it is quite a skill I think to do it and they seem to do it really well here.

Int-D: So why did you choose this facility then why do you come here I know you have mentioned something but specifically

CLT13: It has got everything it is got swimming pool

CLT16: You've got lots of options so you know whether it's swimming or using the gym you can use the group exercise the health suite and I think it's such good value for money

CLT15: Classes for me if they did not do the classes I would not come

CLT11: I would agree with that

CLT15: The motivation element the group and music, in the gym I wear headphones I have to bring my own music or it can be a real slog for me in the gym. So classes for me. Health and fitness to manage my weight and sometimes if I've had a hard day at work I can come in with stress relief. Or Not necessarily stress just tired and the class seems to just go does and sometimes when I'm like that I think I won't go tonight but when you go you get there it's absolutely fine that's what happens and the social environment if you don't know people well some amazing classes and people they come and they've not come for a while and you wonder where he is and people ask questions about each other so it is a bit of a relationship things as well

CLT16: You feel more energised afterwards

Int-D: So we have the health and well-being side and also the social environment

CLT13: becomes a way of life really

CLT12: it's mental wellbeing as well, it comes from the mental for me

Int-D: So how does the gym fit into a lifestyle

CLT15: My lifestyle works around it

CLT14: I work in Greater Manchester so the early evening classes are hard for me so I have to engineer my work around some classes and I understand why because you've got to do it for the masses rather than individuals but now I've retired I'm doing 3 days but when the gym does change its times over the Year I've had to give up classes because of that reason where as now I'm partly retired and that sometimes is an issue. But if you put a class on then at 8:30 people don't turn up then it's no good so there's that balance that has to refer

CLT13: Yes I think this gym got everything for everybody whatever that is and it is reliable as well

Int-D: What about the location. It is quite central

CLT13: It comes in quite handy for me

CLT14: It's not in the middle of nowhere but I suppose you have to make the effort to come anywhere really if it's providing a need

Int-D: So you're more likely to plan all the things around what your timetable is here rather than the other way round

CLT14: I think you need to look at your own diary what time are you free and then see because there's so many classes here and your link to the other Trust gyms as well and there's bound to be something for you, there's bound to be something you'd have to be working 100 hours a week to not be able to

CLT11: I think for me it is the other way around I try to fit the classes in around but the appeal here is there is options if you can't do the things there are options

Int-D: I understand that it's the personal circumstances and were you were at that point in your life but I think what comes through is that it doesn't have to be central because there is so much choice whether it is at this site and the other sites. So what motivates you to stay at the gym then whether it's specifically this gym or a gym

CLT13: Well for me this is the only gym I know and I get what I want

CLT11: I think you need a reason to change

CLT13: If it's not broke don't fix it

CLT14: I think for a lot of people who are reasonably fit enjoy that fitness and if it's starts to fade away that you're not going to the gym you start to feel like you are missing it so perhaps going to be driven to go back

CLT11: I think I'll be coming here 5 or 6 years and never once has a class been cancelled short notice and that is really important as I've been a member at gyms where that has happened and it doesn't take many of those before people start to think that's not for me I'll go somewhere else

CLT13: you'll go somewhere else

CLT11: So I think it's that consistency of service you know you rely on it

CLT16: I feel physically and mentally stronger coming to do the exercises seeing a meeting nice people. There are a lot of nice fitness instructors and everybody's being come in and it's nice to talk to people

CLT12: I think especially if you live on your own and you feel lonely and you come to classes and you get to speak and meet people

CLT16: When you've been working all them years and you retire and you are like, what now

Int-D: Suppose there is the generic one which is why do we go to the gym which is that social side. we've made that first decision at primary decision that is what we want in our life but then then why do we keep coming here it is reliability and choice would that be good summation

All Yes

Int-D: So the influence of other members do other members influence you and your behaviour

CLT14: Not for me

CLT15: I don't think so

CLT14: I just do what I do, what I like to do but it is good to do in a group and that's important isn't it but I don't only do it because other people did it if I wasn't wanting to do that I would do it

CLT11: If you are doing a weights class and you're shifting a bit more than needed if you're thinking that if they can do it surely I can

CLT12: It pushes you not to stop were if you're on your own you know I'll just finish

CLT11: It's the same for anything if you're running on your own you can't maintain the same levels well most people can't anywhere but training in a group you can find more

CLT13: Yes you can push yourself more

CLT16: You get more out of the group exercise I don't think I could get anywhere near my fitness now just going into the gym

Int-D: so you like coming to certain classes and notice when certain individuals are not there so as an environment perhaps if it was not them individuals and it was other individuals that tended to come who cause problems or who you did not like would that influence your behaviour to not come

CLT16: No

CLT12: It wouldn't affect me

CLT15: I don't mind but I know some customers that it has I wouldn't say any more but there have been a particular person that at one stage there a lot of people in the group were irritated by and some of them had said

Int-D: So it can have a disruptive influence and it doesn't necessarily change your decision to but it can alter your mindset

CLT15: I couldn't care less

CLT12: yes it can and I think that's when your instructor comes in

CLT13: Yes get your coat

CLT16: Yes some, for some you can feel sensitive and you might feel you won't come in anymore

CLT15: Sometimes if you have someone who's new in a group and you know yourself when you come the first time you can feel really silly. You get somebody new who comes in and perhaps they might talk to them after and just say hi and the instructor will often say that but

then you lot you can chat to them and say too much you've done it to a 3 times you will know whether you do like it or you don't judge it on 1 time

Int-D: Do you feel part of the service or do you feel that the server is just created and you come and consume it do you feel part of it

