

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY, CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION AND BRAND EQUITY AT A SELECTED
FITNESS CLUB IN PIETERMARITZBURG**

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**School of Management, IT and Governance
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Declaration

I, Mxolisi Malcom Zwelibanzi Mtshali, declare that:

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Abstract

The main aim of the study is to measure the perceptions of gym members with regard to the three constructs (service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity). This was prompted by the fact that there are gaps in knowledge concerning the significance of the three constructs within the fitness industry. Furthermore, there are limited studies that have concentrated on these constructs within the South African industry, especially in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The intense competition within the South African fitness industry. Therefore, this motivated the researcher to also look at the relationships among these constructs.

A convenience sample of 99 gym members who voluntarily participated was selected from a fitness club in Pietermaritzburg. The data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire and subjected to different kinds of statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics, reliability analyses and inferential statistics were considered for each construct and the data presented in tables and graphs. The research findings are:

The service quality dimensions rated from lowest to highest are: tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy. Furthermore, most of the key service quality 22-variables, based on their importance to the gym members, were rated above average. The results also revealed that most of the gym members are satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club. Significant and positive correlations were found to exist between service quality and customer satisfaction. The brand equity dimensions, rated in ascending order are, brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association. All the 12- variables of brand equity were rated above average. In addition, significant and positive correlations were found to exist between service quality and brand equity.

It is recommended that the fitness club should place greater emphasis on the evaluation of service quality, gym member's satisfaction and brand equity to maintain and attract gym members, while sustaining a competitive advantage against rivals.

However, It would be beneficial if similar studies were to be conducted with other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg or a comparison between fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg and Durban.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Background of the Study

1.0 Introduction and Background

The construct service quality is commonly used within the business context of the fitness industry. However, construct service quality means different things to different people or businesses, and, as a result, service quality is quite difficult to define. Many definitions have been formulated pertaining to service quality. From a customer's perspective, Wood and Brotherton (2008) define service quality as the value that is defined by customers concerning service performance. Initially, service quality was used as a "defensive mechanism" but, currently, it is used as a competitive instrument to develop a new market and protect the market share (Yee, Yeung & Ma, 2013).

According to Soita (2012), "service quality" has appeared to have a positive return on investment, "customer satisfaction" and other indirect factors. Furthermore, Dhurup, Singh and Surujlal (2006) indicated that service quality plays a vital role in differentiating the unique selling proposition of the business from rivals. Theodorakis, Howat, Jae-Ko, and Avourdiadou (2014) pointed out that poor customer service can negatively affect both the present and future sales' standard of a business.

In the context of service quality within the fitness industry, Alexandris, Douka, Papadopoulos and Kaltsatou (2008) emphasised that consumers in all places have become more quality conscious and there has been an increased consumer demand for higher quality service. Yet, the gym members' "expectations and perceptions of service quality", along with superior service quality, will vary from one country to another, because the services offered from an economically developing country and a developed country will vastly differ (Saravanan & Rao, 2007). MacIntosh, Doherty and Walker (2010) argued that service quality in the "fitness industry" is not only a significant factor for customer satisfaction and profitability but also to measure the competitiveness of a service business. Therefore, fitness clubs are pressed to deliver exceptional services to their fitness club members to have a sustainable competitive edge against rivals.

Dhurup, Singh and Surujlal (2006:106) define “customer satisfaction” as the degree of satisfaction in meeting and exceeding customer expectations with the service provided. In the context of customer satisfaction, Yee, Yeung and Ma (2013) indicate that measuring customer satisfaction within the fitness industry is very important. According to Alexandris, Dimitriadis and Kasiara (2001), customers are, as yet, not happy with the “service quality” offered by fitness clubs even though the number of fitness clubs keeps on increasing. Moreover, Media Update (2018) pointed out that SMMEs (Small Medium Micro Enterprises) within the fitness industry are failing to meet and exceed customer expectations. Wood and Brotherton (2008) pointed out that fitness clubs are now introducing some interesting measures in meeting and exceeding customers’ expectations. This includes being accommodative of cultures within the fitness industry. Therefore, it will be beneficial if the South African fitness clubs can adopt this strategy for the success of the business.

Schneider, Macey, Barbera, and Martin (2009) argue that the key factors influencing “customer satisfaction” within the fitness industry are still misunderstood. The authors further stated that customer satisfaction changes from time to time within the fitness industry. Therefore, a consistent measure of customer satisfaction within the fitness club is required. Besides, measuring customer satisfaction provides great feedback, which is beneficial for the business.

Farquhar (1989) defines “brand equity” as the added value assigned to the tangibles or intangibles of the business. Simon and Sullivan (1993) pointed out that the significance of brand equity is to differentiate the business offerings within the industry. Chang and Chelladurai (2003) confirm that well-established fitness clubs are now surviving through brand equity. The researchers revealed that a brand name influences customers’ expectations and perceptions (Sehhat, 2013: Alexandris *et al.*, 2008: Berry 2000: Garvin, 1983). Simon and Sullivan (1993) proffered that brand knowledge is what drives consumers to have “positive or negative” associations with the brand. Considering the rise of competition within the fitness industry and the value of customers, brand equity acts as a catalyst in conveying the differentiating factor of the brand (Williams, 2010). Although the well-known fitness clubs within the industry are surviving, they are finding it difficult to accommodate all the changing needs of consumers, due to lack of industry information (Lam, Zhang & Jensen,

2005; Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal, 2006; & Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, measuring brand equity is vital for the success of the fitness club.

Most of the South African people are using fitness clubs in different sizes and formats to be healthy, get fit, stay active and so forth, but other brands are missing the boat within the fitness industry (Media Update, 2018). According to Statista (2017), South Africa has the highest club revenue in Africa and Middle East, generating over \$ 900 million per year. This serves as an indication that the South African fitness industry is very lucrative with potential opportunities and, therefore, the seriousness of initiating innovative strategies to maintain and increase market share are vital. Yes, competition has its own ups and downs, depending on the capabilities of a fitness clubs as well as financial strengths.

According to Richard (2015), companies like Virgin Active always listen to their customers through consistent research and further use feedback from customers as a competitive advantage against its rivals. Also, ten years ago, Planet Fitness and Virgin Active started extending their businesses by opening fitness centres in townships. In fact, Soweto and Khayelitsha were the first townships to be provided with that opportunity (Ngceba, 2017). Hence, measuring service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity at the selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg is deemed to be an important exercise.

Fitness clubs are thriving and growing by exploiting market changes and paying attention to accommodating consumer's needs. Serving gym members is important in developing a fitness club. The reason behind that is to secure a way to survive and always be ahead vis-à-vis rivals by successfully providing better quality service. Customers should be reminded at all times about the quality of services because the competition is fierce in the South African fitness industry and worldwide (Ngceba, 2017: Williams, 2010: Schneider *et al.*, 2009: Chang & Chelladurai, 2003). A standout amongst the vital issues fitness clubs are dealing with is the existing competition to get educated about how much fitness club members are satisfied and their perspectives about service performance. The ability to carefully monitor the gym member's "satisfaction" will set up a great value to rally on, in rivalry stadia and getting more market share (Ngceba, 2017: Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014).

According to Ngceba (2017), most of the well-known fitness clubs do understand that they cannot keep gym members “satisfied” for an extended period. Therefore, consistent marketing research is necessary due to the lack of industry information. The following table presents the relevant recent studies within the fitness industry. Furthermore, the table also presents the number of studies that have been conducted within the South African fitness industry and the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Table 1.1 Summary of Recent Studies

Author and year	Context of research	Country/Place
Ngceba (2017).	“Service Quality at Selected Health and Fitness Centres in Townships in the Greater Durban Area.”	South Africa (Durban)
Suwono and Sihombing (2016).	“Factors Affecting Customer Loyalty of Fitness Centers: An Empirical Study.”	Indonesia
Theodorakis <i>et al.</i> , (2014).	“A Comparison of Service Evaluation Models In The Context of Sport and Fitness Centres In Greece.”	Greece
Yee, Yeung and Ma (2013).	“Drivers of Customer Satisfaction In The Fitness Club Industry.”	United Kingdom (UK)
Zongli (2012).	“A Comprehensive Assessment of Commercial Health & Fitness Clubs’ Service Quality.”	China
Soita (2012).	“Customers’ Perception about Service Quality In Commercial Health and Fitness Clubs In Uganda.”	Uganda

Author and year	Context of research	Country/Place
Alam and Hossain (2012).	“Motivations Behind Attending Fitness Clubs in Bangladesh: A Survey Study on Clubs’ Members in Sylhet.”	Bangladesh
Alexandris, Douka, Papadopoulos and Kaltsatou (2008).	“Testing The Role of Service Quality on The Development Of Brand Associations and Brand Loyalty.”	Greece
Tong and Hawley (2009).	“Measuring Customer-Based Brand Equity: Empirical Evidence From The Sportswear Market In China”.	China
Dhurup, Singh and Surujlal, (2006).	“Customer Service Quality At Commercial Health and Fitness Centres.”	South Africa (Johannesburg)
Draper, Grobler, Kilian, Micklesfield, Lambert and Noakes (2006).	“An Inventory of The South African Fitness Industry.”	South Africa

Source: Compiled by the researcher.

With respect to above table 1.1, it is important to highlight a list of constructs that were previously examined by the above studies, namely; service quality, customer loyalty, brand associations, brand loyalty, Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) and perceptions. However, not many studies have measured the combination of “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity” within the South African fitness industry. Therefore, there are gaps in knowledge concerning the three concepts. As a marketer, it is essential to look at these concepts and have a better understanding of “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity” within the South African fitness industry. The proposed study will contribute to the areas that have been under-researched within the South African fitness industry, because there is a dearth of literature within the South African industry and, more particularly, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).

1.2 Research Problem

According to Draper *et al.*, (2006), competition is more intense within the South African fitness industry. Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal (2006) also pointed out that the well-established fitness clubs are monopolising the South African market due to a threat of new entrants. Executing proactive strategies to maintain the existing customers and attract new customers is more than essential (Chang & Chelladurai, 2003). According to Yee, Yeung and Ma (2013), the effective use of service quality as a cornerstone of a business marketing strategy is critical in ensuring the success of the business.

Currently, customers are seeking value because they are educated and knowledgeable about quality. Determining gym member's satisfaction is significant, since the final decision of a gym member is grounded with several factors (Bodet, 2006: Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014: Ngceba, 2017).

Chang and Chelladurai, (2003) endorse that well-established fitness clubs are now surviving through brand equity. Ngceba (2017) cautions though that brand equity works effectively only if there is a more in-depth understanding of it by the consumer and business, which will have a positive effect on the brand.

Based on the aforementioned, a call for measuring service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity at a selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg is necessary. This is because based on an evaluation of the extant literature, it was found that relatively limited literature exists featuring service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity in a fitness club context, particularly in South Africa, and the relationships between these constructs.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How service quality and its dimensions are perceived by fitness club members based on the SERVPERF model?
2. What are the fitness club members' current satisfaction levels of the services provided by the selected fitness club?
3. What are the perceptions of fitness club members concerning the brand equity of the club using Aaker's model?

4. What are the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity based on the selected fitness club?

1.4 Research Objectives

For the selected fitness club, the “specific objectives” are as per the following:

1. To evaluate how service quality and its dimensions are perceived by fitness club members based on the SERVPERF model.
2. To determine fitness club members’ current satisfaction levels of the services provided by the selected fitness club.
3. To determine the perceptions of fitness club members concerning the brand equity of the club using Aaker’s model.
4. To determine the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity based on the selected fitness club.

1.5 Justification of the Study

There is a lack of “literature” with regards to the combination of three constructs; “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity” within the fitness industry. Therefore, the vital contribution of the proposed study would be measuring the three constructs; service qualities, customer satisfaction and brand equity at a selected South African fitness club. Furthermore, the study is important in terms of presenting an insight into how fitness club members at the selected fitness club rate service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity. Another significant contribution of the study would be identifying the key factors influencing service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity. Moreover, the proposed study will play an essential role in addressing the gaps in knowledge with regards to the three constructs within the South African fitness industry, specifically, in the province of KZN. This information would assist the top management of the selected fitness club in ascertaining whether there is a need or not for improvement, to attract new members, while maintaining the existing fitness club members.

Evidently, this is most exigent because it will help the SMMEs (small medium and micro-enterprises) within the industry regarding the key factors that are considered most significant to customers. The new knowledge will challenge some innovative strategies to be formulated

and implemented in accordance with customers, as the priority, rather than money, as the primary priority. Therefore, the gym members will have an opportunity to select the best fitness club that matches or meets and exceeds their expectations.

The fitness clubs have the potential to alter the ‘lifestyle’ of the South Africans, since South Africa is a developing country and the standard of living is slowly changing. The gym exercise improves health and it is good for your heart, it has an effect against a number of cancers. However, for these reasons, it is imperative to measure the key service quality influencers of customer satisfaction and brand equity at a selected fitness club. An increase of fitness clubs results in an increase in job opportunities, standard of living and improves health life style.

The following discussion outlines the summary of the research methodology adopted in this study.

1.6 Research Methodology

The proposed “research design” for this study was quantitative method and the study population were fitness club members of a selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg. Unfortunately, the selected fitness club have only one branch in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Due to the nature of the study, non-probability sampling was adopted as a technique for selecting a specific number of elements from the population of interest to represent the whole population. Initially, a total number of 120 fitness club members were proposed for the study due to the nature of the selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg and research costs. Nevertheless, the researcher distributed 140 questionnaires at the fitness club from the morning, early afternoon, and late afternoon. The gym members were given a chance to take the questionnaires home and submit them on the next day at the help-desk. This sampling technique was selected to accommodate different opinions and experiences of each session from the selected fitness club.

A structured questionnaire was employed for primary data collection. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions. Section A consisted of service quality ratings. Section B

consisted of customer satisfaction ratings. Section C consisted of brand equity issues. Lastly, section D included demographic information.

Before data collection, the questionnaire was pre-tested from the few students that train at the university fitness club in Pietermaritzburg campus. The main reason why it was not pretested on the selected fitness club members is because of the nature of the selected fitness club and to avoid a limited number of potential participants.

The researcher undertook an application for gatekeeper's permission, ethical clearance and informed consent (*attached in the appendix section*) as part of the ethical process of collecting primary data.

1.7 Limitations of the study

This study was limited by the research problem, questions and objectives since everything was done in accordance within such boundaries. Moreover, the literature, methodology, findings as well as conclusions were guided by these boundaries.

The proposed study was aiming to cover 120 gym members through convenience sampling, and 140 questionnaires were distributed, but only 99 came back after approximately a month. As a result, the findings cannot be generalised to the public particularly as a non-probability sampling technique was adopted. In general, the findings can only be relevant in Pietermaritzburg. Notably, the data collected can only be applicable to the sample employed. A full discussion of the limitations is presented in chapter seven.

1.8 Outline of the Study

Seven chapters were formulated for this thesis. Chapter one includes the "introduction, background of the study, problem statement, objectives, hypotheses, justification of the study and the summary of the research methodology".

The literature review is divided into two chapters; chapter two and three. Chapter two addresses the theory of service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity. All of these constructs are defined, described and illustrated with examples.

Chapter three discusses the significance of service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity within the fitness industry and empirical studies are also considered.

Chapter four consists of a full discussion of the research methodology employed for this study in addressing the objectives. This includes the research design, study population, sampling method, data collection, question design and data analysis for each objective.

Chapter five unpacks the research findings. There are four sections: demographic information, service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity.

Chapter six presents the discussion of the findings, in relation to the objectives and hypotheses of the study.

Chapter seven presents the recommendations for both future research and for the selected fitness club, followed by the conclusion for the study.

1.9 Conclusion

According to the above background, the assessment of the three constructs is considered to have voluminous returns, for both parties (consumer and service provider). Furthermore, the above discussion also pointed out that this study will tend to have a significant impact, particularly in the province of KZN, since not many studies have researched the perceptions of consumers with regards to service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity within the fitness industry. Also, the problem statement, objectives, hypothesis, justification of the study, summary of the methodology and outline of the study were accordingly justified and explained.

CHAPTER TWO

Theory of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Brand Equity

2.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the three constructs, namely; “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity”. The chapter focuses only on the theory of the above mentioned constructs. For a better understanding of the theory of service quality, the chapter begins with the characteristics of services and that is followed by a brief discussion of service quality models that are mostly used within the marketing management environment.

The theory of customer satisfaction is also provided, with different perspectives in defining and measuring customer satisfaction within the marketing context.

Lastly, the concept of brand equity is discussed with different perspectives. In the “marketing context”, brand equity is looked at from the customers’ perspective. Therefore, Customer-Based Brand Equity is provided. Moreover, the different models of brand equity are also explained. The discussion of the literature is guided by the objectives of the study.

2.1 Service Quality Defined

Service is a construct that is characterized by different elements. According to Siddique, Karim & Rahman (2011:18), it is crucial to first outline that service quality is characterized by “intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability”. Therefore, these characteristics should be knowledgeable for a better understating of service quality.

Intangibility: a service cannot be seen, tasted, held or smelt before purchase to assure quality. The only thing a customer can do is to make an assessment based on past experiences. Intangibility is considered to be the most defining feature of a service (Siddique, Karim & Rahman, 2011: Zongli, 2012).

Heterogeneity: each consumer will tend to have unique demands and experiences of a service. Consistency is deemed to be difficult under this aspect because what a business

anticipates to deliver may not entirely be the same from the consumer's perspective (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985).

Inseparability: this aspect refers to services that are offered and consumed at the same time in the same location. Consumers tend to have “high expectations” with regards to the quality of service delivery, which can lead to disappointment if they receive less than what they expected (Zongli, 2012).

Perishability: products can be stored whilst services cannot be stored. A service is perishable; it cannot be stored for future use or sale. This is a challenge to the service providers in terms of estimating demand (Siddique, Karim & Rahman, 2011) and capacity utilisation planning (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985).

Service quality is difficult to define as many factors are considered when defining it (Saravanan & Rao, 2007; Siddique, Karim & Rahman, 2011; Osei-Poku, 2012). The customers' “expectations and perceptions of service quality”, along with superior service quality, will vary from one country to another because the services offered from an economically developing country and a developed country will vastly differ (Gunning, 2000; Saravanan & Rao, 2007). Osei-Poku (2012) suggested that a “meaningful” definition of service quality should be based on consumers' experiences concerning service performance.

Ngceba (2017:14) defined service quality as meeting consumer specifications and requirements. In support, Klopper and North (2014:99) is of view that service quality could be a determinant of how well the “service level” conveyed matches consumers' expectations. Suwono and Sihombing (2016) defined service quality as the value that is well defined by customers with regards to service performance. In support, Soni (2015) also believes that service quality is defined from consumer's perspective. The author elaborated that the definition of service quality should consist of “value and exceeding” consumer expectations. Therefore, providing a much better service than the consumer expected, determines service quality.

Although other researchers define service quality as meeting customers' expectations with services delivered (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985; Metha, Lalwani, and Li Han,

2000: Siddique, Karim & Rahman, 2011). Zeithaml (1988) defined service quality as the consumers' evaluation of the overall quality or superiority of the service. Nam's (2008:223) view of service quality is that it is the consumers' overall feeling of the relative excellence of the business about its services. According to Saravanan and Rao (2007), service is claimed to be quality once it incessantly conforms to consumers' expectations. However, the general consensus amongst these definitions is that customers' expectations and perceptions determine service quality.

Nevertheless, the major role of service quality is that it has a strong link to profitability, market share, customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention (Rust, Zahorik, & Keningham, 1994). The authors further pointed out that the lack of consistency with service quality might not link to the above benefits. Therefore, persuasive service recovery is significant to reinforce the bond between the service provider and the consumer (Siddique, Karim & Rahman, 2011).

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), consumers' perceptions and expectations of service quality are measured on five service quality dimensions, namely; tangibles, empathy, reliability, assurance and responsiveness.

In relation to the aforementioned service quality dimensions, Metha, Lalwani, and Li Han (2000) contend that it is quite difficult for customers to evaluate service quality without considering the following five dimensions: tangibles, empathy, assurance, responsiveness and reliability. Tangibles pertain to the physical facilities, equipment, staff and any other materials that can be used to communicate tangibles. Empathy is associated with caring and providing individual attention to customers. Assurance is mainly concerned with the ability to stimulate trust and confidence. Reliability is considered as the capacity to execute the promised services correctly without errors. Lastly, responsiveness is regarded as the willingness to assist the end-user and deliver prompt service.

Due to an intensification of service quality interest, various models have been established to measure service quality from different industries. Many service quality models have been adapted from the manufacturing industry into the service sector (Nam, 2008: Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal, 2006: Metha, Lalwani, & Li Han, 2000: Gunning, 2000).

2.1.1 Service Quality Models

Merican, Suhaize and Fernando (2009) outline that there are almost nineteen service quality models that have been utilised in the framework of services marketing. Although amongst the nineteen service quality models that have been used to measure service quality, SERVPERF (service performance) and SERVQUAL (service quality) are the most dominant and knowledgeable models that have been utilised in the fitness industry (Ngceba, 2017; Suwono & Sihombing, 2016; Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014; Yee, Yeung & Ma, 2013; Zongli, 2012; Soita, 2012; Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2001). A brief discussion of these models is presented hereunder:

2.1.1.1 “The Gronroos Service Quality Model”

According to Gronroos (1984), appropriate construction of “service quality” has to be customer-based. The model depends on two variables: the “expected service and experienced service”. The outcome of these two variables is considered to be “perceived quality” (Gronroos, 1984). The author places more emphasis on consumers’ “perceptions” of service quality as well as the contributing factors that influence service quality. Furthermore, this model measures service quality with “performance scores” only. The author further outlined that the manner in which the service is performed tends to have a positive influence on consumers “perceptions” of a service.

However, there is some criticism associated with the model. One of the most important criticisms is that the model does not sufficiently accommodate services related to physical and technological factors. Secondly, the model does not fully describe all the components of service adequately. Lastly, the authors recommended that none of the two dimensions must admire partiality over the other (George & Gibson, 1988).

2.1.1.2 “The SERVQUAL Model”

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) articulated that the “SERVQUAL model” concentrates on the differences pertaining to consumers’ expectations and perceptions of service by identifying the gaps between “expectations” and experiences. The SERVQUAL model is also known as the ‘Gaps’ model. However, the ‘Gaps’ model of service quality is made up of the marketer (service provider) and consumer gaps (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1998).

Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006) indicated that the SERVQUAL model consists of five dimensions (Tangibles, Empathy, Assurance, Responsiveness and Reliability) that are discussed under service quality above. The authors further elaborated that these dimensions are depicted through 22-variables on a measurement scale. Parasuraman *et al.*, (1998) explain that the SERVQUAL questionnaire measures the expectations plus perceptions of the service and each section consists of 22-variables.

The SERVQUAL model pinpoints “five gaps” that might cause consumers to experience poor service quality. Although, Gap1 and Gap5 are the most significant Gaps considered to have a direct relationship with consumers (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1998), the researchers argue that gap 5 is the service quality gap and is the only gap that can be directly measured. Therefore, the SERVQUAL model was precisely designed to capture gap 5, which is the perception gap. (Zongli, 2012: Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal, 2006: Gunning, 2000). What is more, there is a great possibility that Gap 1 to 4 cannot be measured but have a “diagnostic value”. A brief discussion of the Gaps model follows:

Gap 1 reflects the management insight of customers’ expectations about service quality. Due to the significance of consumers’ satisfaction, any service business needs to understand and gather essential information about its target market. Even though there are discrepancies between management perceptions and customers’ expectations, to operate with a full understanding of your customers will influence the competitiveness of a business by delivering exceptional service quality as expected (Ziethamal, Bitner & Gremler, 2009). Gap 1, however, is designed to discover the difference between what a consumer expects in addition to what she/he gets to verify service quality. A negative gap is a matter of interest since it indicates that consumer expectations surpass perceptions of service delivery (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1998: Ziethamal *et al.*, 2009).

According to Ziethamal *et al.* (2009) Gap 2 outlines the contrast between what the “managers trust” and believe the customers desire against what the customers anticipate that the business will offer. The authors further pointed out that the manager at this level believes that consumers’ expectations are sometimes unrealistic in such a way that it’s quite difficult to achieve them. This is due to the nature of the service and some other aspects that relate to the environment. A study conducted by Soita (2012) confirmed that no service business will meet

and exceed the consumer's expectations specifically in the fitness industry. The author further elaborated that the basic strategy that needs to be embraced by marketers of services is to keep a clear design without complicating it. Parasuraman *et al.*, (1985) is of the opinion that executives are finding it challenging to deliver quick responses consistently concerning repairs. Furthermore, this kind of decision is influenced by the level of commitment the executives have in ensuring that quality problems are addressed at the earliest moment.

