

## **Personal Involvement Level in Fitness Training: An Example of a Turkish Fitness Club**

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### **Abstract**

Fitness centres, especially in developed nations are means of exercising in a controlled environment that offers customised training facilities, along with helping the members to socialise. Although services and the rates differ from one to another, they all work with the same principal- obtaining membership of the attendants, longer the membership, better for both parties: members and club owners alike. This article will explore the fitness industry in Turkey briefly, by providing background information about the participants of the research. It will then move into portraying their involvement level with the fitness activities. Finally, the paper will present a summary and recommendations sections, based on the research findings. The data for the article collected from members of a fitness club in Adana during the 6 months period of time. Out of 200 questionnaires left, 79 returned by the participants, who were the members of the fitness club under scrutiny.

**Keywords:** Physical Activity, Exercise, Physical Fitness, Fitness Training, Personal Involvement.

## **Fitness Çalışmalarında Kişisel Bağlılığın Etkisi: Türkiye'den Bir Fitness Kulübü Örneği**

### **Özet**

Fitness salonları, özellikle gelişmiş ülkelerde üyelerine kontrollü bir ortamda sundukları değişik alternatif metodlarla egzersiz yapmanın yanısıra üyelere sosyalleşme imkanları da sağlamaktadır. Her ne kadar sağladıkları hizmetler ve aldıkları ücretler farklılıklar gösterse de bu tür merkezler genelde aynı prensiplerle çalışırlar: ne kadar uzun süreli sağlanırsa her iki taraf için de -gerek kulüp, gerekse üyelerin- menfaatine olan üyelik sistemi. Bu çalışma öncelikle konu hakkında teorik bilgi ve geri plan bilgisi oluşturacak çalışmanın katılımcıları hakkında özet bilgiler vererek Türkiye'deki fitness sektörünü genel olarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Daha sonra katılımcıların fitness çalışmalarına kendilerini kişisel olarak nasıl bağladıklarını ortaya koyacaktır. Son olarak, araştırma sonuçlarına dayanan özet ve öneriler kısmı çalışmada yer alacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Fiziksel Aktivite, Egzersiz, Fiziksel Dinçlik, Fitness Çalışma, Kişisel Bağlılık

## Introduction

The fitness industry is on a rapid growth worldwide, particularly in Western societies (McCabe *et al.*, 2007). In the US -as leading the industry- there are more than 30,000 centres and in the Europe numbers are steadily growing as well (Afthinos *et al.*, 2005).

In Turkey, fitness emerged as an industry in the 1980s, and gained its popularity through 1990s with the opening of numerous health and fitness centres. In the new millennia, the industry marked an apparent success having reached thousands of fitness centres all around the country. Fitness industry in Turkey is in a continuous growth phase in contrast to other sectors. Turkey's fitness industry is directly affected by the roles of the government through the Ministry of Sports, which sets regulations for the opening of private health and fitness centres under the control of the Provincial Directorates (Sekendiz, 2005).

Faced with an intense competition, fitness clubs (along with other service offerings) try to make their customers satisfied in order to retain them. The more services offered to the customers, the better chances are winning over competition (Islam & Mohammadzadeh, 2014).

Before progressing further, it is believed to be better lay a brief foundation for the reader clearing such confused terminology of physical activity, exercise and physical fitness. *Physical activity* is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure. The total amount of caloric expenditure associated with physical activity is determined by the amount of muscle mass producing bodily movements and the intensity, duration and frequency of muscular contractions (Taylor, 1978). Although the term “exercise” used interchangeably with physical activity, it differs greatly. *Exercise* is physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive and purposive in the sense that improvement and maintenance of one or more components of physical fitness is an objective (Taylor, 1983). In contrast with both terms, *physical fitness* is a set of attributes that people have or achieve. Being physically fit means the ability to carry out daily tasks with vigour and alertness, without undue fatigue and with ample energy to enjoy leisure time pursuits and to meet unforeseen emergencies (Caspersen *et al.*, 1985).

Regular physical activity is believed to improve cardiovascular fitness, maintenance of healthy joints, lower blood pressure, along with other physical benefits (Brown *et al.*, 2000). It also reduces anxiety, stress and depression, hence avoiding any health risks associated with those (Asci, 2003). Coupled with these established benefits, ability to socialise with others and its benefits to improve one's social circle (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008), joining a fitness club became almost addictive for some individuals. Despite their ever increasing number, fitness clubs attracted less attention from mainstream researchers, especially in Turkey. This research, therefore aims to explore this gap in the literature by providing the findings of the study that is conducted on the members of one of the largest fitness clubs in Adana/Turkey.

