Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived quality, perceived value and satisfaction with future intentions of fitness centre clients in Spain. The sample consisted of 1,805 clients at ten fitness centres. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Data were analysed with confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model. The findings indicate that perceived quality influences perceived value and satisfaction, perceived value influences satisfaction and behaviour intentions, and
Consumer behaviour and sport services

satisfaction influences behaviour intentions. These results suggest that if consumers have a positive perception of quality, this will influence their satisfaction and loyalty. This study is important for fitness centre management professionals since it brings to the forefront the importance of the perception and continual evaluation of fitness centre consumers.

**Keywords:** sport management; sport marketing; perceived quality; value; satisfaction; loyalty; fitness.


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1 Introduction

According to the International Health, Racquet & Sports club Association (IHRSA, 2014), the fitness industry continues to grow worldwide. Others report that fitness organisations in the private sector are booming (García et al., 2011), and are on the verge of becoming the leaders of leisure installations (Datamonitor, 2010). Specifically, Europe is currently the most profitable market that coincides with the increase in the number of practitioners (IHRSA, 2014). Within the markets with the highest profitability and number of clients is Spain with more than 5 million practitioners and an expenditure of more than 2 billion dollars annually, placing it among the top countries worldwide in expenditure and number of clients (IHRSA, 2016). Sacavém and Correia (2009) consider Spain as second with regard to the ratio of market penetration (15.3%) as observed in the growth of the number of facilities and an even greater growth in the membership of fitness centres (European Commission, 2014; García-Ferrando and Llopis, 2011; Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2015).

Concurrently, however, even though this is an industry that boasts a superior increase in its number of participants, research has shown that there is a problem with loyalty of fitness centre clients (European Commission, 2014; García-Fernández et al., 2014). This brings to the surface a concern that has generated interest in a number of studies regarding customer loyalty, for example, relating the service convenience with satisfaction and future intentions (Chang and Polonsky, 2012; García-Fernández et al., 2017a), quality and satisfaction in Greek fitness centres (Theodorakis et al., 2014), in sporting facilities in Cypriot (Tsitskari et al., 2014) and in Canadian fitness centres (MacIntosh and Law, 2015). Undoubtedly, promoting customer loyalty in sporting services is in line with the promotion of physical activity which would result in lower health problems (Jiménez et al., 2015).

In the research literature there are few studies that examine the many different factors of client perception and its repercussions on loyalty even in countries, as in the case of Spain, where the fitness industry appears to be consolidated while at the same time growing (European Commission, 2014).

The manuscript is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction and future intentions and the relationships between the variables. Section 3 explains the theoretical model and the hypothesis. Section 4 indicates the design and the methodology of the empirical study. Section 5 presents the results of the current study. Finally, Section 6 provides discussion of the findings and conclusions.
2 Theoretical background

2.1 The relationship between perceived quality, perceived value and satisfaction

Although there is a dearth of studies geared toward the analysis of the client’s perception in the sporting environment and its relationship to his/her loyalty (Nuviala et al., 2015), quality and value have generated recent interest in the literature, as evidenced in the number of publications on sport organisations, specifically in regards to perceived quality (Pérez-López et al., 2015). In the case of perceived quality, Grönroos (1984, p.37) defines it as “the outcome of an evaluation process where the customers compare their expectations with the service they perceive to have received”, and Zeithaml (1988, p.3) as “the view of the consumer on the excellence or superiority of a product/service”. In the sport sector, Ko and Pastore (2004, p.162) defined it as the “customer’s overall impression about the service performance, service delivery systems, and overall consumption experiences”. Regarding the perceived value, Zeithaml (1988, p.14) defines it as the “overall assessment of a product based on the perceptions of what it receives and what it gives in return”. Later, Oliver (1999) defines perceived value as a positive function of what the client received and a negative function of what the client sacrificed.

On this topic, there are studies that focused on the analysis of the relationship between perceived quality and perceived value, finding positive, direct, and significant relationships between the variables among spectators of sporting events (Calabuig et al., 2010, 2012, 2015). Furthermore, studies oriented to public sport facilities obtained the same results (Jin et al., 2015; Nuviala et al., 2012b), as did studies on general sport organisations (Nuviala et al., 2015; Pitts, 2015; Schwarz et al., 2015) and professional teams (Byon et al., 2013; Pitts et al., In Press). In the same way, research studies within the fitness sector examining client perception showed positive and direct results with regards to the relation of these variables (García-Fernández et al., 2017a; Theodorakis et al., 2014).

