

## **Original Research Article**

### **Impact of perceived service quality on customer loyalty through customer delight and satisfaction: Examining the moderating role of reputation/ image of Chinese fitness centres**

#### **Abstract**

The trend of joining a fitness club has been growing rapidly since the last decade, but it's difficult to justify the actual reason which can keep the members of the club loyal. This study has indicated some key reasons for customer loyalty, including perceived service quality and customer satisfaction which is influenced by customer delight. Therefore, the basic aim of this research is to explore the effect of perceived service quality on customer loyalty. To explore the relationships made by deep literature analysis, this research collected the data from 411 members of Chinese fitness clubs. This data was further observed in AMOS software to ensure the results of the hypothesis. The results highlighted that there is a significant and positive impact of perceived service quality on customer loyalty. In addition, the results of all the hypotheses were found positive and significant. The study used a limited sample size, as the total number of members was not certain. This limitation can be addressed by future studies, and those studies can also check how word of mouth strengthens or weakens the relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty. The managers of owners of fitness clubs can seek the important results highlighted by this research for developing marketing strategies for clubs.

**Key Words:** Service Quality; Customer Loyalty; Customer Delight, Customer Satisfaction; Image; Repute.

## **Introduction**

The fitness industry is growing at a rapid pace. More than 6,000 new gyms stepped into the fitness industry in the U.S., a 20% increase from 2010 to 2015 (Yoon et al., 2016). According to a report from International Health, Racquet and Sports Club Organization, the year 2014 witnessed a 4.7% increase in the number of gyms and fitness clubs all around the world (IHRSA, 2015). China and Hongkong, for example, have 2,600 and 600 fitness clubs and gyms, respectively. These fitness centres serve more than 3.5 Million customers in these two countries (IHRSA, 2013). There is a positive growth in the fitness industry of China primarily due to increasing health awareness and disposable incomes of Chinese citizens. These factors have led to a fitness trend among millennials and generation Z, who are willing to invest in their fitness and health. The Chinese fitness industry is expected to generate an attractive annual income of \$7.1 Billion in 2020 with an annual growth of 4.4%. The fitness trend in China started in the early 1980s, and since then, the fitness industry has shown rapid growth, primarily due to increased incomes and awareness towards fitness and health. However, this increase in trend towards using the services of gyms and fitness clubs also increased due to a lack of physical exercise in professional jobs. More and more professions require people to sit in offices which have led to many health problems like obesity, heart problems and high cholesterol. Hence, the interest in physical exercise among the Chinese population is increasing. People are willing to pay for gym and fitness services to carry out physical exercise and overcome health-related problems that arise due to a lack of exercise.

On the other hand, the gyms and fitness centres encourage their managers to provide their customers with value-added services to differentiate themselves from their competitors. The gyms and fitness centres which provide more and better services can attract more customers and retain their existing ones. One such competitive advantage of fitness centres and gyms is service quality (Theodorakis et al., 2014; Garcia-Fernandez et al., 2018; Tsitskari et al., 2017). According to analysts, service quality is the only competitive differentiator for products and services provided by the companies in the service industry (Joeng et al., 2015; Gronroos, 2007; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Furthermore, the survival of the service industry hinges on the provision of superior service quality (Abas & Imam, 2016; Ariani, 2015; El Alfy & Abukari, 2019; Herrera, 2016; Maringe & Mourad, 2012; Saif, 2014). As a part of survival strategies

within the service industry, management has a vital role in continuously monitoring service quality levels (Cabellero & Walker, 2010; Rezaei et al., 2017). Service companies need to understand processes, procedures and crucial resources that are needed to improve their service quality. Companies that sell services can maintain loyal and satisfied customers if they can offer superior service quality (Vogt et al., 2015; Herrera, 2016).

