

Consumer Behavior in the Virtual Fitness Industry

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Abstract

In modern society, we are increasingly moving toward digitalization, which is also strongly reflected in the fitness industry and consumer behavior. This article explores consumer behavior in the context of virtual fitness services. It is important to understand that with the rise of online workouts and applications, purchasing patterns and consumer preferences in this field are also changing. We conducted a quantitative study in which we surveyed users of virtual fitness services (as well as those who do not use them) with the aim of analyzing their habits, preferences, and level of satisfaction. The results of the study showed that participants demonstrated a relatively high level of satisfaction with virtual workouts, which have become part of their daily routine – especially for those with busy schedules. We found that consumers choose remote workouts primarily because of the flexibility, accessibility, and wide range of programs offered by these services.

1 INTRODUCTION

The virtual fitness industry is part of the broader domain of consumer services, developing in step with changes in consumer behavior. Consumer purchase behavior includes the activities of searching for, buying, using, and evaluating products or services with the goal of satisfying needs and desires. This behavior is influenced by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors. Cultural factors include values, norms, and social strata; social factors involve the influence of family, friends, and social groups. Personal factors such as age, lifestyle, and economic status, as well as psychological factors such as motivation, perception, and attitudes, significantly shape purchase decisions (Grand View Research, 2023; Zupančič, 2016; Solomon, 2009).

Understanding the decision-making process and the factors that affect it is crucial for companies because it enables effective marketing strategies and tailoring of the offering to consumer needs. This is

especially important today due to rapid changes in technology and consumer expectations. These dynamics are particularly pronounced in the virtual fitness industry, where consumers' decisions about using virtual workout platforms are shaped by price, accessibility, service quality, flexibility, and personal values related to a healthy lifestyle. Modern consumers increasingly focus on efficiency and ease of use – a pattern that also holds in fitness (Grand View Research, 2023).

The development of digital platforms has enabled workouts to be tailored to individual needs, offering personalized solutions and progress tracking. Wearables and apps play an important role by recording data and enabling interactivity. These changes serve the growing demand for flexible solutions that allow users to work out anywhere and anytime (WellHub, 2023).

This study is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which suggests that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are key drivers of technology adoption. In the context of virtual fitness platforms, these factors are examined to understand how they influence consumer satisfaction and engagement. Additionally, the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan) is used to explore intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that guide user preferences for virtual workouts, providing a deeper insight into the factors that contribute to the widespread adoption of digital fitness services.

The research problem addresses the evolving consumer behavior in the virtual fitness industry, particularly focusing on user satisfaction, motivation, and preferences. Despite the rapid expansion of the industry, there is limited empirical research on how consumers engage with and evaluate virtual fitness services, especially regarding factors like flexibility, accessibility, and personal values related to health. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing insights into how different demographic groups interact with virtual platforms and their perception of the services offered.

2 THE EMERGENCE OF THE VIRTUAL FITNESS INDUSTRY

In recent years, the virtual fitness industry has experienced exceptional growth, driven by digitalization, busy lifestyles, greater attention to health, and the coronavirus pandemic. New forms of exercise have emerged – from virtual marathons to guided online programs – supported by technological advances that enable access without expensive equipment. Today, apps and web platforms offer live and on-demand workouts as a cost-effective and flexible alternative to traditional methods (Zupančič, 2016; Vučković, 2017).

The pandemic accelerated this transition, as gym closures and movement restrictions pushed many toward online workouts. The virtual industry responded with a wide selection of courses and group sessions, helping to ease both physical and psychological burdens. A variety of styles are now available – from yoga and Pilates to high-intensity training – so consumers can choose according to their needs and fitness level (Vučković, 2017; Ule, 2013).

Beyond the workout itself, the industry fosters social interaction through forums, social networks, and online group classes where users share experiences, motivate one another, and connect. Virtual acquaintances often grow into real friendships, illustrating how the online development of the fitness industry has intertwined health, social life, and technological progress while offering individuals a high degree of flexibility (University of Maribor, 2018; Ricci et al., 2020).

2.1 Development of the virtual fitness industry

The development of the virtual realm and with it the fitness industry is dynamic, rooted in technological innovation, changes in consumer habits, and trends in health and well-being. Early virtual fitness programs were simple follow-along videos, but the spread of the internet and smart devices enabled interactive platforms with apps, online courses, and live workouts, leading to greater popularity and a more diverse offering (Novak, 2014). The coronavirus pandemic significantly accelerated this process, as brands such as Nike and Adidas quickly adapted with online courses and virtual events (Novak, 2014; Grand View Research, 2023).