However, Gap 3 gives emphasis to the distinction between the service delivered by the personnel of the organization and the stipulations regulated by managers. This performance gap ascends when there is a decrease in standards of service quality and a decline in what consumers expect additionally. With reference to that, resources are required to meet the standards and overcome the performance gap (Ziethamal *et al.*, 2009). Dhurup *et al.*, (2006) indicated that there are several challenges linked with the performance gap, like the lack of knowledge of the staff, nonexistence of team effort, inferior technology and so forth.

Advertising and other forms of communication have a significant influence on customers' expectations. The service businesses need to understand that promising more than what you can deliver will elevate initial expectations while lowering the perceptions of quality due to unfulfilled promises. Nonetheless, the communication Gap (Gap 4) represents the assurances imparted by the organisation to the customer, however, these do not relate to customers' expectations of those outside assurances (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1998). It is important, especially in the service industry, to deliver service quality as promised to avoid the communication Gap and disappointments to consumer's expectations (Ziethamal *et al.*, 2009).

SERVQUAL has had many criticisms despite its popularity and acknowledgement from different industries and many researchers (Buttle, 1996: Gunning, 2000: Dhurup *et al.*, 2006: Soni, 2015). The SERVQUAL model is considered to be inappropriate due to emphasis on expectations only rather than an attitudinal model of service quality. Furthermore, SERVQUAL does not develop on existing information into "psychology, economics and statistics". These are the two theoretical criticisms that are considered to be significant (Buttle, 1996: Soni, 2015). The above authors further detailed the following criticisms:

1. Gaps model: there is insufficient proof that consumers examine service quality in terms of "P-E" (perceptions minus expectations) gaps.

2. Process orientation: the “SERVQUAL model” does not concentrate on the outcomes of the service encounter, but on the process of service delivery.
3. Dimensionality: the “five dimensions of SERVQUAL” are considered not be universal but contextualised. Moreover, the dimensions do not at all times load in accordance with the theory of the SERVQUAL model. There is a high degree of inter-correlation between the dimensions.
4. Expectations: it is contended that consumers use standards rather than expectations to assess service quality. Even though that may be the case, SERVQUAL is also “criticised” for failing to determine absolute service quality expectations.
5. Item composition: it is contended that not all the variables can capture the variability within each SERVQUAL dimension.
6. Moment of truth (MOT): it is argued that consumers’ assessment of service quality may differ from time to time.

Dhurup *et al.*, (2006) pointed out that even though there are many criticisms shared against the SERVQUAL model, this doesn’t take away the fact that the model remains a very valuable instrument in assessing service quality. In support, Zongli (2012) emphasised that every model has its weaknesses, but the most important thing is to try and minimise them. Furthermore, to confirm that the SERVQUAL model is a valuable instrument in measuring service quality Nam (2008); Saravanan & Rao (2007); Dhurup *et al.*, (2006) and Gunning (2000) have presented significant inputs using a SERVQUAL model.

2.1.1.3 “The SERVPERF Model”

According to Cronin and Taylor (1992), the SERVPERF model is a perfection of the SERVQUAL model that measures service quality in different circumstances. The authors opined that SERVPERF does not concentrate on “expectations”, rather it focuses on the assessment of service quality “perceptions” by assessing the consumers’ “overall feelings” concerning the service performance. Most researchers found the SERVPERF model to be superior as compared to SERVQUAL model in some areas (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1998; Metha, Lalwani, & Li Han, 2000; Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014; Ngceba 2017). The reason for this is that the SERVPERF model has confirmed that consumers’ perceptions should be centred on service experiences. Furthermore, the SERVPERF model goes beyond to identify the cause of consumer’s satisfaction (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014). A study that was conducted by Yee,

Yeung and Ma (2013) confirmed that the SERVPERF model is superior, as compared to the SERVQUAL model, since it reduces the biases of responses and does improve on existing information into psychology, economics and statistical measures.

In addition, Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2008: 133-134) shared the structure concerning the questions associated with the SERVPERF model as shown in table 2.1 below. These questions are frequently used to measure the perceptions of consumers in a scaled format.

Table 2. 1 Perceptions

Reliability
• “When ABC Enterprise promises to do something by a certain time, they will do so”.
• “When you have a problem, ABC enterprise shows a sincere interest in solving it”.
• “ABC corporation performs the service right the first time”.
• “ABC enterprise provides its services at the time it promises to do so”.
• “ABC enterprise insists on error-free records”.
Responsiveness
• “ABC company keeps customers informed about when services will be performed”.
• “Employees in ABC corporation give you prompt service”.
• “Employees in ABC enterprise are always willing to help you”.
• “Employees in ABC business are never too busy to respond to your request”.
Assurance
• “The behaviour of personnel in ABC enterprise instils confidence in you”.
• “You feel safe in your transactions with ABC business”.
• “Workers in ABC business are consistently courteous with you”.
• “Staffs in ABC business have the knowledge to answer your questions”.
Empathy
• “ABC corporation gives you individual attention”.
• “ABC employees give you personal attention”.
• “Staffs of ABC enterprise understand your specific needs”.
• “ABC corporation has operating hours that are convenient to all its consumers”.

Tangibles

- “ABC corporation has modern-looking equipment”.
- “Physical facilities of ABC are visually appealing”.
- “ABC workers appear neat in appearance”.
- “Material associated with the service (pamphlets or statements) are visually appealing”.

Source: Researchers compilation

Please note that a discussion on the application of SERVPERF within the fitness industry is provided in the following chapter.

Despite SERVPERF’s acknowledgement and superiority, some criticisms are levelled at the model. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), the SERVPERF scale seems to experience lack of consistency and the generalisable factor structure. Furthermore, the authors also outlined that consumers’ insights of service quality differ from time to time. However, not much has been reported about the criticisms of the SERVPERF model. Therefore, there is a great possibility that the weaknesses of SERVPERF are manageable, depending on an industry’s nature (Wilson *et al.*, 2008; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Metha, Lalwani, & Li Han, 2000).

2.1.1.4 “Haywood-Famer’s Conceptual Model of Service Quality”

According to Haywood-Famer (1988), service quality is completely measured with three aspects called three Ps. namely; “physical facilities, processes and procedures”, “people’s behaviour elements” and “professional judgement”. The author further explained that the appropriate balance amongst these three Ps is very important. With regards to physical facilities, processes and procedures make a great impression to customers, especially within the industry that offers services of low labour intensity. Therefore, as much as employees have a significant effect in the way which service quality is rendered, but in other industries like fitness clubs, physical facilities are “demanded” to be of high quality (Haywood-Famer, 1988; Ngceba, 2017).

2.1.1.5 “The Dynamic Process Model of Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml”

Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml (1993:78-79) “acknowledged” that consumers’ “perceptions and expectations” change from time to time and, therefore, their model is fit to identify that and test the correlations amongst the consumers’ “perceptions and expectations”. The authors tested the model and found that positive “perceptions” are dependent on the overall service quality of a company. Once customers are fully satisfied with the overall service quality of a business, they tend to spread a “positive word of mouth” about the brand and recommend the brand. The authors also stressed that lowering the “expectations” of customers is important but it is not an easy project to fulfil; then again the outcome is exceptional.

Boulding *et al.*, (1993) argued that service providers should consider this model with the aim of understanding the factors influencing service quality and a consumer’s expectations regarding their services. Furthermore, the outcome from this model will assist the service providers in evaluating the associated value and further improve the services to manage consumer’s perceptions. The authors pointed out that an improvement in service quality will tend to have an increase in consumer’s “perceptions” and “expectations”.

2.1.1.6 “The Three-component model of Rust and Oliver”

Rust and Oliver (1994) formulated a model that was not tested to confirm if the model does measure what is supposed to be measured. Instead, the model was supported by the literature (McDougall & Levesque, 1994: Brady & Cronin, 2001: Martínez & Martínez, 2010). The model consists of two dimensions, “functional and technical quality”. These two dimensions are broken down into three variables; service product, service delivery and service environment. According to Rust and Oliver (1994), service product relates to the services designed to be provided, whereas service delivery relates to service performance and, lastly, service environment consists of tangibles factors.

2.1.1.7 “The Return-on-Quality Approach of Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham”

Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham (1995) view service quality from the consumers’ perspectives similar to numerous quality models. The authors argued that the variables of service quality should be based on the company’s procedures. This suggests that the “quality” improvement

should be at the centre of business, specifically at the “process and sub-process level” (Rust *et al.*, 1995). The authors recommended that focus groups should be employed during data collection, with the aim of ensuring that most essential areas are covered. Apart from that, the model is characterised by four assumptions; “quality is an investment”, “quality efforts must be financially accountable”, “it is possible to spend too much on quality” and “not all quality expenditures are equally valid” (Rust *et al.*, 1995). The framework in this method is more similar to the value-based approach. In the value-based approach, costs and prices regulate quality, therefore quality defines value (Kotler, 2000). Hence, the authors suggested that quality enhancement efforts should be “financially accountable” and this kind of effort is deemed to be a future investment. However, other researchers criticised this model because it concentrates on customer retention rather than customers’ “perceptions” on service quality (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014; Al-Hawari & Ward, 2006; Parker & Mathews, 2001; Vavra, 1997).

2.1.1.8 “The P-C-P Service Attribute Model of Philip and Hazlett”

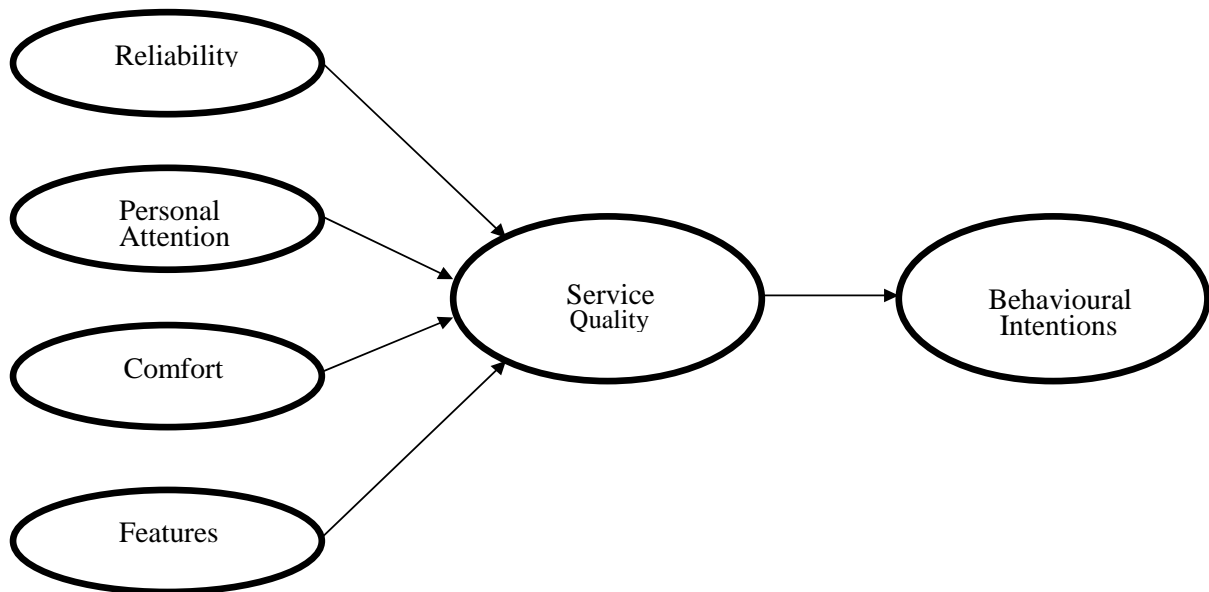
The model of Philip and Hazlett (1997) is made up of three categories, namely; pivotal, core and peripheral. There are different types of dimensions under each category and the model adopted SERVQUAL and SERVPERF dimensions. The authors detailed that this model addresses crucial issues related to the valuation of individual services. Furthermore, the authors argue, similar to Cronin and Taylor (1992), that the “Gap” between “expectations” and “perceptions” should be measured in a combined scale but not in two separate scales. The pivotal attributes relate to acquired information; core attributes relate to reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, whereas peripheral attributes relate to access and tangibles. The pivotal attribute is more about the determinants that consumers consider when selecting a certain service provider. This relates to consumers’ expectations when selecting a brand of their choice. The core attributes are dominated by SERVPERF and SERVQUAL dimensions but also combine the Gronroos (1984) dimensions. The last category describes the materials associated with services (Philip & Hazlett, 1997).

2.1.1.9 “Dabholkar, Shepherd and Thorpe’s antecedents Model”

Dabholkar, Shepherd and Thorpe (2000) come up with a model that considers service quality as a separate construct from the components. The authors argue that service quality is better forecasted by its “antecedents” rather than the components. Please refer to figure 1.1 below;

the model measures the elements of service quality as separate factors but associated with service quality. Then, the behavioural intentions result from service quality. Therefore, the components are deemed to be the predictors of overall service quality (Dabholkar *et al.*, 2000).

Figure 1. 1 “Dabholkar, Shepherd and Thorpe’s Antecedents Model”



Source: Dabholkar *et al.*, (2000:157)

2.1.1.10 “The Hierarchical Approach of Brady and Cronin”

The model designed by Brandy and Cronin (2001) consists of different aspects, which proves that the service quality construct is a multidimensional pyramid. This was confirmed by their qualitative and empirical evidence. Their results revealed that outcome, interaction and environmental quality are three primary dimensions of service quality “perceptions” of consumers. The outcome and interaction dimensions are adopted from Gronroos’s (1984:1988) model. Gronroos (1984) is of view that service quality should be evaluated in terms of customer-based and service employees. In support, Brady and Cronin (2001) are of

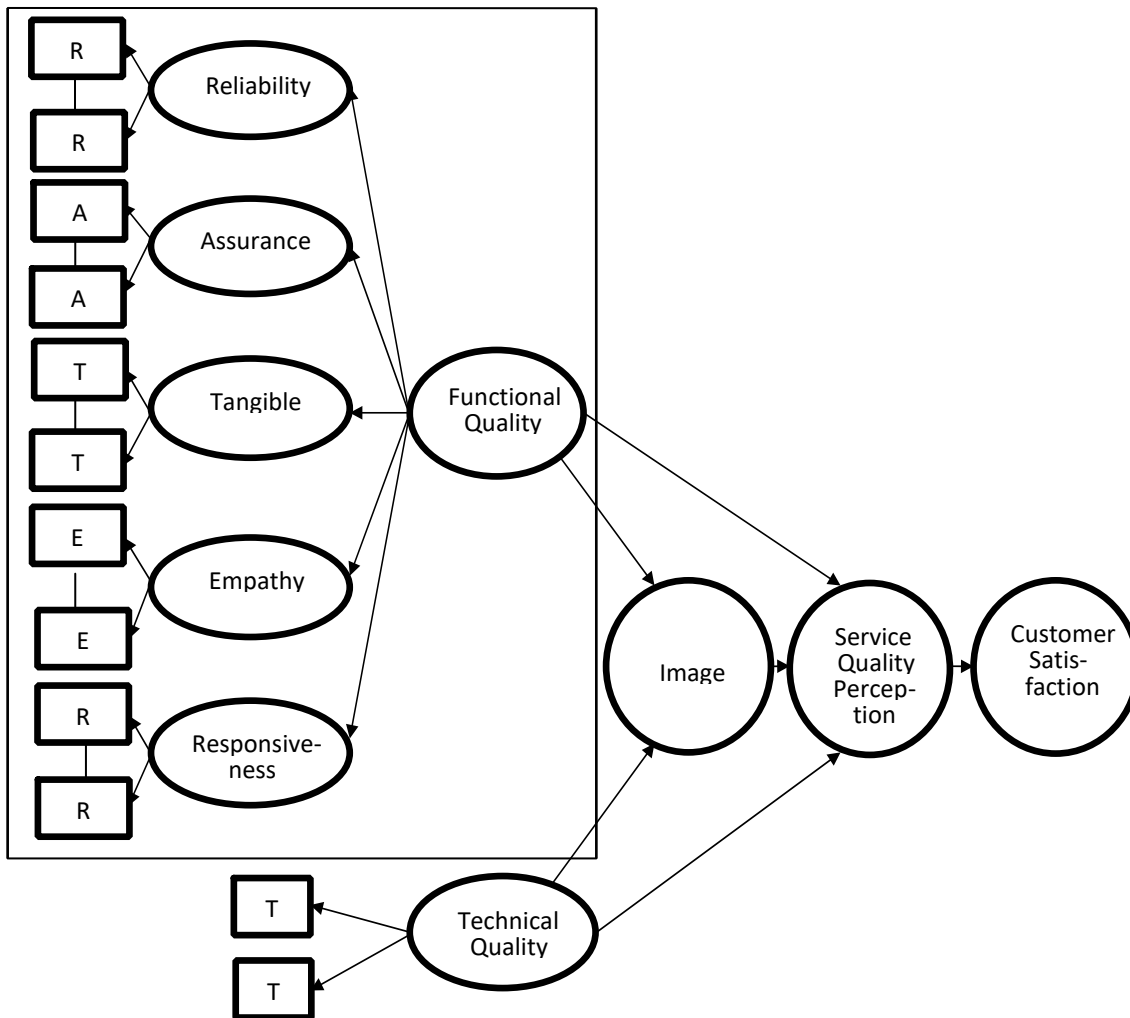
the same view even though they prefer to use different terms such as “technical” and “functional quality”. The third dimension (environmental quality) is more about the “service environment” on quality “perceptions” (Brandy & Cronin, 2001). These three primary dimensions provided “empirical” evidence to the model of Rust and Oliver (1994) that these dimensions are the building blocks of service quality. Moreover, Brandy and Cronin (2001:260) found that there are sub-dimensions under each of the three primary dimensions (“outcome, interaction and environmental quality”). According to the authors, consumers firstly evaluate the “sub-dimensions” before they assess the outcome, interaction and environmental quality. The assessment of the sub-dimension will tend to have an impact on the valuation of the “outcome, interaction and environmental quality” (Brandy & Cronin, 2001:15). Furthermore, the authors argue that empathy, reliability and responsiveness are considered to be “modifiers” of the “sub-dimensions” but not direct determining factors of service quality. On the other hand, Parasuraman *et al.*, (1985:1998) consider these dimensions (empathy, reliability and responsiveness) as significant predictors of service quality. The findings of Brady and Cronin (2001) proved that this is a great model to be considered in measuring service quality. However, the disappointment of this model is that “sub-dimensions” are in fact not directly determining factors of service.

2.1.1.11 “The Kang and James Model adopted from Gronroos’s model”

Kang and James (2004) adapted the key dimensions of the Gronroos (1984:1988) model, namely; “functional quality” and “technical quality” but then added a third dimension which was called “image”. Please refer to figure 1.2 below. Kang and James (2004) tested their model and confirmed the Gronroos (1984:1988) model and the findings revealed that there is a strong relationship between the SERVPERF dimensions. Moreover, these dimensions are considered to be predictors of functional quality. The authors also confirmed that there are other “sub-dimensions” of functional quality that should be evaluated as part of measuring service quality. The findings also revealed that the “perceptions” of consumers concerning overall service quality are influenced by “technical” and “functional quality”. In addition, brand image was confirmed to be a mediating factor in consumers’ “perceptions” of overall service quality. Kang and James (2004) further confirmed that the interaction between a consumer and staff have a significant influence on the consumer’s “mental image” of the company, and this tends to depict the service quality of the business. Most of the studies have

measured service quality specifically on one individual dimension which is “functional quality”.

Figure 1. 1 “The Kang and James Model adopted from Gronroos’s Model”



Source: Kang and James (2004:269)

2.1.1.12 “Kang’s Hierarchical Structure of Service Quality”

Kang’s model (2006) describes service quality in terms of technical and functional quality. These two dimensions are officially known as “process quality” and “outcome quality”. The author adopted the SERVPERF dimensions as sub-dimensions (under functional) to measure consumers “perceptions” about service quality. This serves as a confirmation that SERVPERF dimensions are essential aspects to consider when measuring service quality (Kang 2006: Kang & James, 2004: Dabholkar, Shepherd & Thorpe, 2000: Philip & Hazlett,

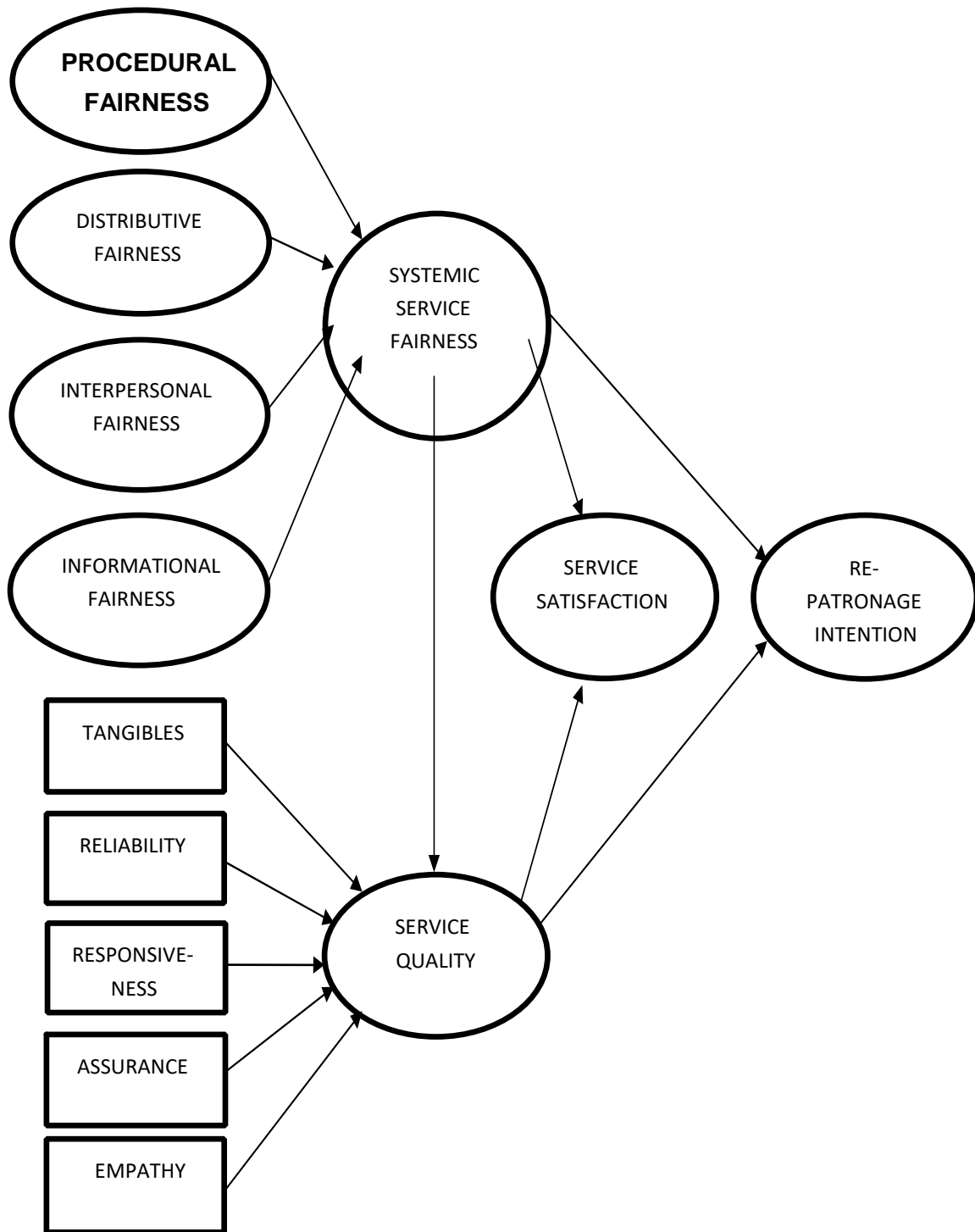
1997). Kang (2006) tested the model, and the findings supported the model. Moreover, the results revealed that tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy are vital dimensions that represent the functional quality. The empirical evidence depicted that consumers' perceptions of service quality are measured on both process quality (functional quality) and outcome quality (technical quality) (Kang, 2006).

2.1.1.13 "Carr's FAIRSERV model"

According to Carr (2007:108), the SERVQUAL model excludes the "equity" theory based on its measures, even though it's perspicuous as of "previous experiences" that equity (fairness) is frequently assessed in service encounters. The author points out that consumers should get what they deserve like other consumers of a similar service. As a result, consumers will not simply assess the "quality" of the service encounter, but also include "equity". The FAIRSERV model puts forward that service valuation results from a contrast of services against "norms" of fairness and the handling of related consumers (Carr, 2007). The author further indicated that a balanced distribution of service quality resources is important, especially for not unduly favouring specific individuals or group.