CLT13: I feel part of it

CLT14: Yes I think we're a part of it

Int-D: So how does that express itself

CLT13: Well I look forward to coming because I live on my own and it gets you at the house as I say keeping fit as got everything going for it

Int-D: In terms of feedback then you said about classes when it's on whether it's a change of equipment or weather a change of personnel how do you feel that feedback taken do you feel it's received

CLT13: But when we got some new bikes we were asked how would you like this and that was on trial or do you like the other better and so you do feel involved

CLT15: However I would say that it's a rarity

CLT11: I must say I don't feel particularly engaged with the development of the services here

CLT15: Timetables change and you don't feel particularly involved. I wouldn't say it particularly bothers me but customer generally other than the bike customers usually find out about it because things are changing or whatever but occasionally an instructor might say the changing soon and she might ask do you want to do this class at 5 1/2 pass but generally it doesn't and I don't feel included as a customer

CLT11: I would agree with that

CLT13: Yes

CLT12: Yes it can feel a bit pushy

Int-D: But when you do things such as a class on site you do feel very involved as a post to overall

CLT11: Yes in that regard yes and that's after from the instructors themselves

CLT14: and yes you do feel more engaged with some specifics such as classes but as an organisation the decision-making in the organisation it's not really engage with that all

CLT12: I think you most of you guys because you've been coming to classes and you know everybody's name and it's you ask personal questions have you been on holiday I have not seen you in a while, so you do feel part of a team

CLT13: A family loosely

CLT12: Groups that come to the same classes and if anybody is missing you can feel it's a bit quiet today at such and Such bodies missing and you feel quite involved in that way I do. it can be quite a social and talk about the cinema or what's on tv even though we train we are quite social as well. as well the instructors that work here most have been here a long time so you guys are perhaps see same faces the whole time so it's not a different instructor every 2 minutes and you get that same service and that same quality of instruction all the time

CLT11: continuity. It's interesting because you asked earlier but other members can have about whether you enjoyed the class or not but I think the more important relationship is the relationship with the instructor and that continuity and I know times when people haven't come to classes because they have changed instructor for a couple of weeks. so I think that is going back to the other point that not many of them leave but if they did I think that would be quite a test if suddenly two or three main instructors who have been here left

CLT14: I suspect they might

CLT15: You do get some that one certain instructor on a holiday some members won't come

CLT14: It is a trust thing as well and an instructor can know your limits and go back to that goal base so you are putting a lot of trust in people that are helping you

Int-D: So return to the demands of what you want. what are the determinants of demand for a gym when you deciding on the range of facilities or the facility you choose what is the criteria and what's the enticement what's the more important priority that you think about when you will be choosing a gym. So if you were not a member here and had to go and choose a gym what will be the key criteria you will go and look at some going to choose that gym because of A B and C

CLT14: I would look at the cleanliness and the toilets are they clean If it's not cleaned that's a sloppy environment and if that's sloppy probably or possibly the rest will be sloppy so looking at the general cleanliness in the first place and work from there

CLT15: I would look at the variation of activity what can I get out of my £33 a month and that I think that is were this gym it's not got any competitor anywhere compared to it.

CLT11: if you do 5 classes you want to be doing 5 different classes a week

Int-D: so the program is it class specific studio specific or is the program across all the aspects of the facility other provisions or would it just be about studio classes for you

CLT11: Probably just studio classes

CLT14: I guess that's from person to person I mean a gym is a gym isn't it

Int-D: To be more clear I think things like swimming for example for some site there might be a similar price are more expensive but they have a pool on site and within that day off and certain classes as well

CLT11: I think it's personal if you'd like swimming or not personally I don't use the pool

CLT13: Its got Everything for everybody

CLT15: The variations immense

CLT12: The Range is very wide

CLT14: Just the size of the site shows it

CLT11: I think one of the key things is you don't know until after you have joined is that accessibility in classes you know I think around lifestyle that people have difficulties getting on to the classes and if they can't get on which is as bad as being cancelled and you do not tend to have that problem here it's quite accessible full stop again it's about building a reliable program with routine and you can do that

Int-D: So, cleanliness, programming

CLT16: value for money

Int-D: so is that cost specific or is that im willing to pay more to get a lot so what do you see as value

CLT16: Cost and as many options of membership to join up to

CLT12: I think if the place has got a pool it's always a more appealing it is for me

CLT16: A gym without and you get the health suite and lot of places don't have it

CLT12: If you have the money you may be willing to pay more for a pool and a health suite because it seems more appealing. Sometimes with a class you are not motivated or to go in the gym you can always have a swim

CLT16: And a lot of people just come to swim

CLT12: I think the pools good as well if you have injuries so you have an alternative place if you can't do the classes every week

CLT16: If you're willing to pay a bit more you want a bit more

Int-D: So if you felt the value was better at a more expensive facility would you go there or would you or if you thought it was cheaper somewhere else but the value is better would you be there you

CLT12: I think I would want to try to

CLT13: I am happy where I am

CLT12: it depends on money doesn't it

Int-D: what do you think are the key aims and values of the Trust or of this facility

CLT13: I think it's got everything for everybody you can't get better than that

Int-D: What do you think they are trying to achieve then what are they trying to attract what are the aims and objectives

CLT15: I think the building itself it has got a medical component in it so the two things go together they're trying to get you fit physically mentally with ailments and then you look at the physical side to carry on. I've got a bad back now and when I have one before how I came to be a member here was through my GP because he referred me to the facility here which started the process basically and so the facility as a whole is in my opinion really good