The first forms date back to the 1990s, when aerobic and Pilates video programs – aimed primarily at women – were popular (Fidler, 2015). With the development of the internet, portals with training content appeared, enabling comparisons of techniques and easier purchase decisions. Smartphones and tablets brought the next breakthrough: mobile apps made programs available anywhere and added progress tracking and workout planning (Fidler, 2015; Di Vaio et al., 2021; Vujičić, 2021).

Since 2020, live-streamed workouts have become popular, providing an interactive experience and a sense of community. After the pandemic, the virtual fitness industry has established itself as a lasting part of the market, with hybrid models combining in-person and online training to deliver social interaction and high flexibility (Vujičić, 2021; WellHub, 2023).

2.2 Examples of the virtual workout platforms

There are several platforms on the virtual fitness market offering different types of programs and services – from cycling, running, and weight training to Pilates and aerobics – tailored to users' needs. They differ in scope, features, and style, allowing consumers to choose what best suits their goals.

2.2.1 Peloton

Peloton set new standards thanks to interactive cycling classes that simulate routes from major races. Beyond cycling, it offers running, strength, and stretching, creating a comprehensive approach to fitness. A key differentiator is live classes, led by professional trainers who provide both structure and a sense of community as participants share experiences via the screen and messaging. The platform also includes a rich library of on-demand sessions, so workouts are available anytime. Social features – sharing achievements and progress – boost motivation and adherence (Winchester et al., 2021).

2.2.2 Beachbody On Demand

Beachbody On Demand is a popular virtual fitness platform with diverse programs for different fitness levels and goals. Among the best known are P90X, Insanity, and 21 Day Fix – intense, results-oriented programs. P90X is a 90-day periodized plan combining strength, cardio, and flexibility, while Insanity is a 60-day high-intensity interval program designed for maximum endurance. The platform also

includes nutrition guidance and progress tracking. Its holistic approach – combining training and nutrition and availability across devices make it flexible and accessible (BODi, 2025).

2.2.3 Nike Training Club

Nike Training Club offers a wide selection of programs for various goals and difficulty levels, suitable for beginners and experienced athletes alike. Users can choose short or long sessions focusing on strength, flexibility, or a combination. Programs include bodyweight exercises and simple equipment (e.g., bands and running gear), and the app features mobility and rehab segments to prevent injury and improve movement quality. Video demos enhance safety and effectiveness; access to coaches provides additional guidance. Progress logging motivates users and informs developers about preferences (Adamakis, 2017; Lin et al., 2020).

2.2.4 Fitbod

Fitbod specializes in weight training. It builds personalized plans based on goals, available equipment, and readiness, and it dynamically adapts sessions – useful when traveling or when equipment access is limited. The platform logs sets, reps, and loads and projects goals based on current progress. Real-time adjustments keep motivation high, while video demonstrations and tips help prevent injuries – an efficient option for users seeking optimized training (Halperin, 2019).

2.2.5 Zombies, Run!

Zombies, Run! combines exercise and gameplay. While running or walking, users participate in an audio-narrated survival story, complete missions, and respond to prompts that often vary pace-making training fun and effective. The app tracks distance, speed, and time, and a community layer allows sharing experiences, strengthening motivation and belonging (Farič, 2021).

2.2.6 Strava

Strava is a leading app for tracking physical activity, especially running and cycling. GPS-based, it records distance, speed, pace, and time. Users analyze progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, and compare results with others. Segments with leaderboards add competition and motivation. Social features (sharing activities and feedback) and safety tools (real-time location sharing) make it a comprehensive system for athletes and recreational users (Sprujit, 2021).

2.2.7 Hard To Kill

Hard To Kill targets individuals preparing for military selections, especially special forces. It offers a broad spectrum of training – from intervals and functional workouts to loaded rucks and bodyweight sessions – aimed at improving physical readiness and psychological resilience. Community support is strong, with users often connecting outside the app. High programmability lets users tailor training to military demands and lifestyle (HTK, 2025).

3 RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Methodology and sample

A quantitative research design was applied to investigate consumer behavior in the use of virtual fitness platforms. The target population consisted of adults engaged in sports activities who had experience with online fitness programs. Efforts were made to capture diversity in terms of age, gender, and education.

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) How do flexibility and accessibility influence user satisfaction with virtual fitness platforms? (2) What is the relationship between user motivation and satisfaction with virtual fitness services? (3) How do demographic factors such as age, education, and gender affect the adoption and usage patterns of virtual fitness services?