Carr (2007) developed a model that consists of SERVPERF dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and multidimensional "norms of fairness" (procedural, distributive, interpersonal, informational and systemic fairness), as depicted in Figure 1.3 below. The FAIRSERV model "implies" that consumers do not evaluate services based on SERVPERF dimensions only, but including the multidimensional "norms of fairness. Moreover, Carr (2007) specified that consumers do consider the comparison of treatments amongst other consumers with similar services. Therefore, equal treatment to all customers is essential because consumers can have a different perception with your service delivery if they are treated differently as compared to others. This will impact the satisfaction level of consumers concerning overall service quality (Carr, 2007). Figure 1.3 below shows that the multidimensional "norms of fairness" ("procedural, distributive, interpersonal, informational and systemic fairness") Carr (2007:77) have an impact on how consumers value systemic fairness. The overall fairness (systemic fairness) acts as a mediator amongst fairness dimensions, service quality, service satisfaction and patronage outcome (Carr, 2007).

Figure 1. 2 “The FAIRSERV Model”



Source: Carr (2007:121).

The above discussion carefully presented a great theory of “service quality”, characteristics of services and the service quality models that are mostly used within the marketing context. The following section concentrates on the discussion of customer satisfaction.

2.2 Customer Satisfaction Defined

Alexandris *et al.*, (2004) defined customer satisfaction as a result of meeting and exceeding customer expectations and perceptions, while, Tse and Wilton (1988) describe customer satisfaction as: “*The consumer’s response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations (or some norm of performance) and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption.*” On the other hand, Oliver (1997) defined customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction as the outcome from service experiences as compared to the expectations. Zeithaml (1988) argued that customer satisfaction is created on current, past and future experiences. Customer satisfaction is regarded as a “multidimensional” construct (Chiu, Cheng, Yen & Hud, 2011). The following table 2.2 provides the varying perspectives of the construct customer satisfaction.

Table 2. 2 Varying Perspectives on Customer Satisfaction Construct

Author/s	Definition of the Construct
Pizam and Ellis (1999), Vavra (1997:4).	“Customer satisfaction is formed based on the outcome of service or product experiences”.
Gunning (2000:11).	“Customer satisfaction is based on the disconfirmation of expectation model”.
Parker and Mathews (2001:9).	“Customer satisfaction is as a result of an ongoing process as an outcome”.
Host and Knie-Andersen (2004:246).	“Satisfaction is considered as an overall judgement or else a particular characteristic”.
Al-Hawari and Ward (2006:3).	“Consumers overall valuation of the services or products”.
Dhurup <i>et al.</i>, (2006:9-10).	“Satisfaction is all about meeting the expectations and continuously changing needs of consumers”.
Clemes, Gan and Ren (2010:36).	“Is based on consumer’s expectations and service experiences.”
Tu, Wang, and Chang (2012:302)	“Satisfaction is about meeting the needs and exceeding expectations of consumers”.
The Academy of Marketing Science & Sports (2014:14).	“Satisfaction is based on the customers’ evaluation of service experiences”.

Source: Compiled by the researcher.

Giese and Cote (2000) argued that there is no consensus amongst the various definitions of customer satisfaction. Zongli (2012) also asserted that customer satisfaction is not a simple concept to explicitly define. Despite that, the above definitions have some obvious similarities relating to service or product experiences, even though there is some distinction that separates them. The similarity is that customer satisfaction is an outcome of a service performance.

The concept of customer satisfaction was firstly introduced by Cardozo in 1965. Cardozo (1965) also argues that satisfaction enhances the probability of repeated purchase or brand loyalty, due to the fact that satisfaction has an influence on consumer behaviour. However, Giese and Cote (2000) point out that, before defining customer satisfaction, it is important to firstly look at what constitutes the construct of satisfaction. Moreover, the above authors found three components that institute the “customer satisfaction” construct. “*A summary affective response of varying intensity, with a time-specific point of determination and limited duration, directed toward focal aspects of product acquisition and or consumption*” (Giese & Cote, 2000).

It is essential to have coherence of what makes customers “dissatisfied or satisfied” regarding the services offered by the business (Soni, 2015). According to Giese and Cote (2000), customer satisfaction is claimed to be a significant construct concerning the long-term partnership amongst businesses and customers. There are numerous benefits associated with the construct. Yee, Yeung and Ma (2013) argue that good profit is generated from the concept of customer satisfaction. In support, Dhurup *et al.*, (2006) asserted that satisfaction has a significant contribution to make in repetitive purchases, loyalty and profit. According to the author above, a satisfied customer leads to repetitive purchase, loyalty and satisfaction with service. That is the reason satisfied consumers will tend to have more intentions to repurchase the service or spread a positive word of mouth about the service performance of a company. However, Tu, Wang, and Chang (2012:25) cite Soni (2015:34) who argues that sometimes a satisfied customer will not always make a repeated purchase because the business might not always accommodate all the changing needs and wants of the consumers.

Due to intense competition within the fitness industry, achieving a competitive advantage is necessary for the protection of a consumer’s interest. Hence, well-established companies are

drastically differentiating within the market (Alexandris *et al.*, 2004). According to Alexandris *et al.*, (2004), consistency is another strategy that can be adopted by marketers or companies to differentiate themselves from rivals within the service market. Tu, Wang, and Chang (2012) indicated that to strengthen the competitiveness of the business, a long-term relationship with consumers is also key within the service industry. The authors further outlined that customer value is more than important over everything when building long-lasting partnerships between the consumer and business. Therefore, delivering an exceptional service quality will drive profitability and boost consumers' confidence in your brand while posing a threat to rivals within the industry. This is grounded on the basis that a "satisfied customer" will tend to be more likely to come back and re-use the services (Dhurup *et al.*, 2006).

According to Gunning (2000), customer "satisfaction" can be used as a determining factor to measure the success of the business in building a relationship with consumers. It is because customer satisfaction illustrates the imbalance amongst what consumers are expecting and the actual service performance. In other words, customer satisfaction is closely related to customers' expectations and service experiences. Kotler (2000) declared that due to an increase in competition between businesses, companies are now switching from a product or sales philosophy to a marketing philosophy, which will lead to businesses striving to be exceptionally good relative to the competition.

According to Cardozo (1965), the concept of satisfaction is recommended to be essential, mainly if loyalty is absent. Hence, it is crucial to go beyond the construct of satisfaction and oversee other related elements that strengthen consumers' loyalty like trust. The following researchers (Kotler, 2000: Giese and Cote, 2000: Tse and Wilton, 1988) claim that customer satisfaction is also influenced by trust. Tse and Wilton (1988) define trust as assurance in a "partner's reliability and integrity". Kotler (2000) considers trust as a crucial variable that moderates the perceptions of risk concerned. Usually, when there is no trust, there is no great relationship between the two parties (customer and company). Trust has an effect on consumers' decision making when selecting a product or service. Therefore, if trust is lacking then the brand is deemed to be null and void (Tse & Wilton, 1988). According to Cardozo (1965), before consumers conduct business with any company, they first evaluate the risks

involved and then consider other factors like price and so forth. A brief discussion of customer satisfaction within the fitness industry follows in the next chapter.

The measurement of customer satisfaction is indeed a significant focus for companies to consider due to countless benefits associated with the construct. Nevertheless, customer satisfaction has pulled great attention in many industries (Giese & Cote, 2000; Kang & James, 2004; Soni, 2015). However, Gunning (2000) posits that customer satisfaction can be measured with different models depending on the nature of the study. According to Saravanan and Rao (2007), consumer satisfaction can be evaluated at an individual level but then reported at the collective level. For example, a fitness club might ask gym members to rate their experience concerning cleanliness, quality of equipment, friendliness of staff, knowledge of staff and so forth. Moreover, the fitness club might also ask about overall satisfaction concerning service performance.

Gunning (2000:88) further outlined that there are four models of “customer satisfaction” that can be used to measure the level of “customer satisfaction”. Namely: the “disconfirmation of expectation model, the performance model, the rational expectations model, and the expectations artefact model”. These models are discussed in the following section.

2.2.1 Customer Satisfaction Models

To avoid repetitiveness of ideas, words and content, other service quality models that are frequently used to measure customer satisfaction are not included under this discussion since they have already been dealt with in the previous section.

Various models that have been proposed to look at the concept of customer satisfaction in different industries tend to have similarities but there is a significant distinction that separates them. Most researchers concentrate on the significance of these distinctions amongst the numerous models that have been proposed (Cronin & Taylor, 1992: cited in, Gunning, 2000). A brief discussion of these models follows:

2.2.1.1 “The Disconfirmation of Expectation Model”

This model propounds that customer satisfaction is affected by the perceived performance along with the expectations of performance. The model consists of four components, namely; “expectations, perceived performance, disconfirmation, and satisfaction” (Gunning, 2000:90). The author further elaborated that the model demonstrates that, if perceived performance is less than expectations, dissatisfaction takes place, which adversely affects satisfaction (negative disconfirmation), while if perceived performance meets or exceeds expectations, satisfaction occurs, and this is regarded as positive disconfirmation. However, Cronin and Taylor (1992) specified that this model is not appropriate to measure service due to various limitations the model has. For example, there is inadequate empirical evidence that underpins the relevance of the “expectation-performance gap as the basis for measuring service” (Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

2.2.1.2 “The Performance Model”

According to Spreng and Mackey (1996), this model concentrates on the buyer’s perception of a product or service performance, which have a positive impact on end-user satisfaction. Cronin and Taylor (1992), as cited in Soni (2015:23), articulated that this model is frequently referred to the SERVPERF model, since both of them concentrate on the assessment of service quality “perceptions” by measuring the consumer’s overall feelings regarding the service performance. Cronin and Taylor (1992) further stated that the model illustrates a positive effect of “expectations on perceived performance” and that is the capacity of consumer expectations to foresee performance. *“Performance is characterised as per the level of quality of the product or service, as perceived by the consumer, relative to the price paid.”* (Gunning, 2000:90).

2.2.1.3 “The Rational Expectations Model”

The rational expectations theory is reflected to be an economic concept whereby individuals settle on decisions in light of their balanced standpoint, accessible data and past experiences (Kennan, 1979). According to Kennan (1979), this interpretation is commonly used within the financial sector. However, Gunning (2000:25) articulated that the rational expectations model proposes that perceived performance, as well as expectations, are equal to each other. The author further stated that the model assumes that consumers tend to have informed

expectations of performance and this is considered as a shortfall for all the models discussed above.

2.2.1.4 “The Expectations Artefact Model”

The model clarifies that there is a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction by perceived performance. Furthermore, there is also a positive correlation between perceived performance and expectations but in the absence of combining expectations directly with customer satisfaction (Johnson, Nader & Fornell, 1996) cited in (Gunning, 2000). Gunning (2000) stated that it is because expectations “do not act as an anchor” in the evaluation of satisfaction. Performance is expected to rise due to the expectations disclosed by consumers.

The literature stipulated the significance of measuring customer satisfaction and, of course, customer satisfaction is deemed to be dissimilar from service or product industry. However, different perspectives concerning brand equity are discussed in the following section.

2.3 Branding

According to Keller (2008), when you think about “branding as a marketer”, you should think broad by considering your customers, competition, trust, assurance, differentiation, value creation, the value of a brand and so forth. Even so, it is more than important to unpack the concept of a brand before discussing branding. Keller (2008) defines a brand as “term, logo, name”, or anything that pinpoints supplier offerings from those of rivals. A brand could be a valuable element in your marketing communication process of the business.

The researchers, Ambler (2003), Keller and Lehmann (2006), Keller (2008) argued that there is a lot of misunderstanding or misinterpretation on the concept of branding since there are numerous definitions of branding. Furthermore, nowadays, branding is complex and more significant in the professional world of marketing. Keller and Lehmann (2006) highlighted that branding is an ongoing process that requires more attention. However, Farquhar (1989) contended that branding creates a unique identification that serves as the foundation of a promise to your customers. The Academy of Marketing Science & Sports (2014) argues that branding should motivate a consumer before purchase to be confident in purchasing the product or service, due to emotional connection a brand has to your target market.

2.3.1 Brand Equity

Farquhar (1989) defines brand equity as the “added value” assigned to the tangibles or intangibles of the business, whereas Keller (2008) argues that brand equity is defined by customer experiences and perceptions through the effect of the marketing activities of the business.

The Academy of Marketing Science & Sports (2014) pointed out that brand equity is a paramount measure of brand success. Keller and Lehmann (2006) indicated that equity stimulates a certain level of quality and reduces risk in the minds of consumers. Ambler (2003:46) mentioned that brand equity has various competitive challenges. The author further stated that these challenges require the managers to be strategic about brand management. Moreover, “strategic brand management” is, therefore, essential to protect the value of the brand continuously. Keller (2013) defines “strategic brand management process” as the “design and execution of marketing programmes to build, measure and administer brand equity.”

Keller (2008:122) delineated the four “building blocks” of brand equity. There is brand identity (“who are you”), brand meaning (“what are you”), brand response (“what about you”) and brand relationships (“what about you and me”). These building blocks are frequently used to build a strong brand equity. However, Ambler (2003) indicated that there is no future for a business without brand management strategies.

Brand equity presents many benefits equally to the organisation and its consumers. The concept consequently provides value to the business through price premium, brand loyalty, brand extensions and so forth. On the other hand, it “gives value” to the consumers through self-confidence in the purchasing decision, customer satisfaction and quality assurance areas. These benefits are strongly linked with brand positioning and the consumer’s experiences with the brand (Klopper & North, 2014). Ambler (2003) reaffirms that the power of a brand rests on the interpretation of consumers about their experiences with the brand.

According to Klopper and North (2014), marketers should craft a competitive advantage through the benefits presented above to build a unique association or identity. This unique

association will differentiate the business from its competitors and further neutralise the competition, only if the business is always ahead of its rivals.

2.3.1.1 Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

In the marketing context, “customer-based brand equity” has gained considerable attention (Soni 2015; Harris & Mark, 2004; Keller 1993). There are different perspectives regarding brand equity; this study will employ a consumer perspective rather than a financial perspective. The reasoning behind this is that in the “marketing context”, brand equity is looked at from the customer’s perspective (Keller 1993).

According to Keller (1993), an understanding of how consumers interpret brands from the market is critical. It is due to the fact that the consumer’s interpretation of a brand will determine the suitable marketing strategy, pricing strategy and channel strategy. However, “CBBE” is defined as the “differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” (Keller, 1993:3). Ambler (2003) contends that, for any brand to be believed to have value, it should be valued by consumers first before a brand can claim to have brand value. In other words, if the brand is deemed to have no value from the customers’ perspective, then CBBE does not exist. CBBE results from consumers’ brand knowledge and their unique favourable brand association. Brand equity is a perfect instrument for marketers to understand past actions as well as the future purposes of the brand. When a consumer has developed a positive attitude towards a product or service, then it is clear that historical investment has initiated a mark. Therefore, the present will lead the marketers for future plans in achieving the anticipated results (Keller 1993; Ambler, 2003; Harris & Mark, 2004).

Appropriate brand awareness plus brand image are considered to be an indicator of strong brand-based brand equity. This process permanently conquers customers’ mind space while creating a correlation between customers’ needs and brand offering. Nevertheless, Keller (1993) and Aaker (1996) looked at “brand equity” from a customer’s perspective, although they conceptualised it differently. According to Harris and Mark (2004), an in-depth understanding of “brand equity” from a consumers’ perspective is important for fruitful “brand management”. It is because positive CBBE can lead to a great profit at a lower cost. Hence, there is an excellent opportunity for a business to command higher prices, brand

extensions or licensing (Ambler, 2003). In this case, a brand is viewed to be relevant, if not dominant, due to CBBE. Keller (1993) indicated that high brand equity carries inordinate advantages within the competitive environment. However, the following discussion focuses on a few brand equity models that have been frequently used by different authors.

2.3.1.2 Brand Equity Models

According to Ambler (2003), different models have been established to measure brand equity and further enlighten the various “sources of brand equity”. Saravanan and Rao (2007) specified that, amongst other models, some popular models are Aaker’s model, Keller’s model, the Lasser, Mittal and Sharma model, Morgan’s model, and Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey’s model of brand equity. Therefore, the table 2.3 below shows several research studies that measured brand equity in different ways. According to table 2.3, it is clear that the construct of brand equity is deemed to be a “multidimensional” construct; hence it has been measured in different ways. However, most of the studies adopted the “two most commonly” used models namely: Aaker’s model and Keller’s model.

Table 2. 3 Measurement of Brand Equity

Author/s	Context of the study	Measures of brand equity
Keller (1993).	“Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity.”	“Brand Association/Image and Brand Awareness.”
Lasser <i>et al.</i>, (1995).	“Measuring Customer-Based Brand Equity.”	“Performance, Value, Social Image, Trustworthiness and Commitment.”
Aaker (1996).	“Across Brands and Markets.”	“Perceived Quality, Associations/Differentiation, Loyalty, Awareness and Market Behaviour.”
Berry (2000).	“Cultivating Service Brand Equity.”	“Brand Meaning and Brand Awareness.”

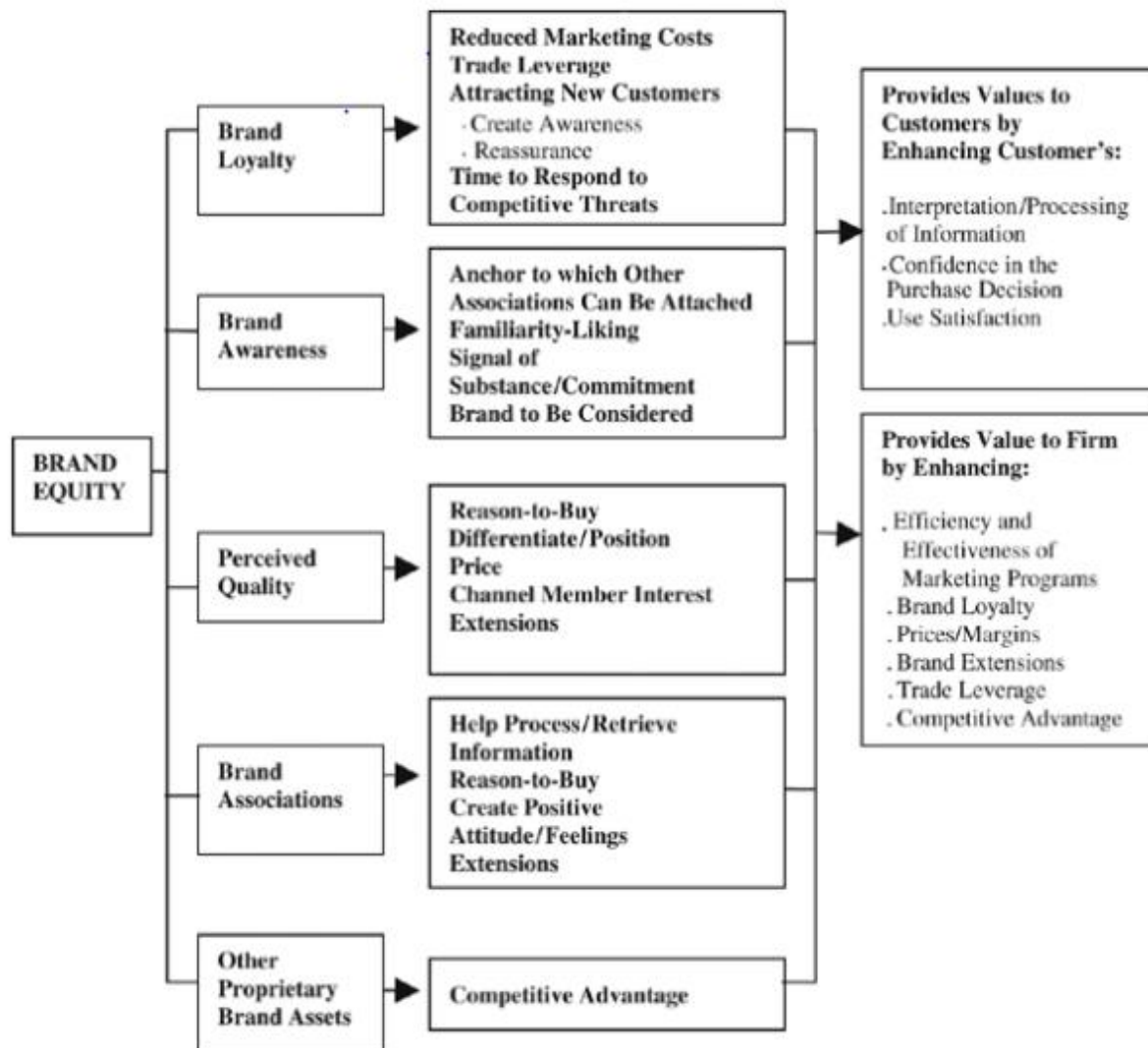
Author/s	Context of the study	Measures of brand equity
Morgan (2000).	“A Consumer-Oriented Framework Of Brand Equity and Loyalty”.	“Functionality, Performance Emotional, Intangible and Affinity.”
Ambler (2003).	“Valuing Brands and Brand Equity: Methods and Processes.”	“Perceived Quality, Associations/Differentiation, Loyalty, Awareness and Market Behaviour.”
Pappu et al., (2005)	“Consumer-Based Brand Equity: Improving The Measurement – Empirical Evidence.”	“Perceived Quality Awareness, Loyalty and Associations.”
Alexandris, Douka, Papadopoulos and Kaltsatou, (2008).	"Testing The Role of Service Quality on The Development of Brand Associations and Brand Loyalty."	“Brand Associations and Brand Loyalty."
Tong and Hawley (2009).	“Measuring Customer Based Brand Equity: Empirical Evidence from the Sportswear Market in China.”	“Brand Association, Brand Loyalty, Perceived Quality and Brand Awareness.”
Williams (2010).	“Examining The Role of Brand Associations In Multipurpose Fitness Facilities: The Relationship Between Service Quality, Exercise Commitment, Brand Associations, And Brand Loyalty.”	“Brand Associations, And Brand Loyalty.”
Sehhat (2013).	“Banking industry”	“Brand Loyalty, Brand Awareness, Brand Associations and Perceived Quality.”

Source; Compiled by the researcher.

2.3.1.2.1 “Aaker’s Model of Brand Equity”

Aaker (1996) identified five key components that make up brand equity. The author further formulated ten measures of brand equity that are grouped into five components. These five components are, namely: “brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations”, and market behaviour (Aaker, 1996:9). According to Aaker (1996:9), market behaviour focuses on the financial-based brand equity measure. Therefore, market behaviour is not included in the following discussion because the proposed study’s interest is on customer-based brand equity.

Figure 1. 3 Aaker’s Model of Brand Equity



Source: Aaker (1996:9).

A deep insight into each component of brand equity model is explained as follows:

2.3.1.2.1.1 Brand Loyalty

Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) defined brand loyalty as the “commitment” made by the consumer based on “superior service quality and perceived value”. Aaker (1996) indicated that “brand loyalty” can be measured through “repeated” purchase, regardless of competitors’ efforts. Harris and Mark (2004) have stated that loyalty is the fundamental drive of price premium and a “barrier to entry of competition”. According to Alexandris *et al.*, (2008), loyalty is formulated from customer satisfaction and can be used as a competitive advantage to get new customers. The authors further indicated that highly satisfied customers tend to spread a “positive word of mouth” about the brand.

2.3.1.2.1.2 Brand Awareness

Aaker (1996) defines “brand awareness” as the strength of “recognition and recall” in the minds of consumers about the presence of the brand. The author further states that brand name, logo, symbols and other certain associations that attached to the brand are considered to be building blocks and measures of brand awareness. Keller (2008) avers that when consumers make decisions at the “point of purchase”, “brand recognition” plays a significant role in influencing the decision-making process. Furthermore, the author also states that when consumers make decisions away from the “point of purchase”, “brand recall” plays an important role in influencing the decision-making process. According to Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein (2014), “brand awareness” is strongly created on “repeated exposure” through the marketing techniques of the brand.

2.3.1.2.1.3 Perceived quality

Zeithaml *et al.*, (2006) defined “perceived quality” as the judgement that is made by consumers based on the overall performance of the product or service. Keller (2008) indicated that “perceived quality” is a sensitive topic within the service industry. The author further argued that “perceived quality” is amongst the key aspects that “drive [the] financial performance” of the business. Moreover, Aaker (1996) highlighted that “perceived quality” is what “differentiates the unique selling proposition (USP)” of a business. According to Yee, Yeung and Ma (2013), factors like “price, positioning and brand extensions” influence how consumers perceive quality. The authors further detailed that consumers tend to take price as

an indicator of quality. MacIntosh, Doherty and Walker (2010) argue that price is not a decent indicator of quality since other businesses use price as a positioning strategy.

2.3.1.2.1.4 Brand Association

Aaker (1996) defines brand association as the unique attributes that customers link with a brand. This component is considered to be more critical since it helps to differentiate a brand from rivals. The positive associations with a brand are the driving force of brand equity which stimulates consumer's interest and creates a clear picture in the minds of consumers (Harris & Mark, 2004). Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein (2014) argued that not all consumers have a positive association, but others tend to have different perceptions such as negative association. The authors further detailed that an umbrella branding strategy is not always an idyllic strategy to go for because negative association with one product can damage the image of all the related products under a single brand name.

