
PREFERENSI KRITERIA PEMILIHAN *PERSONAL TRAINER* OLEH *FITNESS MEMBERS*

PREFERENCES FOR SELECTING A PERSONAL TRAINER BY FITNESS MEMBERS

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Abstrak

Personal trainer adalah seorang tenaga kerja profesional yang memiliki pengetahuan dan keahlian dibidang latihan kebugaran (fitness), di mana mereka memiliki tugas membantu klien mereka untuk mencapai target tubuh ideal dengan menggunakan berbagai aspek dan faktor yang mereka miliki berupa konsultasi, tanya jawab, program dan pola latihan hingga motivasi maupun peralatan latihan yang mereka miliki, Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mengkaji preferensi kriteria pemilihan personal trainer oleh fitness members. Penelitian ini mengkaji preferensi kriteria pemilihan personal trainer dengan melibatkan 10 members perempuan aktif di WZone Gym Studio Babarsari Yogyakarta. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Hasil menunjukkan urutan preferensi prioritas kriteria Kepribadian (90%) ramah, nyaman, komunikatif, memotivasi, serta postur ideal sebagai indikator awal kepercayaan. Pengalaman & latar belakang (80%) riwayat melatih dan hasil member sebelumnya lebih diutamakan daripada gelar. Harga, promo dan value for money menjadi pemicu utama, terutama bagi mahasiswa dan pemula, Sertifikasi (60%) hanya pendukung, kemampuan praktis jauh lebih penting. sebagai penentu utama, referensi semua member Wzone diberikan referensi dari member advisor. Temuan ini merekomendasikan manajemen gym perempuan untuk merekrut PT yang ramah dan berpengalaman, menawarkan paket promo plus trial, serta menonjolkan testimoni visual untuk meningkatkan kepuasan dan retensi member.

Kata kunci: preferensi, *personal trainer*, *fitness members*

Abstract

A personal trainer is a professional workforce who has knowledge and expertise in the field of fitness training, where they have the task of helping their clients to achieve their ideal body targets by using various aspects and factors that they have in the form of consultation, questions and answers, training programs and patterns to motivation and training equipment that they have, The purpose of this research is to examine the preferences of selection criteria Personal trainer by Fitness Members. This study examined the preferences of personal trainer selection criteria by involving 10 active female members at WZone Gym Studio Babarsari Yogyakarta. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews. The results showed the order of priority preference of the Personality criteria (90%) friendly, comfortable, communicative, motivating, and ideal posture as an early indicator of trust. Experience & background (80%) Coaching history and previous members' results take precedence over degrees. Price, promos and value for money are the main triggers, especially for students and beginners, Certification (60%) is only supportive, practical skills are much more important. As the main determinant, the reference of all Wzone members should be given a reference from. These findings recommend female gym management to recruit friendly and experienced PTs, offer promo packages plus trials, and highlight visual testimonials to increase member satisfaction and retention.

Keywords: preferences, *personal trainer*, *fitness members*

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INTRODUCTION

Physical fitness is a body condition that can carry out daily activities without excessive fatigue and is increasingly becoming a lifestyle of urban people in Indonesia, including in Yogyakarta as a student and tourism city. According to the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM, 2021), fitness is influenced by factors such as age, gender, and physical activity. The growth of gyms in Yogyakarta reflects the increasing public interest in structured sports, with personal trainers (PT) as the main support service. According to Hamada (2014), the existence of a gym has become a phenomenon in terms of the need for people to do comfortable sports, so that currently the existence of the fitness industry in Indonesia has developed along with public awareness of a healthy lifestyle to improve body fitness, as seen from the increasing number of gyms and fitness centers (Melwair & Wibowo, 2024).

Fitness is a physical activity or exercise for the formation of body muscles that is carried out regularly and periodically with the aim of maintaining body fitness and improving body proportions by using weight tools according to a person's ability (Pratama et al., 2020) Along with these developments, the need for more personalized and targeted services is also increasing, one of which is personal trainer services. Personal trainers are professional workers who have knowledge and expertise in the field of fitness training, where they have the task of helping their clients to achieve their ideal body targets by using various aspects and factors that they have in the form of consultations, questions and answers, training programs and patterns to motivation and training equipment that they have (Winanda, 2017). They not only understand in theory various principles of physical exercise but are also able to apply them practically according to individual needs.

