

WHAT TYPE OF PROFESSIONALS ARE WORTH BEING HIRED FOR FITNESS CLUBS?

STUDY MADE AMONG FITNESS TRAINERS AND FITNESS CONSUMERS

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Fitness industry is an important segment of sports economy worldwide. The number of registered members in fitness clubs has shown a slow, but steady increase. The key objective of our research is to look into the fitness sector in terms of both the demand and supply sides, from the aspect of the fitness providers, as well as of fitness consumers using these services. We are aspiring to explore the training session attendance-related habits of consumers in the Hungarian fitness sector and investigate the factors, features influencing the attendance of the specific trainers' sessions. Our research focuses on fitness trainers and leisure-time sportspeople who attend gym sessions and therefore the sample may only include people who meet these parameters. As our primary research method, we used interviews and questionnaire survey among fitness trainers and consumers. We asked a total of 753 leisure-time sportspeople and 261 trainers. Our research covers the study of training habits of fitness consumers and a personality analysis of fitness trainers. We think our research results support our fundamental hypothesis that the competitiveness of gyms could be improved by gathering informations on the consumers training habits and selecting the proper experts (trainers).

Keywords: fitness services, fitness providers, fitness consumers, fitness trainers

Introduction

Establishment and operation of sport facilities providing leisure sports options is becoming an increasingly important field in terms of the role of sports in the economy [1]. While previously, civil associations were the most frequent to provide sports opportunities for leisure athletes, currently fitness clubs are becoming more and more popular among consumers of sports services [2]. On a global scale, fitness industry plays an important role in sports economy, as the number of consumers exercising in fitness facilities or gyms is constantly increasing [3].

Hungary is at the bottom of the European ranking for health behaviour indicators such as smoking, alcohol consumption and physical inactivity [4]. According to the categories of Ács et al. [5], in 2010, 77% of Hungary's population had an inactive lifestyle, of which the proportion of people not engaged in any kind of sports was 44% in 2013. Only 4.5%

of Hungarians do sports on a daily basis, 3.2% engage in muscle building and endurance/stamina training on a daily basis, while 76% do not perform any exercise of such at all [6]. Approximately 20% of the Hungarian population can be considered regularly being engaged in sports [7]. Increasing physical activity would be significantly less costly than medication of diseases caused by physical inactivity [8].

Among other things, the fitness sector and its sports facilities – including fitness clubs – available to anyone serve the involvement of the population in regular physical exercise. In Hungary, not only the level of physical activity, but also sporting at fitness clubs lags behind other European countries [9].

Service providers are important participants of the fitness sector – there is a growing competition among them in Hungary – as well as consumers who pay for the services provided by fitness clubs. In 2016, fitness clubs have already generated over eighty-one billion dollars of revenue for the global fitness industry [10].

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In 2012, forty-thousand fitness clubs provided sporting opportunities for forty-four million guests and employed four hundred thousand employees throughout the EU annually [11]. According to the 2014 survey of EUROBAROMETER [9], 9% of the European population was registered as members of a recreational or fitness club in 2009. This ratio increased to 11% by 2014. According to the study, despite the increase in the number of members, home exercise is still the most common and frequent form of working out [9]. Among university students, fitness facilities are the most popular; every second student chooses this type of exercise [12].

In 2011, there were approximately four hundred fitness halls operating in Hungary with a total of 300,000 members, with a turnover of one hundred and forty-four million EUR [13]. Since 2009, the physically inactive proportion of the population in Hungary has decreased by 9% and the amount of people exercising every day has increased threefold [14].

Only 6% of the Hungarian population exercises in sports clubs, however, there is a steady growth in this regard. This proportion is higher among people who do sports on a regular basis (26%) [9].

Research on the services [15], trends [16, 17], and health benefits [18–21] of fitness started to thrive during the recent decades.

In Hungary, there is an oversupply of fitness providers, therefore the utilization rate of fitness clubs is approximately 40% [2]. There is an extremely large competition within the sector, therefore lots of studies focus on exploring the factors that affect the fitness facility selection of consumers, and the characteristics of the sports consumption habits of fitness guests. The results of these studies [22–25] reflect that one of the most important factors influencing the gym choice of the fitness consumers is the person of the trainer.

Materials and methods

Our research focuses on the fitness trainers who conduct group training sessions, as well as leisure-time sportspeople who attend gym sessions and perform training under the control of a trainer, and therefore the sample may only include people who meet these parameters.