2.3.1.2.2 “Keller’s Model of Brand Equity”

According to Keller (2008), Keller's model of brand equity concentrates on “consumer-based brand equity” (CBBE), whereby the sovereignty of a brand lies in what dwells within the minds of consumers because of their experiences over time. The author pointed out that brand equity is determined by brand knowledge, brand image and brand awareness. The discussion of these dimensions is provided hereunder.

2.3.1.2.2.1 Brand Knowledge

Brand knowledge is formulated after an important process called branding. Branding is about selecting a brand name, logo, sign, or anything that identifies supplier offerings from those of competitors. The significance of brand knowledge in memory to customer's decision making is captured. Other factors that should be well documented are trust, assurance, differentiation, value creation, the value of a brand, etc. Understanding the umbrella of brand knowledge is vital, because it influences the outcome decision of a customer when thinking about a brand (Keller, 2008). The author further stated that brand knowledge is distinguished by the relationship between brand awareness, brand image, brand association and other indirect factors.

2.3.1.2.2.2 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is defined as a combination of brand recall and brand recognition that plays a significant role in consumers' minds about a specific product category or service (Keller, 2008). According to Keller (1993), brand knowledge plays a key role in consumer's minds, particularly under challenging circumstances. It is whereby the strength of the brand gets involved during the consumer's choice or decision making. However, then, all of this requires brand awareness because it consists of brand recognition. Brand recognition relates to the consumer's extent in correctly identifying a brand, product or service. According to the author, these constructs act as a catalyst in such a way that a consumer can discriminate with other brands and then select a brand that he/she is fully aware of. In doing so, brand recall is vital in the consumer's mind to easily retrieve the brand name during a selection process. Keller (2008) pointed out that brand awareness plays an integral part in influencing the decision making of customers. Furthermore, because consumers are exposed to different types of brands on a daily basis, therefore, these three constructs (brand knowledge, brand recognition & brand recall) increase the likelihood of the brand to be fully accepted under different conditions.

2.3.1.2.2.3 Brand Image

Keller (1993) stated that "brand image" is an important concept within the marketing industry. However, brand image is defined as the set of associations with a brand that tends to influence the final decision of a consumer (Keller, 2008). A fundamental condition for the creation of a "brand image" is a unique association or differentiation. The author further indicated that favourable brand associations are a critical component that represents the value of a brand in various areas and tends to determine and control the success of the business. There are four major types of brand associations linked to the customer's memory. They are types of "brand associations", favourability of "brand associations", the "strength of brand associations" and uniqueness of brand associations. Under types of brand associations, there are attributes, benefits and attitudes. Attributes are described as "features" that define a product or service. Benefits are regarded as the "personal value" customers attach to the service or product attributes. Brand attitudes are described as a customer's overall evaluation of a brand. Keller (1998) further highlighted that the marketing programmes are considered to be an instrument for the creation of favourable brand associations. The author also stated that the brand attributes, benefits and attitudes are communicated through the use of the

marketing programmes in creating a favourable brand image. Moreover, the strength of the brand relies on how consumers interpret the information and how it is maintained. Therefore, informing, persuading and reminding are critical in a consumer's memory. Encoding or processing of data requires aggressive and robust marketing so that that information can be stored to long-term memory. After consumers have tried or tested your product or service, they then start to have a particular association with your offerings, and overall judgement also arises.

2.3.1.2.3 “The Lasser, Mittal and Sharma Model of Brand Equity”

According to Lasser, Mittal and Sharma (1995), customers' “perception of the overall superiority of a product carr[ies] that brand name when compared to others.” The authors further specified that brand equity would tend to be low if a brand is not performing the functions which it is designed for. Moreover, the authors formulated a model of measuring brand equity based on the five dimensions, namely; “attachment, performance, trustworthiness, social image, and value”.

2.3.1.2.4 “Morgan’s Model of Brand Equity”

Morgan (2000) views brand equity as defined by two categories: “functionality and performance” as well as “emotional and intangible”. These are two broad categories that measure brand equity in accordance with a specific market. For example, in the motor car industry it could be petrol consumption and performance. This example is for the first category. The second category is also known as “affinity” and it is not categorical since it entails universal procedures that touch consumers' emotions concerning brands. The author further indicated that these categories view brand equity as an integration of “affinity” and a performance level detailed to a service or product.

2.3.1.2.5 “Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey’s Model of Brand Equity”

Pappu, Quest and Cooksey (2005) employed Aaker's (1996) model of brand equity and its dimensions, namely; brand awareness, “brand associations”, “perceived quality” and “brand loyalty”. The content of this dimension is similar to the discussion of Aaker's (1996) model of brand equity. Therefore, these dimensions would not be discussed.

Table 2. 4 Summary of Service Quality Models

Model	Key findings	Limitations/appropriateness for this study
<p>“Grönroos model of service quality”.</p>	<p>“According to the author, service quality depends on three variables: expected service, experienced service and corporate image. Service quality is defined in customer-based, and functional quality is viewed as more important rather than technical quality.”</p>	<p>“The model is not fit for the selected study because it does not offer enlightenment on how to measure functional and technical quality”.</p>
<p>“SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman <i>et al.</i>,”</p>	<p>“The SERVQUAL model concentrates on the differences pertaining to consumers’ expectations and perceptions of service by identifying the gaps amongst expectations and experiences. The model can also help the service providers with the external environment to identify the gaps in knowledge”.</p>	<p>“The SERVQUAL model will not be suitable for this study since it measures both expectations and perceptions. Therefore, this will make the questionnaire relatively complicated and time-consuming. There are many criticisms associated with the model”.</p>
<p>“SERVPERF model of Cronin and Taylor”.</p>	<p>“The SERVPERF model is a perfection of the SERVQUAL model which measures service quality in different circumstances. SERVPERF does not concentrate on expectations, instead it focuses on the assessment of service quality perceptions, by assessing the consumers’ overall feelings concerning the service performance”.</p>	<p>“The SERVPERF model will be employed for this study due to its popularity within the fitness industry. Because it only concentrates on the consumer's perceptions, it will make the questionnaire less complicated and more economical to administer”.</p>

Model	Key findings	Limitations/appropriateness for this study
<p>“Haywood-Farmer’s Conceptual Model of Service Quality”.</p>	<p>“The Haywood-Farmer’s model measures service quality based on the three dimensions, namely; physical facilities, people’s behaviour elements and professional judgement. These dimensions provide a good insight in understanding the construct of service quality”.</p>	<p>“The model will not be selected because it does not suggest a mechanism for measuring service quality. Furthermore, there is no recommendation of a practical procedure proficient of assisting management to pinpoint service quality problems or practical means of improving service quality.”</p>
<p>“The Dynamic Process Model of Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml”.</p>	<p>“This model attempts to provide insights into the process by which customers form judgements of service quality and the way these judgements affect subsequent behaviour. The model recognizes that consumers’ perceptions and expectations change from time to time and, therefore, the model is fit to identify that and test the correlations amongst the consumers’ perceptions and expectations”.</p>	<p>“The model does not provide a great mechanism that can be adopted to measure service quality construct. The model merely enhances understanding of service quality and behavioural intentions of customers”.</p>
<p>“The three-component model of Rust and Oliver”.</p>	<p>“Service product, service delivery and service environment are three dimensions considered to measure service quality”.</p>	<p>“The model was not tested to confirm whether it does measure what is supposed to be measured, and it does not recommend any tool to be adapted in measuring service quality. For those reasons, the model will not be employed for this study”.</p>

Model	Key findings	Limitations/appropriateness for this study
<p>“The Return-on-Quality Approach of Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham”.</p>	<p>“The model views service quality from the consumers’ perspectives similar to numerous quality models. The model suggests that the variables of service quality should be based on the company’s procedures, which means that the quality improvement should be at the centre of business, specifically at the process and Sub-process level”.</p>	<p>“The model is not considered because it concentrates only on customer retention rather than customers’ perceptions on service quality”.</p>
<p>“The P-C-P Service Attribute Model of Philip and Hazlett”.</p>	<p>“The model is about the general framework of evaluating service quality for any service provider and the specific areas that require improvements for service quality. The dimensions to these three levels of attributes are individual sector-dependent regarding the consumer.”</p>	<p>“The model does not provide general dimensions to the three levels of attributes. It also lacks empirical validation and will therefore not be considered for this study.”</p>
<p>“Dabholkar, Shepherd and Thorpe’s antecedents Model”.</p>	<p>“Service quality is better visualised by its antecedents rather than its components. The model measures the components of service quality as separate factors but associated with service quality.”</p>	<p>“The model measures behavioural intentions rather than actual behaviour and will not be considered for this study.”</p>

Model	Key findings	Limitations/appropriateness for this study
<p>“The hierarchical approach of Brady and Cronin”.</p>	<p>“Qualitative and empirical evidence depicted that the service quality construct is a multidimensional pyramid. Consumers firstly evaluate the “sub-dimensions” before they assess the primary dimensions, outcome, interaction and environmental quality”.</p>	<p>“This model regrets that sub-dimensions are in fact in a position to answer almost all the questions about service quality and no study has adopted this model within the fitness industry. Therefore, the model was disregarded for those reasons”.</p>
<p>“The Kang and James Model adopted from Gronroos’s model”.</p>	<p>“The findings revealed that the perceptions of consumers concerning overall service quality is influenced by technical and functional quality”. “Kang and James (2004) tested their model and confirmed the Gronroos (1984:1988) model and the findings revealed that there is a strong relationship between the SERVPERF dimensions”.</p>	<p>“The limitations of this model are that consumer satisfaction is treated as an independent construct. Mover, no study has adopted this model within the fitness industry”.</p>
<p>“Kang’s Hierarchical structure of Service Quality”.</p>	<p>“Service quality is measured in terms of technical and functional quality. The SERVPERF dimensions are employed as sub-dimensions (under functional) to measure the consumers’ perceptions about service quality. The empirical evidence depicted that consumers’ perceptions of service quality are measured on both process quality (functional quality) and outcome quality (technical quality”.</p>	<p>“There is limited evidence to show that the hierarchical structure is fit for any industry. A few studies have adopted this model within the fitness industry”.</p>

Model	Key findings	Limitations/appropriateness for this study
<p>“Carr’s FAIRSERV model”.</p>	<p>“The model adopted the SERVPERF dimensions to measure service quality, but then added the equity (fairness) dimensions. It is felt that customers are concerned with getting what they deserve in relation to other customers of the same service.”</p>	<p>“This is a great model to be considered, but for the selected study, it will not be appropriate. It is because, not many studies have adopted this model in the service industry, let alone the fitness industry”.</p>

Source: Researchers’ compilation.

2.4 Conclusion

All the theories have been fully defined and discussed in this chapter. Additionally, the researcher has presented all the theoretical concepts that are deemed to be relevant under each construct. It is evident that the three constructs; “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity” can be measured in different ways. This chapter outlined the different models that can be adopted to measure service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity within the fitness industry. Nevertheless, not all these models can be adopted for this study due to their limitations. However, the following chapter will highlight the suitable models that will be adopted to measure the three constructs.

CHAPTER THREE

Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Brand Equity in the Fitness Industry

3.0 Introduction

The theory chapter has detailed the significance of the three constructs “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity”. The theory chapter further demonstrated that “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity” are complex and ephemeral constructs. The researchers have become confident in their arguments about the fact that service quality is not the only crucial aspect for customer satisfaction, but there are other aspects that are considered before or after the final decision (Dhurup *et al.*, 2006: Bodet, 2006: Alexandris *et al.*, 2008: Williams, 2010: Soita, 2012).

However, the aim of this chapter is to discourse “issues” of service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity within the fitness industry. Each concept is discussed in relation to its significance within the fitness industry. Because of the limitations disclosed and the nature of the industry, the researcher found only two models to be relevant for this research study. Therefore, there are only two models that are discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, the relationship between the three constructs is also covered. The overall service quality, overall customer satisfaction and overall brand equity is also introduced in this chapter.

3.1 Service Quality in the Fitness Industry

Researchers have confirmed that service quality is a weapon that businesses use to attract customers away from other rivals (Brown & Swart, 1989: Drucker, 1993: Metha, Lalwani, & Li Han, 2000). According to Lam, Zhang and Jensen (2005), the United States market is extremely becoming more “health conscious” than before. A study that was conducted by International Health, Racquet and Sports-club Association (IHRSA) (2004) revealed that, from the period of 1987 to 2003, there had been an increase of “regular club users” by more than 200% from selective fitness clubs. However, Lam, Zhang and Jensen (2005) pointed out that the competition is very intense in the American fitness segments. The authors further indicated that fitness clubs are fighting for the same target market, using different strategies to compete and provide exceptional service quality. Within the South African context,

Dhurup *et al.*, (2006) confirmed that the population is becoming health conscious for various reasons like health issues, work-related pressure and so forth. As a result, the South African fitness industry is dominated by the European fitness clubs and there is high competition. A study that was conducted by Draper *et al.*, (2006) revealed that there was an increase of \pm 30% South Africans that had been joining fitness clubs from 2004 to 2006. However, the author further pointed out that most of the South African fitness clubs are failing to attract and maintain gym members. In support, Soita (2012) highlighted that most of the African fitness clubs are missing the boat because they don't have rich information with regards to the fitness industry as a whole.

MacIntosh, Doherty and Walker (2010) argued that service quality in the fitness industry is not only a significant factor for customer satisfaction and profitability, but also to measure the competitiveness of a service business. A study that was conducted by Chang and Chelladurai (2003) confirmed that "professional knowledge, cleanliness and responsibility" are significant factors that club members take into consideration when evaluating the service quality of any fitness club in America. Saravanan and Rao (2007) argue that "different factors" influence customer satisfaction at different times. In support, Yee, Yeung and Ma (2013) indicated that the perceptions of customer experiences influence overall customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction scores can provide significant feedback of whether a fitness club is delivering a truly seamless customer experience.

3.1.1 Measurement of Service Quality in the Fitness Industry

Several models have been developed to measure service quality in different industries, and, therefore, it is essential to highlight the most appropriate model that was adopted by this study. There are two types of models frequently used by researchers in the fitness industry, namely; SERVQUAL and SERVPERF. Various researchers have found SERVPERF as a superior model that can be utilised to "measure service quality" in the fitness industry (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014: Yee, Yeung & Ma, 2013: Zongli, 2012: Soita, 2012). The authors opined that SERVPERF does not concentrate on "expectations", rather it focuses on the assessment of service quality "perceptions" by assessing the consumers' "overall feelings" concerning the service performance. Furthermore, SERVPERF scale has been experimentally verified to be a superior measure of service

quality (MacIntosh, Doherty and Walker, 2010; Draper *et al.*, 2006) and it reduces the biases of responses and does improve on existing information into psychology, economics and statistical measures (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014; Ngceba, 2017). Additionally, the SERVPERF model goes beyond to identify the cause of consumer's satisfaction (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014). However, it is clear that this study will concentrate on the SERVPERF model since it is the most suitable model that measures "service quality and customer satisfaction" on customer perceptions and experiences about service performance (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). The details on the functionality of the SERVPERF model are presented hereunder.

3.1.1.1 "The SERVPERF Model"

This study will use the SERVPERF model since it is the most popular model that measures service quality on customer's perceptions and experiences about service performance (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Various researchers have found SERVPERF as the only superior model that can be utilised to "measure service quality" in the fitness industry (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014; Yee, Yeung & Ma, 2013; Zongli, 2012; Soita, 2012). The SERVPERF model applies similar 22-items used in the SERVQUAL model to measure service quality, but SERVPERF is a perception-only model. The SERVPERF model consists of five dimensions (Tangibles, Empathy, Assurance, Responsiveness and Reliability) that are discussed hereunder concerning the fitness industry. These dimensions are depicted through 22-variables on a measurement scale.

3.1.1.1.1 Tangibles

According to Chang and Chelladurai (2003), appearance and contact with physical facilities are more than significant in the fitness industry since it is the central core of the business. Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006) further elaborated that this dimension is used to communicate the desired image and persuasive quality to the public. However, most of other activities and services depend on the consumer's usage of the equipment and facilities. The authors further elaborated that if the equipment or facilities are not functioning as expected, then, the actual delivery of the service is affected outrageously.

A study that was conducted by IDEA (2007) revealed that gym members are now looking for the state-of-the-art facilities that have almost everything that a sports person is looking for, but not a weightlifter. The authors further elaborated that due to competition within the fitness industry, fitness clubs are now offering class exercises for individual members and group members. However, Gunning (2000) argues that culture plays a fundamental role in the business industry and culture has a significant impact on people's behaviour within society. With regards to that, the facilities provided by the fitness clubs are not up to standard in accommodating the cultural values of people within society as a whole. However, it is very difficult to accommodate all the different cultural values of people within society as a whole (Ngceba, 2017).

3.1.1.1.2 Empathy

Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) outlined that the empathy dimension depicts staff "willingness to assist customers, to deliver prompt services, to meet and exceed customers' expectations, and to treat customers with respect, kindness and honesty." According to Mohr, Bitner and Booms (1994), the contact between the service provider and customers has the most dominant effect on "quality judgments". The author further indicated that empathy is considered as an important ingredient that is used to differentiate a fitness club amongst other rivals. It is because empathy is linked with significant factors that can be used to generate a maximum satisfaction of gym members. Schneider *et al.*, (2009) supported the fact that staff attitude is another factor that contributes to customer satisfaction within the fitness industry. Wood and Brotherton (2008) pointed out that the good behaviour of staff can help a fitness club to compete on customer satisfaction.

While, Kattara, Weheba and El-Said (2008), on the other hand, accentuate that bad behavior of staff can lead to negative publicity and dissatisfaction from customers. These are small issues that are taken for granted within the fitness industry, which are, however, considered in the final decision making of a gym member. Empathy requires much training because most of the time, the gym members are always moody. Therefore, if you are not skilled enough to deal with these kind of customers, then you won't be able to understand the mindset of gym members.

3.1.1.1.3 Reliability

A study that was conducted by Zongli (2012) revealed that gym members are promised almost everything during a persuasive section, but once they have joined the gym, everything changes, especially with regards to Wi-Fi strength and cleanliness during the afternoon sessions. Schneider *et al.*, (2009) pointed out that reliability is what gym members are looking for since it relates to the capacity to execute the promised services correctly, without errors. The authors further stated that reliability is what gym members are looking for when selecting a fitness club that keeps its promises.

Andaleeb and Conway (2006) confirmed that employees are responsible for consistent performance to provide exceptional services at all times. All of this depends on the professional knowledge and skills of staff together with their decency. However, Chang and Chelladurai (2003) opined that informing customers and problem-solving skills are other crucial factors that fitness club members consider when analysing service quality at a fitness club. The authors further argue that reliability can damage the brand image if the services are not performed as promised, because of high expectations.

3.1.1.1.4 Assurance

In some industries, assurance is not that important due to the high risk and outcomes that are beyond the control of the business (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006). In the fitness industry, customers usually look at the safety issues of using the equipment, maintenance of cleanliness, safe parking, trusted fitness club instructors, accurate weight loss exercises, professionalism and so forth (Mohammad *et al.*, 2014). Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2001) posit that the effective communication (direct or indirect communication) with consumers and the overall attitude that employees have is what constructs a positive perception in consumers' minds about the brand. Soita (2012) alluded that sending emails as well as messages with regards to any inconvenience and assuring the gym members about the plan of action is very important. Mohammad *et al.*, (2014) argue that sometimes it is difficult to maintain assurance within the fitness industry. For example, crime is a major concern to overcome since other areas like bathrooms cannot have cameras.

3.1.1.1.5 Responsiveness

Zeithaml *et al.*, (2006) confirmed that this dimension outlines the significance of managing customer's complaints, requests and knowledge to answer questions. Suwono and Sihombing (2016) mentioned that to keep your word means a lot to gym members. This means that if you promise to make a follow-up within a week or so, then it is essential to provide feedback within that period to stimulate an excellent reputation on responsiveness. In the study that was conducted by Hutt and Speh (2012), it was revealed that "being true to your words" is considered to be significant in winning gym members' loyalty. Furthermore, the authors specified that it is advisable for a business to look at responsiveness from the customers' point of view rather than the business perspective to do more business, as expected. If you promise to call a gym member then do so within the time frame you agreed on.

Mohammad *et al.*, (2014) indicated that a helpful staff member is the one that is always willing to provide answers, even if the questions are stupid, but still find a polite way of providing answers. Positive perception is earned on responsiveness because as a staff member you always find possible ways to inform gym members about feedback that is meaningful. Claiming to know almost everything is dangerous, therefore, it is important to provide honest answers or ask from the managers if required (Hutt & Speh, 2012).

3.2 Overall Service Quality

Theodorakis *et al.*, (2014) conducted a study titled "A comparison of service evaluation models in the context of sport and fitness centres in Greece" which measured Overall Service Quality with four items: "The excellent overall service, high-quality programmes, centre's outstanding programmes and superior services in many ways." The author requested the respondents to rate these items at a global scale, as recommended by Oliver (1997), while, other researchers used one question to measure overall service quality within the fitness industry (Clemes *et al.*, 2011; Hightower *et al.*, 2002; Dabholkar, Shepherd & Thorpe, 2000).

An important discussion of gym member's satisfaction is presented in the following discussion.

3.3 Customer Satisfaction in the Fitness Industry

The gym member's satisfaction is usually shaped by different factors that have resulted from service experiences (Metha, Lalwani & Li Han, 2000). The authors further elaborated that the nature of programmes offered has a significant effect on gym member satisfaction, let alone the attitude of staff members that are executing those programmes. Alexandris *et al.*, (2004) specified that a member who has "positive perceptions" about a particular fitness club or services offered, is more likely to have a high level of satisfaction, even if the fitness club is struggling to maintain the level of consistency.

Hutt and Speh (2012) indicated that an increase in "customers' expectations" has steered managers to turn out to be consumer focused. As a result, the resources are now concentrated on ensuring that gym members are extremely satisfied with the services. In spite of that, Mark (2004) signposted that the allocation of resources is deemed to be useless if the fitness clubs are not fully aware of their weakness concerning the gym members' satisfaction. The author further suggested that it is a great initiative to, firstly, capture the positive results related to having a mostly satisfied consumer base, only if the managers have an "understanding" of the underlying factors contributing to gym members' satisfaction. According to Andaleeb and Conway (2006), it is due to the fact that meeting gym members' expectations is key for "service quality" aspects that lead to gym members' satisfaction since there is an excellent possibility for gym members to remain loyal. A study that was conducted by Dhurup, Singh and Surujlal (2006) revealed that most of the fitness clubs are not concentrating on meeting and exceeding the needs of gym members. Furthermore, the results also showed that fitness club members tend to look for a better fitness club due to the dissatisfaction with unsatisfactory services. According to Harris and Mark (2004), retaining dissatisfied fitness club members has become extremely difficult for fitness club owners due to innovative ideas presented by the well-recognised fitness clubs.

In support, Yeung and Ma (2013) argued that gym members will always select a service that promises to meet what they need. As a matter of fact, gym members will select services concerning their perceptions of "customer value", that might be satisfying their needs. Previous studies profess that the higher degree of "perceived value" provides a route to a greater level of customer satisfaction; therefore, "consumer value" has a significant effect on customer satisfaction (Alexandris *et al.*, 2004; Mark, 2004; Dhurup *et al.*, 2006; Wood &

Brotherton, 2008; Schneider *et al.*, 2009; MacIntosh *et al.*, 2010). Despite the high correlation between “customer value” and customer satisfaction, MacIntosh *et al.*, (2010) suggested that gym members can be kept through high switching rates even if customer value is not being fulfilled. On the other hand, Bodet, (2006) argued that keeping gym members through high switching cost can lead to negative publicity and dissatisfaction if customer value is insignificant.

Ong Lai Teik (2015) highlighted that gym members at the age of 60 years and above tend to have a different behaviour as compared to others. The reason behind that is because they like to be recognised and respected at all times. To deal with such gym members requires dedicated staff members to monitor them at all times because they tend to spread a positive word of mouth about their satisfaction level with the fitness club. In support, the study conducted by Raaphorst (2010) revealed that the membership of gym members tends to decrease with age. The author further argued that old age people are less likely to join a fitness club as compared to the younger generation.

Tsitskari, Tsiotras and Tsiotras (2006) believe that satisfied fitness club members tend to be loyal and frequently visit the fitness club. Also, Wood and Brotherton (2008) opine that happy fitness club members tend to attract new members because they spread a positive word of mouth about their experiences. However, a study that was conducted by Metha, Lalwani, and Li Han (2000) revealed that factors like price, cleanliness, variety of equipment and individual attention are essential factors that contribute to fitness club members’ satisfaction. In support, Saravanan and Rao (2007) pointed out that price seems to be a contributing factor that the lower-class gym members are considering when selecting a fitness club. Then again, the upper-class gym members have a perception that high price means good quality and, therefore, they will be highly satisfied.