Loyalty is an important factor in business survival and the development of competitive environments (Bilika et al., 2016; Sumantra & Yuesti, 2015). Service quality is one way to increase loyalty because the success of a service action is determined by quality. In addition to service quality factors, satisfaction is one factor that plays a role in increased loyalty. Justin Paul et al. (2016) argues that loyalty is directly influenced by customer satisfaction with service quality. Apart from service quality, customer satisfaction, customer delight is one factor that plays a role in increasing customer loyalty. If customer delight has been established, then the next task of the company is to obtain and maintain loyalty. Customer satisfaction is a crucial factor but not sufficient to ensure customer loyalty (Taplin, 2013; Kumar, Pozza & Ganesh, 2013; Dolnicar, Coltman & Sharma, 2015). Customer delight is another supplementary construct that contributes to customer loyalty besides customer satisfaction (Torres, Fu and Lehto, 2014; Magnini, Crotts and Zahrer, 2011; Albayrak & Caber, 2015). It positively impacts customer loyalty and works parallel to customer satisfaction (Wang, 2011; Oliver, Rust and Varki, 1997; Finn 2005, 2006; Loureiro, 2010; Kim, Vogt & Knutson, 2015; Kim, 2011) while some studies show that it has no such impact on customer loyalty (Oliver, Rust and Varki, 1997). Other studies have discovered a positive relationship between delight and loyalty but could not confirm a similar relationship with customer satisfaction (Bartl, Gouthier & Lenker, 2013). This study aims to resolve these inconsistencies by reassessing the separate, parallel and simultaneous effects of satisfaction and delight on customer loyalty in the fitness industry.

Several recent studies have focused on highlighting the importance of identifying service quality attributes that directly impact customer satisfaction (Donicar, Coltman & Sharma, 2015) and/or delight (Albayrak & Caber, 2015). However, the examination of the relationship between loyalty, satisfaction, delight and quality remains insufficient in the fitness industry of China. Therefore, the second aim of this study is to unveil the attributes of service quality that positively impact customer loyalty while considering customer delight and satisfaction. This study will

examine whether a well-established service loyalty-satisfaction-quality system (Zabkar, Brencic & Dmitrovic, 2010; Yoon, Lee and Lee, 2010; Pandza Bajcs, 2015) can be persuasive in parallel to a service loyalty-delight-quality system. Several studies have aimed to understand the role of a company's reputation and image in influencing consumer buying behaviour and customer loyalty (Tu et al., 2013; Richard & Zhang, 2012; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2011; Helm & Tolsdorf, 2013; Dick & Basu, 1994). However, there is a lack of literature on understanding the impact of the image or reputation of a fitness centre on the loyalty of their customer.

Based on the above explanation, this research aims to confirm the relationship between customer loyalty, satisfaction, delight and service quality and also to determine whether customer delight or satisfaction is the best indicator of customer loyalty. Moreover, this study also aims to test how to strengthen the relationship between customer loyalty and satisfaction through the moderating role of fitness centre reputation. This study will contribute towards four main topics based on the research setting and aims. Firstly, the empirical analysis in this study indicates a direct and positive effect of service quality on loyalty intention. Secondly, the study finds substantial evidence to support the parallel roles of loyalty-satisfaction-delight-quality, loyalty-satisfaction-quality, and loyalty-delight-quality systems. Thirdly, the results also found serial mediation of delight and satisfaction among the relationship of service and loyalty. Fourthly, the findings establish a significant moderating role of reputation between the relationship of satisfaction and loyalty. The hypothesised relationships are shown in figure 01.

## **Literature Review**

### **Customer Loyalty and Service Quality:**

Customer loyalty can be defined as the inclination of customers towards repeating the purchase of a service or product due to holding favourable attitudes and/or a psychological bond with the product or service or towards the company that provides them (Yeo et al., 2015; Gede, Mahatma, Yuda, Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013; Wong & Sohal, 2003; Deng et al., 2010). Previous studies have proposed several constructs based on customer loyalty. According to a study, customer satisfaction, service quality, and employee loyalty play a crucial role in maintaining customer loyalty in a high-contract service industry (Yee, Yeung & Cheng, 2010). Furthermore, another study discovered that cognitive sense, affective sense, conative manner, and behavioural manner are the different phases that play a role in developing customer loyalty (Oliver, 1999). Cognitive

sense, affective sense and conative behaviour form attitudinal loyalty, which depends on customer experiences with their service providing company. Once a customer is satisfied with the services, he/she displays attitudinal loyalty. Once the customer has developed attitudinal loyalty and passed the first three stages, the next step will lead to behavioural loyalty. Pan Sheng and Xie (2012) confirmed this evolvement process of customer loyalty by a meta-analysis about the antecedents of customer loyalty. This study also discovered a positive impact of loyalty programs, commitment, trust and customer satisfaction on customer loyalty. Customer loyalty also depends on switching costs, brand reputation and quality, according to Pan, Sheng and Xie (2012).

