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Exploring Factors Influencing Consumer Decision-Making in Repurchasing Martial Arts Club Membership

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Abstract

This study investigated the factors that influence consumers' decision-making when purchasing martial arts club memberships. Two hundred ninety martial arts club members from a metropolitan area of the United States participated in the study. Five major influential factors (instructors and staff, facility, membership fee, location, and martial arts program) have emerged through a literature review and factor analysis. A multiple regression analysis presented that, among the major factors, the instructors and staff, the facility, and the membership fee played major roles in martial arts club decision-making. In addition, female participants demonstrated greater consciousness regarding their decisions than their male counterparts. Owners and marketers of martial arts clubs should consider the findings of this study to better understand members' purchase decisions.

Keywords: Consumer Decision-Making, Purchase Intention, Martial Arts industry, Sport Marketing

Introduction

Over the past several decades, the martial arts industry has experienced significant growth and become one of the major participants in business in the sport industry (Statista, 2018). In 2018, approximately 3.6 million Americans actively participate in martial arts, and martial arts clubs generate around \$4 billion in revenue (Gaille, 2018). Furthermore, martial arts goods equipment sales increased by around 33% from \$314 million in 2007 to \$418 million in 2017 (Statista, 2018).

Although the martial arts industry has witnessed significant growth, many small martial arts clubs have faced various market and financial challenges, and one of the major reasons for these challenges is related to the lack of understanding of consumer purchasing behaviors in the martial arts industry. Fundamentally, consumers will not purchase a product that does not meet their criteria of expectations. Martial arts club owners and marketers should understand these criteria of expectations which are some of the most critical elements in the consumer decision-making process. Although there have been some research studies on martial arts, few focused on marketing. In particular, no studies have focused on the primary factors that influence consumers' decision-making when purchasing martial arts club memberships. Therefore, this study is designed to examine the major influential factors and their relationships with a demographic variable of gender on consumers' decision-making in

purchasing martial arts club memberships. Understanding the factors that influence members' decision-making process will enable owners and marketers in the martial arts industry to develop more effective marketing strategies to keep current and reach prospective consumers.

Dynamics of Consumer Decision-Making

Understanding factors influencing consumers' purchase decisions has long been one of the central issues among consumer behavior researchers. According to consumer decision-making process models, consumers go through three critical stages before making the final purchase decision (Armstrong & Kotler, 2020; Mullin et al., 2014).

The decision-making process starts with the recognition of a need or a problem. In this stage, consumers recognize a discrepancy between the existing and desirable states (Armstrong & Kotler, 2020; Shank & Lyberger, 2014). When the discrepancy is large and important, the consumer decision-making process starts to fill the discrepancy. Consumers in this stage are triggered by internal, such as personal needs and experiences, and external stimuli, such as interactions with reference groups. The first step that marketers should understand is consumers' wants and needs. The significant growth of the martial arts industry indicates that there is a high level of consumers' need to purchase a membership or join a club.

Once consumers are aware of the need and problem, they seek out solutions. In this stage, consumers try to obtain information from various sources about products that can satisfy their needs and wants (Armstrong & Kotler, 2020; Childers & Rao, 1992). Sources with high credibility, such as those having expertise, will serve as primary sources of information (Childers & Rao, 1992). These sources include personal (i.e. family, friends, salespeople, and dealers) and non-personal sources (i.e. TV, radio, magazine, and the Internet). For this stage, marketers should identify some major information sources which influence consumers' decision-making to establish better marketing strategies.

Another crucial stage before making a purchase decision is the evaluation stage (Armstrong & Kotler, 2020; Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014). After gathering necessary information from various sources, consumers go through an intensive evaluation stage regarding the features and characteristics of the products. In this stage, consumers develop a set of evaluation criteria for use in making the product selection. Hence, marketers should understand some major criteria which influence consumer decision-making and develop marketing strategies based on these criteria (Armstrong & Kotler, 2020).