## Methodology

The data gathered for this research was collected from the members of a fitness club in Adana/Turkey. The club is located in the central part of Adana city with more than 300 registered and active members. Access gained through the researcher's personal connections and a total number of 200 questionnaires were left at the front desk to be filled by the club members. Accompanied with a short introduction explaining the researcher's affiliation and the reasoning behind the study. With the help of the reception staff and the fitness instructors, 79 questionnaires were returned during the period of 6 months. There were 17 questions in each questionnaire that collected the overall information on the participants such as demographics and income level. Adapted from Kyle *et al.* (2007), the additional scale that is also included, which consisted of 15 questions, aimed to collect data on five different areas: *Attraction*, *Centrality*, *Social Bonding*, *Identity Affirmation* and *Identity Expression*. Each question had a 5 point scale where 1 coded "Strongly Disagree" and 5 "Strongly Agree" answers.

*Attraction* is the importance of the activity (in question to the individual) and pleasure derived through participation (in such activity). *Centrality* is the lifestyle choices and personal investments made by an individual to support his/her continued association with the activity. *Social Bonding* is the social tie (and connection) that binds individuals to specific activities. *Identity Affirmation* is the degree to which leisure activity's opportunity to allow an individual to affirm self to another. *Identity Expression* is the opportunity that a leisure activity provides to an individual to express self to others (Kyle *et al.*, 2007).

## Results

Out of 79 questionnaires collected, 8 excluded because either some sections of the questionnaires were left blank or all the answers on the scale were grouped on the same one such as "Strongly Agree". Following pages will present the characteristics of the participants in a table format.

**Table 1.** Sample Characteristics

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b><i>Gender</i></b>			
Male	49	69	
Female	21	30	
NR (No Response)	1	1	71
<b><i>Age Group</i></b>			
Younger than 20	19	27	
20-29 Years Old	32	45	
30-39 Years Old	18	26	
40-49 Years Old	1	1	
50-59 Years Old	1	1	
60 Years Old & Older	0	0	
NR	0	0	71
<b><i>Marital status</i></b>			
Single	49	69	
Married	18	25	
NR	4	6	71
<b><i>Education</i></b>			
High School or Below	25	35	
Undergraduate Degree	34	48	
Postgraduate Degree	10	14	
NR	2	3	71
<b><i>Monthly income</i></b>			
≤ 1000 TL	17	24	
1001-2000 TL	12	17	
2001-3000 TL	6	8	
3001-4000 TL	3	4	
≥ 4001 TL	5	7	
NR	28	40	71

As presented in Table 1, majority of the research participants were male (69%) and were aged between 20-29 years old (45%). Least age groups were between 40-49 and 50-59 year olds (both 1%). Despite being inconclusive, this indicated that with age amount of people involve in fitness decreases. When it comes to marital status and education, 69% of the participants were single and majority of the respondents had a university (undergraduate) degree. We can, therefore, propose that single people have more time to spend for sports activities such as fitness training and also education plays a positive role on the number of people that join fitness clubs. There is, however, no conclusive evidence in the level of income and the amount of people participate in fitness training. One could speculate that, more the income, more money one can spare on leisure and sports related activities. Findings of this research on the other hand did not support such a connection. Majority of the responses to the questionnaires came from the less than 1,000 TL a month earning group (24%). There is an indicator, however, that we should also take into account before making any further suggestions on this topic. 40% of the respondents did not indicate their income, means they could fall into any other income category, resulting that group becoming highest.

The scale used in the study based on Kyle *et al.* (2007) consisted of 15 questions in total. As displayed in Table 2, first three set of questions aimed to measure *Attraction* characteristic of the participants. Second set consisted *Centrality* related questions whereas third set included *Social bonding*. Remaining two group of questions tried measuring *Identity Affirmation* and *Identity Expression* characteristics of the respondents.

**Table 2.** Proposed Items and Factor Domains

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***Attraction***

- A1 Fitness is one of the most enjoyable things I do
- A2 Fitness is very important to me
- A3 Fitness is one of the most satisfying things I do

***Centrality***

- C1 I find a lot of my life is organised around fitness
- C2 Fitness occupies a central role in my life
- C3 To change my preference from fitness to another recreation activity would require major rethinking

***Social Bonding***

- SB1 I enjoy discussing fitness with my friends
- SB2 Most of my friends are in some way connected with fitness
- SB3 Participating in fitness provides me with an opportunity to be with friends

***Identity Affirmation***

- IA1 When I participate in fitness, I can really be myself
- IA2 I identify with the people and image associated with fitness
- IA3 When I'm doing fitness, I don't have to be concerned with the way I look

***Identity Expression***

- IE1 You can tell a lot about a person by seeing them doing fitness
  - IE2 Participating in fitness says a lot about who I am
  - IE3 when I participate in fitness, others see me the way I want them to see me
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Kyle *et al.* (2007) removed some of the questions from *Centrality* characteristic of the McIntyre and Pigram's (1992) work to form an independent one called *Social Bonding*. It is, therefore, worthwhile to compare these two characteristics with each other once the responses are presented and explained. Same conclusion could be reached, based on the assumption that *Identity Affirmation* and *identity Expression* characteristics are rather similar to each other in terms of the questions asked and -based on the previous studies- the outcome they are expected to generate. For this reasoning, answers to these two characteristics will also be compared once they are presented and explained.