The customer purchase intention of service is influenced by the quality of service perceived by the customers when they first bought the service. If the company succeeds in delivering quality service the first time, the customers are more likely to purchase the service again. Customers put service quality in high regard, and it contributes towards their loyalty to the service or the service provider (Zeithaml, Berry & Pasuraman, 1996). Studies indicate a strong relationship between customer loyalty and service quality (Saura et al., 2008; Kuo, Wu & Deng, 2009). Customers who experience a good quality of service are most likely to repeat their purchase. Their purchase behaviour depicts their feeling towards the service provider. The service which fulfils customer expectations will ensure their loyalty towards the service or service provider. They will be inclined to purchase the service from the service provider, which delivers the best service quality and will avoid purchasing the same service from other companies (Kaura, Prasad & Sharma, 2015). Hence, we formulate the following hypothesis:

***H1: There is a positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty***

### **Service Quality and Customer Delight:**

Research by Plutchik (1980) discovered that eight basic emotions interact with each other to produce customer delight. His psych-evolutionary theory of emotion identified these eight emotions as anticipation, anger, disgust, sadness, surprise, fear, acceptance and joy. Plutchik's (1980) study discovered consistent results from psychoanalysis of his subjects that indicated that these primary emotions interacted to form complex emotions. This study identified customer delight as a result of interaction between surprise and joy. Delight can be described as an emotional experience that is more intense than satisfaction. Customer delight is a level of

fulfilment, pleasure or enchantment achieved by a customer from a service. It occurs when a service delivers an experience beyond what the customer expected from the service (Scheuing, 1990). It is an emotional state that is achieved when the expectations of customers exceed a degree of surprise (Oliver, Rust & Varki, 1997). Business analysts have realised customer delight to be a crucial factor in ensuring customer loyalty which cannot be achieved by ensuring customer satisfaction alone (Verma, 2003; Jones & Sasser, 1995). Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) explained service quality in terms of customer satisfaction as a universal attitude of judgement towards the superiority of service. Companies consider service quality as a vital component of their service and product offerings, as studies have identified its strong relationship with customer retention and a company's Profitability (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003; Baker and Crompton, 2000).

Sufficient evidence, if present, to strongly link customer delight to customer loyalty and satisfaction (Loureiro et al., 2014). Kim et al. (2015) identified customer delight as a strong promoter of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Besides, Cohen & Areni (1991) explained this relation as delight being a strong emotion that puts a substantial effect on memory which then dictates the cognitive actions of customers. These actions dictate the purchase behaviour of customers and ensure the satisfaction and loyalty of customers. Hence, we assume that customer delight is a crucial dictator of customer intentions, behaviours and satisfaction. Keeping this in mind, we propose the following hypotheses:

***H2: There is a positive effect of service quality on customer delight***

### **Customer Delight and Satisfaction:**

Although the earlier research (Oliver et al., 1997; Finn, 2005) tended to take account of the separate impacts of customer delight and satisfaction on those outcomes acting in parallel with each other, more recent works (e.g. Finn, 2012; Chitturi et al., 2008) suggested a positive relationship between these two factors. Finn (2012) discovered a strong association between customer delight and customer loyalty at satisfaction levels that are above the respondents' average level; Chitturi et al. (2008) also found a positive correlation between delight and satisfaction. However, to our knowledge, only a few studies have been found to investigate the causal relationship between satisfaction and delight. This study argues that even though they are related to each other, satisfaction and delight are two distinct concepts. Many marketing

researchers accept a theoretical framework in which a cognitive evaluation of performance predicts customers' feeling state (e.g. Bagozzi et al., 1999; Lam, Shankar, Erramilli, & Murthy, 2004; Menon & Dubé, 2000; Nyer, 1997; Olsen, 2002; Wirtz & Bateson, 1999). For example, Nyer (1997) suggested that an individual's cognitive appraisal of a situation leads to an affective experience. In the same vein, we suggest that customer delight is one facet of a practical evaluation that can be predicted from customer satisfaction as the cognitive component of the evaluation.