Specifically in this sector, one of the most common topics studied is the connection between perceived quality and satisfaction (García-Fernández et al., 2014, 2017b) due to specific interest in their relationship (Rosa et al., 2012), there existing a direct and positive relationship between both variables (Dhurup et al., 2006). In particular, Oliver (1993) indicates that satisfaction is a psychological result that emanates from an experience or an emotional response to experiences associated with a purchase (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983). Overall, the more recent research emphasises this relationship within fitness centres in Greece (Avourdiadou and Theodorakis, 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2014), Taiwan (Hsueh and Su, 2013), Portugal (Carrizo and Freitas, 2016) and Cyprus (Tsitskari et al., 2014).

2.2 The relationship between perceived value, satisfaction and client loyalty

Perceived value is a concept that has been slightly linked to customer satisfaction (Dorai and Varshney, 2012; Pitts and Stotlar, 2013), affirming, according to Cronin et al. (2000) that value influences satisfaction in a positive manner. In the sport environment, the perceived value and customer satisfaction relationship is often considered. Calabuig et al. (2010) and later Calabuig et al. (2012) obtained positive results from sport spectators
with regards to this relationship, coinciding with the studies by Bodet (2012) and Nuviala et al. (2012a), but not with the work of Nuviala et al. (2015). Although scarce, there are previous studies such as those from Murray and Howat (2002), Theodorakis et al. (2014) and García-Fernández et al. (2017a) conducted in centres in Australia, Greece and Spain, respectively, which coincide with confirming a positive, direct, and significant relationship of perceived value and customer satisfaction.

In a like manner, perceived value influences customer loyalty and behaviour intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Pitts and Stotlar, 2013). In research studies conducted in the sport sector, Theodorakis et al. (2014) and Howat and Assaker (2013) identified an indirect relationship between both variables in fitness centre and aquatics clients. Similar work includes that of Calabuig et al. (2014) who demonstrated perceived value to be the strongest and direct link with regard to client loyalty to public sport facilities. Furthermore, the work of Murray and Howat (2002) affirms the same in fitness centres in Australia.

Additionally, Anderson and Mittal (2000) reported that satisfaction intimately corresponds with attitude since this variable is inclined to predict the intentions of purchase, and thus predict loyalty. In the sport sector various studies have analysed these relationships (Calabuig et al., 2010, 2012; Howat and Assaker, 2013; Kim et al., 2006). In research regarding centres, the work of Murray and Howat (2002) stands out. These authors conclude that satisfaction works between perceived quality and loyalty, and this is similar to a study by Alexandris et al. (2004) that addresses the mediation of satisfaction on perceived quality and loyalty. Recently, Theodorakis et al. (2014) and Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014) corroborated the direct relationship between satisfaction and behaviour intentions in fitness centres in Greece.

3 Hypotheses and theoretical model

The review of the literature shows a minimal amount of research in regard to examining the relationship between perceived quality, perceived value and satisfaction with future intentions of fitness centre clients. More specifically, fitness centres in Spain have not been considered. The literature could be enhanced with such research. Moreover, fitness centre management professionals could benefit from this research. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived quality, perceived value and satisfaction with future intentions of clients in fitness centres in Spain. With this purpose, and based upon the literature review, the following five hypotheses were developed to guide the research:

Hypothesis 1 The perceived quality of clients of fitness centres maintains a direct and positive relationship with their perceived value.

Hypothesis 2 The perceived quality of clients of fitness centres maintains a direct and positive relationship with client satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3 The perceived value of clients of fitness centres maintains a direct and positive relationship with client satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4 The perceived value of clients of fitness centres maintains a direct and positive relationship with future intentions.
Hypothesis 5 The satisfaction of clients of fitness centres maintains a direct and positive relationship with future intentions.

The model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Proposed structural model

4 Methods

4.1 Participants

A study of non-experimental explicative design (Ato et al., 2013) with a sample composed of clients of fitness centres in Spain. There were 1,805 fitness centre clients of which 55% (993) are female and 45% (812) are male. The size of the sample was calculated with a 3% error for a level of confidence of 99% ($Z = 1.96$). The age of the study’s participants included 7% ($n = 127$) less than 20 years of age; 44.1% ($n = 796$) between 21 and 40 years; 20.4% ($n = 369$) between 41 and 60 years; and 28.4% ($n = 513$) 60-plus years of age. With regards to the level of education of the participants, 29.2% ($n = 527$) had completed elementary or primary level education; 17.9% ($n = 323$) acquired secondary or high school level; 18.7% ($n = 337$) had professional preparation; and 34.2% ($n = 618$) reported a university education, master or doctorate. With regards to occupation, 14.3% ($n = 258$) are students; 7.8% ($n = 140$) are professionals; 19.5% ($n = 352$) are employees working for someone other than themselves; 14.3% ($n = 77$) are self-employed; 14.1% ($n = 255$) are unemployed; the ‘other’ category was chosen by 42% ($n = 723$) of the sample. Finally, the longevity of the client’s activity with the fitness centre showed 53.9% ($n = 974$) of the sample had been clients of the fitness centre for less than a year; 17.2% ($n = 311$) had been with the fitness centre for one to two years; 11.3% ($n = 203$) had been clients for two to three years; and 17.6% ($n = 317$) had been clients for more than three years.