Bodet (2006) indicated that it is essential to measure “customer satisfaction” in the fitness industry because of the strong competition presented by the industry in retaining their fitness club members, while attracting new members. The author further recommended that other factors need to be investigated when measuring gym members’ satisfaction. In support, Raaphorst (2010); Hutt & Speh (2012) and Ong Lai Teik (2015) stated that there are so many linkages that influence gym members satisfaction. As a result, the authors suggested that considering all the angles that are deemed to influence gym member’s satisfaction should be

considered during the measurement of customer satisfaction. For example, in the study conducted by Bodet (2006), it was revealed that the service-workers' level and attitude seems to have a significant effect on gym members' satisfaction. However, only a well-known fitness club tends to pay more attention to such factors concerning the level of satisfaction for gym members (Ngceba, 2017: Ong Lai Teik, 2015).

According to the researchers (Gunning, 2000: Wood and Brotherton 2008: MacIntosh *et al.*, 2010: Yee, Yeung & Ma, 2013), customer satisfaction is vital for gym members' retention, loyalty and provides high credibility for the organisation. MacIntosh *et al.*, (2010) found that failure to respond to gym members' requirements might have an impact on service loyalty. In addition, the authors also pointed out that trust plays a crucial role in loyalty. The researchers acknowledged the fact that "customer satisfaction" is at times formed in accordance with the level of "service quality" provided by the fitness clubs (Teik, 2015: Ong Lai Teik, 2015: Clemes *et al.*, 2011: Tsitskari *et al.*, 2006: Metha *et al.*, 2000). In spite of that, Gitomers (2001:246) argued that a satisfied gym member "could switch" to any fitness club, even though satisfied gym members tend to buy or use the same service again. Therefore, satisfaction might not be an indication that a gym member will automatically become loyal to a fitness club. However, the author also pointed out the antecedents of loyalty which fitness clubs can focus on, namely; the importance of gym members' involvement in decision making as well as psychological commitment.

However, customer satisfaction can be measured in different ways, depending on the specific area that the study is intended to focus on. As a case in point, a study can focus on the quality of equipment, consistency of quality sessions, the behaviour of fitness club instructors and so forth (Saravanan & Rao, 2007). According to Bodet (2006), to measure customer satisfaction in the fitness industry is more than necessary because different aspects contribute to customer satisfaction.

Based on the above discussion, a gym member's satisfaction is an essential issue within the fitness industry. This is considered because there are "many factors" that have an impact on gym member's satisfaction and this requires a significant measurement to have a better understanding. The discussion hereunder addresses the correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction.

3.4 The Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in the Fitness Industry

Most of the researchers have been using these two constructs “service quality” and “satisfaction” interchangeably; although they are related, they are also distinctive (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988: Zeithmal & Bitner, 2003: Williams, 2010). However, most of the studies in the services marketing literature have disclosed that these two terms are strongly correlated (e.g., Ngceba, 2017: Teik, 2015: Soita, 2012: Williams, 2010).

In a period of increased competition, South Africa has the highest club revenue in Africa and the Middle East. It is inferred that fitness clubs should concentrate on “service quality” and “consumer satisfaction” enhancement so as to drive the quality of business performance (Ngceba, 2017: Williams, 2010: Schneider *et al.*, 2009). According to Teik (2015), service quality and customer satisfaction are vital concepts that have a significant influence on gym members’ perceptions. The author further pointed out that a warm atmosphere, adequate space and modern facilities are a few service quality factors that have a significant effect on gym members’ satisfaction. This indicates that service quality could have a significant influence on customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is fundamental within the fitness industry concerning the success of the business, and, for this reason, service quality measurement and control is necessary (Soita, 2012). However, Ngceba (2017) argues that the services provided by the fitness centres tend to have a higher influence on gym members’ satisfaction. Moreover, the author further stated that service performance and gym members’ satisfaction have a positive influence on the capabilities of marketing campaigns in attracting more gym members to be part of the fitness club.

Saravanan and Rao (2007) argued that the service aspects contributing to customer satisfaction in the health club context are still misunderstood. However, the results depict the key significant factors that are mostly considered by consumers when evaluating service quality in the fitness industry. These factors include the quality of equipment, staff behaviour and image (brand equity). The authors further elaborated on the fact that these factors do not have the same weight and, therefore, this misleads the researchers when identifying the key service attributes of customer satisfaction (Saravanan & Rao, 2007). The relationship

between service quality and consumer satisfaction begins when gym members are beginning to relish the services provided by the fitness club. Hence, satisfaction is reflected as an emotional state that is formed through service performance (experiences) (Soita, 2012). There is a “strong correlation” between service quality and customer satisfaction, and, therefore, the following discussion presents few studies that are documented by the researcher.

The purpose of the following table 2.5 is to present the recent number of studies that have shown the relationship between the two constructs. The documented studies point out the significant measure of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction within the fitness industry.

Table 3. 1 The Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in the Fitness Industry

Author and year	Context of research	Key findings
Teik (2015).	“Enhancing the experience of needs satisfaction through service engagement: A case of Commercial fitness centres in Malaysia.”	“There is a statistically significant relationship between service quality and fitness club members satisfaction.”
Soita (2012).	“Gym members’ perception about service quality in Commercial Health and Fitness Clubs in Uganda.”	“Strong relationship between Overall Service Perception and Overall Members Satisfaction, but weak relationship between tangibles and Overall Members Satisfaction”.
Dhurup, Singh and Surujlal (2006).	“Customer service quality at commercial health and Fitness centres.”	“Personnel, Facility attraction, Convenience and information dissemination, Safety and support, and membership have a significant influence on fitness club members overall satisfaction”.

Bodet (2006).	“Examining Customer Satisfaction in a Health Club Context”.	“Staff behaviour and non-tangible factors (image) have a significant influence on fitness club members’ satisfaction”.
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Source: Researchers’ compilation.

As depicted, the study of the relationship between “service quality and customer satisfaction” within the fitness industry has been limited concerning the number of studies as well as their scope. This serves as an indication for an important measure of “service quality and customer satisfaction” within the South African industry. Furthermore, only a few studies have extended their concentration to measure the relationship between “service quality and customer satisfaction” within the fitness industry. Teik (2015) has, for example, specified that there are limited empirical studies within the field of sport management and marketing. However, hereunder is the discussion of customer satisfaction measurements within the fitness industry.

3.5 Measurement of Customer Satisfaction in the Fitness Industry

Amongst the various models that have been proposed to look at the concept of customer satisfaction in different industries, they tend to have similarities but a significant distinction that separates them. Gunning (2000) pointed out four models of customer satisfaction that can be selected to measure the level of customer satisfaction, namely: the “disconfirmation of expectation model, the performance model, the rational expectations model and the expectations artefact model”. However, this study will concentrate on the SERVPERF model to measure customer satisfaction. The logic of the argument is that the researcher is intended to measure customer satisfaction based on service performance, and the SERVPERF model concentrates on service quality “perceptions” by assessing the consumers’ “overall feelings” concerning the service performance. In support, the researchers mostly used this model within the fitness industry and that has motivated the researcher to consider this model in measuring the level of gym members’ satisfaction (Harris & Mark, 2004; Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal, 2006; Bodet 2006; Yee, Yeung & Ma, 2013; Ngceba, 2017).

A few measurements will be secured from the five dimensions (“Tangibles, Assurance, Empathy, Responsiveness and Reliability”) of SERVPERF model. Tangibles pertain to the

physical facilities, equipment, staff and any other materials that can be used to communicate tangibles. Empathy is associated with caring and providing individual attention to customers. Assurance is mainly concerned with the ability to stimulate trust and confidence. Reliability is considered as the capacity to execute the promised services correctly without errors. Lastly, responsiveness is regarded as the willingness to assist the end-user and deliver prompt service. Therefore, the statements will be derived from each of the above dimensions and the participants will have to show their level of disagreement or agreement with the statements on a “7-point Likert scale”. According to Ong Lai Teik (2015), “operationally”, satisfaction is deemed to be an outcome and therefore, it can be measured as the summation of the satisfactions with the several aspects of the service. A similar view was taken by (Ngceba (2017) Suwono and Sihombing (2016) Yee, Yeung & Ma, (2013) Alam and Hossain (2012) within the industry.

3.6 Overall Customer Satisfaction

Ong Lai Teik (2015) viewed gym members’ overall satisfaction as a multifaceted construct. The hypotheses were tested on five variables, namely; “program quality needs, interaction quality needs, outcome quality needs, physical environment needs and engagement” using a questionnaire. However, the hypothesis testing revealed that there is an insignificant correlation amongst programme quality needs and overall satisfaction. Alternatively, Theodorakis *et al.*, (2014) viewed gym members’ overall satisfaction based on three items, as supported by Oliver (1997) and Cronin *et al.*, (2000). The overall customer satisfaction was measured based on the following items; “Satisfied with centre’s programmes/services, very happy with programmes/services and Wise decision to become a member” (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014).

The discussion hereunder expounds on brand equity within the fitness industry, another important variable in this study.

3.7 Brand Equity in the Fitness Industry

According to Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein (2014), fitness clubs are considered to be brands, and much attention is needed to manage the image or an association that is linked to the brand. There are several factors that are linked to the brand. For example, the name of the

country has a positive role with regards to the image or status of the brand. Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) argue that fitness clubs are in a “brand war” for good reasons. For example, most of the well-known fitness clubs are positioning themselves as international brands because of the status and good association that consumers have about international brands compared to local brands. In a study conducted by Bodet, Meurgey and Lacassagne (2009), it was revealed that there is a “significant difference” concerning the way that international fitness brands are marketing themselves compared to their actual depiction. Moreover, the authors further highlighted that the international fitness clubs have a great understanding of how to position their brands through social media platforms, even though the study concentrated on French fitness clubs.

Clearly then, within the fitness industry, brand awareness and brand image play a pivotal role in consumers’ decision-making Aaker (1996). For that reason, brand knowledge is systematically crafted through brand awareness and brand image (Williams *et al.*, 2014). Keller (1993) indicated that consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) takes place when consumers are aware of the brand and they have a positive and unique brand association. The study conducted by Williams *et al.* (2014) also shows that brand strategies like price and organic brand communication (word of mouth) do affect the perceptions of the potential members about a fitness club brand. In another study conducted in India, Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein (2014) revealed that there are other indirect factors (like the environment) that influence brand association. Williams (2010) concurs that brand association has a significant influence on “brand equity”.

Based on the above discussion, brand equity has intangible advantages that are linked to a brand. Within the fitness industry, brand equity is a critical aspect that is considered to be significant due to customer loyalty, competitive advantage, increased margins and expansion opportunities that can arise from it.

3.7.1 Measurement of Brand Equity in the Fitness Industry

As stated in the previous chapter, Aaker’s model and Keller’s model are two types of models that are frequently used to measure brand equity in the fitness industry. It is clear from the previous chapter that the construct of brand equity is deemed to be a “multidimensional”

construct; hence it has been measured in different ways. According to Wright, Williams and Byon (2017), Aaker (1996) evidently is the inventor of the CBBE methodology and has given specific research consideration concerning the consumer rather than the company or investors. Furthermore, Williams *et al.*, (2014) elaborated that when Aaker's model of brand equity is correctly implemented, it determines the "long-run" impact of marketing decisions. However, not much has been reported relating to the criticisms of the Aaker's (1996) model of brand equity. In this regard, the weaknesses of Aaker's (1996) model are considered to be manageable since the model is mostly used within the fitness industry. This has motivated the researcher to adopt this model to measure brand equity. Therefore, to evade a reiteration of the same discussion, the discussion hereunder will concentrate on the dimensions of Aaker's (1996) model of brand equity within the fitness industry since it is adopted for this study.

3.7.1.1 Brand Loyalty

Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) specified that in the context of the fitness industry, brand loyalty is reflected in a mix of gym members' behaviour and positive attitudes about a brand. The gym member's loyalty goes one step further due to a dedication to making a continued investment through a long-term relationship with a brand. The authors further indicated that gym members' loyalty is a crucial factor in the fitness industry since it is linked with satisfaction. A gym member remains loyal only if the fitness club is providing better services at all times. Wood and Herdeen (2007) confirmed that gym member's loyalty is quite challenging to achieve in a competitive environment like the fitness industry. Furthermore, the authors highlighted the measurements of brand loyalty in the fitness industry, which include, the tolerance of inconsistent prices, positive word-of-mouth about the brand, renewal of contracts and an increasing number of gym members who are joining the fitness club on a monthly basis.

3.7.1.2 Brand Awareness

Due to an increasing number of fitness clubs, building brand awareness is quite difficult (Williams *et al.*, 2014). Tong and Hawley (2009) contended that awareness plays a significant role in portraying the unique selling proposition (USP) of the fitness club. The authors further stated that the awareness of the fitness club makes the job of the staff members to be simple and easier, since people will be aware of the brand and its benefits. A

positive reputation of the brand is more than essential with the fitness industry because it is a highly competitive environment. A study conducted by Wright, Williams and Byon (2017) revealed the interesting strategies that can be adopted by the fitness clubs in the business world of today. This involves crafting a prestigious image within the minds of people, keeping a constant presence on social media platforms, keeping the website of a fitness club attractive and appealing, and partnering with other great businesses like Nike or Adidas for cross promotion.

3.7.1.3 Perceived Quality

According to Wright *et al.*, (2017), within the fitness industry, more weight is placed on the brand power or status of the brand in determining the quality of a brand. Gym members are very conscious about the status of a fitness club because it brings conceit, excitement and other positive associations in the minds of gym members. The Academy of Marketing Science & Sports (2014) has suggested that perceived quality is believed to make a contribution to gym member's satisfaction. The author further elaborated that perceived quality is considered to be a weapon in differentiating the business services from those of competitors and it also stimulates the consumer's interest to be part of the business. An example would be Virgin Active, that is perceived as a high-quality brand within the fitness industry. Mohammad *et al.*, (2014) confirmed that perceived quality can permit a fitness club for brand extensions to be put in place of the untapped market within the industry or different industry.

3.7.1.4 Brand association

Alexandris *et al.*, (2008) indicated that brand association has played a significant role in adding an additional element concerning value to a fitness club brand. The authors further pointed out that the unique qualities associated with a brand are usually a motivational factor for gym members to consider a fitness club. Moreover, it is said that these qualities stimulate positive attitudes and feelings about the brand. However, Tong and Hawley (2009) argued that brand association sometimes gets misinterpreted by people within the fitness industry. Therefore, it is imperative to have full control on perceptions that the fitness club is trying to communicate with the gym members or the targeted population. An example would be a scandal that took place at Virgin Active branch in Hatfield. The Hatfield branch in Pretoria

was perceived to be racist due to an incident that took place when there was only one black person that joined the gym to train with whites. After joining the gym, a young black person was humiliated by whites since that branch was mostly promoted to white people that are staying around that place (News24, 2012).

Based on the above discussion of the dimensions of Aaker's model of brand equity, all the dimensions are considered to be significant within the fitness industry, because they engage with consumers and create opportunities for a fitness club to grow further. Additionally, it is evident that brand equity tends to have a significant value both to the business and consumers. Hereunder is a brief discussion of a relationship between service quality and brand equity.

3.8 The relationship between service quality and brand equity in the fitness industry

According to Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000), brand equity plays a vital role in differentiating the unique services offered by a fitness club. The authors further stated that brand equity acts as a catalyst in stimulating the interest of fitness club members. Williams and Pedersen (2012) argue that direct experiences with service quality act as a precursor of "brand association" within the minds of gym members. The authors further stated that service quality is a weapon for crafting brand equity within the fitness industry. In addition, therefore, once brand equity is established, gym members tend to have a positive experience, trust and other indirect factors that will enable a fitness club to charge more for its services. In support, Raaphorst (2010) outlined the important factor that relates to the relationship between "service quality and brand equity" within the fitness industry, namely; trust. The author argued that trust tends to strengthen the member's loyalty and have a direct impact on a gym member's behaviour that is considered to be momentous for a long-lasting relationship. In addition, the ingredients of trust and a long-lasting relationship is "brand equity". According to Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein, (2014), service quality and brand equity are fundamental constructs that produce a reliable relationship between gym members and a service provider. The authors further indicated that the success of these two constructs hinges on the financial services of a fitness club.

The study conducted by Mckenzie, Chiliya, and Chikandiwa (2016) revealed that marketers should adopt the use of celebrity endorsement to build brand equity while communicating the

services offered by a fitness club. This strategy can foster trustworthiness, attract and retain gym members. Furthermore, the authors outlined that this is a decent strategy to be adopted, because of its assistance to captivate with potential gym members while breaking through the hectic clutter. Gym members are faced with information overload on a daily basis, and as a result, celebrities can spread a positive communication and have a significant influence on gym members (Mckenzie *et al.*, 2016). Raaphorst (2010) argued that the use of celebrity endorsement has its own challenges in any industry; for example, negative publicity of a celebrity can cost the public recognition of the brand, whereas positive announcement of a celebrity can increase the number of gym members within the period of six months.

Williams (2010) and Alexandris *et al.*, (2008) disclosed the fact that the evaluation of the fitness club image (cooperate image) is considered to be an influential factor in determining the quality of services to be expected. In other words, brand equity is built on the basis of service quality. Hence celebrity endorsement is deemed to be vital in building brand equity (McKenzie *et al.*, 2016). However, Alexandris *et al.*, (2008) argued that, to a certain extent, differentiating exceptional service quality within the fitness industry is difficult due to competition that is provided and the nature of the industry. In support, Ngceba (2017) indicated that a value proposition is important within the South African fitness industry due to competition. Moreover, the author stressed that frequency of attendance tends to represent the brand value of the fitness club. As a result, many fitness clubs are struggling to maintain a consistent number of gym members' attendance. According to Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein (2014), as much as the frequency of attendance is deemed to represent the brand value of a fitness club, however, the number of people who joined the fitness club gives the impression to be a true reflection of brand value.

It must be said though that the empirical studies have depicted great results of a correlation between service quality and brand equity within the fitness industry. Table 1.6 below presents the empirical studies concerning "service quality and brand equity" in the fitness industry.

Table 3. 2 The Correlation Between Service Quality and Brand Equity in the Fitness Industry

Author and year	Context of research	Key findings
Alexandris <i>et al.</i> (2008).	“Testing the role of service quality on the development of brand Associations and brand loyalty.”	“There is a relationship between brand association, brand loyalty, and service quality”.
Williams (2010).	“Investigating the role of ‘brand associations’ in multipurpose fitness Facilities: the relationship between service quality, exercise Commitment, brand associations, and brand loyalty.”	“Service quality dimensions have a significant relationship with the building blocks of brand equity” (added value, logo, association, location, and management).
Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein, (2014).	“The Relationship between Marketing Mix with Brand Equity in Fitness and Aerobic Fitness clubs.”	“Price, shopping centre’s image, and sale promotion had a stronger positive relationship with fitness club’s brand compared to other elements.”
Williams et al. (2014)	“Building Viable Fitness Brands: the significance of branding in Enticing potential Gym members.”	Price and word-of-mouth have a significant correlation with brand association and brand awareness.

Source: Compiled by Researcher.

The above table 2.6 confirms that there is limited evidence in backing a direct relationship between “service quality and brand equity” within the fitness industry. This serves as an indication for an important measure of service quality and brand equity within the South African industry. However, Williams and Pedersen (2012), Williams *et al.* (2014) and McKenzie *et al.*, (2016) specified that there is limited literature based on empirical studies pertaining to service quality and brand equity within the fitness industry.

3.9 Overall brand equity

Tong and Hawley (2009) measured overall brand equity with four questions; “(1) even if another brand has the same features as X, I would prefer to use X, (2) If another brand is not different from X in any way, it seems smarter to use X, (3) X is more than a service to me.” Nevertheless, Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein, (2014) viewed overall brand equity differently, since it was measured through averaging together the ratings on individual brand equity components to reflect an overall reflection.

3.10 Conceptual model

The model (figure 2.7) was proposed to measure service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity at the selected fitness club. Service quality and customer satisfaction were measured through the SERVPERF model while brand equity was measured using Aaker’s Model (1996). Customer satisfaction and brand equity were considered as dependent variables while service quality was considered as an independent variable.

Figure 3. 1 Measurement of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Brand Equity



Source: Researchers' conceptual framework.

Based on an evaluation of the literature concerning the measurement of the three constructs with the fitness industry, the research study was intended to address the gaps in knowledge and hypothesised the following:

3.11 Reseach Hyphotheses

H0_A: "The current fitness club members are highly satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club".

H1_B: "The current fitness club members are not satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club".

H2_A: "There is a significant, positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction".

H3_B: "There is no significant, positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction".

H4_A: "There is a significant, positive relationship between service quality and brand equity".

H5_B: "There is no significant, positive relationship between service quality and brand equity".

3.12 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to "discuss the key" constructs that are found to be relevant within the fitness industry and guided by the research topic and objectives of the study. According to the literature, service quality and customer satisfaction are beginning to get more attention within the fitness industry due to their significant value in contributing to the betterment of the business.

Furthermore, service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity can be measured in different ways, as indicated in chapter 2, but chapter 3 presented the most popular models that are applicable for the study. The concepts of overall service quality, overall customer satisfaction and overall brand equity were also discussed. Empirical studies were documented to show that there is a relationship between the three constructs; service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity, even though there are few studies within the fitness industry. In

this regard, there is a lack of literature with regards to the combination of the three constructs within the South African fitness industry. In accordance with the information presented in this chapter, the development of a research methodology was considered. The following chapter discusses the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Methodology of the Study

4.0 Introduction

The following discussion presents the research methodology that was employed for this study. The significance of a research methodology is that it finds answers and fill gaps in knowledge. However, the methodology structure was designed and guided by the objectives of the study to gather the required data. This chapter consists of the research design that will be discussed hereunder, the population of interest is described and the sampling procedure is also explained. Furthermore, the data collection method adopted in this study is discussed in relation to the nature of the study. The pretesting of the questionnaire is also considered to detect imperfections. In addition, the significant issues concerning reliability and validity will be explained. The data analyses will be explained in accordance with each objective of the study. The ethical considerations are also discussed.

4.1 Research Design

Research design is a framework that stipulates the details of conducting research. There are two types of research design, namely; qualitative and quantitative approach. Qualitative research is defined as an unstructured approach, based on small samples, intended to gain rich details about the topic, whereas quantitative research is defined as an objective measurement that concentrates on statistics or numerical analysis of data (Malhotra, 2010). The proposed research design for this study was a quantitative method. This method was selected with the aim of getting a better understanding of the research problem and to quantify the data and apply statistical analyses.

A descriptive research design was employed in relation to the objectives of the study as a complete research method. Jefferson (2004:56) defines descriptive research as the approach that is characterised by the aim of the study and research objectives. A descriptive research design is easy to administer and saves time and money (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). According to Malhotra (2010), descriptive research is classified into two categories; cross-sectional and longitudinal design. The longitudinal design is defined as “a fixed sample(s) of population

group measured repeatedly” (Malhotra, 2010), whereas a cross-sectional design is defined as a type of research that consists of the once-off data collection from the sample (Malhotra, 2010). For this study, a cross-sectional survey method was employed for data collection purposes. Therefore, the data was collected only once from the selected fitness club.

A descriptive survey method was used to collect relevant data. According to Creswell (2014), survey methods consist of personal interviews, mail interviews, electronic interviews, and telephone interviews. Personal interview administration was adopted in this study to cover a large number of fitness club members

4.2 Study Population

The population of interest for this study was fitness club members of a selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg. However, the selected fitness club has only one branch in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. As a result, the population of interest was limited since there is only one branch that exists in the province. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) define population as a group of people sharing a common set of “characteristics” that a researcher feels meet the selection criteria for the study. Malhotra (2011) revealed that the research population consists of four determinants, namely; sampling units, time, extent and elements, which is shown for this study as follows:

Element: Gym members at the selected fitness club

Sampling unit: Available gym members of the selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg

Extent: Pietermaritzburg, Scottsville fitness club

Time: August 2018

4.3 Sampling

A sample is defined as a group of participants that represents the population for investigation purposes (Malhotra, 2010). The process of selecting a sample is called sampling. Sekaran and Bougie (2013:296) define sampling as the technique of selecting a specific number of elements from the population of interest to represent the whole population. According to Malhotra (2010), “probability and non-probability sampling” are two types of sampling

methods that can be selected by researchers as a sampling technique. Probability sampling is defined as a sampling method that gives everyone from the population an equal chance of being selected, while non-probability sampling is defined as the process that does not provide all the participants with an equal chance of being selected (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Table 4. 1 Classes of Sampling Designs

Sampling Methods	
“Non-probability Sampling”	“Probability Sampling”
<i>Volunteer sampling:</i> the sample self-select themselves but only if they are updated about the investigation.	<i>Simple random sampling:</i> everyone has “an equal chance” of being selected in the sample.
<i>Convenience sampling:</i> the selection criteria is based on the availability and easy access to the sample.	<i>Systematic random sampling:</i> the members are selected with a random starting point and following a fixed periodic interval.
<i>Judgemental or Purposive sampling:</i> a researcher selects the sample based on personal judgement or certain criteria to be part of the study.	<i>Stratified random sampling:</i> the population is divided “into subgroups or strata”, and then random sampling is employed on each stratum.
<i>Quota sampling:</i> the population is firstly identified into heterogeneous group and subgroups are formed, then the sample is selected in terms of the set quota.	<i>Cluster sampling:</i> the population is divided into clusters, then simple random or systematic sampling is used.
<i>Snowball sampling:</i> the researcher selects an element that matches the criteria, then the rest of the participants are obtained by referral of the initial participants.	<i>Multistage sampling:</i> the population of interest is divided into a cluster and then selected randomly.
<i>Matched sampling:</i> the first participant is judgementally selected, and an additional participant is explored that look like the first participants on a variety of important variable.	
<i>Genealogy-based sampling:</i> the initial participant is “approached” and convinced to	

participate in the study and asked to refer a researcher to his or her close relatives.	
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Source: compiled by researcher, adapted from (Ngceba, 2017; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013; Malhotra, 2010).