While trying to devise a strategy of customer delight, it is essential to provide an expected, positive performance level that results in customer satisfaction and then focus on attractive requirements that yield delight (Berman, 2005). Dissatisfied customers are not likely to be delighted because if the core or basic requirements that customers expect are unfulfilled, customers will not be delighted (Berman, 2005; Kano, Seraku, Takahashi & Tsuji, 1984; Keiningham et al., 1999). Therefore, before delight can be created, acceptable performance on core attributes is necessary (McNeilly & Barr, 2006). In line with this thinking, Wang (2011) showed customer delight has a significant influence on repurchase intentions if core service quality is exceptional. Therefore, some level of customer satisfaction may be necessary for customer delight. This reasoning and the associated evidence lead to the following hypotheses:

***H3: There is a positive relationship between customer delight and customer satisfaction***

#### **Loyalty and Satisfaction in the Fitness Industry:**

Customer satisfaction is discovered to be a primary aspect of customer loyalty as only satisfied customers will demonstrate loyalty and positive affiliation towards the company. Several studies prove a positive association between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bernhardt, Donthu & Kennett, 2000). Customer satisfaction is a predictor of future behavioural intentions (Anderson and Fink, 2005). According to Anderson and Mittal (2000), customer satisfaction is closely related to customer attitude, which predicts purchase intentions. There are several studies that highlight this relationship in the sports industry (e.g. Kim et al., 2006; Howat & Assaker, 2013; Calabuig et al., 2015). However, not enough literature is present to demonstrate this relationship in the fitness industry. But, some researches, like the one conducted by Murray & Howat (2002), concluded that the relationship between behavioural intentions and service quality is mediated by customer satisfaction and that customer loyalty is directly dependent on it. This

conclusion was also supported by Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis and Grouios (2004), who considered customer satisfaction as a crucial mediator between loyalty and perceived quality. Later, the strong relationship between behavioural intentions and customer satisfaction was collaborated by Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2004) and Theodorakis et al. (2014). Based on this literature analysis, we hypothesise that:

***H4: Customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty***

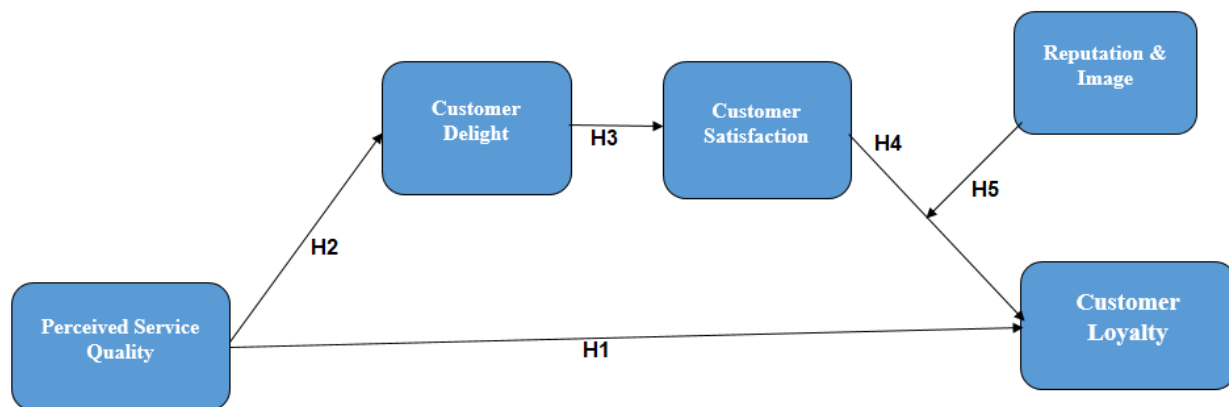
#### **Reputation/Image of Fitness Center:**