This essay studies the personality of trainers working with leisure-time sportspeople in the fitness sector, in terms of how these factors influence the attendance at group sessions, i.e. their economic efficiency for fitness service providers and fitness centers. Our survey also covers the sports habits of leisure-time sportspeople attending gym.

We are to approach our field of research from the aspects of both the trainers and the sportspeople, and

therefore the opinion about the personality of the trainers has been assessed also among the trainers, as well as the consumers, guests attending the gym. On the trainer's side, we looked into the training attendance and the personality of the trainers, as well as the interrelations thereof. On the consumer's side, we gathered information on what role the aforementioned trainer-related interrelation has in the gym choice.

As our primary research method, we used interviews and questionnaire survey among trainers and participants in training sessions controlled by trainers. Surveys could be filled in online and on hard copies.

The subject of our study determined the target group of the interviews and questionnaires, and as a result the respondents were trainers working in the fitness sector, and leisure-time sportspeople attending gym, and participating in trainers' classes. We used two different questionnaires for the assessment of trainers and sportspeople respectively. The respondents are informed of the voluntary nature of the completion, of its anonymity and the purpose of the survey [26].

A total of 1014 respondents answered the questions: 753 sportspeople and 261 trainers. Below we are presenting the content of the two questionnaires in details.

Questionnaire for fitness trainers

The questionnaire that was completed by trainers consists of two major parts:

- *General information:* This part includes questions related to the respondent's demographic features as well as to the attendance at the respondent's classes (the trainer's popularity, success). This part of the questionnaire included both close- and open-ended questions, questions of ratio, nominal and ordinal measurement levels.
- *Myers–Briggs Type Indicator:* This part of the questionnaire focused on the personality of trainers. For this purpose, we used the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator, which assesses the personality on the basis of its information processing-related characteristics. Dr. Ildikó Takács has been applying the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator for decades at the University of Technology, in cooperation with Lajos Izsó for the purposes of career orientation [27]. As according to the American and British literature, the shorter version of the test – G Form consisting of 94 questions – also provides accurate measurement, however, due to its brevity people are more willing to fill it in, we opted to use this version. The use of this method is justified by its excellent applicability in the field of career choice and career orientation [28].

The Myers–Briggs Type Indicator is a test method created on the basis of Jung’s typology. It is attributed to Briggs and Myers, and its final form was elaborated by Briggs and Myers [28]. The test distinguishes preferences along four dimensions specified by Jung’s typology, according to which the tested people can be characterized:

- Extraversion (E) vs. Introversion (I)
- Sensing (S) vs. Intuition (N)
- Thinking (T) vs. Feeling (F)
- Judging (J) vs. Perceiving (P)

People belonging to the different types can be characterized with the following traits:

Extraverted: interested in the tangible and social stimuli, activity-oriented, sociable, characterized by impulsiveness and proactivity.

Introverted: focus on their own inner world, contemplative, reserved, do not like being in focus.

Sensing: focus on stimuli perceivable by the senses, prefer rational, useful, practical things, present-oriented.

Intuitive: prefer deeper interrelations, options, intuitions are important for them, future-oriented.

Thinking: logical, like analyzing and finding cause and effect relations, objective.

Feeling: approach happenings through feelings, tolerant, evaluates humane aspects.

Judging: like planning everything in advance, order and clear-cut limits are important for them, resolute, cautious.

Perceiving: like diversity, take the opportunities, characterized by openness, curiosity and adaptability [28,29].

Using the preferences, the respondents can be classified into sixteen subtypes, as shown in Table 1.

From the aspect of statistical analysis (SPSS) classifying the 753 respondent sportspeople and 261 trainers into sixteen subtypes would have resulted in too small groups containing a low number of people of the specific types, which are difficult to assess (and it could cause difficulties during SPSS tests). Therefore, we assessed the occurrence frequency of subtypes only in the trainers’ sample – which we considered of

utmost importance –, all the other tests, however, were conducted on groups formed along preference dichotomies.

Questionnaire for fitness consumers

The questionnaire completed by gym guests cover the following fields:

- general data, demographic characteristics
- training session attendance-related habits
- personality of the trainer (according to the personality descriptions of the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator manual)
- personality of the sportsperson (according to the personality descriptions of the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator manual)

Applied statistical methods

During our research we aimed to opt for such methods that ensure the authenticity of our results, and allow to study our field of research from several aspects. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire survey were analyzed using SPSS statistical program.

During the processing of the data set, we applied various types of statistical procedures: descriptive statistical procedures and multivariate statistical analysis methods.