4.2 Instrument

A questionnaire instrument was developed using prior research (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Oliver, 1997; Zeithaml, 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1996). The questionnaire included demographic questions and a total of 31 items grouped into two sections. The first section
consisted of 15 items proposed by Brady and Cronin (2001) to evaluate perceived quality through three dimensions (facility, employees, and programs) in addition to the four items proposed by Oliver (1997) to evaluate quality in general. The second section consisted of scales to measure perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988), satisfaction (Cronin et al., 2000; Oliver, 1997), and future intentions (Zeithaml et al., 1996), each one with four items. A nine-point Likert scale with a range from ‘completely disagree’ (1) to ‘completely agree’ (9) was used for possible responses. The scales have been used in studies related to the fitness industry (Avourdiadou and Theodorakis, 2014; García-Fernández et al., 2017a; Theodorakis et al., 2014).

4.3 Procedure

Data were collected from clients using 15 fitness centres in Spain with common spaces including a fitness room, two or more multi-purpose rooms for directed activities, and a space equal to or greater than 1,000 square metres. The researchers contacted the centres via telephone and offered two meetings with managers who were interested in the study. This led to ten fitness centres participating in the study. Three meetings were held with the managers and coordinators of each fitness centre to explain the objectives and the methodology of the study. In order to not interrupt the daily responsibilities and duties of the fitness centres, one surveyor was assigned in the morning and another in the afternoon to collect as many surveys as possible, requesting the participation in the study of each client as they entered the facility. Each participant took 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey. Data were collected during a ten week period.

4.4 Data analysis

Two stages were developed using the statistical software SPSS and AMOS (v.20.0, IBM Company) for statistical analysis. Initially, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to obtain the factorial structure, followed by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the objective of confirming the measurement model, utilising a maximum likelihood procedure. The internal consistency of the constructs was calculated through the composite reliability considering adequate values higher than .70 (Hair et al., 2009). To test for internal validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was estimated to evaluate convergent validity, demonstrating values higher than .50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2009). Discriminant validity was assumed when the value of AVE for each construct was higher than the square correlation between that construct and any other (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In the second stage, the structural equation model was estimated to prove the research hypothesis, evaluating the predictive validity of the scale of general quality, value, satisfaction, and, future intentions. The adequacy of data for both the measurement and structural model was assessed with a variety of goodness-of-fit indexes (Brown, 2006). Specifically, the good fit of the model was assumed with statistically significant ($p > .05$) values of chi-square ($\chi^2$), the ratio of the statistic $\chi^2$ to its degrees of freedom was less than 3 (Arbuckle, 2006), the CFI, NFI, IFI and TLI indexes greater than .90 (Hair et al., 2009) and, lastly, the RMSEA index was considered optimum with a value inferior to .06 and acceptable with a value inferior to .08 (Byrne, 2000).
5 Results

5.1 Measures model

The relevance of the EFA showed a KMO sampling adequacy index = .956 and significance according to Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity \( \chi^2 (465) = 45,179.41; p < .01 \). Utilising a method of extraction of principle components and an oblique Oblimin rotation method, a structure was obtained explaining 71.22% of the variance, showing all items to have factor loadings higher than .60. Cronbach’s alpha (\( \alpha \)) reliability estimates were between .78 and .96, with the global scale at .95.