The responses to the scale characteristic questions are presented in Table 3 and explained in the following pages.

**Table 3. Scale Characteristics**

Category	Frequency	Percentage	Total
<b><i>Attraction</i></b>			
1	8	4	
2	6	3	
3	46	21	
4	81	38	
5	68	32	
NR	4	2	213
<b><i>Centrality</i></b>			
1	6	3	
2	45	21	
3	67	32	
4	41	19	
5	37	17	
NR	17	8	213
<b><i>Social Bonding</i></b>			
1	32	15	
2	59	28	
3	41	19	
4	42	20	
5	37	17	
NR	2	1	213
<b><i>Identity Affirmation</i></b>			
1	19	9	
2	54	26	
3	47	22	
4	46	21	
5	45	21	
NR	2	1	213
<b><i>Identity Expression</i></b>			
1	29	13	
2	53	25	
3	53	25	
4	36	17	
5	38	18	
NR	4	2	213

1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neither Agree nor Disagree 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree NR: No Response

Table 3 results indicate that majority of the answers to the *Attraction* characteristic related questions fell into “Agree” category (38%), followed by “Strongly Agree” (32%). Remaining categories were “Neither Agree nor Disagree” (21%), “Strongly Disagree” (4%), “Disagree” (3%) and “No Response” (2%). When “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” categories combined, they consisted 70% of all answers, making the majority, highest in all categories. On the opposite side, “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” categories together made just 7% of the all responses. These findings indicate that participants of the study felt they received pleasure from participating in fitness training and related activities. As presented in more detail in Table 2, majority of the respondents to this category believed that fitness plays an important role in their lives, they get satisfied and enjoy when participating in fitness training.

Following characteristic, *Centrality* findings, however displayed a different picture. Majority of the answers (32%) were in “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” category, in a way people with mixed, mostly unsure feelings towards the questions asked. The following category was “Disagree” (21%) closely followed by “Agree” (19). Remaining were “Strongly Agree” (17%), “No Response” (5%) and “Strongly Disagree” (3%). When combined, “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” ones made 26% of total answers, followed closely by “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” categories (24%). Despite the fact that majority of the answers were positive, means -as suggested by the literature- these participants felt that their lifestyle and financial situation supported their involvement with the activity (in our example fitness), this statement is far from being conclusive. That is not only because positive answers to this category questions followed closely by the negative ones, it is also because the majority of the replies fell into in between category. One explanation to this could be that the respondents found some of the questions overstated or even too strong, such as “fitness occupies a central role in my life” and “I find a lot of my life is organised around fitness”.

*Social Bonding* characteristic received the highest replies on “Disagree” (28%), followed with “Agree” (20%), closely followed by “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” (19%). Remaining three were “Strongly Agree” (17%), “Strongly Disagree” (15%) and “No Response” (1%). Negative answers totalled 43% whereas positive ones 37% of all answers. Despite being close to each other and there is a reasonable amount of respondents did not decide which group they belong to (19%), findings indicate that responses to this category showed that majority of the research participants did not feel social inclusion in fitness related activities.

Next scale characteristic on the list *Identity Affirmation* displayed the following results in the order of highest to lowest responses: 26% “Disagree”, 22% “Neither Agree Nor Disagree”, 21% for both “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”, 9% “Strongly Disagree” and 1% “No Response”. The majority of the combined responses were in the positive (46%) and the combined negative responses consisted 35% of all responses. These findings indicate that people who filled the questionnaires felt they affirmed their personal identities with the fitness training, as suggested by the literature.

Final one, *Identity Expression* with the same order produced following results: 25% for both “Disagree” and “Neither Agree Nor Disagree”, 18% “Strongly Agree”, 17% “Agree”, 13% “Strongly Disagree” and 2% “No Response”. When it comes to combined responses to both positive and negative categories, this was the characteristic that two joint categories were the closest amongst all: 38% for the negative (Strongly Disagree+ Disagree) and 35% for the

positive (Strongly Agree+ Agree). Despite the fact that the total negative responses were higher than the positive ones suggests the participants felt they do not use fitness to express themselves to others, this is far from conclusive. One reason to this is two categories being close to each other, as mentioned. Other, “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” or people could not make their mind-up on the matter category is rather high (second highest, after *Centrality* characteristic) means any slight change in favouring either category could change the total outcome.

