



What Influence Does Personal Physical Activity Tracking Have on Membership Retention?



www.trpcem.com

What Influence Does Personal Physical Activity Tracking Have on Membership Retention?

Wearable devices and phone based applications (apps) for self-monitoring of physical activity are becoming increasingly common. However, the level of use and effectiveness among health club members is unknown. Using data collected as part of TRP 10,000™, this article will report on what proportion of members track their physical activity using technology and whether the use of such technology is associated with motivation, visit frequency, progress and ultimately membership retention.

Data and analysis

Between July and September 2013 members taking part in the TRP 10,000™ study completed an online questionnaire which asked them if they were using any product, app or system to track their physical activity, either inside or outside their club. Members who ticked the box to say they used an app were asked to list the app they used.

Who uses physical activity tracking technology and what do they use?

- Overall 27% of members reported using some type of tracking device, with the majority saying they used a phone or web app (15%).
- Slightly more males than females reported tracking their physical activity (30% versus 26%).
- Levels of tracking declined with age (40% in 16-24 year-olds and 7% in members aged 55 and older).
- Long-standing members were also less likely to report using tracking technology compared to newer members.

Members reported an incredibly broad range of systems for tracking but the most commonly cited means was 'myfitnesspal', an internet and app based programme which helps people track their food intake and physical activity to assist with weight loss. All other tracking systems listed were used by less than 1% of members.

Is there a difference in motivation for exercise between members who do and do not track their physical activity?

Members' motivation for exercise was classified as fitness motivation, appearance motivation, enjoyment motivation and social motivation. Table 1 shows the proportion of

members who reported a high level of motivation according to the four motivation types outlined above and whether they reported tracking their physical activity. In general, members who tracked their physical activity reported stronger motivation than members who did not. When considered together, only two types of motivation were significantly higher in tracking members; these were appearance and enjoyment motivation.

Table 1. Level of motivation by type: tracking vs. non-tracking members

	Type of motivation			
	Fitness	Appearance	Enjoyment	Social
Did not use tracking	60	52	55	49
Used tracking	64	62	65	51

Is use of tracking technology associated with visit frequency?

The average visit frequency per month was 6.7 visits for members who reported using tracking technology and 6.7 visits for members who did not, so there is no association between tracking of physical activity and frequency of club visits.



What Influence Does Personal Physical Activity Tracking Have on Membership Retention?

Is use of tracking technology associated with progress?

Figure 1 shows the proportion of members who reported they had made progress in the last 3 months in nine areas, according to whether they reported tracking their physical activity or not. Apart from making friends, all outcomes are in favour of tracking, although differences in reported progress between members who track their activity and those who do not are quite small. The largest difference is in weight loss, with 9% more members reporting weight loss if they also reported tracking their activity. This may not be entirely surprising as the most common method of tracking reported is 'myfitnesspal', which is designed to help people with weight loss.

Figure 1. Proportion of members reporting recent progress: tracking vs. non-tracking



Does tracking physical activity increase member retention?

Figure 2 shows that a lower proportion of members retain their membership over 7 months of follow up if they report tracking their physical activity than those members who do not. 87% of members who do not track their physical activity retained their membership at 7 months compared to 83% of members who do track their physical activity. The risk of cancelling at any point during the 7 month follow up period was 25% higher for the tracking members than it was for the non-tracking members. Members who track their physical activity are younger than members who do not so it is possible it is this age difference that accounts for the difference in risk of cancelling, rather than the use of tracking technology. When we take account of differences in age between tracking and non-tracking members the excess risk of cancelling for tracking members reduces to 7% ; still statistically significant. Furthermore, for every 1,000 members, 4 extra cancel each month if they track their physical activity compared to if they do not (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Retention rate: tracking vs. non-tracking members

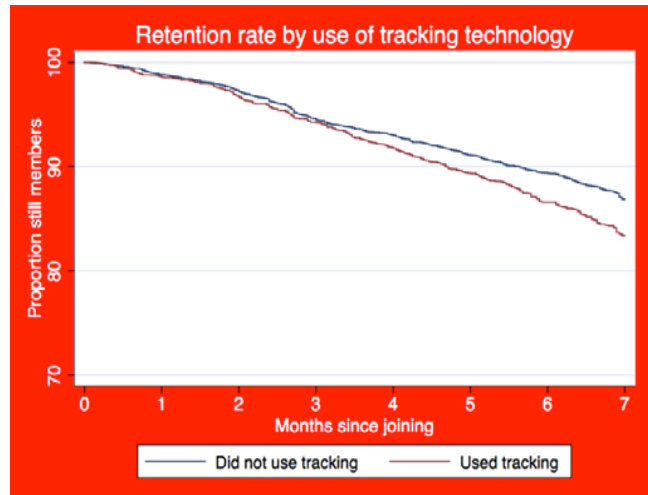
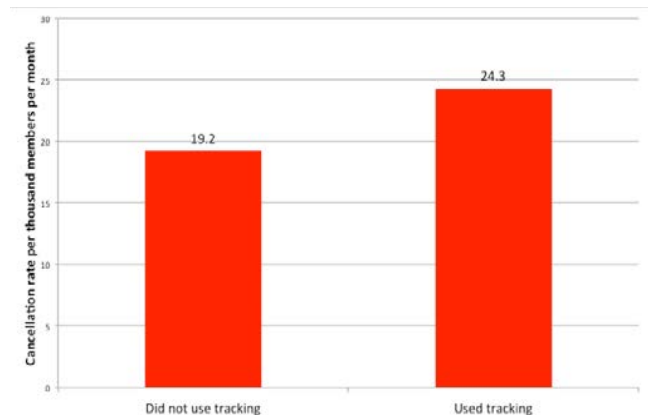