This study used “non-probability sampling”. It is due to the fact that this method requires less effort, not too much time to finish-up and is less costly. Time and budget were the key factors that this research took into consideration during the selection of a sampling method.

However, convenience sampling was carefully chosen to be suitable for this study. Malhotra (2010) defines convenience sampling as a selection technique that is “based on availability” and easy access to the sample. The convenience sampling technique was considered due to the fact that the researcher did not have time and this technique is considered to be the least time consuming as well as the cheapest. Initially, a total number of 120 fitness club members were proposed for the study due to the nature of the selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg and taking into account the research cost. However, 99 fitness club members participated in this study. The fitness club members were selected from the morning session, early afternoon session and late afternoon session. This sampling technique was considered to accommodate different opinions and experiences of each session from the selected fitness club.

4.4 Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was formulated for primary data collection. A self-administered questionnaire was considered due to its benefits like scalability, covering all aspects of the topic, cost efficiency and speed of results (Metha, Lalwani & Li Han, 2000). In addition, a structured questionnaire is frequently used within the fitness industry to collect data (Yee, Yeung & Ma, 2013; Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal, 2006; Draper *et al.*, 2006).

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions. Section A consisted of service quality ratings. Section B consisted of customer satisfaction ratings. Section C consisted of brand equity issues. Lastly, section D comprised of demographic information.

Section A had 22-statements that were intended to measure service quality. The 22-statements were derived from the SERVPERF model which consists of five dimensions

(“Tangibles, Assurance, Empathy, Responsiveness and Reliability”) and 22-items (statements). The service quality section was rated on a 7-point Likert scale in terms of which 1 represents a very poor score and 7 represents an excellent score.

Section B had nine statements that were intended to measure the gym member’s satisfaction. The study concentrated on the SERVPEF model to measure gym members’ satisfaction, as indicated in the literature review. However, the participants had to show their level of disagreement or agreement with the statements. The customer satisfaction section was also rated on a “7-point Likert scale”, with scores closer to 1 representing strong disagreement and scores closer to 7 representing strong agreement.

Section C measured brand equity with 12 statements based on a 7-point Likert scale whereby scores closer to 1 represented strong disagreement and scores closer to 7 represented strong agreement. The statements were derived from Aaker’s (1996) model of brand equity. The statements highlighted the issues related to “brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association”.

Section D was composed of demographic information. This section was essential in understanding the gym member’s background, and such demographic information contributes to a significant value in the statistical analysis. The data collected was related to the participant’s gender, race, age, number of years using the selected fitness club, income bracket per month and employment status. This section was carefully handled due to sensitive questions it contained, and hence was placed at the end of the questionnaire.

However, before the data was collected, an application for gatekeeper’s permission from the selected fitness club and ethical clearance from the University were obtained.

The researcher hired two people to assist during data collection and they were trained on the subject of the topic. The questions were very clear and the instructions were easy to follow. On top of that, the questionnaire was fully explained to the participants and they were informed that the feedback will be provided through the manager of the fitness club. Therefore, if there’s anyone who wants to have access to the final copy of the dissertation, he/she can get it through the manager of the fitness club.

The researchers distributed 140 questionnaires at the fitness club for the morning, early afternoon, and late afternoon sessions. The gym members were given a chance to take the questionnaires and hand them over at the help-desk on the following day. This approach was considered because the gym members have limited time at the gym to multitask. In support, Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2004) highlighted that a questionnaire can be completed either in a supervised or unsupervised setting. However, only 99 questionnaires were returned after a month, and due to time constraints, 99 questionnaires were considered to represent the population of interest for the study.

4.5 Pre-testing the Questionnaire

The pre-testing of the questionnaire was taken into consideration to identify flaws. This assisted the researcher to have clarity on whether the participants do have a clear understanding of the questionnaire or. The questionnaire was pre-tested from the few students that gym at the university fitness club at the Pietermaritzburg campus. The main reason why it was not pretested on the selected fitness club members is because of the nature of the selected fitness club and to avoid a limited number of potential participants. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) describe pre-testing the questionnaire as trail administration to identify imperfections. Most of them complained about the number of questions included, however, it was impossible to reduce them. The anticipated time was 15 minutes, but others took 12 to 17 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

4.6 Validity

Sekaran and Bougie (2013) define validity as an instrument that measures what is intended to be measured. The author further stated that it is essential to consider validity specifically in quantitative research to critique the quality of the study. Three types of validity highlighted by the above authors are face, content and construct validity.

Malhotra (2010) defines face validity as the degree to which an assessment is subjectively seen as covering the concept it is supposed to measure. However, the significance of face validity was considered in this study, because the questionnaire measured the three constructs, namely; service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity. The confirmation

of this construct was sought in the pre-testing phase of the questionnaire and there were no issues raised with measuring what the three constructs were intended to measure.

The category of content validity is described as the measurement tool that adequately covers all the content of variables to be measured (Malhotra, 2010). In this regard, the significance of content validity can be claimed in this study, because most of the questions were derived from the theory of SERVPERF and Aaker's (1996) model, then grounded in the knowledge of the participants to ensure content validity is covered.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), construct validity is the extent to which a "test measures what it claims to be measuring." Malhotra (2010) indicated that construct validity is considered to question the process of whether the measure is indeed behaving similar to what the theory declares a measure of that construct should perform. However, service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity have been measured based on validated instruments as indicated in the literature.

4.7 Reliability

A Cronbach's Alpha test was utilised to gauge internal consistency and likelihood of the results. The Cronbach's Alpha test was considered since it is the most dominant test that has been used and recommended by researchers (Theodorakis *et al.*, 2014; Zongli, 2012; Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal, 2006; Draper *et al.*, 2006). This measure was considered as a criterion for the reliability of the study. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) define reliability as the assessment of consistency if repetitive measurements are considered. The author further pointed out that various types of tests can be used to measure reliability, namely; split-half reliability, multiple forms, Inter-rater, Test-re-Test techniques.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), the theoretical value of "Cronbach's Alpha varies from 0 to 1", with values below 0.7 not reliable.

4.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

After data collection, the questionnaires were numbered from one to ninety-nine and codes were assigned to each variable before being captured on SPSS programme for the analysis.

Regarding missing values, a code was also assigned to those missing values. Moreover, the data was presented in the form of both descriptive and inferential statistics.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), descriptive statistics present a manageable summary of the sample and its measures. The author further indicated that descriptive statistics address four major issues/measures; measures of frequency (percent, frequency, count & etc.), measures of central tendency (mode, mean, median & etc.), measures of dispersion or variation (standard deviation, range, variance & etc.) and measures of positions (percentile ranks, quartile ranks & so forth).

On the other hand, inferential statistics refer to techniques that permit the researcher to use the samples to make generalisations regarding the population from which the sample was drawn (Malhotra, 2010: Jefferson, 2004: Creswell, 2014). Noteworthy is that Sekaran and Bougie (2013) indicated that the techniques of inferential statistics are “the estimation of parameter(s)” and “testing of statistical hypotheses”.

Nevertheless, a number of statistical analyses are used to evaluate the data due to several objectives and two hypotheses. Hereunder is the theory concerning the statistical methods used.

4.8.1 Frequency Distributions

A frequency distribution refers to an overview of all different values that are represented in a graphical or tabular format, taken by variables in a sample (Creswell, 2014). In the frequency table, each entry contains the frequency or count of values within a particular sample, where, for example, a table summarises the distribution of values for the sample (Jefferson, 2004).

4.8.2 One-Sample Test

According to Wood and Herdeen (2007), a one-sample test is considered to check whether a population mean is significantly dissimilar to a hypothesized value. “*One-sample test can only compare a single mean to a specified constant*” (Bodet *et al.*, 2009).

4.8.3 Correlational Analysis

The correlational analysis depicts the items in a data set that relate to each other. The type of correlation analysis adopted in this study is bivariate correlation (Spearman's). This method of statistics is used to study the strength of a relation between two or more continuous variables. However, the correlation can be either negative or positive; a negative correlation occurs when one variable decreases and the other increases, whereas, a positive correlation occurs when one variable increases concurrently with the other. The significant correlations between the variables take place only if $p < 0.05$ (Malhotra, 2010).

4.8.4. Multiple Regression Analysis

The researcher adopted the multiple regression analysis to specifically analyse the relationships between the constructs (service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity) and give some thought of where future data will be. Therefore, the multiple regression analyses was considered to measure two or more variables under each construct. In simple terms, multiple regression independent variables (two or more) are considered in predicting the value of a dependent variable (Malhotra, 2010). The model summary, ANOVA table and Coefficients table are the output of multiple regression analysis. The model summary table reports on the strength of the correlation between the independent variables in the model and the dependent variable. While the ANOVA table compares the sum of variation between clusters with the sum of variation within clusters. The coefficients table specifies that the independent variable(s) in the equation significantly predict the dependent variable with the guidance of the p values ($p < 0.05$), which displays a significant relationship (Wood & Herdeen, 2007).

4.8.5 Analysis of Each Objective

An explanation of the data analysis for each objective follows hereunder.

“To evaluate how service quality and its dimensions are perceived by fitness club members based on the SERVPERF model”.

A descriptive analysis using means and the T-test was used to demonstrate the perceptions of the participants regarding service quality and its dimensions (“tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance & empathy”).

“To determine fitness club members’ current satisfaction levels of the services provided by the selected fitness club”.

A descriptive analysis using means was used for this objective to show the satisfaction level of gym members.

“To determine the perceptions of fitness club members concerning the brand equity of the club using Aaker’s model”.

This objective was analysed using descriptive analysis through means and a T-test to present the perceptions of the participants concerning brand equity and its dimensions.

“To determine the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity based on the fitness club studied”.

An inferential statistic using multiple regression analyses and correlational analysis “for overall service quality, overall customer satisfaction and overall brand equity” was used for the above objective to demonstrate the relationships.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

It is essential to consider the significance of ethical issues since the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is deemed to be the first priority. Therefore, gym members come first, then the researcher will follow. Certain protocols need to be adopted in the direction of the humanitarian and delicate treatment of respondents (Malhotra, 2010). According to Wood and Herdeen (2007), the respondents have to be informed regarding their identity to remain anonymous. Furthermore, Creswell (2014) argued that the respondents should also be updated that they can withdraw at any time without justification or not being punished; hence, their participation is voluntary.

Therefore, the researcher considered an application for gatekeeper’s permission from the selected fitness club and ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Westville campus (*attached in the appendix section*). The ethical clearance was applied for the purposes of collecting primary data. Moreover, the informed consent letter (*attached in the appendix section*) was also considered. The “confidentiality of the participants” was considered, hence, the questionnaires will be kept safe where no one would have access to them, apart from the researcher and the supervisor. This means that the completed questionnaires will be kept in a drawer under lock and key.

Moreover, the research data will be stored in a USB or external hard drive with back up on the researcher's laptops and will be password protected. After submitting the final draft, the research data will be submitted to the supervisor and kept for a minimum period of five years (2018 -2023) in a secure location by arrangement with the supervisor. Then after 2023, the data will be destroyed. However, this is employed to acknowledge and defend the "rights of human subjects".

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology that was used to determine the possible answers required for the research objectives. All the critical issues are fully discussed in relation to the objectives as well as hypotheses of the study. It is imperative for a researcher to present all the necessary steps considered for the quality of this study. The following chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

This section reports on the research findings that were collected through the quantitative method, as indicated in the previous chapter. The findings are presented in a statistical or numerical format. As stated in the previous chapter, this method was employed with the aim of bringing about a better understanding of the research topic and problem statement. The data collected from the ninety-nine (99) participants was analysed using the SPSS programme. A total of one hundred and forty (140) questionnaires were distributed and only ninety-nine were returned, resulting in a “response rate” of 70.7%. Ngceba (2017) and Williams *et al.*, (2014) argued that the 60 per cent and above “response rate” is appropriate for a research study. Hence, 70.7 per cent was deemed to be sufficient for this research study.

With reference to missing values, a code was also assigned to those missing values. This chapter is divided into four segments that are linked to the research objectives of the study. The aim of the study was to:

1. To evaluate how service quality and its dimensions are perceived by fitness club members based on the SERVPERF model.
2. To determine fitness club members’ current satisfaction levels of the services provided by the selected fitness club.
3. To determine the perceptions of fitness club members concerning the brand equity of the club using Aaker’s model.
4. To determine the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, and brand equity based on the selected fitness club.

The first section of this chapter reports on demographic results that are presented in a table format, while the second section consists of service quality findings that are presented in a descriptive format. The third section consists of gym members’ satisfaction results that are also

presented in a descriptive format. Lastly, the fourth section reports on brand equity findings through a descriptive analysis.

5.2 Demographic Findings

The demographic questions were included due to the value they have in understanding gym members' background and also has a significant value in the statistical analysis. The demographic profiles of the participants depict the gender, race, age group, number of years using the selected fitness club, income bracket per month and employment Status.

Table 5.2. 1 Gender

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	40	40.4	40.4	40.4
	Male	59	59.6	59.6	100.0
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	

The above table 5.2.1, shows that only 99 gym members participated in this study. Moreover, the majority of gym members (59.6%) were males, while, female participation amounted to a low score of 40.4% compared to females.

Table 5.2. 2 Race

Race					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	White	15	15.2	15.2	15.2
	African	68	68.7	68.7	83.8
	Coloured	6	6.1	6.1	89.9
	Indian	10	10.1	10.1	100.0
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	

According to the above table 5.2.2, 68.7% of the sample were Africans, followed by whites with 15.2% and Indians with 10.1%. Few coloureds participated in this study with a low score of 6.1%.

Table 5.2. 3 Age Group

Age group					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 to 26	19	19.2	19.2	19.2
	27 to 34	27	27.3	27.3	46.5
	35 to 42	22	22.2	22.2	68.7
	43 to 50	17	17.2	17.2	85.9
	51 and above	14	14.1	14.1	100.0
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	

The above table, 5.2.3, indicates that the majority of gym members who participated in this study are between the ages of 27 to 34. This group comprised 27.3 % of the sample, followed by the age group of 35 to 42, comprising 22.2% of the sample and age group 18 to 26 taking up 19.2% of the sample. The age group of 43 to 50 comprised 17.2% of the sample and the age group from 51 and above comprised of the smallest part of the sample (14.1%).

Table 5.2. 4 Number of Years Using the Selected Fitness Club

Number of years using this fitness club					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than a year	13	13.1	13.1	13.1
	1	22	22.2	22.2	35.4
	2	28	28.3	28.3	63.6
	3	13	13.1	13.1	76.8
	4	7	7.1	7.1	83.8
	5	8	8.1	8.1	91.9
	6	1	1.0	1.0	92.9
	7	3	3.0	3.0	96.0
	9	2	2.0	2.0	98.0
	10	1	1.0	1.0	99.0

	20	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	

The majority of gym members who participated in this study have been using this selected fitness club for two years (28.3%) and one year (22.2%). What's more, there is a great score of 13.1% of gym members that have less than a year using the selected fitness club. Gym members that have 3 years using the selected fitness club contributed with 13.1%. Furthermore, the low scores dominated with 8.1% for five years, 7.1% for four years, 3.0% for seven years, 2.0% for 9 years and 1% for six, ten and 20 years of gym members using the selected fitness club.

Table 5.2. 5 Income Bracket Per Month

Income bracket per month					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	R0 to R3000	16	16.2	16.3	16.3
	R3000 to R6000	4	4.0	4.1	20.4
	R6000 to R9000	12	12.1	12.2	32.7
	R9000 upwards	66	66.7	67.3	100.0
	Total	98	99.0	100.0	
Missing		1	1.0		
Total		99	100.0		

The above table, 5.2.5, demonstrates that the majority (66.7%) of the fitness club participants are earning R9000 and more per month. Moreover, a group between R 0 to R 3000 consist of 16.2%, followed by a group of R 6000 to R 9000 with 12.1%. The participants from an income bracket of R 3000 to R 6000 contributed with a low percentage of 4.0%. However, there was a gym member who did not like to present his/her income bracket per month.

Table 5.2. 6 Employment Status

Employment status					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Employed at a private sector	21	21.2	21.2	21.2
	Employed at a public sector	38	38.4	38.4	59.6
	Self employed	14	14.1	14.1	73.7
	Student	12	12.1	12.1	85.9
	Not employed	1	1.0	1.0	86.9
	Retired	13	13.1	13.1	100.0
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	

The above table 5.2.6, indicates that the majority of gym members (38.4%) that participated in this study are employed in the public sector, followed with 21.2% gym members that are employed at a private sector. In addition, 14.1% are self-employed, 13.1% are retired, 12.1% are students and 1% not employed.

An important discussion of service quality findings is presented hereunder.

5.3 Service Quality Findings

In the following section, the service quality findings are presented using means, T-Test and reliability analysis. These measures were specifically chosen to demonstrate the perceptions of the gym members concerning service quality and its dimensions at a selected fitness club in PMB. Moreover, the following analysis is linked to the objectives of the study.

5.3.1 Reliability Service Quality

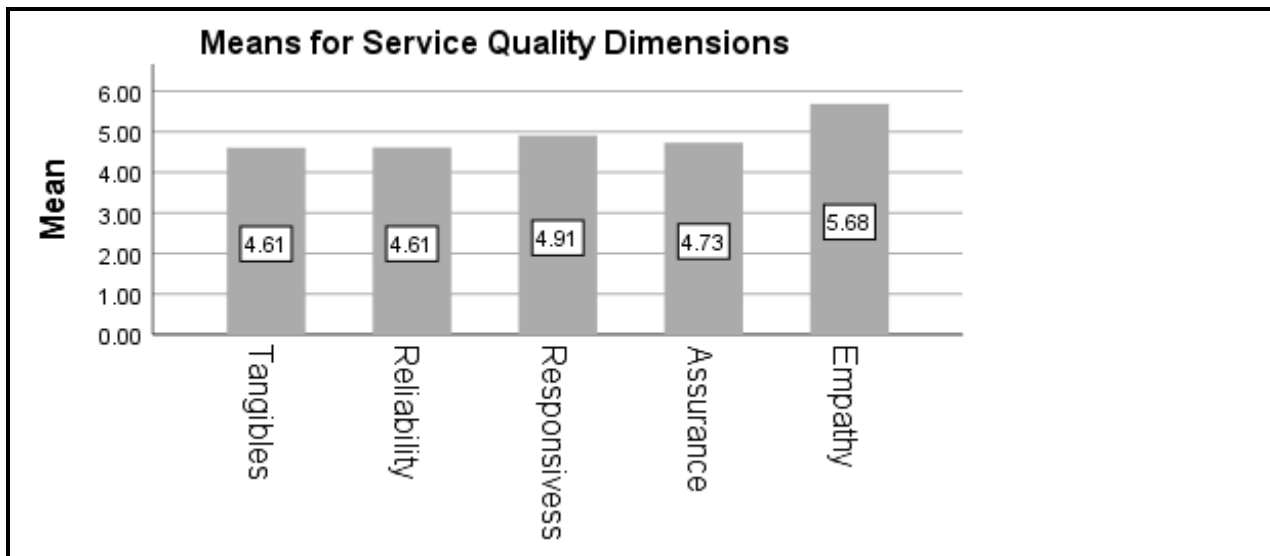
Table 5.3. 1 Reliability statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.891	22

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), the construct service quality is reliable since the Cronbach’s Alpha score is above 0.7. From Table 5.3.1, the Cronbach’s Alpha score is 0.891, which confirms that the twenty-two items measuring service quality have a relatively high internal consistency and would, therefore, be deemed to be reliable.

5.3.2 Means for Service Quality Dimensions

Figure 5.3.2. 1 Means for Service Quality Dimensions



The above figure, 5.3.2, depicts the mean for each of the “service quality dimensions” that was rated by the gym members. Empathy (mean=5.68) and Responsiveness (mean=4.91) have the highest mean values whereas Tangibles (mean=4.61) and Reliability (mean=4.61) have the lowest mean scores. However, in a 7 point Likert scale, a score of 4.61 would be considered to be above average, whereas a score of 3.5 would be deemed to be an average score.

5.3.3 One-Sample Statistics

In order to have a detailed understanding of the specific variables that have the lowest and highest score ratings, table 5.3.3 displays the mean for each of the 22 variables.

Table 5.3.3. 1 One-Sample Statistics

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Quality of equipment	99	5.18	1.110	.112
Dress code of the staff	99	5.76	.809	.081
Willingness of employees to offer assistance	99	5.69	.877	.088
The fitness club keeping its promises	97	4.81	1.158	.118
Notifying gym members in advance about any upcoming inconvenience.	99	4.47	1.373	.138
Staff never too busy to help regardless of gender	99	5.59	.881	.089
Feeling safe to use any equipment of the gym.	99	5.51	.761	.076
Provision of individual attention by gym instructors.	99	5.55	.812	.082
Staff capacity to manage overcrowded gym	99	3.96	1.177	.118
Responsiveness to complaints.	98	3.85	.956	.097
The availability of workout equipment.	99	3.15	1.350	.136
Adequacy of signs and directions.	99	3.87	.933	.094
Adequacy of space.	99	4.65	.918	.092
Cleanliness of equipment.	99	5.69	.853	.086
Convenience of operating hours.	99	6.00	.881	.089
Cleanliness of shower	99	5.53	.774	.078
Knowledge of staff	99	4.60	.755	.076
Background music	99	4.53	.993	.100
Staff is never too busy to demonstrate how to use the equipment.	99	5.26	.708	.071
Quick replacement or repairs of dysfunctional equipment.	99	2.44	1.280	.129
Staff knowledge in answering my questions.	99	4.29	.610	.061

From table 5.3.3 most of the variables were rated above the average and “convenience of operating hours” has the highest mean (mean=6.00) followed by the variable “dress code of the staff” (mean=5.76). However, low and below average scores were received for “Quick replacement or repairs of dysfunctional equipment” (mean=2.44) and “the availability of workout equipment” (mean=3.15).

5.3.4 Overall Service Quality

The T-test below presents the average score of 22 service quality variables that were rated by gym members on a scale of 1 to 7.

Table 5.3.4. 1 One-Sample Statistics

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
OVERALL SERVICE QUALITY	99	4.9079	.55094	.05537

The above table, 5.3.4.1, depicts a mean value of 4.9 for overall service quality. Taking into consideration that the gym members rated 22 service quality variables on a scale of 1 to 7, whereby 1 represents a very poor score and 7 represents an excellent score, it is evident that a mean value of 4.9 for overall service quality can be considered as slightly good.

The discussion hereunder addresses the customer satisfaction findings.

5.4 Customer Satisfaction Findings

This section briefly presents the findings of gym member's satisfaction levels in a descriptive analysis. Means and reliability analysis were included in answering the objectives of the study.

5.4.1 Reliability Customer Satisfaction

Table 5.4. 1 Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.833	9

Sekaran and Bougie (2013) indicated that, if a reliability score is less than 0.60 is deemed to be poor, those at the 0.7 level and above are considered to be "reliable". Therefore, based on the

Cronbach Alpha test depicted in table 5.4.1 above, the nine items operationalising customer satisfaction have relatively high internal consistency, with a score of 0.833 making customer satisfaction a reliable construct for this study.

5.4.2 Means for Customer satisfaction

It is important to present all the customer satisfaction variables that have the lowest and highest score ratings.

Table 5.4. 2 Means for Customer Satisfaction

Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean
I believe that this fitness club offers affordable prices as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg.	99	5.70
I am very happy with the overall maintenance of cleanliness	99	5.58
I believe that this fitness club considers its gym members as the first priority.	99	4.72
I don't regret my choice to join this fitness club.	99	4.58
Overall, I am satisfied with this fitness club.	99	4.57
Regardless of time and money, there is value provided from service quality.	99	4.49
I am very happy with the overall services offered by the fitness club.	99	4.49
Due to value provided by this fitness club, as compared to other fitness clubs, I still select this fitness club as my first preference.	99	4.34

I would not consider myself switching to another fitness club.	99	3.96
Valid N (listwise)	99	

It is evident from Table 5.4.2 above that gym members are satisfied with the services of the selected fitness club, as all the mean scores are above the average value of 3.5. The highest mean is “I believe that this fitness club offers affordable prices as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg” (mean=5.70), followed by “I am very happy with overall maintenance of cleanliness” (mean=5.58). The lowest mean score is (mean=3.96) for “I would not consider myself switching to another fitness club”. However, even this score is above the average value of 3.5.