Table 1  Dimensionality, CR and AVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardised estimate</th>
<th>CR**</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
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<td>Employees</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>0.76</td>
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<td>General quality</td>
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<td>V3</td>
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<td>0.900</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Satisfaction</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>0.921</td>
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<td>S2</td>
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<td>Future intention</td>
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<td>0.875</td>
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<td>62.809</td>
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Results obtained from the CFA for the measurement model indicated a satisfactory fit to the data ($\chi^2 (413) = 3,263.69 \ (p < .001); \chi^2/df = 7.90; \text{RMSEA} = .06 \ (CI = .060, .064); \text{CFI} = .95; \text{NFI} = .94; \text{IFI} = .95; \text{TLI} = .95)$. The statistic $\chi^2$ was significant ($p < .001$) and its ratio to the degrees of freedom assumed a value superior to the recommended criteria of 3.0 (Arbuckle, 2006). Nevertheless, this index has demonstrated to be sensitive to sample size (Hair et al., 2009), the sample size of the present study ($n = 1,805$) being large. For this reason, it is important to take into account other indexes, in this regard, the value for the indexes CFI and NFI were higher than the recommended threshold of .90 (Hair et al., 2009), indicating an acceptable adjustment of the data. The IFI value, which takes into account the parsimony of the model as the sample size, and the TLI value registered a good fit ($\geq .95$). Additionally, the RMSEA index was within the established criteria for good fit of the model (Byrne, 2000).

All items showed high factor loadings (> .70), while the Z values ranged from 17.95 to 27.27, thus indicating that each item significantly carries its respective construct. CR resulted in a .88 value for ‘facilities’ and higher than .90 for the rest of the constructs. The convergent validity was satisfactory for all the constructs with acceptable AVE values which ranged from .60 (‘facilities’) and .84 (‘general quality’) (Table 1).

Descriptive statistics and the correlations between constructs are presented in Table 2. ‘Programs’ was the most valued dimension with the highest median score ($M = 8.26; SD = 1.30$), while ‘facilities’ obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 7.19; SD = 1.49$). In general, all constructs demonstrated high levels of valuation above 7.50, with the exception of ‘facilities’. Evidence of discriminant validity was accepted to the extent that none of the squared correlations exceeded the AVE values for each of the associated constructs.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>GQ</th>
<th>V</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<td>P</td>
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<td>1.42</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.30</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.38</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; F = facilities; E = employees; P = programs; GQ = general quality; V = value; S = satisfaction; FI = future intention.

### 5.2 Structural model

Structural equation models were used to test the relationships and interactions between variables offered in the model (perceived quality, global quality, value, satisfaction, and future intentions). The overall assessment of the structural model showed an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 (423) = 3,877.48 \ (p < .001); \chi^2/df = 9.16; \text{RMSEA} = .067 \ (CI = .065, .069); \text{CFI} = .94; \text{NFI} = .93; \text{IFI} = .94; \text{TLI} = .94$) (Hu and Bentler, 1999).
Figure 2 reveals that the three dimensions of perceived quality positively influence general quality, and programs ($\beta = .44; p < .001$) carries more weight, far above facilities ($\beta = .33; p < .001$) and employees ($\beta = .15; p < .001$), and is responsible for 58% of the variance ($R^2 = .58$) of general quality. Similarly, correlations between the three dimensions of perceived quality showed significance ($p < .001$). For the rest of the variables, general quality ($\beta = .55; p < .001$) and value ($\beta = .35; p < .001$) were positive and significant predictors of satisfaction, which at the same time demonstrated a strong relationship with future intentions ($\beta = .86; p < .001$). General quality also demonstrated a significant relationship with value ($\beta = .68; p < .001$), as well as the relationship established between value and future intentions ($\beta = .04; p < .04$). Finally, the relationships established offer an elevated percentage of the variance of the dependent variables. In this case satisfaction and future intentions are above 60%, and the variance value displayed 46%.

6 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyse the relationship between perceived quality, perceived value, and satisfaction with future intentions in clients of fitness centres in Spain. Specifically, the present study expands the literature with regards to the relationships of these variables within a sport context. Its importance lies in the dearth of studies related to the fitness industry offering novelty in the field of sport consumer
behaviour. The findings suggest, according to the variables analysed, that clients of fitness centres in Spain perceive programs and employees positively, but have a lower perception of facilities. These results could be due to the lack of investment in the design of space in these sporting facilities resulting in a poor perception of them. Notwithstanding, it must be highlighted that satisfaction as well as behaviour intentions (Zeithaml et al., 1996) demonstrated high scores that undoubtedly indicate a positive behaviour.

Considering the first hypothesis, the findings from consumers of fitness centres note a direct and positive relationship between perceived quality and perceived value. The results obtained from the present study support previous work with different consumers of sport organisations (Calabuig et al., 2010, 2012, 2015; Nuviala et al., 2012a, 2012b, 2015) and in Greek and Spanish fitness centres (García-Fernández et al., 2017a; Theodorakis et al., 2014). Specifically, one of the strengths of this research study is to ratify this relationship in Spanish consumers, so that in the general sector clients, who perceive a quality sport service, will also have a positive perception of value. Therefore, when a client perceives the service offered by an employee, the sport activity, or the equipment to have optimal quality, he/she will also perceive a positive value. Likewise, the results obtained are in agreement with previous work in fitness centres from different countries with regard to the relationship between perceived quality and satisfaction (second hypothesis). Furthermore, Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014), Hsueh and Su (2013), Theodorakis et al. (2014) and Tsitskari et al. (2014) found that the greater the perceived quality, the greater the satisfaction of the client. Therefore, the findings of this study corroborate the analysis in the same industry but concerning different countries. This appears to strengthen the relationship of these variables in consumers of fitness centres.