CLT11: I think they're trying to compete with the other local gyms in the area and I think some of the improvements that have been recently seen have been trying to raise the level the cycling for example I don't know where you can go to get one better and better class I just get the impression it's been driven by that there's lots of the gyms around here and they want to be the best

CLT14: Is a heritage thing this was a council gym wasn't it work when there was no money in gyms and gyms was were not fashionable this was a facility then for people in the local area to get fit whereas as a lot of gyms you get the impression it's just jumping on the bandwagon

CLT13: Yes they're there for the money

CLT14: Fitness is on trend and people want to be attracted to what's on trend and from a business point of view don't you and that's why you got all the glitzy glass gyms don't you

CLT13: I find this place they're in it for the long run they're not in it for the cash

CLT15: You'd have to ask the staff or the mission statement

CLT12: I think they're trying to bring all types of people from all types of walks of life into one building to be able to work out if you just coming socially if you just want some social or keep fit mobility or cycling or running or you want to come to train. it is bringing somebody that is competitive and wants to train hard to compete somebody again who just wants to come socially it brings all those people together. so everybody has got something to choose from and the quality of the service that they get is the same whether they're doing it on a serious competitive level or not and to bring together as well so the variety of classes you know anybody can come to them and they get the same workout whether they are here just to stay mobile or whether they're here for a competition to get fitter and stronger and to make those people feel valuable

CLT13: I don't think it's a latest

CLT12: There's no separation people aren't segregated at all. Yeah, I remember when I was unemployed you could swim cheaper and I think you could get your membership cheaper so and trying to care as well for unemployed people

CLT16: The up and active I think a lot of people benefit from that because then they started using up and active to be introduced to all types of societies and at whatever facility was available and it changed their lives and then they started coming regular and getting membership and said this is what I want to do

CLT12: So you could be sent back to your GP and gp referral just to sort gentle exercises if you've been injured or health problems and once you've got into the environment you get to know people and you start to mingle and when that ends that GP referral and you think you know what I enjoy it here I like it here it's friendly it's informative. it's more of a service thing I think you know you might have a CrossFit club aura Boutique cycle club or a weight training gym or just somewhere that does local classes like and I think we want to envelop all of that and bring it together

CLT14: Inclusivity

CLT12: Yes inclusivity

Int-D: Do you feel those values and characteristics a line with your own values and motivation

CLT13: Yes otherwise I wouldn't come here you know nobody thought is your if I didn't like it I wouldn't come

Int-D: So you mentioned before you started, when there was an offer there when you're unemployed it provided you with a lift and a lift up to engage with it and then you get into position a few years later in life when you can choose to go to any facility you like but you decide to stay here and maybe it's because of that value did he gave you and that it gave you heart

CLT12: And the motivation because if you're unemployed you can get a bit lazy, I can't be bothered to look for a job I am sick and doing that bloody blah but the fact that you can come and get your exercise cheaper it keeps your energy going and your motivation higher and it helps motivate you to find a job

Int-D: So they try to be inclusive and there is that community element perhaps does that align with is that an important reason for you to want to come or actually where they do that they don't do that isn't important

CLT11: It's not important

CLT12: Yes of course it is

CLT14: If I lived in another town and I wanted to go to a gym I'd look for a gym that has got the history of being a council run gym when they were because they seem to have evolved into the modern day provider of what you need really and the values with then when it was unfashionable and now a lot of people who are opening gyms I think it's business rather than anything else

Int-D: So those initial values and what you associate with that there is a reason than those the routes for the way they offer it and that's the key driver for what they do

CLT11: The thing is we don't really know what the values are at the organisation to judge it and we can only judge it on what we say in the service really and I think you know go back to my knowledge about the bank as long as the service is good you are happy. I don't know what the values of my bank and I don't really care that I judge them by the service

CLT16: Also you're proud about it because you can recommend it to your friends so why don't you recommend that I can go to the trust and say oh why don't you try it does so many options the fitness instructors are excellent and it's very professional. You're proud about telling people and you're encouraging them to come and join

CLT14: It strikes me as there is no restaurant area and I'm glad about that and I think that all the gyms that have got this area and people congregate in there and talk, they talk fitness but they look at half of them when you think

CLT11: They do it to make money don't there

CLT14: I hope they don't get one here

CLT12: They used to have one, Yeah I know what you mean if it's a cafe area and it's serving well crap.

Appendix 6 – Community Leisure Trust Focus Group. Single Site Analysis

Community Leisure Trust- Attribute Analysis

Interview for CLT

CLT01: Area manager for CLT

Focus group for CLT

CLT11: white British male 50's

CLT12: white British female 40's

CLT13: white British male 60's

CLT14: black African/British male 30's

CLT15: white British male 40's

CLT16: white Asian/Korean female 50's

Programmes

Although Programme was not a fundamental characteristic for the industry framework it was raised as a key criterion within the focus group;

CLT15: Classes for me (most important provision) if they did not do the classes I would not come

For which there was agreement:

CLT11: I would agree with that

And developed this further by suggesting the range of programme was important;

CLT11: if you do 5 classes you want to be doing 5 different classes a week

Further detail was provided around access to the classes, which as the participant states, this is an unknown before joining and could provide something of a negative experience if not managed properly.

CLT11: I think one of the key things is you don't know until after you have joined is that accessibility in classes you know I think around lifestyle that people have difficulties getting on to the classes and if they can't get on which is as bad as being cancelled and you do not tend to have that problem here it's quite accessible full stop again it's about building a reliable program with routine and you can do that

The manager confirms this as an issue, with the added challenge of meeting, what can be 'competing' previous points, of enough capacity and enough variety.