A personal trainer has an important role in helping members achieve personal fitness goals, such as losing weight, building muscle mass, increasing endurance, improving posture, or simply maintaining a healthy lifestyle. In carrying out their duties, personal trainers take a comprehensive approach, which includes initial consultation to find out the client's physical condition, medical history, and goals to be achieved. Based on this data, the personal trainer then compiles a structured and measurable training program, adjusted to the abilities, needs, and time of each client They also act as personal motivators, who always provide encouragement, mental support, and build client commitment to remain consistent in undergoing the training process. Not only that, personal trainers also often provide education about healthy eating, stress management, and an active lifestyle, as well as using various training equipment to maximize training results.

Thus, personal trainers become a holistic and professional companion figure in the process of transforming a person's fitness and become an important part of the fitness and health industry, where in the gym there are various characteristics of members ranging from students, workers, to the public (Donnie et al., 2018). In research conducted by Liv Riseth, it was stated that there are several who choose independent training where with independent training they are more flexible and practice at their own pace (Riseth et al., 2019). In addition, based on the observation and experience of researchers for almost 1 year who worked as a personal trainer at one of the fitness centers in Wzone Babarsari, it was found that the interest in using personal trainer services is still relatively low, which is only about 10% of the total active members

WZone Gym Studio is a fitness center that comes with a unique concept, which is specifically for women. Founded to answer the need for a safe, comfortable, and private

workout space, WZone creates an environment that supports women in maintaining physical fitness while boosting confidence. With the slogan "Women's Zone for a Healthier You", WZone prioritizes personal service and complete facilities designed according to the needs of members (source of the article Physical Training.).

Thus, understanding the preferences and selection criteria of a PT can be important information for fitness management in providing services that suit market needs and helping PTs in improving their competencies and personal marketing strategies. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the factors that are considered by fitness members in Yogyakarta in choosing a university, so that it can be a reference for the development of fitness services that are more targeted to the target. Practically, the results of this research can be used by personal trainer or gym service providers in Yogyakarta in designing service packages that suit the client's preferences, such as the type of program, pricing system, trainer profile, communication method, hybrid service model.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to explore and interpret the underlying phenomena of consumer preferences within a specialized fitness environment. This approach is selected to facilitate a profound understanding of the subjective experiences and decision-making processes of female gym members (Sugiyono, 2019). The research was conducted at Wzone Gym Studio Babarsari, located in Sleman, DI Yogyakarta, a facility characterized by its female-only service model. The investigation spanned a dedicated period from November 3, 2024, to January 12, 2025, allowing for comprehensive longitudinal observation. By focusing on descriptive depth, the study aims to capture the nuanced sociocultural and psychological factors that influence member-trainer dynamics.

The participant selection was executed through a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the gathered data remained highly relevant to the research objectives. From a total population of 626 active members, a sample of 10 female participants was selected based on rigorous inclusion criteria. These criteria required participants to be active members who have utilized or are currently utilizing personal training services and who demonstrated a voluntary willingness to participate in the study. This non-probability sampling method allows the researcher to focus on information-rich cases that provide deep insights into the specific criteria for trainer selection. The use of a focused sample size is consistent with qualitative standards that prioritize the quality and richness of data over statistical generalization.

Data collection was facilitated through a triangulated approach involving semi-structured interviews, direct field observations, and systematic documentation. This multi-method strategy ensures data validity by cross-referencing verbal testimonials with observable behaviors in the gym setting. The analysis of the collected data follows the interactive model proposed by Iba and Wardhana (2023), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During data reduction, the vast amount of raw information is coded and simplified to highlight dominant themes such as personality and pricing. These themes are then systematically presented to reveal patterns, ultimately allowing for the formulation of robust, evidence-based conclusions regarding consumer behavior.