Brand image is a collection of interrelated perceptions about a brand that exists within consumers' minds (Ouwersloot and Tudorica, 2001). This perception is created based on personal consumer experience after using the brand. A brand conceptualises the commitment of sellers to provide consistency and specific product characteristics in the provision of benefits and services to consumers (Philip Kotler, 1999). Richardson et al. (1994) believed that brand image is an important basis for consumers to evaluate a product. The higher the evaluation of the product, the better the recognition of the product's cognitive quality, which in turn affects the behavioural intention of subsequent purchase. Brand image is conceptually then defined in this study as a consumer's association, cognition and belief in the brand through a series of memories (P Kotler et al., 2016). Good brand image can create more value for companies in the long term and is an essential element of marketing (Wang et al., 2019). As such, a fitness club brand should be influenced by fitness club member feedback and evaluation data concerning brand and actual and intended purchase behaviour.

Past studies have identified the strong impact of a company's image on customer satisfaction (Zins, 2001; Andreassen and Linderstad (1998), ElSalam et al., (2013). A similar study by Hu and Huang (2011) also identified that a company's image makes a significant contribution towards establishing customer satisfaction. Ali et al. (2015) also identified that their company's image contributed to increasing and/or maintaining customer satisfaction while studying customers in Pakistan's telecommunication industry. Other studies also identified a positive relationship between corporate image and customer loyalty (e.g. Ad-El-Salam and Shawky, 2013; Loverlock & Writz, 2007; Nukpezah & Nyumuyo, 2010; Boohene & Agyepong, 2011; Agyei & Kilika, 2013; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001; Kandampully & Hu, 2007). Agyei and Kilika (2014) also identified a positive correlation between brand image and customer loyalty. Hence, it

is established that a better brand image contributes to higher customer loyalty. It becomes essential to study corporate image due to its strong impact on customer loyalty. Therefore, based on the above discussion, it is safe to conclude that corporate image originates from consumption experience, feelings, thoughts that are a part of an evaluation process about a company, which turns customer memory into a behavioural intention (Yuille & Catchpole, 1977). Therefore, this study hypothesises:

***H5: In the context of the fitness industry, the reputation/image of the fitness centre positively moderates the relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty.***



**Figure 01: Hypothesised research model**

## **Methodology**

### **Data collection and sample**

The authors developed a questionnaire to collect the data from customers of fitness centres in China. The sample of fitness centre customers was selected using convenience sampling techniques. The research was a field study, and the questionnaires were delivered to the respondents inside the premises of different fitness centres in China. A total of 1000 questionnaires were distributed among the research participants. Among these, 427 responses were returned, and 16 responses were dropped from the data analysis because of incomplete answers. Therefore, the final useable responses were 411, which indicate a 41 per cent successful response rate. Among these 411 responses, 52 per cent of the participants were male, and 48 per cent were female. The majority, 64 per cent were young respondents having aged between 18 to

33 years. Moreover, the majority of the respondents were well educated and had graduated or above education. As the data were collected in China, the questions were asked in the English language with translation into the local language.

### **Measures**

The indicators and measurement scales were adopted from past valid studies. The construct and indicators of service quality were adopted from the study of Howat and Assaker (2016). Three items scale was adopted from the study of Finn (2005) to measure customer delight. A 3-item measurement scale was used to measure customer satisfaction that was adopted from the study of Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014). The construct of customer loyalty was measured with a 3-item measurement scale, adopted from the study of Cronin et al. (2000). A 6-item measurement scale was adopted from the studies of Lina et al. (2020) to measure the reputation and image of fitness centres. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure all items.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analysed using AMOS version 24. As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step analytical method was used to draw results. In the first step, reliabilities and validities were determined, and latterly in the second step, hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM).

### **Results**

#### **Validity Analysis**

Convergent and discriminant validity results are presented in table-1. These validities are determined through correlations, composite reliability (C.R.), average variance extracted (AVE), and the square root of AVE (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015; Fornell & Larker, 1981). According to Bagozzi and Yi (1988), the value of C.R. greater than 0.60 and the value for AVE greater than 0.70 confirms excellent convergent validity, while the greater value of the square root of AVE than the construct's correlation confirms discriminant validity (Fornell & Larker, 1981). The results reveal excellent validities as all the values for C.R. and AVE are higher than the recommended cutoff criteria. Moreover, all the values for the square root of AVE are also greater than the constructs' correlations.