Data were collected using an online questionnaire created in the lka survey platform. The questionnaire was published on 9 February 2025 and remained open until 21 March 2025. The survey was distributed via social networks (Facebook, Instagram) and private messages, with the majority of responses obtained through social media channels. Prior to full implementation, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on a sample of five individuals to verify clarity and appropriateness. Based on their feedback, several items were refined, and the final version was prepared.

A total of 100 respondents participated in the study, which provides a valuable snapshot of consumer behavior in the virtual fitness sector. However, the sample size is relatively small, and the predominance of female respondents may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could benefit from a more representative sample to improve the accuracy of conclusions and provide insights into different demographic groups.

A total of 100 respondents participated in the study, comprising 38 men (38%) and 62 women (62%). The predominance of women reflects their more frequent engagement in online fitness programs and their higher representation on social media platforms used for data collection. From a sociological perspective, women more often rely on virtual workouts due to the need to balance family and professional obligations. The age distribution was as follows: 18–25 years (27%), 26–30 years (17%), 31–35 years (5%), 36–45 years (16%), and 46 years or older (35%). The educational structure of respondents included: elementary education (6%), secondary education (38%), college/university degree (38%), and master's degree (18%).

3.2 Results

Frequency of Using Online Workout Platforms

Respondents reported varying levels of engagement with online workout platforms. A total of 21% indicated that they had never used such platforms, while 35% reported rare use, defined as once per month. Occasional use, defined as more than twice per month, was reported by 20% of respondents. This indicates the survey is relevant for current users while also including non-users, showing potential areas for improvement to reach them.

Table 1: Frequency of using virtual workout platforms

How often do you use virtual workout platforms?	Number	Percent
Never	21	21 %
Rarely (once per month)	35	35 %
Occasionally (more than twice per month)	20	20 %
Regularly (once per week)	13	13 %
Frequently (more than three times per week)	11	11 %

Usage history of online platforms

Respondents were divided into four groups based on the length of their use of virtual workout platforms. A total of 42% reported using platforms for less than six months, 16% had been using them between six months and one year, 15% between one and two years, and 27% had been engaged with such platforms for more than two years.

This distribution shows that the majority of respondents were relatively new users, while more than a quarter had long-term experience. The presence of both short-term and long-term users in the sample provides valuable insights into differences in satisfaction, motivation, and training outcomes.

Table 2: Usage history of online platforms

How long have you used virtual workout platforms?	Number	Percent
Less than 6 months	42	42 %
6 months to 1 year	16	16 %
1 –2 years	15	15 %
More than 2 years	27	27 %

Satisfaction with fitness since using virtual platforms

When asked about their satisfaction with physical fitness since starting to use virtual workout platforms, 40% of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied, while 27% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. A total of 33% remained neutral. These results indicate that experiences with virtual workouts are not uniform. While a notable share of users reports positive effects, more than a quarter express dissatisfaction, and one-third have not formed a clear opinion. This suggests that virtual platforms hold potential for improvement in terms of program quality, guidance, and long-term user engagement.

Table 3: Satisfaction with physical fitness since using virtual workout platforms

How satisfied are you with your physical fitness since using virtual workout platforms?	Number	Percent
Very dissatisfied or dissatisfied	27	27 %
Neutral	33	33 %
Satisfied or very satisfied	40	40 %

Perception of contribution of virtual workouts to fitness

Respondents were asked whether they believe that virtual workouts contribute to their physical fitness. A total of 43% agreed, 32% disagreed, and 25% remained neutral. These results suggest that while nearly half of the respondents perceive a positive contribution, a significant share either disagrees or is undecided. The relatively high proportion of neutral responses points to uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of virtual platforms, indicating the need for improvements in program quality and persuasiveness.

Table 4: Perception of contribution of virtual workouts to fitness

Do you agree that virtual workouts contribute to your physical fitness?	Number	Percent
Agree	43	43 %
Neutral	25	25 %
Disagree	32	32 %

Personalized programs and motivation

Several questions addressed the role of individualized programs in shaping user motivation and training outcomes. According to the results, 54% of respondents stated that individualized programs increased their motivation, while 49% believed that such programs improved their results. About one quarter disagreed, and roughly one third remained neutral. When asked about additional motivation provided by personalized programs, 50% reported a positive effect, 31% were neutral, and around 19% experienced no change. These results indicate that personalization is generally perceived as beneficial, especially in terms of motivation, though not all respondents recognize clear improvements. The presence of neutral and skeptical responses highlights the need for further development of tailored programs and better communication of their benefits.