During the past decade, researchers in various fields investigated the factors that influence the consumers' purchase decision-making process in various industries. Yoh, Chen, and Jang (2016) investigated the utilitarian and hedonic factors that influence American college students' athletic shoe purchases. Tiwari and Joshi (2020) investigated the factors influencing online purchase intention among generation Z consumers. Datta and Nath (2021) investigated consumers' purchase intention of real estate. Favero, De Angelo, Kos, and Eunni (2006) found that Brazilian customers factor in criteria such as quality, safety, comfort, and price when they purchase automobiles. Stevens, Lathrop, and Bradish (2005) investigated the Canadian Generation-Y consumers' decision-making on purchasing sports products. Theodorakis, Alexandris, Rodriguez, and Sarmiento (2004) used several factors, such as facilities, instructors and staff, and programs, to measure Portuguese consumers' satisfaction with health clubs. They also measured the relationship between the demographic characteristics of participants and the influence of such factors on consumer satisfaction.

Because characteristics of consumers can significantly influence consumer behaviors, researchers on consumer behavior in various fields investigated the relationships between consumer purchasing behaviors and demographic backgrounds (Costa, 1994; Kemp et al., 1997; Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Yoh et al., 2006; Zeithaml, 1985). Among demographic variables, research consistently found that gender is one of the most important variables in consumer behaviors because gender difference is very evident in the field of consumer behavior (Costa, 1994; Kemp et al., 1997; Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Yoh et al., 2006). In general, research reported that females tend to have more concerns and spend significantly more amount of time on product purchase decisions than their male counterparts. Moreover, according to Meyers-Levy's selectivity model of information processing model, males tend to use a single selective cue. On the other hand, females are more comprehensive and effortful decision-makers by collecting product information from a variety of sources (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991).

Research Questions

Although researchers and marketers in various fields investigated the factors that influence consumers' decision-making, there is no empirical study on consumers' decision-making in the martial arts industry. The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influence martial arts club members' decision-making when choosing martial arts clubs. Specifically, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What major factors influence consumers' decision-making in purchasing martial arts club memberships?
2. Are females more concerned and conscious about their decision-making when they purchase martial arts club memberships?
3. Does the influence of the major factors differ between genders?

Methods

Participants: The participants for this study were 290 martial arts club members in a metropolitan area of the United States. Self-administered surveys were given to the participants. Of the 290 collected survey questionnaires, females represented 47.2% ($n = 137$) and males made up 52.8% ($n = 153$) of the participants. The mean age of the participants was approximately 31, and the average year of participating in martial arts was 4 years.

Instrumentation: The survey was developed through literature reviews and discussions with a panel of experts, including instructors and members of martial arts clubs. The survey was pilot-tested with 33 members of a martial arts club and the initial survey was modified upon the test results. The internal reliability of the survey was 0.731. The survey for this study consisted of two parts with 33 questions. The first part included demographic questions, and the second part consisted of 29 questions about the factors influencing consumers' decision-making on selecting martial arts clubs.

Throughout a factor analysis, five major factors have emerged: instructors and staff, facility, membership fee, location, and martial arts program. Some sample questions are: (1) some factors significantly influenced my decision on choosing the martial arts club, (2) I was very conscious about my decision when I chose the martial arts club, (3) the reputation of instructors and staff was very important when I chose the martial arts club, (4) the facility that the club provides was very important when I chose the martial arts club, (5) the location of the club was an important factor when I chose the martial arts club, (6) I considered the amount of membership fee as one of the primary reasons to choose the martial arts club, and

(7) the effectiveness of the martial arts programs was very important when I chose the martial arts club. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used to measure the degree of influence of each factor on consumers' decision-making.

Data Analysis: The data collection process was completed in eight weeks. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the data analyses. Descriptive statistics of mean, frequency, and standard deviation were acquired to analyze the data. A multiple regression analysis was employed to measure R^2 , which is generally used to find how much the predictor variables (the five factors) can explain the criterion variable (purchase decision-making). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if the influence of the major factors differs between male and female participants. Alpha values were set at .05 to determine statistical differences.

Results

Descriptive statistics found that the majority of participants are conscious of some elements of martial arts clubs when choosing martial arts clubs. The mean of the following question "There are some factors that I consider important when I choose a martial arts club" was 4.59/5 ($M = 4.59$). The result of ANOVA ($F(1, 288) = , p < .01$) revealed that female participants ($M = 4.69$) showed a higher level of consciousness on certain factors when choosing martial arts clubs than their male counterparts ($M = 4.37$).

As shown in Table 1, the results of this study also indicated that, among the five major factors, *the instructors and staff* ($M = 4.43$) were the most important factor when selecting martial arts clubs followed by the facility ($M = 4.34$), the membership fee ($M = 4.04$), the location ($M = 3.86$), and the program ($M = 3.70$). The influential order of the five factors did not differ between male and female participants.