We used descriptive statistical methods to study the quantitative results and explore the personal features of the fitness trainers and sportspeople, the training habits of the sportspeople, the number of attendees at gym classes, and the responses were analyzed by using distribution ratios.

The variables were of nominal, ordinal, and ratio scale measurement levels. In the case of nominal variables, the criteria of completeness and mutual exclusion are met, such groups are formed whose members have at least one feature in common, and are distinguished from the members of other groups on the basis of the same feature. Ordinal variables can be ranked according to specific features, and the members of different groups can be arranged into order accordingly [30]. Our research methods were selected in a way that they match the variables of different measurement levels.

Table 1. Sixteen subtypes of the Myers–Briggs temperament index

Sensing	Sensing	Intuitive	Intuitive		
<i>Thinking</i>	<i>Feeling</i>	<i>Feeling</i>	<i>Thinking</i>		
ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ	<i>Introverted</i>	Judging
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP	<i>Introverted</i>	Perceiving
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP	<i>Extraverted</i>	Perceiving
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ	<i>Extraverted</i>	Judging

Source: Takács, 1999, p. 9 [28]

The questionnaire survey was conducted in autumn 2017. The interview and the questionnaire for trainers were answered by 261 people, while the questionnaire targeting gym visitors was completed by 753 people.

Respondents of the questionnaire for trainers

The questionnaire was distributed online among the trainers working in gyms. The registry of professionals working in the fitness sector is not deficient, there is no database available in Hungary, and therefore these people are difficult to contact, their number and their distribution according to socio-demographic features are unknown.

From among the trainers of the sample, there were 57 men and 204 women, which is a significant, almost three-fold difference (Fig. 1). It can be assumed that on the one hand, the number of women – similarly to many other professions – is higher among trainers conducting group sessions than that of men, and on the other hand, in the early days of fitness, popular aerobic classes were linked to female trainers, fitness enjoyed the highest popularity among women, trainers primarily came from among women, and this tradition lives on in the field of other group training sessions as well.

In terms of age, the sample is rather diverse, all age groups are represented among trainers. It can also be claimed, however, that it is mainly the members of the young and middle-age groups who work in such jobs, the majority of the sample (207 people) is under 45 years of age. This can probably be attributed to a period of spread and dynamic growth of the fitness movement, to the fact that the number of gyms has

not increased until the recent decade. In this period, an increasing number of trainers were needed, which was a motivating force in vocational trainings and career selection of young people. The representatives of older age groups come primarily from among those who work as physical education teachers, or who have left their previous sports career and changed for trainer career in the field of leisure-time sports.

The majority (63%) of trainers who filled in the questionnaire have been working in their jobs for over 3 years, 102 of which for over 5 years, and therefore it is probable that the respondent trainers have professional experience and had time to build their clientèle.

Respondents of the questionnaire for fitness consumers

753 guests attending gyms responded to the questionnaire. 500 of them are women (66%) and 253 are men (34%) (Fig. 2). As the respondents of the questionnaire were people who do sports only in gyms under trainer control, it can be concluded that – as compared to men – women ask for the trainer's assistance in higher proportion if they do workout in fitness centers. We have no data indicating whether this proportion is similar in the case of gym attendees in reality, however, based on the experience, the proportion of women is higher in gyms, and at group training sessions in particular. The majority of group training sessions are organized for female visitors: aerobic, body shaping, nevertheless, female attendance is higher even at training sessions that are not expressly targeted at women (spinning, spine training).

As the next step in the analysis of socio-demographic data, we looked into the age composition of