CLTO1: another challenge is our group ex because our group ex is so fantastic and there is only limited space, we've got online bookings and people will be sat at the portal at 12 at night waiting for 7 weeks in advance and they will check it and put everything in they want and believe it or not one of the biggest challenge is Pilates at the current time because we are charging quite a reasonable price because of our membership base it is very much a lower price than you would get elsewhere so it is absolutely packed and people want it more and more on the programme but we can't fit it on the programme anymore then it already is because you have got to have a wide variety on your program

This is further complicated by alignment of programming. One change in demand in the past decade has been family membership, requiring the provider to align service offerings to this market, especially around programming.

CLTO1: we are heavily into the family training and family membership making sure that people come and keeping healthy as a family it is packing it in and putting activities in with the restrictions we've got because of the physical building so if somebody wants to do a boot camp what can we put on for the kids at the same time so the kids have something so now people are bringing kids to the boot camp session but it is what else can we put on at different times so parent and baby Sessions are going on.

Ultimately the class programme is seen as fundamental to achieving an organisational objective of making the site more of a community based destination;

CLTO1: It's the group ex that they will regularly come to. then perhaps doing three classes and dinner time class and actually having it as a destination, having more of a community or social base. That for us is great.

CLEANLINESS

Beyond the more overt reasons for cleanliness, it was also noted that cleanliness can act as an indicator for other operational practice at the sight.

CLT14: I would look at the cleanliness and the toilets, are they clean. If it's not cleaned that's a sloppy environment and if that's sloppy probably or possibly the rest will be sloppy so looking at the general cleanliness in the first place and work from there

The manager supports its importance, saying.

CLT01: you have got a team of 5 staff on to make sure the facility is clean and then because of financial constraints you can only pay certain rates and that is a challenge because of our own success,... keeping the areas clean and free that you can do that and 2 minutes later because of footfall it is a mess again.

Gym Equipment

Although there was limited discussion about equipment, this may have been because as a group, they were happy with the provision and although important it was not a critical factor for them. However for other users who primarily only use the gym area this is likely to be different.

CLT13: It's got Everything for everybody

CLT15: The variations immense

CLT12: The Range is very wide

However, the equipment is acknowledged as being a critical resource for the organisation. So much so it is listed in the business plan.

CLT01: There is a business plan set in place to ensure that we are keeping up with the latest trends so new pieces of kit that come through on an annual basis. We tend to look at the 5 Year mark in replacing the entire kit but other than that it is every 6 months we want to refresh if possible new bits of kit on the gym floor.

RANGE OF SERVICE OFFERING

For this case study, the range of service offering easily outstrips the other sites. This is primarily due to its public sector position and requirement to offer provision to the wider community population. However, this attribute was important to the group and even if they didn't use always use a provision, having the choice was important.

CLT12: If you have the money you may be willing to pay more for a pool and a health suite because it seems more appealing. Sometimes with a class you are not motivated or to go in the gym you can always have a swim

CLT16: And a lot of people just come to swim

It also became evident that provision was not seen in silo's, but the users actually identified the benefit of having a multi-purpose site and how value could be added by linking these. A specific example was GP referrals from the same site, with a referral indicating what provision to use to aid recovery.

CLT12: I think the pools good as well if you have injuries so you have an alternative place if you can't do the classes every week

CLT15: I think the building itself it has got a medical component in it so the two things go together they're trying to get you fit physically and mentally with ailments and then you look at the physical side to carry on. I've got a bad back now and when I had one before is how I came to be a member here was through my GP because he referred me to the facility here which started the process basically and so the facility as a whole is in my opinion really good

For some, this this process linking the service offerings was the reason they joined and the effects of other attributes (community/ social) led them to stay.

CLT12: So you could be sent back to your GP and gp referral just to sort gentle exercises if you've been injured or health problems and once you've got into the environment you get to know people and you start to mingle and when that ends that GP referral and you think you know what I enjoy it here I like it here it's friendly it's informative. it's more of a service thing I think you know you might have a CrossFit club aura Boutique cycle club or a weight training gym or just somewhere that does local classes like and I think we want to envelop all of that and bring it together

What also became clear that, it wasn't just about quantity, but the quality of provision.

CLT11: I think they're trying to compete with the other local gyms in the area and I think some of the improvements that have been recently seen have been trying to raise the level the cycling for example I don't know where you can go to get one better and better class I just get the impression it's been driven by that there's lots of the gyms around here and they want to be the best

STAFF

This topic needed little prompting and as a site that was willing to open itself up to scrutiny,

perhaps not surprising that the users had a positive take on the staff interactions, with some comparing to previous experiences.

CLT13: I used to be a member of Xercise4Less and I just thought it was rubbish the classes were not as good and the rest of the staff here it was just not organised and I think you need to be organised and be driven

Specifically, staff knowledge was raised as a key requirement.

CLT13: I find the staff know what they're talking about and they're very helpful and I will ask them a question and if they don't know then another staff member will not and they will put you on to them whereas I think not that I go to other gyms but I think you are left to your own how to train and you are not really sure about technique which then you can hurt yourself

CLT15: it is highly skilled though, so 20 people could do a class with and they could all be challenged and that's 20 different sets of challenges isn't it so it is quite difficult it is quite a skill I think to do it and they seem to do it really well here.

It was further noted that staffing was critical, especially around aspects of being positive, helpful and friendly.