*Social Bonding* scale characteristic constructed as separate by Kyle *et al.* (2007), which this study also employed, was presented within *Centrality* by the original work of McIntyre and Pigram (1992). If we compare both characteristics with the findings of this study, we discover an amount of difference in both. First, despite still being high and having the third place among other six categories, “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” answers were the highest in the *Centrality* characteristic. This is an indicator that majority of the respondents (32%) to the *Centrality* related questions were not sure about how to answer the questions or did not believe either way (positive or negative) the questions fully represented them. Second, a comparison between each characteristic in terms of highest and lowest groupings in each category also generated different results. In *Centrality* for example, second highest answers fell into “Disagree” category, whereas in *Social Bonding* they were in “Agree” category. Third, combined results of positive and negative answers for both categories in each characteristic were different too. Being very close to each other, for the *Centrality* positive answers to the questions were higher than the negative ones (26%-24%). *Social Bonding*, however, displayed the opposite with even a greater margin for both: 43% for negative answer groupings, 37% for positive ones. Based on these findings (limited to this research), it could be claimed that Kyle *et al.*'s (2007) decision to construct a different characteristic named *Social Bonding* is justified.

*Identity Affirmation* and *Identity Expression* were another two scale characteristics that constructed separately from the previous studies by Kyle *et al.* (2007). When compared with each other, “Disagree” was the highest category of all answers in both, almost with same amount of answers: 26 for “Identity Affirmation” and 25 for “Identity Expression”. Classification of the rest of answers, on the hand, did not follow the suit. Second higher amount of replies came to “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” for the *Identity Affirmation* and “Strongly Agree” for the *Identity Expression* characteristic. Third and fourth ones were same for both: “Agree” category. When it comes to comparing cumulative results for the positive and negative categories, *Identity Affirmation* has 46% of all answers in the positive and 35% in negative. *Identity Expression* is, however on the opposite side, even there is a small difference in both: 38% negative and 35%. If both scale characteristics stayed in one as the earlier studies suggested, combined positive answers to all questions for these characteristics would be higher (46 IA+35 IE=41%) than the negative ones (35 IA+38 IE=37%). This suggestion clearly contradicts with the *Identity Expression* characteristic findings of this study, hence (as with the previous two) Kyle *et al.*'s (2007) decision to construct a different characteristic for each is also justified.

## Conclusions

This paper presented findings of a study that conducted in one of the biggest fitness clubs in Adana/Turkey. Its aim was to provide personal involvement level with the fitness related

activities amongst its members. Based on a 15 question scale that was developed by Kyle *et al.* (2007), the research examined the findings within the limits of this study, as explained before. Five scale characteristics out of scrutiny, *Attraction* was the only one that the respondents almost wholeheartedly agreed that fitness training was important for them, it was very satisfying and they enjoyed a lot when participating in fitness. This finding coincided with the previous studies as explained in more detail earlier. *Social Bonding*, however, exhumed mixed feelings among the respondents. Unlike the conclusion reached by some of the former research, this study is not conclusive enough to suggest that participants associated themselves socially with the help of fitness training. Some stated that, they gained a respectful number of friends with the help fitness, whereas others stated fitness training had nothing to do with their ability to increase their social circle. Next characteristic, *Identity Expression* was not as significant as the previous studies outlined. 35% of all respondents stated that they fully satisfied with the fitness related activities, whereas 38% declared the opposite. In addition, these participants did not feel that fitness training helped them to express their personality to others. *Identity Affirmation* related questions, on the other, generated responses in line with the main stream research findings. Almost half of all participants (46%) believed that fitness reflected their identity correctly and positively to others. In addition, based on these findings, we could propose that these individuals' *Identity Affirmation* was a "significant predictor" on their attachment to fitness training, as suggested by Kyle *et al.* (2007).

There are also limitations of the study that the reader should be aware of and a number suggestion could be made for the future studies. Despite the reasonable total amount of questionnaires left to the fitness club that participated in this study (200) out of 71 usable responses (about 36%) were less than predicted. Although the fitness club in question is being one of the largest clubs in Adana and the researcher has personal connections with the club owners', the return rate was rather low. Another limitation is, (as also pointed out by some of the previous studies) the amount of male respondents. 69% of all the participants were male, means duplicating the research on a female dominated study group may yield different results.

A final suggestion could be made on the *Centrality* scale characteristic. Far from being conclusive, this study indicated that the majority of the respondents could not make their minds up when replying *Centrality* characteristic related questions, hence it received the highest number of "Neither Agree Nor Disagree" category answers amongst the others (32%). This could be due to the reason of "improperly formed questions" asked to the participants, which the future studies should take into account. Modifying or softening some (or all) of these questions perhaps is a solution to this problem.

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