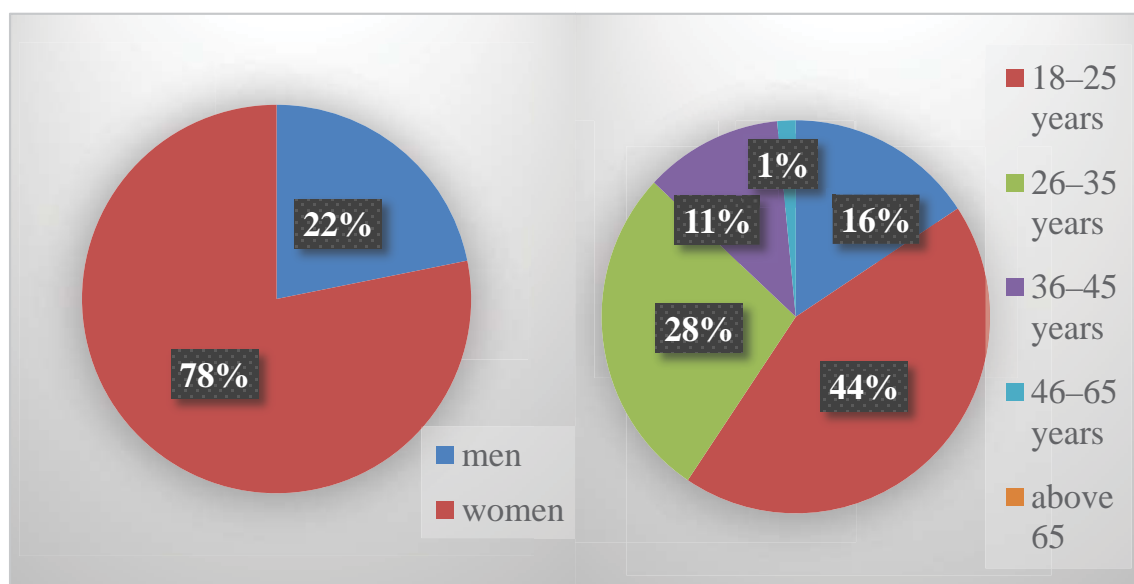


Fig. 1. Distribution of trainers sample based on gender and age. (Source: Own research, 2017 ($N = 261$))

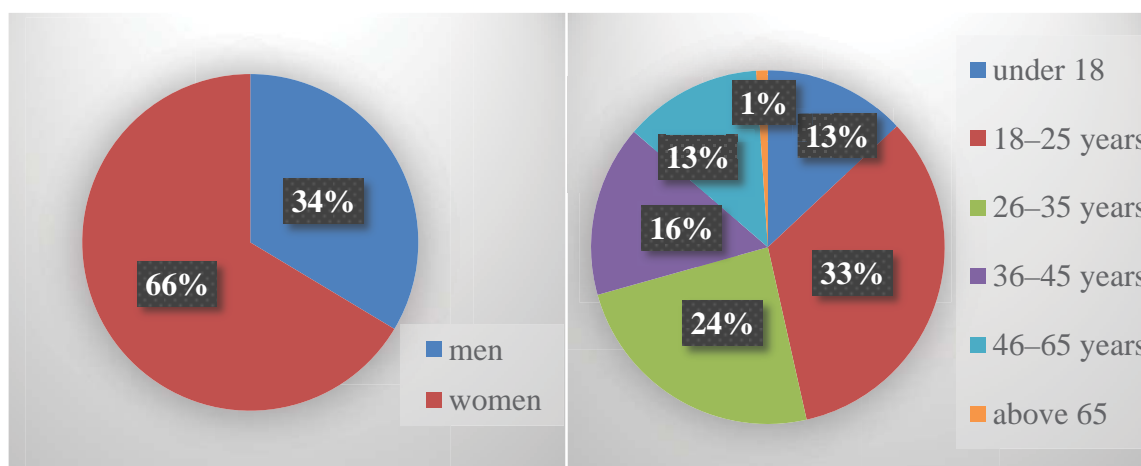


Fig. 2. Distribution of fitness consumers sample based on gender and age. (Source: Own research, 2017 (N = 753))

the group of people attending gym. Eighty-six percent of the respondents (647 people) are between 18 and 65 years of age, and most of them (252 people) belong to an age group of 18–25. The lowest number of responses (only eight) came from people over 65 years of age, while the sample includes 98 people under the age of 18.

It can therefore be concluded that the trainer-controlled training sessions offered by fitness service providers are more popular among the young and middle-aged groups – as compared to older people, or they probably offer less services that are targeted at older age groups. Services targeted at the old age group are hardly present in the range of gym services, the target age group – as indicated by the ratios of the sample – is the age group of 18–25. Simultaneously with the “aging” of gyms, the age of attendees also gets higher, as those who incorporate these training forms into their lives at an earlier age may go on attending the same training session at the age of 30–40.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (94%) consider their financial status average or even better. A total of 359 people answered that their financial status is average, 280 people answered that their financial status is slightly better than the average, and 70 people responded that their financial status is much better than the average. The sample almost completely lacks such people who consider their financial status worse than the average, only 44 people selected this response option.

Following an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, it can be concluded that women use such services of gyms that are provided by trainers in much higher number than men, and that the attendees of these training sessions typically have high qualification and average, or above-the-average financial status. Such groups of society that have lower qualifications and lower income, as well as those working in blue-collar jobs are virtually not represent-

ed in the sample. It is probable that the same figure reflects the composition of gym attendees.