CLT12: It is down to staff as well if you have good staff there energy and the vibrance of staff if they are positive and they're up for it and it's their passion you get that from them and you get that motivation to do more definitely it is down to the staff

Ultimately this led to how the relationship between user and staff can be critical and if a staff member who has developed that relationship and garnered trust, leaves, it could be the sole reason for members to do the same.

CLT11: I think the more important relationship is the relationship with the instructor and that continuity and I know times when people haven't come to classes because they have changed instructor for a couple of weeks. so, I think that is going back to the other point that not many of them leave but if they did, I think that would be quite a test if suddenly two or three main instructors who have been here left

CLT15: You do get some that one certain instructor on a holiday some members won't come

CLT14: It is a trust thing as well and an instructor can know your limits and go back to that goal base, so you are putting a lot of trust in people that are helping you

Staffing importance was confirmed by the area manager, who acknowledged the changing landscape but felt the interpersonal connections was still very important.

CLTO1: as a business our staff being the highest priority, as people want to speak to people, but the industry has completely changed and moved towards technology and wireless technology and people are thinking I can do all that without speaking to people, I can just swipe in. We have purposely not done that access because we want someone to come and actually talk to somebody. Especially with the client base because it's such a wide client base that one kind of method does not suit all.

CLTO1: as a business our staff being the highest priority, as people want to speak to people

As highlighted in the focus group the manager specifically pointed towards knowledge and friendliness as critical attributes that they want to develop in staff. When managed well, there can be further beneficial overflows as highlighted at the site.

CLTO1: the challenge working with young staff sometimes they would rather have their head down and maybe not talk to anybody and that is not what we are about.

CLTO1: I am a true believer in staff attending all the classes from the cleaner to myself, we will attend all classes so we can go and experience it and you are using your locker, you are using the changing rooms and getting that experience.

CLTO1: having a better awareness of your products and services but they are happier in the workplace they are a healthier workforce and also HR sickness levels have reduced, so it is win win.

MEMBERS INFLUENCE

The influence of other attendees can affect the experience of users but there were some mixed responses from the focus group as to whether this was important, which followed a trend of group activity and individual activity.

CLT15: The motivation element the group and music, in the gym I wear headphones I have to bring my own music, or it can be a real slog for me in the gym.

CLT14: I just do what I like to do but it is good to do in a group and that's important isn't it but I don't only do it because other people did it if I wasn't wanting to do that I would do it

CLT11: If you are doing a weight's class and you're shifting a bit more than needed if you're thinking that if they can do it surely I can

CLT16: You get more out of the group exercise I don't think I could get anywhere near my fitness now just going into the gym

CLT12: It pushes you not to stop were if you're on your own you know I'll just finish

It is evident that supportive members can drive motivation, and drive users on which in turn leads to a more valuable and enjoyable session. However, the extent to which it influences a user's decision making is questionable.

CLT14: Not for me *-other members influence you and your behaviour*

CLT15: I don't think so *-other members influence you and your behaviour*

Yet, when there is fellow member who is seen as disruptive, it clearly does cause a lasting impression.

CLT15: I don't mind but I know some customers that it has I wouldn't say any more but there have been a particular person that at one stage there a lot of people in the group were irritated by and some of them had said

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

The location appeared to be of less importance to other attributes, however it was noted that it was not a problem to access.

CLT14: It's not in the middle of nowhere but I suppose you have to make the effort to come anywhere really if it's providing a need

CLT13: It comes in quite handy for me

However, its local importance and the perspective of accessibility was developed by one member.

CLT12: There's no separation people aren't segregated at all. Yeah, I remember when I was unemployed you could swim cheaper and I think you could get your membership cheaper so and trying to care as well for unemployed people

CLT16: The up and active I think a lot of people benefit from that because then they started using up and active to be introduced to all types of societies and at whatever facility was available and it changed their lives and then they started coming regular and getting membership and said this is what I want to do

Although the initial point was not specifically geographic, it does indicate the importance of a central location that is accessible to all the community and without financial barrier. If this was not the case, they would not have attended and therefore would not be a current member. Geographic importance is acknowledged by the manager, who highlights the initiatives to combat the geographical issue. This fundamentally links back to a core characteristic in the industry framework, 'community'.

CLTO1: The organisation has been split up and we have teams that go out engage with kids also into deprived areas so they can deliver the service out there then try and get them to come into here

CLTO1: So our kind of focus is really not only on the fitness element but also on our social responsibility more than anything, because we are quite successful in those areas we can then look at areas that will convert into large income streams but they have potential to do so, but we have that social influence to do.

CLTO1: we have partnered with an organisation that has a central hub within one of the areas of the ethnic community for the ladies who don't want to come in. So we have a pocket on a Sunday from 5 till 7 but then they want more than that, so it is trying to support those areas and parts of the community and we have assisted and help them purchase gym equipment and setting up the procedures and the training so people are able to do that in their local community then hopefully we can convert and get them to come to us.

PARKING

Although this was not specifically mentioned in the focus group, the manager did identify parking as a primary point for complaints.

CLT01: Better car parking is one and in terms of cleanliness I would say cleanliness was one but now they're quite understanding, however we can always keep improving in this area, but I think that is in terms of our comments that comes back as from previous years.

INFORMATION

Although this was not touched on by the focus group, the manager provide detail on how information was provided and its importance.

CLT01: you can never get another opportunity to make another first impression so it is that bonus of ok they've come to us however it is the challenge of how do we get that person aware of what they can experience if they haven't come through the door in the first place. So that is done through social media videos.

They are also aware of getting information to different users can be best achieved in different ways and on different platforms, however the messaging needs to be authentic.