*Table 1: Results of Descriptive, Correlation, and Validity Analyses.*

Variables	Mean	S.D	CR	AVE	S.Q	C.D	C.S	C.L	IMG
S.Q	3.55	1.00	0.843	0.574	<b>0.758</b>				
C.D	3.64	1.11	0.882	0.714	0.386***	<b>0.845</b>			
C.S	3.61	1.09	0.780	0.542	0.306***	0.252***	<b>0.736</b>		
C.L	4.09	0.92	0.801	0.573	0.211***	0.234***	0.293***	<b>0.757</b>	
IMG	3.68	1.03	0.870	0.530	0.447***	0.244***	0.184**	0.109*	<b>0.728</b>

Note: N=411; SQ= service quality; CD=customer delight; CS= customer satisfaction; CL= customer loyalty; IMG= reputation and image; CR= composite reliability; AVE=average variance extracted; \*\*\*p<.001

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was conducted to determine to measure model fitness using SEM, and results are presented in table-2. "Chisquare ( $\chi^2/df$ ), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental fit index (IFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)" were used as fit indices. The fit indices of 5-factor measurement model, reveal excellent model fit ( $\chi^2/df = 4.72$ , RMSEA = 0.084, IFI=0.81, TLI=0.79, CFI=0.81).

Table 2: Results of Confirmative Factor Analysis (CFA)

Measurement Models	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	IFI	TLI	CFI
Measurement Model	235.47	142	1.66	0.04	0.98	0.97	0.98

### Test of Hypothesis

After determining validities and model fitness, we have tested hypotheses using SEM and results are shown in table-3 for direct effect and for the moderation effect results are shown in table-4. Results of total direct effect indicate a significant and positive impact of service quality on customer loyalty ( $\beta=0.193$ ,  $P<.001$ ). Perceived service quality has significantly and positively influenced customer delight ( $\beta=0.364$ ,  $P<.001$ ). Moreover, results reveal that customer delight is significantly related to consumers' satisfaction ( $\beta=0.252$ ,  $P<.001$ ). Furthermore, the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty is also positive and significant ( $\beta=0.285$ ,  $P<.001$ ).

The conditional effect of focal predictor customer satisfaction on customers' loyalty through the moderation of reputation and image is tested, and results are shown in table-4. The results reveal

significant moderation of reputation and image of fitness centre between the relationship of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

The results designate a low effect of consumer satisfaction on their loyalty to the club ( $\beta=0.160$ ,  $P<.01$ ) for consumers having low perception about repute/image of the fitness centre. While, the effect of customer satisfaction on their loyalty to the fitness centre gets strong ( $\beta=0.285$ ,  $P<.001$ ) in the case of average image perception. Moreover, this effect of consumer satisfaction on their loyalty to fitness centres gets stronger with higher repute/image perception ( $\beta=0.475$ ,  $P<.001$ ). The finding indicates that the repute or image of the fitness centre plays and critical role in forming customers' satisfaction and loyalty. Based on the results, all study hypotheses are well supported and accepted. The significant interactions of focal predictor (customer satisfaction) and moderator (reputation/image) is also shown in figure-2.

Table 3: Test of Hypotheses (Direct Effect)

<i>Relationships</i>	<i><math>\beta</math></i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Perceived Service Quality → Customer Loyalty	0.193	0.06	***
Perceived Service Quality → Customer Delight	0.364	0.07	***
Customer Delight → Customer Satisfaction	0.252	0.06	***
Customer Satisfaction → Customer Loyalty	0.285	0.05	***

Note: \*\*\* $p <.001$ .

Table 4: Test of Moderation Effect

<b>Store Reputation and Image</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>Boot SE</b>	<b>BLL CI 95%</b>	<b>BUL CI 95%</b>
<b>-1 SD</b>	0.160**	0.05	0.091	0.309
<b>Mean</b>	0.285***	0.04	0.160	0.412
<b>+1 SD</b>	0.475***	0.03	0.306	0.614

Note: \*\*\* $p <.001$ , \*\* $p <.01$ ; IE: indirect effect; BLL: boot lower limit; BUL: boot upper limit; CI: confidence interval