Results

Attendance on trainings

The fitness sector is highly competitive, and therefore, from economic aspects, profit is of utmost importance for fitness clubs. A major part of the profit comes from the income generated by the group training sessions conducted by trainers. The more popular the group sessions of a trainer are, the more it is worth for the gym to employ the specific expert. The popularity of the fitness trainers was measured by the attendance of their classes. We hypothesized that the number of athletes who choose to exercise on the lesson of a particular trainer, reflect the success of that trainer. The attendance of the trainings was determined as a percentage based on the proportion of maximum and average actual participation. The ratios were categorized into percentages of 40, 60, 80 and above (Fig. 3).

The sample of the trainers shows significant differences in terms of class attendance. The most popular trainers in our study are those with more than 80% participation in their classes, with 27% (70) of the respondents. The next category is the 60–80% attendance rate, with 36% (95) of the sample. They are followed by a less successful group (55) with only 40–60% attendance. Finally, trainers for the least-attended classes with less than 40% attendance. Probably they do not belong to employees who generate enough revenue for fitness clubs. The smallest, but still higher than expected proportion of respondents, 16%, belonged to this group.

The most profitable employees for the gyms are clearly the fitness professionals who complete group classes, reaching between 80% and 100% of attendance. However, only 27% of the sample belongs to this

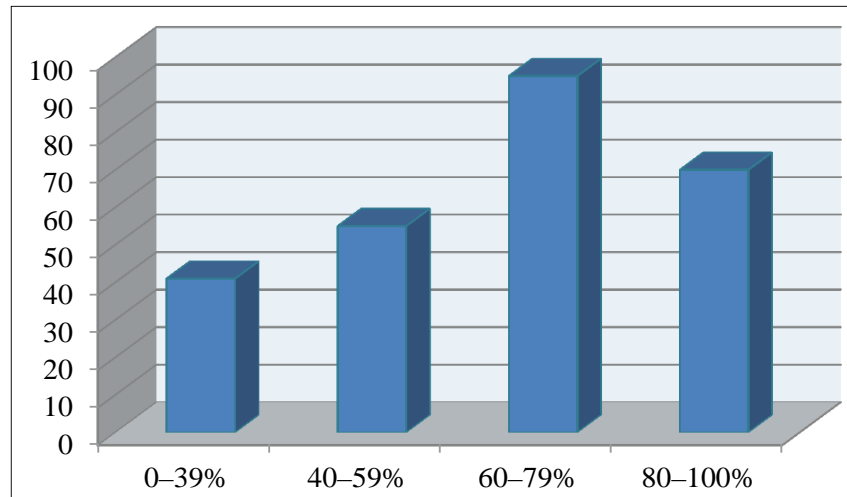


Fig. 3. Distribution of trainers sample based on attendance at their classes.
(Source: Own research, 2017 ($N = 261$))

group, most of them are in the group with 60–79% attendance. It is necessary to look at the differences between the less and more popular trainers and the factors that influence the attendance of their trainings.

Training habits of consumers

The results obtained through the study of training session attendance-related habits reflect that the majority of fitness consumers responding to our questionnaire, i.e. 75% attend gym training sessions on a weekly basis. It is a significant difference as compared to the average population, 38% of which does sports with some regularity, but 62% never does any (Fig. 4). The research focuses on the guests of fitness

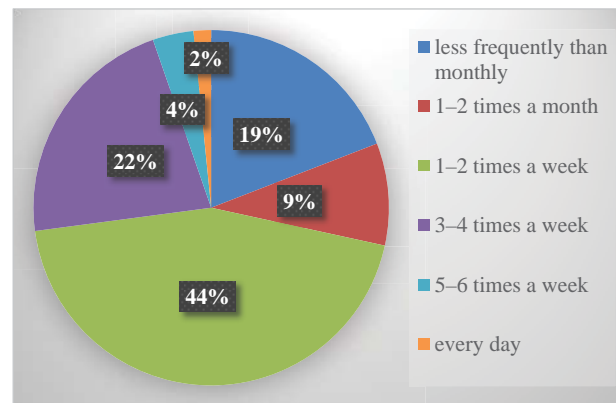


Fig. 4. Distribution of fitness consumers sample based on their training habits. (Source: Own research, 2017 ($N = 753$))