CLT01: we have used Facebook and Instagram but from going through and talking to them (younger users) and through surveys with them that is the preferred medium (snapchat) and what they would use. So to post putting something corporate on there would not do anything because with paid adverts it works on Facebook and some platforms but if they don't want it on that platform as it is more of a social interaction so to point of what we are looking at is do we put selfie pictures on the walls and have selfie points just to try and go through the user's themselves promoting, they will then become the defenders and speak about the organisation and take us up being giving a very positive point of view

However, it is accepted that despite being very efficient at disseminating information, online platforms can have their problems.

CLT01: We had feedback about being able to book onto classes, technology is great but when technology does not work it is a nightmare. So we are building a new system at the time and we're having a few challenges with that the website in terms of the bookings has been down and we got absolutely slaughtered.

TOTAL PRICE

When it came to price, the focus group was quite considered as they understood price could

be a barrier and therefore important

CLT12: if you're unemployed you can get a bit lazy, I can't be bothered to look for a job I am sick and doing that bloody blah but the fact that you can come and get your exercise cheaper it keeps your energy going and your motivation higher and it helps motivate you to find a job

However there was a deeper appreciation as to the value of the service they were receiving and the wider benefits of using a fitness centre;

CLT16: You've got lots of options so you know whether it's swimming or using the gym you can use the group exercise the health suite and I think it's such good value for money

CLT15: I would look at the variation of activity what can I get out of my £33 a month and that I think that is where this gym it's not got any competitor anywhere compared to it.

CLT13: How can you put a price on the value of keeping fit

CLT15: I think cost is an issue for people but what we lose sight of is a lot of people went to gym4less and a lot of people left and now they're starting to come back and they went and left because of cost but it didn't work out.

However, the knowledge of the focus group and disposable income is not necessarily representative of the local population. As the manager identifies.

CLT01: We need to be aware that we are in one of the most deprived areas of the UK so that has a significant impact on us.

SOCIALISE

The social aspect was evident; however, this did appear to focus around those who attend classes;

CLT15: some amazing classes and people they come, and they've not come for a while and you wonder where he is and people ask questions about each other so it is a bit of a relationship things as well

CLT13: A family loosely

CLT12: Groups that come to the same classes and if anybody is missing you can feel it's a bit quiet today as such and such a body is missing and you feel quite involved in that way I do. it can be quite a social and talk about the cinema or what's on telly even though we train we are quite social as well.

When in the gym the social engagement is reduced.

CLT01: So I think in terms of that, I think people want to interact, however, we don't on the gym floor.

When discussing social engagement with the manager, there was an appreciation as to the value that can be added through better engagement across users and staff and this was being managed through brand standards.

CLT01: In terms of staff training we asked them to do three things, if they are within 10m of somebody they have to make eye contact with them. If they are within 3m of them they have to acknowledge them and if they are within 1m they have to physically talk to them.

CLT1: That not only is that of the warm welcome and friendly arrival at the reception desk, it's having that and having people feel that the welcome and

There was also an acknowledgement that they could learn from other providers.

CLT1: It is that aspect of it as well that they have more of a friend, especially with our smaller sites, it is a community-based group of people, who come in and know the staff by name. We have mentioned CrossFit, where they have got that interaction with their members and they feel part of something.

Health and Wellbeing

This characteristic was critical for this type of provider in the industry categorisation and was keenly identified by the group, pointing to both the physical and mental health benefits.

CLT15: Health and fitness to manage my weight and sometimes if I've had a hard day at work, I can come in with stress relief.

CLT12: it's mental wellbeing as well, it comes from the mental for me

CLT12: if you're unemployed you can get a bit lazy, I can't be bothered to look for a job I am sick and doing that bloody blah but the fact that you can come and get your exercise cheaper it keeps your energy going and your motivation higher and it helps motivate you to find a job

There was also an acknowledgment of the wider service offerings and how they are interrelated in order to provide health and wellbeing support to the community;

CLT16: The up and active I think a lot of people benefit from that because then they started using up and active to be introduced to all types of societies and at whatever facility was available and it changed their lives and then they started coming regular and getting membership and said this is what I want to do

CLT15: I think the building itself it has got a medical component in it so the two things go together they're trying to get you fit physically and mentally and then you look at the physical side to carry on.

Appendix 7 – Questionnaire for Fitness Centre Users

It is important that we are able to capture your opinions on a range of issues regarding the facility. In so doing, you will help us better understand how well the service is delivering for users and where opportunities to improve are available.

The questionnaire requires minimal writing with questions being primarily multiple choice. As such, it should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

Remember, the questionnaire is anonymous, so no one will know what you put. So please be honest!!

What is your age

1. What is your Age?

18 -30

31-40

41-50

51-60

61-70

70+

2. Gender

3. What is your average attendance, in normal times (non Covid restriction)

3+ per week

2x per week

1x per week

less than 1x per week

4. How long have you been attending (name of facility)?

1 mth or less

1- 3 mths

3 - 6 mths

6mths -1 year

1 - 2 years

more than 2 years

5. What is your Ethnicity? (please enter what you most closely identify with)

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being **strongly disagree** and 5 being **strongly agree**; to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

6. I would refer (name of facility) to my family and friends?

Strongly

Strongly

**Appendix 7 – Questionnaire
for Fitness Centre Users**

disagree agree

1 2 3 4 5

7. My opinions are listened to and considered by managers at the facility?

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5

8. I feel I am treated as a valued customer?

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5

The next range of questions are again on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 (**strongly disagree**) and 5(**strongly agree**). These are split into 4 sections and ask, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements. **Please circle the relevant number for each.**

To what extent do you **agree** or **disagree** with the statements about the physical facility?