5.4.3 Overall Customer Satisfaction

The T-test below presents the average score of 9 customer satisfaction variables that were rated by gym members on a scale of 1 to 7.

Table 5.4.3. 1 One-Sample Statistics

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
OVERALL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	99	4.7138	.59351	.05965

According to the above table 5.4.3.1, the overall customer satisfaction mean value is 4.7. Considering that the gym members rated 9 customer satisfaction variables on a scale of 1 to 7, whereby 1 represents a low score and 7 represents a high score, a mean value of 4.7 for overall customer satisfaction, therefore, can be considered as slightly satisfactory since it’s rated above the average value of 3.5.

5.4.3.2: One-Sample Test

The discussion hereunder demonstrates how gym members rated the 9 customer satisfaction variables on a scale of 1 to 7, since the researcher was expecting all the variables to be rated as exceptional. Therefore, a test value of 3.5 was not considered because anything that is less than five is not deemed to be exceptional.

Table 5.4.3. 2 One-Sample Test

One-Sample Test							
		Test Value = 5					
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Lower	Upper						
OVERALL SATISFACTION	CUSTOMER	-4.798	98	.000	-.28620	-.4046	-.1678

It is evident from the above table, 5.4.3.2, that the overall customer satisfaction p-value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected because there is strong evidence at 5% level of significance to conclude that the fitness club members are not highly satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club.

The following discussion presents the perceptions of fitness club members concerning the brand equity of the selected fitness club.

5.5 Brand Equity Findings

Hereunder, brand equity findings are presented in a descriptive analysis, mean, T-test and reliability analysis.

5.5.1 Reliability Brand Equity

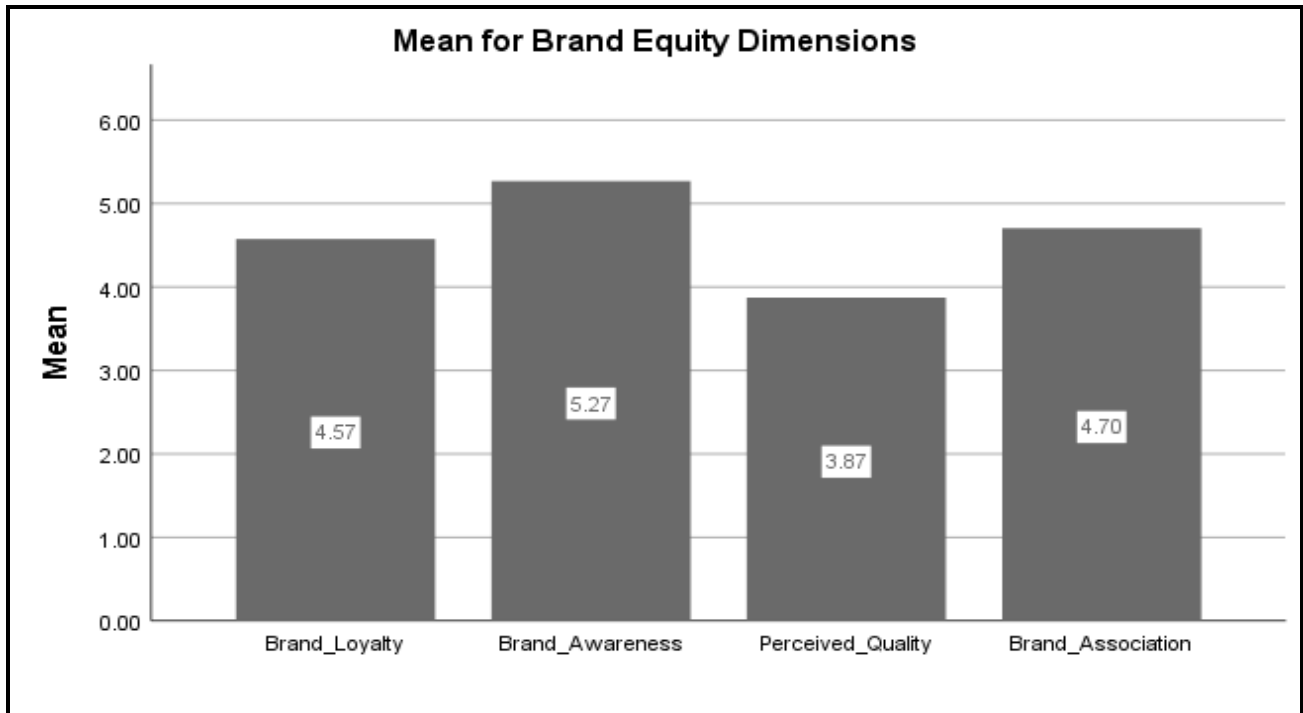
Table 5.5. 1 Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.882	12

From the table 5.5.1 above, the twelve items for brand equity are deemed to be reliable measures of the construct brand equity as the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.882 is above 0.8.

5.5.2 Means Values for the Brand Equity Dimensions

Figure 5.5.2. 1 Means for Brand Equity Dimensions



From the above figure, 5.5.2.1, brand awareness with a mean score of (mean=5.27) is the highest, brand association mean score (mean=4.70) is the second highest, followed by brand loyalty mean score (mean=4.57) and perceived quality mean score (mean=3.87) is the lowest.

5.5.3 One-Sample Test

T-test is presented to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding pertaining to each variables of brand equity that have the highest and lowest scores ratings.

Table 5.5.3. 1 One-Sample Statistics

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The brand image of this fitness club is of a high quality.	99	4.08	1.056	.106
In my own view, this fitness club is a leading brand as compared to others.	99	3.61	1.058	.106
I think most of the Scottsville residents are fully aware of this fitness club.	98	4.96	.849	.086
The Scottsville location does match the brand positioning of this fitness club.	99	4.83	.959	.096
I can easily recognize the logo of this fitness club.	99	5.57	.823	.083
I would recommend this fitness club to other people.	99	4.81	1.007	.101
The brand image of this fitness club is associated with quality.	99	4.34	.939	.094
I can easily identify the uniqueness of this fitness club.	99	4.94	.967	.097
I think this fitness club has a great credibility as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg.	99	3.93	.929	.093
I am not ashamed of using this fitness club.	99	4.67	.808	.081
I have good reasons to support this fitness club over competing ones.	99	4.80	.903	.091
If given the choice again, I will still gym at this fitness club.	99	4.02	1.317	.132

From the above table 5.5.3, all the mean scores of brand equity variables are above average, but there are lowest and highest scores. Brand awareness variables “I can easily recognise the logo of this fitness club” (mean=5.57), and, “I think most of the Scottsville residents are fully aware of this fitness club” (mean=4.96) have the highest scores compared to other variables. Perceived quality variables “In my own view, this fitness club is a leading brand as compared to others” (mean=3.61), “I think this fitness club has a great credibility as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg” (mean=3.93) have the lowest scores. A brand loyalty variable “If given the choice again, I will still gym at this fitness club” (mean=4.02) has the lowest score.

5.5.4 Overall Brand Equity

The T-test below presents the average score of 12 brand equity variables that were rated by gym members on a scale of 1 to 7.

Table 5.5.4. 1 One-Sample Statistics

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
OVERALL BRAND EQUITY	99	4.6042	.62411	.06273

From the above table 5.5.4.1, the mean value for overall brand equity is 4.6. This mean value can be deemed to be slightly good; hence, it is above the average value of 3.5. The gym members were asked to rate the brand equity statements on a scale of 1 to 7 to show their level of disagreement/agreement, whereby scores closer to 1 represent strong disagreement and scores closer to 7 represent strong agreement.

The following discussion presents the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity.

5.6 Correlations Coffience

This method is selected to measure the strength and type of relationship between two variables. The One Sample K-S test was used to check whether the data is normal or not. However, Spearmen’s correlation is used because there is an assumption that the data is not normal. Theodorakis *et al.*, (2014) pointed out that the statisticians recommend a nonparamatic version of the test when data is not normal.

Table 5.6. 1 Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction Correlations

Correlations							
Spearman's rho		Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Overall Customer Satisfaction
OVERALL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	Correlation Coefficient	.497**	.390**	.461**	.545**	.240*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.017	.
	N	99	99	99	99	99	99
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

According to the above table, 5.6.1, the correlation between assurance and overall customer satisfaction is 0.545, followed by the correlation between tangibles and overall customer satisfaction with 0.497. Even though other service quality dimensions received low scores, that does not, however, change the fact that there is a positive and strong linear relationship between service quality dimensions and overall customer satisfaction.

Table 5.6. 2 Service Quality and Brand Equity Correlations

		Correlations								
Spearman's rho		Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Brand Loyalty	Brand Awareness	Perceived Quality	Brand Association
Tangibles	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.485**	.663**	.481**	.352**	.463**	.329**	.420**	.498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000
	N	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
Reliability	Correlation Coefficient	.485**	1.000	.606**	.423**	.484**	.234*	.223*	.264**	.263**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.020	.027	.008	.009
	N	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
Responsiveness	Correlation Coefficient	.663**	.606**	1.000	.508**	.567**	.358**	.259**	.328**	.377**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.010	.001	.000
	N	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
Assurance	Correlation Coefficient	.481**	.423**	.508**	1.000	.555**	.359**	.212*	.315**	.316**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.035	.001	.001
	N	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
Empathy	Correlation Coefficient	.352**	.484**	.567**	.555**	1.000	-.036	.149	.078	.060
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.723	.140	.445	.553
	N	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).										

From the above table, 5.6.2, there is a correlation between the four dimensions of service quality (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness & assurance) and four dimensions of brand equity (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality & brand association). The p-value confirmed that there is a positive and strong linear relationship between the above mentioned dimensions. However, there is a negative correlation between empathy and brand loyalty, whilst there is a positive correlation between empathy and the other three brand equity dimensions (brand awareness, perceived quality & brand association). Nevertheless, the p-value revealed that there is not enough evidence to show that there is a correlation between empathy and brand equity dimensions (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality & brand association).

Hereunder, the relationship between overall service quality, overall customer satisfaction and overall brand equity findings are presented.

5.7 The Relationship between Overall Service Quality and Overall Customer Satisfaction

Table 5.7. 1 Model Summary

Model Summary^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.681 ^a	.463	.458	.43712
a. Predictors: (Constant), Overall_Service_Quality				
b. Dependent Variable: Overall_Customer_Satisfaction				

From the above table, 5.4.4, the model summary statistics predict 46.3% (R-Square = 0.463) of the dependent variable (overall customer satisfaction) can be explained by its linear relationship with the explanatory/independent variable (overall service quality).

Table 5.7. 2 ANOVA

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.987	1	15.987	83.671	.000^b
	Residual	18.534	97	.191		
	Total	34.521	98			
a. Dependent Variable: Overall_Customer_Satisfaction						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Overall_Service_Quality						

According to the above table 5.4.4.1, the results specify that the model is a significant predictor of overall customer satisfaction (F=83.671, p<0.05).

Table 5.7. 3 Coefficients

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.241	.382		3.248	.002	.483	2.000
	Overall_Service_Quality	.725	.079	.681	9.147	.000	.568	.882
a. Dependent Variable: Overall_Customer_Satisfaction								

The above table, 5.4.4.2, shows that overall service quality is significantly and positively related to overall customer satisfaction ($\beta=0.681$, sig=0.000). In addition, the results outline that a 1-unit increase in overall service quality will bring about a 0.725-unit “increase” in overall customer satisfaction.

5.8 The Relationship between Overall Service Quality and Overall Brand Equity

Table 5.8. 1 Model Summary

Model Summary^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.573 ^a	.328	.321	.52984
a. Predictors: (Constant), Overall_Service_Quality				
b. Dependent Variable: Overall_Brand_Equity				

The above table, 5.5.6, indicates that 32.8% of the variability in the dependent variable (overall brand equity) can be accounted for by all the independent variables (overall service quality).

Table 5.8. 2 ANOVA

ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.308	1	13.308	47.405	.000^b
	Residual	27.231	97	.281		
	Total	40.539	98			
a. Dependent Variable: Overall_Brand_Equity						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Overall_Service_Quality						

According to the above table, 5.5.6.1, F and Sig are statistically significant, demonstrating that our model fits the data (F=47.405, p<0.05).

Table 5.8. 3 Coefficients

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.377	.463		2.972	.004	.457	2.296
	Overall_Service_Quality	.661	.096	.573	6.885	.000	.471	.852

a. Dependent Variable: Overall_Brand_Equity

The above table, 5.5.6.2, shows that overall service quality is significantly and positively related to overall brand equity ($\beta=0.573$, Sig=0.000). Additionally, the results outline that a 1-unit increase in overall service quality will produce a 0.661-unit increase in overall brand equity.

The following discussion presents the key findings in relation to each objective.

5.9 Summary of the Research Objectives

Table 5.9. 1 Summary of the Research Objectives

OBJECTIVES	KEY FINDINGS
<p>“To evaluate how service quality and its dimensions are perceived by fitness club members based on the SERVPERF model”.</p>	<p>a. “Empathy and Responsiveness have the highest mean values, whereas Tangibles and Reliability have the lowest mean scores. However, all the dimensions were above the average score of 3.5”.</p> <p>b. Most of the 22 variables were rated above the average”. However, low and below average scores were received for “Quick replacement or repairs of dysfunctional equipment” and “the availability of workout</p>

	<p>equipment.”</p> <p>c. The mean for overall service quality was above average.</p>
<p>“To determine fitness club members’ current satisfaction levels of the services provided by the selected fitness club”.</p>	<p>a. As all the mean scores for satisfaction variables were above the average value of 3.5.</p> <p>b. The mean for overall customer satisfaction was above average.</p>
<p>“To determine the perceptions of fitness club members concerning the brand equity of the club using Aaker’s model”.</p>	<p>a. Brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty received the highest mean scores, whilst the perceived quality mean score was the lowest.</p> <p>b. All the mean scores of each brand equity variables were rated above average.</p> <p>c. The mean score for brand equity was above average.</p>
<p>“To determine the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity based on the selected fitness club”.</p>	<p>a. There is a positive and strong linear relationship between service quality dimensions and overall customer satisfaction.</p> <p>b. There is a correlation between the four dimensions of service quality (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness & assurance) and four dimensions of brand equity (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality & brand association). However, there is a negative correlation between empathy and brand loyalty, whilst there is a positive correlation between empathy and the other three brand equity</p>

	<p>dimensions (brand awareness, perceived quality & brand association).</p> <p>c. Overall service quality is significantly and positively related to overall customer satisfaction.</p> <p>d. Overall service quality is significantly and positively related to overall brand equity.</p>
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5.10 Decision on the Research Hypotheses

Table 5.10. 1 Decision on the Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Decision taken
H0_A : “The current fitness club members are highly satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club”.	REJECTED
H1_B : “The current fitness club members are not satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club”.	ACCEPTED
H2_A : “There is a significant, positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction”.	ACCEPTED
H3_B : “There is no significant, positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction”.	REJECTED
H4_A : “There is a significant, positive relationship between service quality and brand equity”.	REJECTED
H5_B : “There is no significant, positive relationship between service quality and brand equity”.	ACCEPTED

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the most significant results of the study, using “descriptive and inferential statistics”. The findings revealed the most important factors that gym members are satisfied with, as well as those that they are not highly satisfied with, which is something that requires special attention. The researcher also included “overall service quality, overall customer satisfaction and overall brand equity” due to the fact that the literature alluded to the importance of these constructs.

The demographic findings are going to be linked significantly in the following chapter to show their value in the study. The service quality findings are related to the first objective, whilst customer satisfaction findings are related to the second objective and brand equity findings are related to the third objective. The fourth objective was strategically covered through correlation analyses under customer satisfaction findings as well as brand equity findings.

The following chapter concentrates on the discussion of these results concerning the objectives, hypotheses and literature of the study.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion of the Results

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine service quality, gym members' satisfaction and brand equity at a selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg. The findings were expected to address the "problem statement and objectives" of the study. The findings provided an insight into service quality ratings, gym members satisfaction and brand equity ratings.

This study is intended to make an important contribution regarding the gaps in knowledge of the three constructs; "service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity" within the fitness industry. Evidently, this is most exigent because it will help the SMMEs within the industry in terms of their knowledge of the key factors that are considered to be important by the fitness club members.

However, this chapter presents the discussion of the information gathered from the fitness club members at a selected fitness club and is supported by the literature. Most importantly, "failures and major problems" are key in the following discussion of the findings.

This section is presented in the following sequence; "service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity". The hypotheses will be part of the discussion in accordance with the objectives of the study. What is more, is that this discussion will be grounded by the literature and the appropriateness of the conceptual framework will be reflected. However, measuring these three constructs is pivotal in determining gym members' expectations and perceptions about the overall services offered by a fitness club. In addition, this discussion will specify where the selected fitness club stands in the minds of gym members as well as business wise. A brief discussion of this chapter is as follows.

6.2 Service Quality and Its Dimensions

The gym members rated service quality dimensions, and all of them were rated above average. However, there were lowest and highest scores.

This is a great achievement for a selected fitness club, due to the fact that empathy is considered to be a significant ingredient that is used to differentiate a fitness club amongst other rivals. It is due to the fact that empathy is linked with great factors that can be used to generate a maximum satisfaction of gym members (Mohr *et al.*, 1994). Those factors are consistency in aiding, training to deal with different people on a daily basis, a listening skill, gym member's interest and attention. Kattara *et al.*, (2008) pointed out that these factors are taken for granted within the fitness industry, particularly by SMMEs.

The low rating for the tangibles dimension, is deemed to be a serious challenge that requires much attention due to the fact that tangibles are the central core of the business within the fitness industry. A study that was conducted by Soita (2012) also found that there was a biggest gap between "expectations and perceptions" of Uganda's gym members concerning tangibles. According to Zeithaml *et al.*, (2006), most of the activities and services depend on the equipment and facilities. This dimension is frequently used to communicate the desired image and persuasive quality to the public. If the equipment or facilities are not functioning as expected or are limited, then the actual delivery of the service is affected outrageously. Even though gym members are joining a fitness club for different purposes, that does not take away the fact that tangibles are expected to be hundred per cent up to date. A study that was conducted by IDEA (2007), revealed that gym members are now looking for the state-of-the-art facilities that have almost everything that a sports person is looking for, but not a weightlifter. It is advisable for the selected fitness club to consider tangibles as a priority because there is a great possibility that gym members are leaving this fitness club after two to three years due to this reason.

Reliability also received the same lowest ratings as tangibles. This can reflect a negative perception because gym members are always searching for a fitness club that keeps its promises. However, sometimes gym members tend to have high expectations because of the reputation, price or the type of people that are using that selected fitness club. Schneider *et al.*, (2009) pointed out that reliability is what gym members are looking for since it relates to the capacity to execute the promised services correctly without errors. Informing gym members about an inconvenience is critical within the fitness industry (Ngeceba, 2017). In support, Andaleeb and Conway (2006) stressed that providing exceptional services at all times is significant, but it all depends on the type of staff you have.

Responsiveness was found to be the second highest dimension compared to others. This is also deemed to be a great achievement for the selected fitness club. It is because this dimension consists of significant variables like customer complaints, willingness to offer assistance, knowledge to answer questions and staff is never too busy to help, regardless of gender. In support, Hutt and Speh (2012) found responsiveness to have the highest score amongst other dimensions. Furthermore, the authors suggest that “being true to your words” is critical because it is another recipe to win gym members’ loyalty. Positive perception is earned on responsiveness because, as a staff member, you always find possible ways to inform gym members about feedback that is meaningful. If you promise to call a gym member concerning complaints or what so ever, then do so within the time frame you agreed on.

Assurance was also the third highest dimension compared to others. This is an important dimension within the fitness industry, even though in some other industries it is not that important. Mohammad *et al.*, (2014) argue that sometimes it is difficult to achieve or maintain assurance within the fitness industry. It is the fact that assurance comprises high risk and outcomes that are beyond the control of the business. Assurance correlate with safety issues of using equipment, safe parking, professionalism, etc. Therefore, for the selected fitness club to get a good score that is above average is essential since this dimension can be used as a competitive advantage.

6.2.1 Service Quality Variables

The one-sample test revealed that most of the 22-variables were rated above the average and “convenience of operating hours” was the highest, followed by “dress code of the staff”. These are positive results, since a selected fitness club can have a clear picture concerning the specific variables that are rated high.

However, other variables received a poor score that is below average, “Quick replacement or repairs of dysfunctional equipment” and “the availability of workout equipment.” These are two variables that suggest more attention since the availability of workout equipment is deemed to be significant within the fitness industry. Furthermore, equipment is the main core of the business since most of the gym members are always using it. An adequate amount of the right equipment reduces the training time of gym members, and it also offers exclusive

exercise programmes. Zeithaml *et al.*, (2006) highlighted the fact that tangibles are used to communicate the desired image and persuasive quality to the public. Moreover, most of the other activities and services depend on the gym member's usage of the equipment and facilities. Hence, the authors further elaborated that if the equipment or facilities are not functioning as expected, then the actual delivery of the service is affected outrageously.

6.2.2 Service Quality Summary

The “**first objective**” of the study is to evaluate how service quality and its dimensions are perceived by fitness club members based on the SERVPERF model. Therefore, the above discussion has highlighted the perceptions of fitness club members with regards to service quality and its dimensions. Empathy received the highest score, followed by responsiveness and assurance, whereas both tangibles and reliability received relatively similar low scores. Most of the 22-variables were rated above the average and “convenience of operating hours as well as the dress code of the staff” received the highest ratings. However, other significant variables received a poor rating, which is below the average value of 3.5. These variables were “Quick replacement or repairs of dysfunctional equipment and the availability of workout equipment.” Therefore, the null hypothesis ($H0_A$) was rejected due to the fact that there are other service quality variables that gym members are not satisfied with. ($H0_A$: *The current fitness club members are highly satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club*).

6.3 Customer Satisfaction

The “**second objective**” of the research is to determine fitness club members' current satisfaction levels of the services provided by the selected fitness club. The above discussion has highlighted the satisfaction level of the services offered by the selected fitness club. This has resulted from the fact that Metha *et al.*, (2000) detailed that gym members' satisfaction is usually shaped by different factors that arise from service experiences. However, a full discussion concerning the gym members' current satisfaction levels of the services provided by the selected fitness club is as follows.

It is evident from the previous chapter (table 5.4.2) that gym members are in some way okay with the services of the selected fitness club. Hence, all of the mean scores were above the

average value of 3.5. This is a good achievement for the selected fitness club. It is due to the fact that Tsitskari *et al.*, (2006) believe that satisfied gym members tend to be loyal and frequently visit the fitness club. Furthermore, Wood and Brotherton (2008) opine that satisfied fitness club members tend to attract new members because they spread a positive word of mouth about their experiences. This confirms the fact that different factors influence gym members' satisfaction levels, hence there are other service quality variables that gym members are not satisfied with, but they are satisfied with the services (Raaphorst, 2010; Hutt & Speh, 2012; Ong Lai Teik, 2015).

The customer satisfaction variables that received the highest score are; “I believe that this fitness club offers affordable prices as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg” and followed by “I am very happy with the overall maintenance of cleanliness”. A study that was conducted by Metha, Lalwani, and Li Han (2000) revealed that factors like price, cleanliness, variety of equipment and individual attention are essential factors that contribute to gym members' satisfaction. In support, Saravanan and Rao (2007) pointed-out that price seems to be a contributing factor that the lower-class gym members are considering when selecting a fitness club. Then again, the upper-class gym members have a perception that high price means good quality and, therefore, they will be highly satisfied. This is confirmed by the findings of income bracket per month, for gym members at the selected fitness club. The table, 5.2.5 (from the previous chapter), revealed that most of the gym members who participated in this study earn more than R 9000 per month with a high score of 66.7%, while, the lower class from the group between R 0 to R 3000 was the second highest with 16.2%. Therefore, the selected fitness club does accommodate all the social class categories (upper, middle and lower classes). However, a great question would be, is 16.2% a decent number to represent the majority of the South African population?

However, there was a customer satisfaction variable that received the lowest score, “I would not consider myself switching to another fitness club.” Even though it was above the average value of 3.5, this means that there are gym members who are slightly dissatisfied. In support, the number of years for participants using the selected fitness club revealed that the majority of fitness club members are using this selected fitness club for a period of one to two years. After that, the numbers of gym members using the selected fitness club tend to decline. In light of this, the advice of Gitomers (2001:246) should be borne in mind, that satisfaction might not be an indication that a gym member will automatically become loyal to a fitness

club. In spite of that, this requires more attention, since dissatisfied gym members tend to search for a better fitness club and retaining dissatisfied gym members is very difficult, since well-recognised fitness clubs are always implementing interesting strategies (Harris & Mark, 2004; Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal, 2006).