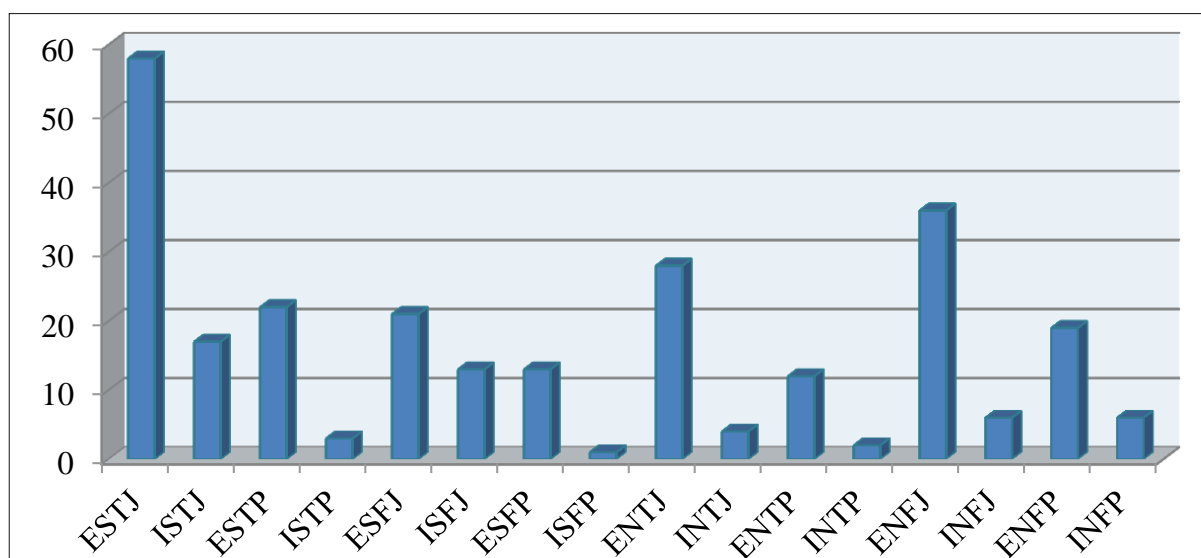


Fig. 5. Distribution of the sample of trainers according to the 16 basic types of MBTI.
(Source: Own research, 2017 ($N = 261$))

clubs, and therefore – based on the composition of the sample – regular participation in physical activities was considered probable. Consequently, we assume that those respondents who reported attendance at fitness training sessions once or twice a month or more rarely, do some sports activity in other venues as well.

Personality types

Our objective was to analyze the sample of trainers on the basis of the Myers–Briggs personality types. We assumed that from among the Myers–Briggs personality types, extraverted type is more common among trainers than introverted type. Trainers' personality was assessed by the Myers–Briggs Temperament Index.

According to the Myers–Briggs Temperament Index, extraverted – sensing – thinking – judging (ESTJ) type proved to be the most common within the sample of trainers (Fig. 5).

The hypothesis was justified during the study of the sample, based on the test results conducted by using the Myers–Briggs Temperament Index, 80% of the respondent trainers belong to the group of extraverted preference. When comparing the complex personality types, extraverted, sensing, thinking and judging types represented a significant proportion among trainers, out of the sixteen different types, 22% of the respondents belonged to this particular type, and therefore it can be assumed that the tested personality preferences influence the choice of trainer career.

We examined the differences in the four preferences separately too. Figure 6 clearly presents that extraversion vs. introversion, as well as judging vs. perceiving preference pairs proved to show the largest difference. Accordingly, 80% of the trainers in the

sample (209 people) are extraverted, and only 52 of them are introverted.

People with extraverted attitude are characterized by activity, intense relationship with the environment, good communication skills, open approach to the external world, interest in others. When comparing the attitudes characterizing the extraverted personality with the features attributed to introverted people in public sense – the latter are shier, reserved, they prefer solitude to company – the resulting outcome perfectly matches the expectations pertaining to trainers. In terms of Myers' system, for 183 people (70%) judging is the preferred lifestyle, while for 78 people (30%) it is perceiving. This remarkable difference is interesting, however, in the case of attitude characterizing the judging type of people it can also be explained in relation to the sample of fitness trainers, especially when the groups are refined by linking the other dimension – thinking–feeling function – to it. In general, judging type of people are methodical, confident, quick, and they are likely to make decision once they have obtained adequate information. The difference was not so remarkable in the case of perceiving and decision making preferences, however, a minor distinction can be detected here as well. 148 trainers (57%) belong to the perceiving type, and 113 (43%) to the intuitive type, and in terms of decision making, 146 people (56%) are thinking, and 115 people (44%) are feeling.

Our next objective was to study whether the personality type is related to the attendance of the trainers classes. There were no significant differences neither based on personality types nor the four preferences. Thus, the number of guests participating in the training is not influenced by the personality of the trainer.