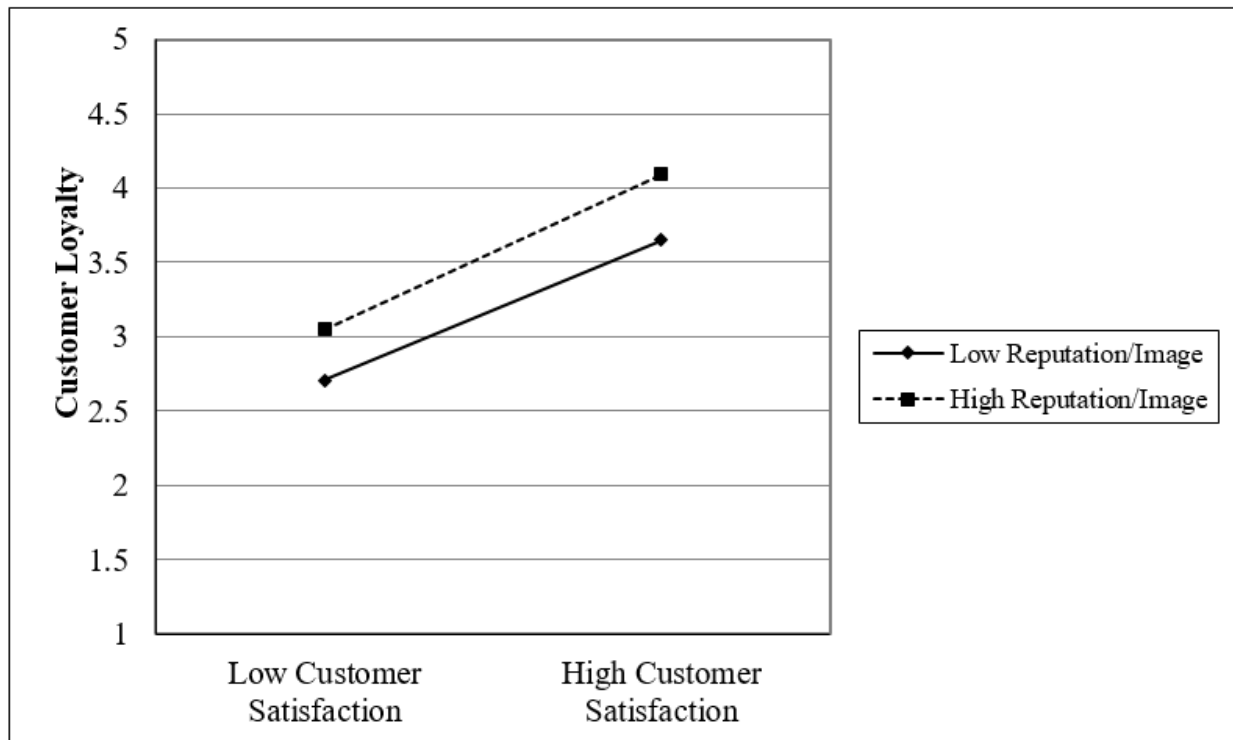


Figure-2: Mod graph

## Discussion

Many studies on service marketing focused on service quality. Among these studies, only some highlighted the concept of perceived service quality and its impact on customer loyalty. Similarly, this study emphasised an investigation of perceived service quality's influence on the loyalty of fitness club members. The relation of this service quality was also determined with customer delight. In addition, the study highlighted the role of customer delight on customer satisfaction. Moreover, this relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty was examined by using the reputation/image of a fitness club as moderating variable. The results have demonstrated the relevance of studying perceived service quality from the perspective of fitness club members. Moreover, in several ways, the results extended and qualified the available literature on relationships among perceived service quality and customer loyalty, perceived service quality and customer delight, customer delight and customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

The first hypothesis of study H1 predicted that perceived service quality is positively related to customer loyalty. The positive and significant relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty highlight that better quality of service can enhance the loyalty of fitness club members who are considered a potential customer of fitness clubs. The product may create loyalty by its features, but services mainly require quality to make the customer loyal (Devaraj et al., 2001). The results of H1 are in line with the study of Auka et al. (2013), who also explored the positive relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty while focusing on the retail banking sector. Rahim (2016) concluded that the long term survival of the service industry in this highly competitive environment is only possible by focusing on perceived service quality, which leads to customer loyalty. The results of many other studies on perceived service quality (Segoro, 2013; Ostrowski et al., 1993. Dahiyat et al., 2011, Goyal and Chanda, 2017) has acknowledged the significance of customer loyalty.