Table 1

Mean of the Five Major Factors

Factors	Mean	SD
Instructors and staff	4.43	.53
Facilities	4.34	.64
Fees	4.04	.71
Location	3.86	.78
Programs	3.70	.63

The results of a multiple regression analysis using the five major factors of martial arts clubs as predict variables and decision-making in the selection of martial arts clubs as a criterion variable found that the R^2 of the overall model was 0.406 and F test statistics were significant ($F(5, 284) = 11.221, p < .01$). Furthermore, the multiple regression revealed that, among the five factors, the instructors and staff, the facility, and the fee significantly influence consumers' decision-making, while the location and the martial arts program did not.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis for the Five Major Factors

Factors	B	SE B	β
Instructors and staff	2.47	0.72	0.22*
Facilities	1.75	0.52	0.19*
Fees	2.14	0.61	0.21*
Location	-0.008	0.049	-0.01
Programs	0.027	0.066	0.03

*: Significantly influence decision-making at a 0.05 level

Gender Differences in the Factors

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to investigate the relationship between the genders of participants and the three significant factors.

Instructors and staff: ANOVA found that the influence of the instructors and staff on the consumers' decision-making did not significantly differ between genders. Both female ($M = 4.47$) and male ($M = 4.41$) participants showed the highest mean on the factor of instructors and staff.

Facility: ANOVA revealed that the influence of martial arts facilities on the consumers' decision-making significantly differed between genders. ($F(1, 288) = 4.056, p < .05$). Female participants showed a higher mean ($M = 4.43$) than their male counterparts ($M = 4.20$) on the importance of the facility when they chose martial arts clubs. This result indicated that females are more conscious of the quality of the facility.

Membership Fees: ANOVA showed that the influence of the membership fee on the consumers' decision-making significantly differed between genders. ($F(1, 288) = 4.003, p < .05$). Female participants showed a higher mean score ($M = 4.11$) than their male counterparts ($M = 3.89$) on the importance of membership fees. This result indicated that females are more conscious of the number of membership fees.

Table 3

Gender Differences in the Three Significant Factors

Gender	Male		Female		F
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Instructors	4.41	.59	4.47	.53	0.917
Facilities*	4.20	.62	4.43	.66	4.056
Fees*	3.89	.77	4.11	.63	4.003

*: Significantly different at 0.05 level

Discussion

The results of this study indicated that martial arts members are very conscious about their decision when purchasing memberships. Specifically, this study found that female consumers were more conscious about their decision-making in martial arts club membership purchases than their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with some previous studies. Often men and women are shopping differently even for the same products (Zeithaml, 1985), and females tend to have more concerns about the product purchase decision-making and collect more information regarding the product (Belch & Willis, 2001; Clark, et al., 2001; Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991; Zeithaml, 1985). This finding can be

explained from several different standpoints. First, it can be related to social roles. Different social roles between males and females often impact their decision-making process (Darley & Smith, 1995). Because of their roles in a family or a society, compared to males, females tend to be more influential to other consumers (Belch & Willis, 2001; Clark, et al., 2001; Moschis, 1985; Popcorn & Marigold, 2001). For example, Popcorn and Marigold (2001) stated that females influence approximately 80 percent of all consumer purchases. Clark, et al. (2001) reported similar findings that housewives play a very important role when making a purchase decision on household products. Furthermore, mothers are particularly important figures in children's decision making and children and mothers essentially act as one consumer many times (Clark et al., 2001). As a result, they substantially influence the children's purchase decision-making process. Because of their roles, it is suggested by several studies that, in comparison with men, women are more likely to conform and have greater usage of cues to make the right purchase decision (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991).

From the trait standpoint, researchers found that men tend to be more independent, confident, and willing to take risks (Areni & Kiecker, 1993; Prince, 1993) as well as less prone to perceive product risk than women (Darley & Smith, 1995). Therefore, men often spend less time in various stages of the purchase decision-making process than women. For example, several researchers emphasized that male consumers miss subtle cues in the decision-making process because they often tend not to engage in the comprehensive processing of information. Conversely, female consumers are likely to engage in effortful, comprehensive, and itemized analysis of all available information regarding the product as well as their purchase decision (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991). As a result, female consumers showed a greater amount of concern and consciousness toward their purchase decision-making than their male counterparts.