In relation to the third hypothesis, different studies on sport consumers had revealed the relationship between value and satisfaction (Bodet, 2012; Calabuig et al., 2010, 2012; Nuviala et al., 2012a), and this is supported by the results in this study. However, in the case of the work of Nuviala et al. (2015) the results did not corroborate this relationship, suggesting a heterogeneous consumer sample that perhaps results in the lack of a relationship between both variables since attitudes change according to the sport service. Yet, the results from the current study indicate a positive relationship in Spanish customers of fitness centres, exactly as set out in the work of Murray and Howat (2002), Theodorakis et al. (2014) and García-Fernández et al. (2017a) with the same typology of consumer, indicating that satisfaction is a consequence of fitness centre clients’ perceived value. Therefore, the importance of perceived value appears to be present as long as there is a positive relationship with future intentions or loyalty as expressed by Calabuig et al. (2014) and Theodorakis et al. (2014) guaranteeing the fourth hypothesis of this study. Accordingly, a client with a positive perception of value will be a client who is more than likely to be loyal.

Recently, findings in studies by Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014) and Theodorakis et al. (2014) indicated a positive relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in clients of fitness centres. Precisely, the findings of the current study corroborate this relationship in consumers of fitness centres in Spain, thus supporting the fifth hypothesis offered in this study. Therefore, it could be indicated that clients of fitness centres in Spain are satisfied with the services received, have a positive attitude, and consequently will be more loyal.
6.1 Implications

Lastly the current study seems to affirm that if a fitness centre consumer has a positive quality perception of the centre, this can influence the perceived value and his/her satisfaction, thus resulting in a more loyal client. For this reason, it is considered important for those responsible for fitness centres to continually evaluate their consumers. Loyalty will depend on their perception of such variables as quality, value, and satisfaction. In particular, managers of fitness centres must carry out a correct management of the three factors analysed in this study. In fact, the facilities, the employees and the programs are decisive in the loyalty chain of the clients of these sports facilities. Thus, the correct management of human resources and physical activity programs will influence a positive perception of quality. Likewise, cleaning care, the attractiveness of the facilities and the good conditions of the equipment and the environment, should be of particular attention, as they will influence the consumer’s perception. Thus, if clients perceive a positive quality of these factors, they will obtain a positive perception of value, thus reducing the monetary and non-monetary sacrifices associated with this variable (Oliver, 1999). Likewise, as has been shown, the continuous analysis of the perceived quality of the customer will help determine the degree of consumer satisfaction. Precisely, the findings showed that perceived quality influences satisfaction so managers must properly manage their resources to achieve high levels of satisfaction. In short, the greater the perception of quality, value and satisfaction, the more loyal will be the customers of the fitness centres. Therefore, if the Spanish fitness industry is considered a world reference (IHRSA, 2016), the results obtained are especially valuable for this sector and could be used to improve customer loyalty for consumer of fitness centres in other parts of the world.

6.2 Conclusions, limitations and future research

In conclusion, this study has revealed the positive relationship between perceived quality, perceived value and satisfaction, with future intentions. In fact, perceived quality influences perceived value and customer satisfaction in fitness centres. Likewise, perceived value positively influences satisfaction, also influencing both variables in the client’s future intentions or loyalty.

However, this study has certain limitations. A limitation of the current study was the convenience invitation for fitness centre participation in the study although this is the most commonly used recruitment method in this type of study. On the other hand, conducting a transversal study of quantitative nature could be considered as restrictive for the study. Along this same line, to analyse loyalty with measures of subjective behaviour could result in measures that are not completely representative of customer loyalty although it is the most commonly used instrument in the majority of related investigations. Given these points, future studies should consider including fitness centre associations or federations in order to achieve a heterogeneous and larger sample size of fitness centres. The use of a longitudinal design and qualitative methodology would help achieve a deeper understanding of the consumers of these services, allowing for the management of loyalty data as well as frequency of use, longevity in the facility, and client recommendations. As it stands, this type of study is in its beginning stages, affording numerous investigative opportunities.
References