	Strongly disagree				strongly agree
9.The facility is clean and maintained	1	2	3	4	5
10.There is a sufficient variety of equipment	1	2	3	4	5
11.There is a sufficient number of each equipment	1	2	3	4	5
12.The equipment is cleaned and maintained	1	2	3	4	5
13.Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of supporting Services (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	1	2	3	4	5

To what extent do you **agree** or **disagree** with the statements about staff interactions?

	Strongly disagree				strongly agree
14.The staff are knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5

**Appendix 7 – Questionnaire
for Fitness Centre Users**

15 The staff are friendly	1	2	3	4	5
16.The staff are on hand and helpful	1	2	3	4	5
17.The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment	1	2	3	4	5
18.The other users are friendly and supportive	1	2	3	4	5

To what extent do you **agree** or **disagree** with the statements about programming?

	Strongly disagree			strongly agree	
19.There is a sufficient number of classes	1	2	3	4	5
20.There is sufficient variety of classes	1	2	3	4	5
21.The class times are convenient	1	2	3	4	5
22.The opening hours are convenient	1	2	3	4	5

To what extent do you **agree** or **disagree** with the statements about Accessibility?

	Strongly disagree			strongly agree	
23.The facility is centrally located (in a town or city)	1	2	3	4	5
24.The facility is close to where I live or work	1	2	3	4	5
25.There is Parking available with sufficient spaces	1	2	3	4	5
26.Information is easy to access and up to date	1	2	3	4	5
27.The cost, is a significant reason for choosing the facility	1	2	3	4	5

To what extent do you **agree** or **disagree** with the statements about outcomes?

	Strongly disagree			strongly agree	
28.Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing	1	2	3	4	5
29.Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals	1	2	3	4	5
30.(name of facility) is a good location to socialise	1	2	3	4	5
31.(name of facility) is a central part of my social life	1	2	3	4	5

The next range of questions are again on a scale of 1 to 5 and split into 4 sections. However, this time the score is based on **how important** the criteria is to you, with 1 (**not important**) up to 5 (**very important**). **Please circle the relevant number for each.**

How **important** to you are the following criteria about the physical environment?

	Not important			very important	
32.A facility is clean and maintained	1	2	3	4	5
33.A facility has a sufficient variety of equipment	1	2	3	4	5
34.A facility has a sufficient number of each equipment	1	2	3	4	5
35.The equipment is cleaned and maintained	1	2	3	4	5
36.The range of facilities beyond the gym/studio. (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	1	2	3	4	5

How **important** are the following criteria about staff interactions, to you?

	Not important			very important	
37.Staff are knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5
38.Staff are friendly	1	2	3	4	5
39.Staff are on hand and helpful	1	2	3	4	5
40.The presence and positive engagement of other users	1	2	3	4	5
41.The other users are friendly and supportive	1	2	3	4	5

How **important** are the following criteria about programming, to you?

	Not important			very important	
42. There is a sufficient number of classes	1	2	3	4	5
43. There is sufficient variety of classes	1	2	3	4	5
44. The class times are convenient	1	2	3	4	5
45. The opening hours are convenient	1	2	3	4	5

How **important** are the following criteria about accessibility, to you?

	Not important			very important	
46. A facility is centrally located (in a town or city)	1	2	3	4	5
47. A facility is close to where I live or work	1	2	3	4	5
48. Parking is available with sufficient spaces	1	2	3	4	5
49. The information is easy to access and up to date	1	2	3	4	5
50. The cost is a significant reason for choosing a facility	1	2	3	4	5

How **important** are the following criteria about outcomes, to you?

	Not important			very important	
51. I improve my general wellbeing	1	2	3	4	5
52. I can achieve my fitness goals	1	2	3	4	5
53. I am able to socialise	1	2	3	4	5
54. A facility become a central part of my social life	1	2	3	4	5

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE SURVEY

**Appendix 7 – Questionnaire
for Fitness Centre Users**

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

**Appendix 8 – Further Exploratory Factor Analysis, Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and KMO Score**

Community Leisure Trust

Service quality Performance results

Rotated Component Matrix^{a,b}					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
The staff are on hand and helpful	.896				
The staff are friendly	.865				
The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment	.827				
The other users are friendly and supportive	.807				
The staff are knowledgeable	.729				
There is sufficient variety of classes		.908			
The class times are convenient		.878			
There is a sufficient number of classes		.828			
The opening hours are convenient		.719			
Information is easy to access and up to date		.604			
Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of facilities (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)			.775		

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

The facility is clean and maintained			.759		
There is a sufficient number of each equipment			.757		
There is a sufficient variety of equipment			.698		
The equipment is cleaned and maintained			.658	.313	
(name of facility) is a good location to socialise				.805	
Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals				.803	
Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing				.775	
There is Parking available with sufficient spaces					.809
The facility is centrally located (in a town or city)					.802
The cost, is a significant reason for choosing the facility					.734

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.598	17.133	17.133
2	3.279	15.613	32.746
3	2.724	12.969	45.716
4	2.170	10.335	56.050
5	1.952	9.295	65.346