Figure 3. Rate of cancellation (per 1,000 members per month): tracking vs. non-tracking members



Summary

Overall 27% of members reported using some means of self-monitoring of their physical activity, with the majority using a phone based app or website. Members reported an incredibly broad range of systems for tracking but the most commonly cited means was 'myfitnesspal'. Tracking physical activity was more frequently reported by newer, younger members and less so by older and long standing members.

Members who tracked their physical activity reported higher levels of motivation for exercise, particularly with regards to enjoyment and appearance but less so for social motivation. Despite higher motivation levels, there was no difference in club usage between tracking and non-tracking members;



What Influence Does Personal Physical Activity Tracking Have on Membership Retention?

suggesting that reported motivation for exercise does not translate into behaviour change. Of course it is possible that behaviour changes away from the club.

Small differences in recent progress were reported between tracking and non-tracking members, with greater progress reported for weight loss and appearance by tracking members. This may reflect the use of 'myfitnesspal' as the most common tracking system used by the members surveyed as this is a system advertised to assist with weight loss.

Although members who reported tracking their physical activity had slightly higher motivation and reported a little more progress in some areas, they did not retain their membership for any longer than members who did not report tracking their behaviour. In fact, members who tracked their physical activity had slightly lower retention rates than members who did not. Members who tracked their physical activity tended to be younger and more recent club joiners, characteristics which increase the risk of cancelling. Therefore, it is possible it is these characteristics which explain the difference in retention rates, not tracking. However, when we adjust our analysis for differences in age and length of membership, tracking members still have an increased risk of cancellation, albeit the difference in risk is slightly reduced.

Wearable technology for tracking personal behaviour attracts considerable press coverage and its use is likely to increase. It is possible that club operators will believe that providing their own, or encouraging the use of, tracking technology will have an affect on their membership retention. This is intuitively appealing. However, the results of this study suggest operators should be cautious. Even though members who choose to use tracking systems to monitor their behaviour reported slightly higher levels of exercise motivation and recent progress on appearance and weight loss, this does not translate into changes in club usage or retention. At best there is no effect, at worst it increases the risk of cancellation. We have previously reported that progress on weight and appearance do not increase membership retention whereas perceived social and enjoyment benefits do. There is a danger therefore that a focus on tracking systems may detract from a greater focus on interpersonal relationships within the club, which we have shown are strongly and consistently associated with higher retention rates in members of all types.

Recommendations

- Some members will find tracking their behaviour helpful in making progress on appearance and weight loss but this alone will not improve membership retention.

- The use of tracking systems should not be an excuse to disinvest in interpersonal policies and programmes that are proven to improve retention.

TRP™ 10,000 - Methods

- Nearly 200 clubs from across the industry participated
- Online survey invitation sent to ¼ million members via email
- Members were included if they were aged 16 and over and had attended their club at least once within the last month
- 11,935 members opened the questionnaire between July and September 2013
- 11,887 members completed at least 1 page
- 85% (10,062 members) completed all pages

TRP™ 10,000 - Who took part

- Average age 41 (16 to 85 years)
- 56% female
- Half of members had been a member of their club for at least 12 months, 25% for less than 6 months and 25% for more than 3 years
- First ever club for 25%
- 24% had been a member of the current club before
- 67% of members used their club less than twice a week

About TRP

TRP are the leading providers of Customer Experience Management software and solutions to the leisure industry and invest heavily in research to improve industry insight and develop evidence based products and services.





creating
raving fans

Regional Headquarters

UK & Rest-of-World

18 Monmouth Place
Bath, BA1 2AY

Email: sales@trpcem.com
Tel: +44 (0) 845 621 2001

North America

67 Froehlich Farm Blvd
Woodbury, NY 11797
USA

Email: northamerica@trpcem.com
US Tollfree: +1-800-951-8048