The second hypothesis of study H2 predicted that there is a positive relationship between perceived service quality and customer delight. This positive relation highlights the value of service quality when it's examined from the perspective of customer happiness. Customer delight is a stage where he or she goes beyond expectations about any product or service, and these expectations create a positive emotional reaction (Torres and Kline, 2013). Since the last decade, many researchers and specialist practitioners have been interested in the concept of customer delight to keep customer loyalty and suggest that firms must go beyond mere satisfaction to truly delight the customers (Arnold et al., 2015). Thus H3, predict the relationship of customer delight with customer satisfaction. The results of these hypotheses are in line with studies that highlighted that better service quality delight the customer and customer delight leads to customer satisfaction (Torres and Kline, 2006; Torres and Kline, 2013; Fuller and Matzler, 2008; Finn, 2012; Ahrholdt et al., 2017: Berman, 2005). The satisfaction of customers enhances the chances of customer loyalty (Shankar, 2003). Thus, the H4 of the study found a critical role that customer satisfaction can play in obtaining customer loyalty. Many studies confirmed this relation as positive and concluded that customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty (Bowen et al., 2001; Hallowell, 1996; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Yu et al., 2005; Mohsan et al., 2011; Zameer et al., 2019; Ozkan et al., 2019). Finally, the results of testing H5 shows that reputation/image of fitness club moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The image of the service provider can play an important role in increasing the

loyalty of satisfied customers (Nguyen, 2006). In addition, Lai (2019) concluded that the image and reputation of the service provider could help in building customer loyalty. Therefore, the results of H5 are in line with the study of (De Leaniz et al., 2016; Lai, 2019; Adah, 2020).

### **Implications**

This study has provided a detailed model of evaluating customer loyalty with fitness clubs, but still, it has many practical and theoretical implications. In terms of theoretical implications, first of all, this research extended the limited understanding of perceived service quality and its relationship with customer loyalty. This research has drawn attention to many elements which can lead to customer loyalty. This study departs from earlier studies because they either directly measured the perceived service quality with customer loyalty or focused more on any single domain of service quality. This study provided the extensive linkage of customer loyalty. First, the relationship of perceived service quality was measured with customer loyalty. Secondly, the relation of perceived service quality was examined with customer delight, thirdly, the relationship of customer delight was investigated with customer satisfaction, and fourthly the impact of customer satisfaction was examined on customer loyalty. All proper literature-based relations were also justified by the studies. This research is unique as it presented the actual derivation of loyalty, which starts from perceived service quality and ends at customer satisfaction. Moreover, this comprehensive study is also the first, to the best of the author's knowledge, which has examined the moderating role of reputation/image of fitness club between perceived service quality and customer loyalty.

In terms of practical implications, first, the results revealed that perceived service quality could influence customer loyalty. Therefore, fitness clubs should focus on improving their service quality to make their members loyal to clubs. These clubs can constantly work on delivering high-quality services which can delight the customer. This model of the study highlighted five important relations which have broadened its scope of implications. The fitness club owners or managers can use this study for designing the marketing campaign or improving the loyalty of their customers. The model of this study is constructed on the basis of earlier insights and explains all intermediate processes involved in developing perceived service quality. This helped in clarifying the effective areas which can maximise service quality and develop loyalty among members. Moreover, the study suggested that the reputation/image of fitness clubs can

strengthen the relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty. Therefore, club managers or owners can improve their club's reputation or image for getting the loyalty of customers (i.e. members).

### **Limitations**

This comprehensive research has many limitations which can be addressed by future studies. First, the data for the study was collected from a limited number of people and only focused on ordinary levels of clubs. Thus, future studies can use the large sample size and also consider the luxury clubs while replicating this research. Second, the current research has a really broad model indicating the factors associated with customer loyalty. This model can be refined by investigating some more critical indicators of customer loyalty including, work and the environment of the club as potential moderating variables.

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