In the fitness sector, fitness users can choose from countless classes and trainers. We hypothesized that athletes choose the classes of the most sympathetic trainer who seems to be similar to them. The analysis

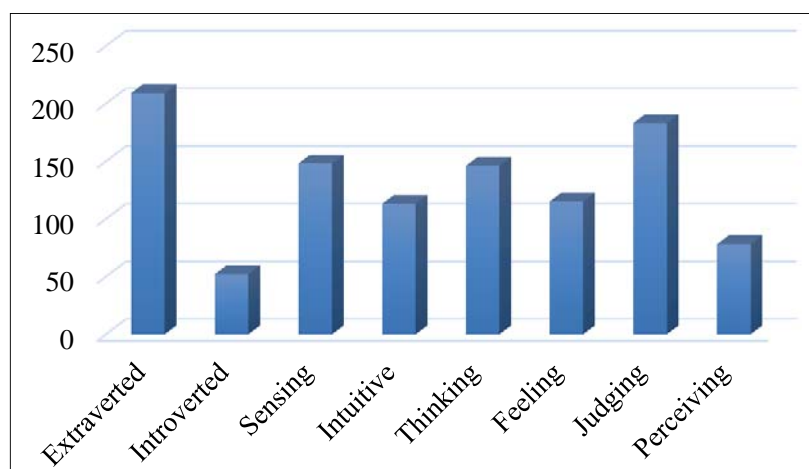


Fig. 6. Myers' personality preferences in the sample of trainers.
(Source: Own research, 2017 (N = 261))

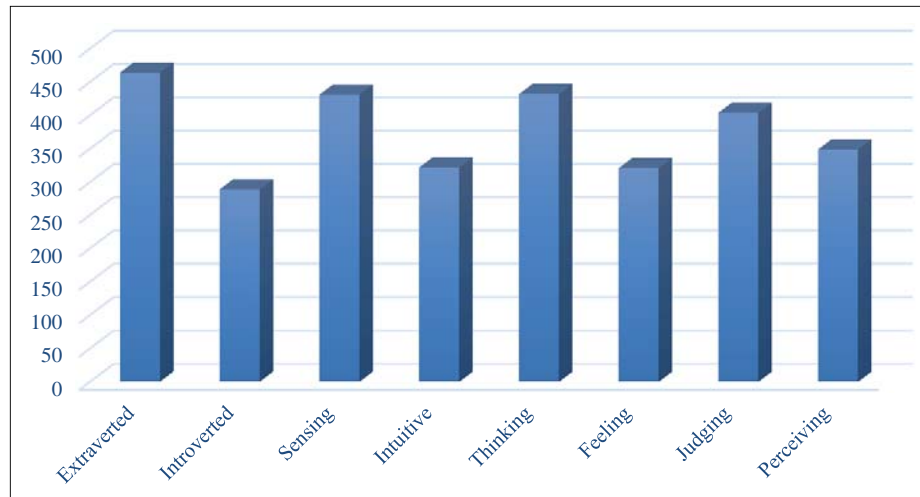


Fig. 7. Myers' personality preferences in the sample of consumers.
(Source: Own research, 2017 ($N = 753$))

of the trainers and fitness guests revealed that the composition of the two samples was similar. Most of the consumers have an extraverted – sensing – thinking – judging (ESTJ) personality type (Fig. 7). However, these differences were not as significant for guests as for the trainers.

We also aimed to study what personality traits the attendees of fitness training sessions attribute to their trainers. We supposed that the personality of the trainer (extraverted/introverted) was an influencing factor in the choice of extraverted and introverted types of sportspeople. We assume – in the case of introverted people in particular – that they prefer to opt for introverted trainers.

The expectations of the fitness consumers in connection with personality preferences matched the results of the sample of trainers, and therefore it can be concluded that the demand and supply sides in terms of personality of fitness trainers are well aligned (Fig. 8).

The Myers' personality type of a trainer truly influences the trainer choice of sportspeople. A significant relationship – as concluded by our research – proves that extraverted type of fitness consumers choose extraverted trainers, while introverted type of consumers rather opt for introverted trainers.