RESULTS

The empirical data suggests that consumer preferences in selecting a Personal Trainer (PT) are primarily driven by a dichotomy between emotional security and functional competence. For novice users like Wilda and Kayla, the "Personality" attribute characterized by friendliness and communication serves as a critical psychological gateway. This preference reflects a need for a supportive environment to mitigate the intimidation often associated with

entering a fitness space. In these instances, the trainer's interpersonal skills act as a primary determinant of service quality, where the emotional rapport established during initial interactions outweighs technical credentials or formal background.

Conversely, a segment of consumers, particularly those with academic backgrounds or higher risk-aversion like Lusi and Nanda, utilizes visual proxies and formal backgrounds as primary filters for reliability. Lusi's reliance on the trainer's physical posture as a proxy for professional belief highlights a "visual-first" verification strategy, where physical appearance is interpreted as an immediate indicator of expertise. For these subjects, a trainer's academic or professional history provides a necessary sense of security. This indicates that while personality facilitates retention, visual and historical evidence of competence serves as the initial "risk-reduction" mechanism for more critical demographics.

The role of professional certification remains paradoxical across the surveyed subjects, often overshadowed by practical experience. While Monica and Shabrina acknowledge the value of certification as a formal standard of competence, a significant majority including Wilda, Hesti, and Nanda view it as secondary or even ambiguous. This suggests a "competence over credentials" mindset where "proven results" and "previous experience" are perceived as more authentic indicators of a trainer's ability than a certificate. In an unregulated or emerging market, consumers appear to prioritize the tangible outcomes of previous clients over formal institutional endorsements, viewing certification as an "added value" rather than a mandatory prerequisite.

Financial sensitivity operates as the ultimate gatekeeper, though its impact varies according to the subject's professional status. For students and young employees like Hesti and Kayla, price acts as a "trigger" or a "hard filter" necessitated by external budget constraints. However, as the consumer's career stability increases, as seen in the cases of Monica and Nabila, the elasticity of price expands, shifting the focus toward "value for money" and service suitability. This transition suggests that while promotional pricing is an effective entry strategy for beginners and students, long-term market sustainability relies on aligning price with the perceived "financial worth" and specialized needs of the professional demographic.

In summary, the decision-making process for selecting a Personal Trainer is a multi-layered filter starting with price and visual appeal, followed by personality-driven rapport, and finally validated by demonstrated experience. For practitioners, this implies that a "one-size-fits-all" marketing approach is insufficient. Trainers must cultivate a blend of "soft" interpersonal skills to satisfy the psychological needs of beginners and "hard" evidence of results to satisfy the analytical requirements of more experienced or academic-minded clients. Ultimately, the perceived value of a Personal Trainer is a synthesis of emotional comfort, visual authority, and financial accessibility.

DISCUSSION

The empirical data identifies the Personality aspect (90%) as the foundational pillar of the member-trainer relationship, functioning as the primary emotional gateway for service engagement. This overwhelming preference suggests that for female members, the technical delivery of exercise is secondary to the quality of interpersonal rapport, which includes friendliness, motivation, and communicative comfort. Respondents such as Wilda and Menik, representing the beginner and housewife demographics, prioritize "psychological safety" to mitigate the intimidation often felt in gym environments. Meanwhile, the use of physical posture as a proxy for trust by Lusi and Nanda indicates that personality is often assessed through a visual-behavioral lens. This aligns with contemporary service marketing theories suggesting that in high-touch industries, the "human element" is the most potent driver of both initial conversion and long-term client retention.

The secondary priority, Educational Background and Experience (80%), underscores a rational pursuit of technical credibility and injury prevention among more critical demographics. Unlike the emotional focus of beginners, students and professionals like Monica and Nabila utilize a trainer's professional history as a "risk-mitigation" tool. The findings reveal a pragmatic orientation where "real-world evidence" such as a trainer's past results and sports history is weighted more heavily than theoretical knowledge. Interestingly, this indicates that while members seek a friend in their trainer, they simultaneously demand a "competent guardian" who can guarantee safety. This dual requirement creates a complex professional profile where the trainer must balance soft skills with a verifiable track record of physical transformation.