Table 5: Questions on individualized programs and motivation

Question	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
Do you feel that individualized ...	10	10 %	12	12 %	24	24 %	29	29 %	25	25 %
How would you rate the effect of individualized programs ...	6	6 %	14	14 %	31	31 %	28	28 %	21	21 %
How much additional motivation do you feel ...	7	7 %	12	12 %	31	31 %	30	30 %	20	20 %

Comparison of live and virtual workouts

The comparison between live and virtual sessions revealed divided preferences. A total of 33% of respondents preferred live workouts, 38% preferred virtual workouts, and 29% remained neutral. When asked specifically about trainer interaction, 50% of respondents reported that this was the main reason

for choosing live workouts. In contrast, 26% disagreed with this statement, and 24% were neutral. Further, 45% of respondents believed that virtual workouts cannot fully replace live ones, 23% disagreed, and 32% were undecided. These results highlight ambivalence: while virtual formats offer flexibility and accessibility, many users continue to value interpersonal contact and the social aspects of in-person exercise.

Table 6: Comparison of preferences for live and virtual workouts

Question	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
How much more do you prefer live workouts compared to ...	26	26 %	7	7 %	29	29 %	17	17 %	21	21 %
Do you prefer to attend live workouts because of the interaction ...	16	16 %	10	10 %	24	24 %	16	16 %	34	34 %
Do you think that virtual workouts do not ...	11	11 %	12	12 %	32	32 %	24	24 %	21	21 %

Flexibility of virtual workout platforms

Flexibility was addressed with three specific questions. Almost half of the respondents (46%) reported that they often or always use virtual platforms to adapt workouts to their lifestyle, while 33% rarely or never used them for this purpose. When asked whether virtual workouts are better tailored to individual needs compared to traditional ones, 38% agreed, 27% disagreed, and 35% remained neutral. Finally, 48% of respondents indicated that they would use virtual workouts more often if platforms offered greater flexibility. A total of 26% would not increase their use, and another 26% were undecided. These findings confirm that flexibility is a decisive factor in motivating broader and more frequent use of virtual platforms.

Table 7: Flexibility of virtual workout platforms

Question	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
How often do you use platforms for ...	16	16 %	17	17 %	21	21 %	24	24 %	22	22 %
Do you think that virtual workouts are better tailored to your ...	12	12 %	15	15 %	35	35 %	22	22 %	16	16 %
Would you use more virtual workouts ...	10	10 %	16	16 %	26	26 %	25	25 %	23	23 %

4 CONCLUSION

The virtual fitness industry is consolidating as a sustainable part of the sports ecosystem. Users seek not only workouts but a comprehensive experience that blends quality content, personalized programs, and an active community. The key success factors are constant availability, the option to train at home or in hybrid models, and a sense of belonging created through interactive features and trainer feedback. Increasingly, workouts are linked with complementary services such as nutrition coaching, psychological support, and group challenges – addressing diverse user needs.

Our research indicates that user satisfaction with virtual fitness platforms is significantly influenced by the flexibility of workout schedules and the availability of personalized programs. These factors are key drivers of motivation and engagement, leading to increased workout frequency and improved well-being. The findings align with previous research on consumer behavior in digital services (Grand View Research, 2023). However, while virtual formats offer significant benefits in terms of flexibility and accessibility, the in-person experience remains important for many users. Direct interaction with trainers and participants enhances the virtual workout experience, suggesting that blended approaches – combining the flexibility of virtual formats with the interactivity of in-person training – are most effective. From a practical perspective, virtual fitness platforms should focus on increasing program customization, offering more interactive features, and ensuring timely, personalized feedback to enhance user engagement and satisfaction.

Looking ahead, growth will be shaped by further innovation: virtual coaches, advanced progress analytics, interactive training, and tighter integration of content into a unified user journey. The greatest opportunities lie in enhancing user experience, pricing accessibility, and safe, data-informed personalization. With thoughtful development, the virtual fitness industry will continue expanding its loyal user base and remain a reference case of successful digital transformation. These advantages are particularly relevant for employed individuals with busy daily schedules, for whom flexibility and accessibility make virtual workouts easier to integrate into everyday routines.

While this study provides valuable insights into consumer behavior, it is limited by the small sample size and the predominance of female respondents. Future research could explore broader demographic groups and longitudinal studies to assess how user preferences evolve over time and the impact of external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic on long-term virtual fitness adoption. Such research could also investigate the role of cultural and geographical differences in shaping consumer behavior in the virtual fitness sector.

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