On the other hand, not only the introverted people, but also the consumers with extroverted preferences consider this aspect important. From among the

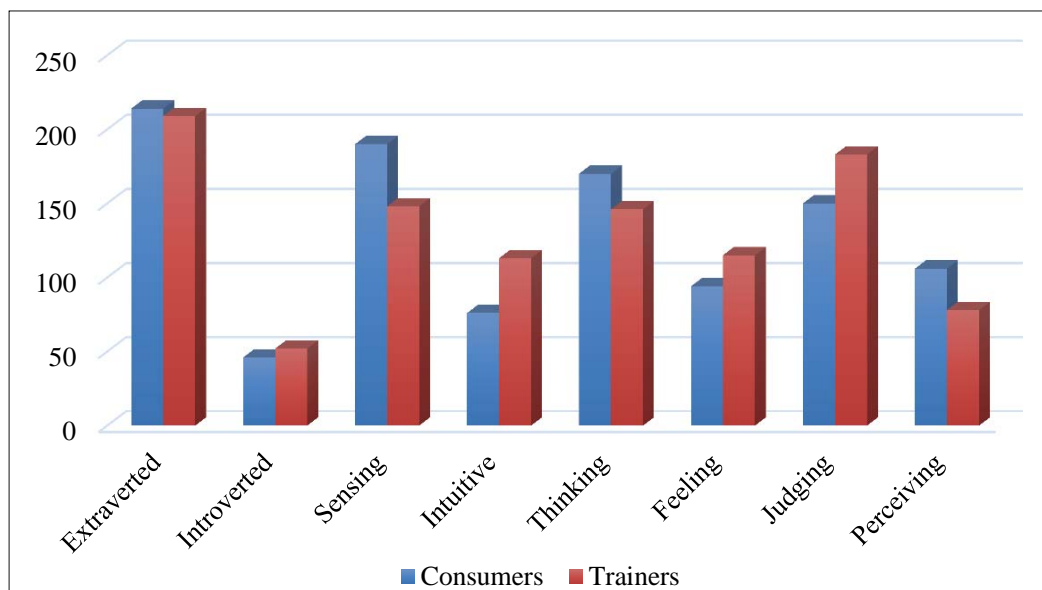


Fig. 8. The composition of the sample of fitness trainers according to the evaluation of consumers and the personality of trainers. (Source: Own research, 2017 ($N = 753$; $N = 261$))

other preference dichotomies, sensing–intuition dimensions were also determinant in this aspect. Tendencies reflect that sensing type of sportspeople opt for sensing trainers, while intuitive sportspeople opt for intuitive type of trainers. There was no difference detected in thinking vs. feeling and judging vs. perceiving preferences.

Finally, we also investigated whether the personality of the trainer has any influence on how important the person of the trainer is when choosing the gym. There was only one dimension that proved to have significant connection with this issue: extraversion. Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that if sportspeople regard their trainer extraverted – i.e. open and friendly –, they will rank the person of the trainer higher among the aspects of facility choice.

Conclusions

There was no significant difference in the attendance of fitness classes based on Myers personality dimensions of the trainers. It is important to emphasize that trainers' behavior is largely shaped by professional requirements in the field. Trainers must adapt to the expectations of consumers in order to be successful, therefore, their belonging to different personality types does not necessarily determine their conscious and chosen behaviors. Rather, the test results indicate persons with which personality traits choose the trainer career.

The results of our study reflect that the great majority of fitness trainers in the sample belong to extraverted, sensing, thinking and judging personality type. In terms of extraversion vs. introversion, there was also a remarkable difference in the sample: 80% of the respondent trainers proved to have extraverted attitude. According to the literature, the characteristics of the ESTJ type are: "logical", determined, "systematic", objective, "effective", direct, "practical", organized, impersonal, responsible [28]. It is difficult to find a consistent career profile description for fitness trainers. There is scarce literature about the personality and abilities of fitness trainers but these almost all include good communication, the importance of a relationship culture, and many of the traits that characterize the dominant ESTJ type.

We also looked into the interrelation between the Myers' personality type of fitness trainers and consumers, and according to our results, it is not only trainer choice of the consumers that is influenced by the preferences, but also the extent to which the person of the trainer is taken into consideration in the gym choice of sportspeople.

Tests related to the personality of trainers reflect that it is advisable for a fitness service provider to engage extraverted trainers, considering the fact that the

person of an extraverted trainer plays a larger role in the facility choice of consumers. Personality preference, on the other hand, has no influence on class attendance, however, introverted fitness trainers are also needed in order to provide diverse services (different types of class) and retain introverted consumers. For the purpose of maintaining the diversity of the range of services, it is not necessary to discontinue classes with lower attendance, it should rather be assessed how these classes could be made more attractive to consumers.

Fitness clubs are advised to gather comprehensive information on the professional skills, qualifications of trainers, and perhaps support the ongoing training of their experts to achieve higher class attendance and long-term success. Gyms can include the professional introduction of trainers in their marketing activity.

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