In terms of the factors that influence the consumers' decision-making in purchasing martial arts club memberships, the results of this study showed that the instructors and staff, the facilities, and the fees played significant roles when consumers purchase a martial arts club membership. Among these three influential factors, the human factor, *the instructors, and the staff* was the most influential. This finding can be explained from the service product standpoint. Martial arts clubs are service-oriented organizations, and their core products are services such as instruction and experiences. There is no doubt that the quality of the core product is one of the most influential factors in consumers' purchase decision-making in any industry. Given the fact of the importance of the core product on consumer purchase decisions, it is not uncommon to see that consumers in the martial arts industry value the quality of the instructors and staff when they select martial arts clubs. Specifically, the score on the survey question "The reputation and the quality of the instructors and staff were very important when I chose the martial arts club" was very high ($M = 4.65$). Bodet (2006) also found one of the most important determinants that influence the satisfaction of health club members was the quality of human factors such as the quality and behavior of instructors and staff. The score ($M = 4.5$) on the question "Willingness to help and courtesy of the staff and instructors are a very important factor" supported the statement on the importance of staff and instructors. Kelley, Hoffman, and Davis (1993) also emphasized that the nature of the interpersonal relationship is a crucial element of satisfaction in the area of services. In other words, human components appear to be a determinant element influencing certain consumer behaviors, such as purchase decisions, loyalty, and repurchase intentions, in a service business (Bodet, 2006).

The result of this study also indicated that the facility of the club was the second most influential factor when club members choose martial arts clubs. Because services are intangible and usually cannot be tried before purchase, customers seek tangible evidence of what they will experience in a given service encounter (Bitner, 1992; Langeard et al., 1981). Moreover, given the fact that consumers in the service business come to expect comfort and convenient facilities, physical evidence, such as facility design, decor, cleanness, and comfort, can send messages that help establish the company's image and influence the customer's expectations (Baker, 1987). Therefore, a well-maintained and managed facility can play an essential role as a consumer relations tool in the service business industry. Previous research in the area of service business reached similar conclusions. Bodet (2006) found that the facility and conditions of the facility, such as design and cleanliness, are key attributes that play a significant role in consumer behavior in the health club industry. Greenwell et al (2002) also examined the importance of facility on consumer satisfaction and stated that, within the context of the service experience, consumer behaviors and perceptions can be significantly influenced by the physical environment in the sport service business industry. As a consequence, the organization with good conditions of facilities will attain positive "word-of-mouth" advertising from their consumers (Bitner, 1992; Ward et al., 1992).

Another important factor was the membership fee. There is no doubt that the price of a product is one of the most influential factors in the consumer decision-making process. When consumers perceive that the value of the product is less than the price, the amount of money that must be given up, the higher prices negatively affect purchase probabilities. On the other hand, when the price is too low in comparison with competitors' prices and consumers' perceived values, consumers may doubt the quality of the product. Therefore, fair price is one of the most significant attributes influencing consumers' purchase decisions.

Implications and Limitations

This study may give useful guidelines and directions to owners and marketers of martial arts clubs to develop better marketing strategies.

First, when advertising, owners, and marketers should emphasize the quality, such as experiences, education, and awards, of their instructors and staff members. One possible way to do this is to include current members' statements of appreciation and gratitude to the instructors and staff as well as some proven records of instructors and staff. Second, owners and marketers should emphasize the quality, such as cleanliness, safety, and user-friendliness, of the facilities. In addition, the staff of martial arts clubs should check the conditions of the facilities regularly and keep them in as good shape as possible. Lastly, owners and marketers should also advertise the reasonableness of the fees by comparison with their competitors' membership fees.

It should be noted that this study is not without its limitations that could be improved in future studies. Although the sample size was not small, the participants in this study were recruited from one martial arts club in a metropolitan area of the United States. Therefore, it is recommended for future studies investigate consumers' membership purchasing behaviors in various geographic regions. Demographic characteristics of consumers, such as socio-economic status, age, ethnicity, and years of training, other than those examined in this study should be considered for future studies because studies consistently found that consumer behaviors can be affected by various demographic variables. Finally, it would also be interesting to know how the influence of the factors differs from the behaviors of other consumer groups (i.e., college students, baby boomers, and senior citizens). Consumer

behaviors can be directly influenced by cultural and social interactions with a specific group of people and the norms of the groups that they belong to.

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