In contrast to global standards, Professional Certification (60%) is perceived as a supportive rather than a mandatory criterion in this specific local context. While organizations like the ACSM emphasize formal credentials, most respondents in this study view certification as an "ambiguous" or "added value" element that is frequently overshadowed by practical demonstration. For many, including those focused on general goals like "fat loss," the absence of a formal certificate is not a deal-breaker if the trainer demonstrates functional expertise. This suggests a "credentialing gap" in the local market, where consumers may lack the literacy to distinguish between different types of certifications, choosing instead to rely on the more tangible evidence of a trainer's own physique or the success of their existing clientele.

The Economic and Price Factor (70%) functions as a strategic "barrier to entry" rather than a definitive measure of service value. While price sensitivity is highly visible among students and those reliant on fixed budgets, it becomes more elastic as the professional status of the member increases. Promos and affordable packages act as the initial "trigger" for access, particularly in the socio-economic context of Yogyakarta, where competitive pricing is essential for market penetration. However, the data implies that once the "personality" and "competence" filters are satisfied, members are willing to view the cost as an investment in their health. This reflects a transition from "price-hunting" to "value-seeking" behavior, where the financial cost is justified by the perceived quality of the interpersonal experience.

A comparative analysis with previous research (Juliano, 2024) reveals a significant paradigm shift in consumer priorities from formal credentials to relational attributes. Previous studies ranked educational background as the top priority (74.1%), whereas the current findings elevate personality (90%) to the zenith of the hierarchy. This transition suggests that the modern fitness consumer is moving away from a purely "academic" evaluation of service providers toward a more "holistic-relational" model. The rise of social media and visual culture may have contributed to this shift, as trainers are now judged on their "connectivity" and "personal brand" rather than just their diplomas. This evolution necessitates a change in how gym studios recruit and train their staff, prioritizing emotional intelligence alongside technical prowess.

The implementation of a Structured Reference System at Wzone Gym Studio effectively addresses the identified preference for "visual proxies" and "autonomy." By providing profile photos and allowing for a "choice" mechanism, the studio reduces the information asymmetry that often plagues the fitness industry. This system empowers the member, particularly the "critical student" and "analytical professional" demographics, to conduct their own preliminary risk assessment. Such transparency not only builds initial trust but also aligns the trainer's "look" and "persona" with the member's specific aesthetic and motivational expectations, thereby optimizing the potential for a successful long-term match.

Despite the depth of these insights, this study acknowledges certain limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. The qualitative nature of the study and the small sample size of ten female members mean that the findings may not be statistically generalizable

to all fitness consumers in Indonesia. Furthermore, the study focused exclusively on a female-only gym environment (Wzone), which may produce different results compared to mixed-gender facilities where social dynamics and competitive pressures vary. The reliance on self-reported data during interviews also introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where respondents might overemphasize "personality" over "price" to appear more value-driven than budget-conscious.

The practical implications of this research suggest that fitness management should move toward a "hybrid" competency model for personal trainers. Recruitment processes should go beyond checking certificates to include assessments of emotional intelligence (EQ), communication styles, and personal branding. For gym owners in Yogyakarta, marketing strategies should emphasize trainer-member "success stories" and personality-driven profiles to lower the psychological barrier to entry for beginners. Strategically, creating flexible, tiered pricing models that cater to students while offering premium, results-oriented packages for professionals could maximize market penetration across diverse socio-economic segments.

Moving forward, the follow-up plan for this research involves expanding the scope to include a quantitative survey with a larger, more diverse demographic to validate these hierarchical preferences statistically. Future studies should explore the impact of digital influence, such as a trainer's Instagram presence, on the "visual-behavioral" proxy of trust identified in this study. Additionally, a longitudinal study tracking member retention rates against specific trainer personality types would provide invaluable data on the actual economic impact of "interpersonal rapport." Ultimately, this research serves as a foundational step toward developing a more localized and gender-sensitive framework for the fitness service industry in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion above, it can be concluded that the main preference of the member criteria is the personality aspect with 9 out of 10 respondents who emphasized this aspect, then there is a background with 8 respondents who make background or experience the second criterion in the selection of a personal trainer, next there is an economic or price factor with 7 respondents influencing the selection of a personal trainer, then there are certificates and expertise with 6 respondents by considering certificates only supporters in the selection of personal trainers, and finally references in Wzone itself in the selection of personal trainers are provided by member Advisors who assist members in making decisions by providing profile photos of prospective members.

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