With regards to the number of years for participants using the selected fitness club, the majority of gym members are using this selected fitness club for a period of one to two years. After that, the numbers of fitness club members using the selected fitness club tend to decline. Therefore, there is a great possibility that the fitness club members are either changing the fitness club after two to three years. This could imply that fitness club members are either losing interest or not fully satisfied with the services they are offered. A study that was conducted by Dhurup *et al.*, (2006) revealed that most of the fitness clubs are not concentrating on meeting and exceeding the needs of fitness club members. Furthermore, the results also showed that fitness club members tend to look for a better fitness club due to dissatisfaction with poor services. Therefore, it is important for a selected fitness club to consider the severe impact of this matter. In support, Bodet (2006) has indicated that maintaining gym members is vital than attracting the new members.

6.3.1 Customer Satisfaction Summary

According to the findings, most of the gym members are deemed to be satisfied with the services of the selected fitness club. Even though they are satisfied, there, however, are other things that they are not highly satisfied with, as alluded to.

All of the mean scores were above the average value of 3.5. The highest mean score was on “I believe that this fitness club offers affordable prices as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg”, followed by “I am very happy with overall maintenance of cleanliness.” However, other variables received a low rating that is deemed to be acceptable, because it is above the average value of 3.5. In this regard, this is an indication that not all fitness club members are “highly” satisfied with services provided by the selected fitness club. Therefore, an alternative hypothesis (*H_{1B}*) was accepted due the fact that not all the fitness club members are highly satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club. (*H_{1B}: The current fitness club members are not highly satisfied with the services offered by the selected fitness club*).

6.4 Brand Equity

The fitness club members rated the brand equity dimensions and there were highest scores and lowest scores.

The brand awareness component was witnessed by gym members to be the highest. Due to an increasing number of fitness clubs within the South African industry, building remarkable brand awareness is considered to be necessary. According to Mohammad, Mahmoud and Moein (2014), “brand awareness” is strongly created on “repeated exposure” through the marketing techniques of the brand. Therefore, it is essential to adopt exciting strategies that can protect the reputation of a brand because of the competitive environment (Tong & Hawley, 2009; Wright *et al.*, 2017). Tong and Hawley (2009) further pointed out that the awareness of a fitness club makes the job of the staff members to be simple and easier since people will be aware of the brand and its benefits.

Regarding perceived quality as being rated the lowest amongst other brand equity components, this is deemed to be a serious challenge. The reasoning behind this is that more weight is placed on perceived quality, since it is considered to be a weapon in differentiating the fitness club from competitors. The dimension also stimulates the potential gym member’s interest to be part of the fitness club (The Academy of Marketing Science & Sports, 2014). Therefore, the bright future of the selected fitness club is deemed to be questionable since “perceived quality” is professed to be slightly poor. According to Wright *et al.* (2017), fitness club members are very conscious about the status of a fitness club, because it brings conceit, excitement and other positive associations in the minds of fitness club members. Another importance of this component is brand extension; therefore, there is a possibility that the selected fitness club can have limited opportunities, if they are prevailing.

Brand association was found to be the second highest. This is deemed to be an important dimension within the fitness industry (Tong & Hawley, 2009). A study that was conducted by Alexandris *et al.*, (2008) revealed that the qualities associated with a brand are usually a motivational factor for fitness club members to consider when selecting a fitness club. Furthermore, service quality has a “phenomenal” influence on brand association. For that reason, this suggests that it is important to work on service quality in order to achieve

positive brand associations. Moreover, the authors further discovered that the unique qualities associated with a brand are usually a motivational factor for gym members to consider a fitness club. However, Tong and Hawley (2009) argued that the way in which brand association is communicated sometimes gets misinterpreted by consumers concerning the fitness club. According to Ngceba (2017), it is necessary to have control on brand association and it should be evaluated continuously.

With regards to brand loyalty, the findings revealed that it was rated third amongst the four components of brand equity. Yoo *et al.* (2000) found that, in the context of the fitness industry, brand loyalty is reflected in a mix of gym members' behaviour and positive attitudes about a brand. This suggests that a gym member remains loyal only if the fitness club is providing better services at all times. Wood and Herdeen (2007) confirmed the measurements of brand loyalty in the fitness industry as the tolerance of inconsistent prices, positive word-of-mouth about the brand, renewal of contracts and an increasing number of gym members who are joining the fitness club every month. Therefore, if the above measures are hardly taking place, then the fitness club should measure gym members' satisfaction level continuously.

6.4.1 Brand Equity Variables

The results revealed that all the mean scores of brand equity variables are above average but there are lowest and highest scores.

The Brand awareness variables "I can easily recognise the logo of this fitness club" and "I think most of the Scottsville residents are fully aware of this fitness club" received the highest scores compared to other variables. These are positive results because almost everyone in Scottsville seems to be fully aware of the selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg. In support, Aaker (1996) pointed out that brand name, logo, symbols and other certain associations that attached to the brand are considered to be building blocks and measures of brand awareness. According to Keller (2008), brand recognition plays a significant role in influencing the decision-making process of a customer.

However, perceived quality variables "In my own view, this fitness club is a leading brand as compared to others" and, "I think this fitness club has great credibility as compared to other

fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg” received the lowest scores. This suggests that the other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg are doing better than the selected fitness club. In addition, “strategic brand management” is, therefore, essential to protect the value of the brand continuously.

6.4.2 Brand Equity Summary

The **third objective** of the study is to determine the perceptions of fitness club members concerning the brand equity of the selected fitness club using Aaker’s model. The above discussion on brand equity has shed light on the perceptions of gym members concerning the brand equity of the selected fitness club.

The gym members rated brand equity components as follows; brand awareness received the highest score, brand association was the second highest, followed by brand loyalty and perceived quality received the lowest score. All the mean scores of brand equity variables were above average, but there are lowest and highest scores. The brand awareness variables “I can easily recognize the logo of this fitness club” and “I think most of the Scottsville residents are fully aware of this fitness club” received the highest scores compared to other variables. Perceived quality variables “In my own view, this fitness club is a leading brand as compared to others” and, “I think this fitness club has a great credibility as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg” received the lowest scores. In addition, a brand loyalty variable “If given the choice again, I will still gym at this fitness club” also received the lowest score. Therefore, this is how gym members perceived the brand equity of the selected fitness club. The gym members’ perceptions suggest that “strategic brand management” is optional because other brands are doing well within the fitness industry, specifically in Pietermaritzburg.

6.5 Relationship between Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Brand Equity

Determining the relationships between “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity” addresses the **fourth objective** of the study.

It is essential for marketers to have a detailed understanding of which “service quality” dimensions predict “overall customer satisfaction” within the fitness industry. In this regard,

it will be undemanding for managers to have a better understanding of which “service quality dimensions” they need to ameliorate for meeting or exceeding fitness club members perceptions or expectations. According to the findings, there is a significant and positive correlation between service quality dimensions (tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance & empathy) and overall customer satisfaction. It is noteworthy to mention that the customer satisfaction ratings were combined for the benefit of outlining the key service quality dimensions that predict overall customer satisfaction. Teik (2015) found that the warm atmosphere, adequate space and modern facilities are few service quality factors that have a significant effect on gym members’ satisfaction. Therefore, this confirms the argument of Saravanan and Rao (2007) that the service aspects contributing to customer satisfaction in the health club context are still misunderstood. It is because the findings between the two constructs will always be changing, depending on gym members’ experiences with regards to service quality.

Concerning “overall service quality” and “overall customer satisfaction”, the findings illustrated that there is a significant and “positive” relationship between the two constructs. Additionally, the results also depicted that any increase in overall service quality will tend to have an increase as well in overall customer satisfaction. Soita (2012) also found similar results that there is a strong relationship between overall service perceptions and overall members’ satisfaction.

For the above mentioned reasons, the null hypothesis (H_{2A}) was accepted, since there is enough evidence to conclude that there is a significant, positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

According to the literature, measuring the equity of your brand is important because of the benefits associated with the construct, especially in a competitive environment. However, the findings revealed that there are only four out of five service quality dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness & assurance) that have a significant and positive correlation with brand equity components; brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness and brand association. This suggests that brand equity is built based on service quality, hence tangibles and brand equity dimensions have a positive correlation. Furthermore, it also outlines the fact that there is a relationship between “service quality and brand equity”, but not much attention has been given to such constructs within the fitness industry. McKenzie *et al.*, (2016) found

the relationship between “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity” to be significant, especially within the fitness industry. It is due to the inordinate benefits that are deemed to be vital during the evaluation or selection process of a fitness club.

However, the findings also confirmed that there is not enough evidence to conclude that there is a correlation between empathy and brand equity dimensions (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality & brand association). This confirms that not all the service quality dimensions will tend to have a significant positive relationship with brand equity dimensions. As a result, overall service quality and overall brand equity were included for further explanations.

The results depicted that overall service quality is significant and positively correlated with overall brand equity. Moreover, the findings also portrayed that any increase in overall service quality will tend to influence the overall brand equity. This suggests that service quality is a weapon to be considered when crafting brand equity within the fitness industry (Williams & Pedersen, 2012). Furthermore, therefore, once brand equity is established, fitness club members will tend to have a positive experience, trust and other indirect factors that will enable a fitness club to have a competitive advantage against rivals.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{4A}) was rejected because a relationship exists only on selective variables.

6.5.1 The Summary of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Brand Equity Relationships.

According to the findings, the relationship between the three constructs does exist but only certain dimensions or variables. Significant and positive correlation was found to exist between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction. Moreover, under brand equity results, a significant and positive correlation exists amongst the following variables; tangibles with brand equity variables, reliability with brand equity variables and, lastly, responsiveness with brand equity variables.

However, there was no significant correlation between; empathy and brand equity components, But then, there is a relationship between overall service quality, overall

customer satisfaction and overall brand equity. Therefore, *H4_A* is rejected due the fact that a significant positive relationship exists only on selective variables. (**H4_A**: *There is a significant, positive relationship between service quality and brand equity*).

6.6 Conclusion

The above discussion has addressed the four objectives of the study concerning the research findings. The study further indicated the service gaps, brand equity gaps and customer satisfaction level. There are new areas that have been identified which require more attention, nonetheless, recommendations regarding such areas will be covered in the following chapter. However, there is, hopefully, some light with regards to gaps in knowledge concerning the three concepts (service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity) and areas that have been under-researched within the South African fitness industry.

Theodorakis, Howat, Jae-Ko, and Avourdiadou (2014) pointed out that poor customer service can negatively affect both the present and future sales' standard of a business. Therefore, the following chapter will briefly outline the key strategies that can be adopted by the selected fitness club in addressing the existing gaps.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Recommendations and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

The main aim of the study was to measure “service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity” at a selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg. The motivation behind was that competition is becoming more intense and customers are becoming more quality conscious. Nevertheless, the emphasis of this chapter is to address the “key issues” that were withdrawn from the findings and discussions. The SERVPERF instrument played a fundamental role in determining the gaps in knowledge concerning “service quality and customer satisfaction” at a selected fitness club. Moreover, the results confirmed that service quality dimensions are connected and both strong and weak dimensions were pointed out.

According to the findings, there are key strategies that need to be formulated as soon as possible, with an aim of protecting the brand equity of the selected fitness club. According to Macey, Barbera and Martin (2009), it important to always to attack the market changes and consider the circumstances of consumers’ needs in advance. Furthermore, serving gym members is always new for the growth of a fitness club and including the well-recognised fitness clubs. However, the limitations and recommendations for future research are also articulated.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 Recommendations for Service Quality

Closing the service quality gaps is the first priority of the selected fitness club, because gym members will never reach a point whereby they are fully satisfied with the services. Satisfaction and brand equity are statistically proven from the findings, namely, that they rely on service quality. According to the study, empathy received a highest score, followed by responsiveness and assurance, whereas both tangibles and reliability received similar lowest scores. Most of the 22-variables were rated above the average and “convenience of operating hours as well as dress code of the staff” received highest scores. However, there are other

significant variables that received a poor score, which is below average value of 3.5, for example, “Quick replacement or repairs of dysfunctional equipment and the availability of workout equipment”.

The results depicted a huge gap under tangibles due to an absence of equipment and quick repairs of dysfunctional equipment. Therefore, high maintenance of tangibles should be a first priority. For instance, it is advisable that there should, at least, be a professional who is going to monitor and identify the dysfunctional equipment on a daily bases and fix it. If this is expensive, then another option could be finding a contractor who will be paid based on the workload.

Regarding the limited number of equipment, adding a variety of equipment is very important. Yes, quality equipment is very expensive; but buying on credit is another option that a business should consider. In doing so, creating a bond with suppliers is key. After two years, a fitness club should consider adding new equipment. For example, buying three adjustable bench press: one incline, one decline and one flat bench press. By doing so, the business can able to accommodate the expectations of gym members.

It is also advisable for a selected fines club to involve its gym members to identify the types of equipment they prefer to be purchased. This will fuel a positive attitude in the minds of gym members that their selected fitness club is very eager about their choices.

Staff members are required to execute the promised services perfectly without errors for the first time. Furthermore, all the staff should be trained how to deal with customers and how to handle complaints and other skills that related to their job description. This will make the staff members to be knowledgeable, effective and so forth.

Gym members should be informed beforehand via emails, messages, notice boards at the gym, social media platforms or handout pamphlets about any inconvenience.

Sympathising with gym members pertaining to their issues is important. Making a follow-up is also a good strategy to reflect a positive image to the gym members that the fitness club is interested in solving their problems.

7.2.2 Recommendations for Customer Satisfaction.

For the purposes of achieving customer satisfaction, it is recommended that a selected fitness club should consider reducing the expectations of gym members by investing in service quality. Measuring gym members' satisfaction level continuously should be considered as priority. In doing so, obtaining a service rating machine, whereby gym members can rate the service quality of the selected fitness club and their areas of dissatisfaction would be useful. This machine should be placed at the entrance, so that the gym members can rate the services on their way in or out. This may perhaps pinpoint the areas that require special attention with a quick response, as well as provide clarity to the management on the importance of monitoring the gym members' satisfaction level whilst gathering accurate data.

However, not all the gym members can be well educated about technology, therefore, a suggestion box should be considered in order to accommodate every one within the fitness club. The suggestion box should be checked at least once a week, to keep up with gym members' interest.

Of course, achieving gym members' satisfaction is not an easy task to consider, nevertheless, the benefits are exceptional. Moreover, investing on gym member's loyalty is very crucial. This consists of loyalty programmes that should be directed to people who have spent more than 4 years using the selected fitness club.

The gym members' satisfaction level is usually shaped by different factors that stem from service experiences. Furthermore, the nature of programmes offered have a significant effect on gym member satisfaction, let alone the attitude of staff members that are executing those programmes.

The researchers pointed out that it is inexpensive to retain customers rather than attracting new ones. The selected fitness club should implement strategies that will increase gym members' retention through consumer service. For example: they should empower the employees to make decisions and claim the issues. Consumer service is all the time better from the first point of contact, be able to respond to a gym member and make autonomous choices in the interest of the company.

7.2.3 Recommendations for Brand Equity

It is a great achievement for the selected fitness club to receive all the mean scores of brand equity variables above average. However, it is also important that better attention is channelled on the brand equity components. The gym members rated brand equity components as follows; brand awareness received the highest score, brand association was the second highest, followed by brand loyalty and perceived quality received the lowest score. The brand awareness variables “I can easily recognize the logo of this fitness club” and “I think most of the Scottsville residents are fully aware of this fitness club” received the highest scores compared to other variables. Perceived quality variables “In my own view, this fitness club is a leading brand as compared to others” and “I think this fitness club has a great credibility as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg” received the lowest scores. In addition, a brand loyalty variable “If given the choice again, I will still gym at this fitness club” also received the lowest score.

Concerning perceived quality, it is recommended that the selected fitness club adopts effective strategies to stimulate positive interest in current and potential gym members. The strategies that can be implemented are as follows; engaging the current gym members to express their satisfaction level regarding service quality, making a follow-up with those gym members who have already terminated their contracts to find out the cause, after that, then repositioning of a brand within the minds of gym members and the community at large. Running competitions can also boost the brand, this should be designed and promoted under a banner of fitness challenge. For fitness fanatics; weightlifting, fitness competition and fitness boot camps, for women; kilograms challenge, beach body challenge, for kids; jumping jacks challenge and so forth.

In the repositioning of a brand, advertising, sales promotion and publicity are key methods that can be adopted in crafting positive associations whilst differentiating the brand from the rivals. Advertising can be done on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube & etc.) and the fitness club website. On the other hand, publicity can be achieved by partnering with universities or EFT colleges by sponsoring excellence programmes, then sending the sales team to recruit or inform people about the benefits of using the selected fitness club. In achieving sales again, the sales team should visit the malls, especially at the end of the month. Students should be given a discount; an example could be, join now and

pay R100 for three months then after that they would be charged a normal price, whereas working people could join for free then pay the normal price as time goes on. Partnering with hotels and resorts as well can have a positive influence on potential gym members. However, it is important to indicate the fact that the selected fitness club can select few recommended strategies that can match the status of the club.

With regards to brand loyalty, the fitness club should start by improving service quality, especially with tangibles and reliability factors. Then, after that, the management should consider taking pictures of happy members receiving those services (group classes, swimming pools, weightlifters, spinning classes and so forth) and share them in all of the above-mentioned platforms. Management may also invite the participating members to share their exciting stories. The sales team should also compensate those gym members who have three years and above using the selected fitness club, so that they can spread a positive word of mouth to the community. Another strategy to keep them loyal is by partnering with a clothing brand, then by offering a discount for producing the club member card.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

Even though the researcher planned everything before time, collected and analysed the data accurately, but there are still anticipated limitations associated with the study.

The proposed study was aiming to cover 120 gym members through convenience sampling and 140 questionnaires were distributed but only 99 came back after a month and couple of days. However, the findings cannot be generalised to the public that a non-probability sampling technique has been used. Nonetheless, the results may possibly be relevant to the South African fitness industry.

The participants were limited in expressing their feelings about service quality, since the researcher used a questionnaire with closed-ended questions. Other gym members were not willing to write their details on the consent form because they were afraid of expressing their original views about the selected fitness club performance. However, the researcher tried to explain how the data will be interpreted as well as their confidentiality.

The length of time being a member at the gym and type of service used might have affected the outcome of the study.

Due to time and cost constraints, the proposed study only focused on one fitness club.

There are many different ways of measuring service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity. However, the proposed study used SERVPERF model and Aaker's (1996) model but the justification is presented in the literature review.

There is a limited literature concerning the three constructs (service quality, customer satisfaction and brand equity), especially within the South African context.

The data collected can only be relevant in a specific geographic territory of SA (Pietermaritzburg). As a result, the research study is appropriate only in Pietermaritzburg.

7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

It would be beneficial if similar studies were to be conducted with other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg or a comparison between fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. In addition, a larger sample will be more accurate for data analysis and generalisability. The questionnaire should include both "opened-ended and closed-ended" questions to accommodate a variety of sentiments. Of course, both opened-ended and closed-ended questions have their own advantages and disadvantages but there are manageable.

The idea of giving gym members a chance to take the questionnaires and submit them on the next day is not a decent method. However, this approach was considered because the gym members have limited time at the gym to multitask, but they take days to return them. Therefore, another approach should be adopted.

7.5 Conclusion

It would be helpful for a future study to consider the recommendations and limitations to the current study. Furthermore, it is advisable for the selected fitness club to reflect on the recommended strategies to improve “service quality, customer satisfaction and brandy equity”. Of course, running a smooth fitness club is not easy, but it requires lots of energy, planning, time, money, consistency and quality research. Yet again, implementing the recommended strategies can have an influence on customers’ value and provide decent benefits to the company.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. This questionnaire is intended to measure service quality, members' satisfaction and brand equity at this selected fitness club. This questionnaire consists of four sections - A, B, C, and D. The estimated time to complete this questionnaire is 15 minutes. It would be appreciated if you would answer all the questions and there is no right or wrong answer.

SECTION A -SERVICE QUALITY RATING

Please rate the following factors by **ticking (√)** the most appropriate answer. This section is intended to measure how you perceive SERVICE QUALITY at this selected fitness club whereby **1 represents a very poor score and 7 represents an excellent score.**

Factors		Very poor							Excellent								
1	Quality of equipment	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
2	Visual appeal of physical facilities	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
3	Dress code of the staff	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
4	Willingness of employees to offer assistance	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
5	The fitness club keeping its promises	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
6	Notifying gym members in advanced about any upcoming inconvenience.	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
7	Staff never too busy to help regardless of gender	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
8	Feeling safe to use any equipment of the gym.	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
9	Provision of individual attention by gym instructors.	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
10	Staff capacity to manage overcrowded gym	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
11	Responsiveness to complaints.	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
12	The availability of workout equipment.	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
13	Adequacy of signs and directions.	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									
14	Adequacy of space.	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>									

Statements		Very Poor					Excellent		
15	Cleanliness of equipment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
16	Convenience of operating hours.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
17	Cleanliness of shower	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
18	Knowledge of staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
19	Background music	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
20	Staff is never too busy to demonstrate how to use the equipment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
21	Quick replacement or repairs of dysfunctional equipment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
22	Staff knowledge in answering my questions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

SECTION B -CUSTOMER SATISFACTION RATING

Please rate the following statements by **ticking (√)** the most appropriate answer to show your level of disagreement/agreement with the statements. **Scores closer to 1 represent strong disagreement while scores closer to 7 represent strong agreement.**

Statements		Very Dissatisfied					Very Satisfied		
1	I am very happy with overall maintenance of cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2	I am very happy with the overall services offered by the fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
3	I believe that this fitness club offers affordable prices as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
4	Regardless of time and money, there is value provided from service quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5	I don't regret my choice to join this fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
6	Due to value provided by this fitness club as compared to other fitness clubs, I still elect this fitness club as my first preference.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
7	Overall, I am satisfied with this fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Statements		Very Dissatisfied					Very Satisfied	
8	I believe that this fitness club considers its gym members as the first priority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	I would not consider myself switching to another fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION C -BRAND EQUITY RATING

Please rate the following statements by **ticking (√)** the most appropriate answer to show your level of disagreement/agreement with the statements. **Scores closer to 1 represent strong disagreement while scores closer to 7 represent strong agreement.**

Statements		Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree	
1	The brand image of this fitness club is of a high quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	In my own view, this fitness club is a leading brand as compared to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	I think most of the Scottsville residents are fully aware of this fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	The Scottsville location does match the brand positioning of this fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	I can easily recognize the logo of this fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	I would recommend this fitness club to other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	The brand image of this fitness club is associated with quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	I can easily identify the uniqueness of this fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	I think this fitness club has a great credibility as compared to other fitness clubs in Pietermaritzburg.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10	I am not ashamed of using this fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Statements		Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree	

11	I have good reasons to support this fitness club over competing ones.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12	If given the choice again, I will still gym at this fitness club.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SECTION D -DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The demographic questions are absolutely essential in understanding gym members background and they have a significant value in the statistical analysis.

DI1. Please indicate your gender.

Female	1
Male	2

DI2. What is your ethnicity/race?

White	1
African	2
Coloured	3
Indian	4
Other	5

DI3. Please specify your age group.

18 – 26	1
27 – 34	2
35 – 42	3
43 – 50	4
51 and above	5

DI4. For how many years have you been using this fitness club? -----.

DI5. Which of these best describes your income bracket per month?

R0 – R3000	1
R3000 – R6000	2
R6000 – R9000	3
R9000 upwards	4

DI6. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

Employed at a private sector	1
Employed at a public sector	2
Self employed	3
Student	4
Not employed	5
Retired	6

THANK YOU!



Appendix B: Ethical Clearance Approval



23 August 2018

Mr Mxolisi Malcom Zwelibanzi Mtshali (216072653)
School of Management, IT & Governance
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mr Mtshali,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0965/018M

Project Title: Measuring Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Brand Equity at a selected fitness club in Pietermaritzburg

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 24 July 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Sanjay Soni
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Isabel Martins
Cc School Administrator: Ms Debbie Cunynghame

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

Appendix D: Editor's Letter of Confirmation

EDITING/PROOFREADING CONFIRMATION

To whom it may concern

This serves to certify that I, Jabulani Mkhize, have proofread and/or edited Mr. M.M.Z Mtshali's Masters' dissertation to ensure that the language, grammar, punctuation and spelling are academically sound and appropriate, by rectifying errors, wherever these have been identified, and rephrasing sentences that would possibly make one lose sight of the flow of the argument.

Title of the Dissertation: "Measuring Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Brand Equity at a Selected Fitness Club in Pietermaritzburg"

Editor's Name : Jabulani Mkhize

Qualifications : PhD (English)

Signature :



The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'J. Mkhize' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Date : 18 June 2019