KMO = .710

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

Importance results

Rotated Component Matrix^{a,b}					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
There is sufficient variety of classes	.905				
The class times are convenient	.844				
There is a sufficient number of classes	.761			-.302	
The opening hours are convenient	.740			.310	
The information is easy to access and up to date	.645				
The presence and positive engagement of other users		.790			
Staff are friendly		.778			
Staff are knowledgeable		.763			
The other users are friendly and supportive		.744			
Staff are on hand and helpful		.697			
A facility has a sufficient variety of equipment			.701		
A facility has a sufficient number of each equipment			.651		
The range of facilities beyond the gym/studio. (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)			.604		
A facility is clean and maintained			.560		
The equipment is cleaned and maintained			.513		

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

Parking is available with sufficient spaces				.653	
The cost is a significant reason for choosing a facility				.619	
A facility is centrally located (in a town or city)				.594	
I can achieve my fitness goals					.793
I improve my general wellbeing					.676
I am able to socialise					.441

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.163	15.060	15.060
2	2.908	13.849	28.909
3	2.017	9.606	38.515
4	1.592	7.580	46.095
5	1.567	7.462	53.558

KMO of .603

CrossFit Facility

Service quality Performance results

Rotated Component Matrix^{a,b}					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
The equipment is cleaned and maintained	.974				

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

There is a sufficient variety of equipment	.962				
There is a sufficient number of each equipment	.952				
Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of facilities (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	.896				
The facility is clean and maintained	.798				
The class times are convenient		.831			
The opening hours are convenient		.761			
There is a sufficient number of classes		.739			
Information is easy to access and up to date		.665			
There is sufficient variety of classes		.653			
The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment			.830		
The staff are friendly			.780		
The other users are friendly and supportive			.772		
The staff are knowledgeable			.563		
The staff are on hand and helpful			.526		
The cost, is a significant reason for choosing the facility				.913	
The facility is centrally located (in a town or city)				.884	

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

There is Parking available with sufficient spaces				.868	
Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals					.888
Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing					.846
(name of facility) is a good location to socialise					.694

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.508	21.469	21.469
2	2.788	13.277	34.745
3	2.589	12.328	47.073
4	2.550	12.145	59.218
5	2.114	10.069	69.287

KMO of .633

Importance results

Rotated Component Matrix^{a,b}					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
The equipment is cleaned and maintained	.869				
A facility is clean and maintained	.861				
A facility has a sufficient variety of equipment	.853				
A facility has a sufficient number of each equipment	.809				

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

The range of facilities beyond the gym/studio. (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	.471			.308	
The other users are friendly and supportive		.858			
The presence and positive engagement of other users		.847			
Staff are knowledgeable		.699			
Staff are on hand and helpful		.698			
Staff are friendly		.551			
The cost is a significant reason for choosing a facility			.803		
Parking is available with sufficient spaces			.793		
A facility is centrally located (in a town or city)			.757		
There is sufficient variety of classes				.735	
There is a sufficient number of classes				.624	
The class times are convenient				.590	
The opening hours are convenient				.581	
The information is easy to access and up to date				.552	.446
I am able to socialise					.737
I can achieve my fitness goals					.702
I improve my general wellbeing			-.411		.581

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.308	15.751	15.751
2	2.832	13.488	29.239
3	2.282	10.866	40.105
4	2.156	10.268	50.373
5	1.911	9.098	59.471

KMO of .638

Collated Case Studies

Service quality Performance result

	Rotated Component Matrix ^a				
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
There is a sufficient variety of equipment	.873				
There is a sufficient number of each equipment	.872				
Excluding the gym/studio there is a good variety of facilities (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)	.866				
The facility is clean and maintained	.821				
The equipment is cleaned and maintained	.789				
The staff are friendly		.822			
The presence of other users has improved my enjoyment		.817			

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

The other users are friendly and supportive		.794			
The staff are knowledgeable		.781			
The staff are on hand and helpful		.709			
There is sufficient variety of classes			.893		
The class times are convenient			.878		
There is a sufficient number of classes			.866		
Information is easy to access and up to date			.560		
The cost, is a significant reason for choosing the facility				.858	
The facility is centrally located (in a town or city)				.817	
There is Parking available with sufficient spaces				.802	
The opening hours are convenient			.314	.350	
Attending the facility has improved my wellbeing					.845
Attending the facility, I am achieving my fitness goals					.842
(name of facility) is a good location to socialise					.820

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.716	17.697	17.697
2	3.294	15.688	33.385

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

3	2.897	13.796	47.181
4	2.355	11.213	58.394
5	2.259	10.759	69.153

KMO of .793

Importance results

Rotated Component Matrix^a					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Staff are friendly	.802				
Staff are on hand and helpful	.796				
Staff are knowledgeable	.794				
The other users are friendly and supportive	.790				
The presence and positive engagement of other users	.759				
There is sufficient variety of classes		.928			
The class times are convenient		.907			
There is a sufficient number of classes		.873			
The information is easy to access and up to date		.726			
The opening hours are convenient		.509			
The equipment is cleaned and maintained			.858		

**Appendix 8 – Further
Exploratory Factor Analysis,
Rotation Sums of Squared
Performance Loadings and
KMO Score**

A facility is clean and maintained			.838		
A facility has a sufficient variety of equipment			.814		
A facility has a sufficient number of each equipment			.811		
The range of facilities beyond the gym/studio. (such as wet facilities, sport hall, café, etc)			.510		
A facility is centrally located (in a town or city)				.768	
The cost is a significant reason for choosing a facility				.733	
Parking is available with sufficient spaces				.716	
I improve my general wellbeing					.808
I can achieve my fitness goals					.805
I am able to socialise					.528

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.399	16.184	16.184
2	3.378	16.088	32.271
3	3.093	14.728	46.999
4	1.746	8.317	55.316
5	1.730	8.239	63.555

KMO of .773