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Methodological Approaches to Socio-Economic Assessment of Consumer Behavior in the Recreational Industry

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ABSTRACT

The article explores methodological approaches to the socio-economic assessment of consumer behavior in the recreational industry as a promising area that is at the stage of active development and is characterized by an increase in demand for recreational services. The article aims to substantiate methodological approaches to the socio-economic assessment of consumer behavior in the recreational industry. The methodological basis of the study is based on a combination of systemic, competency-based, comparative, and interdisciplinary approaches, which provide a comprehensive study of the recreational industry. As a result of the study, the main socio-economic and socio-cultural functions of the recreational industry were identified, social aspects of consumer behavior were revealed, key motives for choosing recreational services were identified, and approaches to measuring the impact of the quality of recreational services on the level of consumer satisfaction were proposed. The results obtained can be used to improve mechanisms for managing recreational activities, increase the competitiveness of market entities, and form effective strategies for interacting with consumers.



KEYWORDS

recreational industry, consumer behavior, methodological approach, socio-economic assessment, service quality, customer satisfaction.



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Методичні підходи до соціально-економічного оцінювання поведінки споживачів в рекреаційній індустрії

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СТАТТЯ	АНОТАЦІЯ
Дослідницька DOI: 10.70651/3083-6018/2026.6.14 Отримана: 19.04.2026 р. Прийнята: 20.05.2026 р. Опублікована: 22.05.2026 р. Авторське право © 2026 автора  Цей твір ліцензовано на умовах Ліцензії Creative Commons «Із Зазначенням Авторства – Некомерційна 4.0 Міжнародна» (CC BY-NC 4.0).	У статті досліджено методичні підходи до соціально-економічного оцінювання поведінки споживачів у рекреаційній індустрії як перспективній сфері, що перебуває на етапі активного розвитку та характеризується зростанням попиту на рекреаційні послуги. Метою статті є обґрунтування методичних підходів до соціально-економічного оцінювання поведінки споживачів в рекреаційній індустрії. Методологічна основа дослідження базується на поєднанні системного, компетентнісного, порівняльного та міждисциплінарного підходів, що забезпечують комплексне дослідження рекреаційної індустрії. У результаті дослідження визначено основні соціально-економічні та соціокультурні функції рекреаційної індустрії, розкрито соціальні аспекти споживчої поведінки, виокремлено ключові мотиви вибору рекреаційних послуг і запропоновано підходи до вимірювання впливу якості рекреаційних послуг на рівень споживчого задоволення. Отримані результати можуть бути використані для вдосконалення механізмів управління рекреаційною діяльністю, підвищення конкурентоспроможності суб'єктів ринку та формування ефективних стратегій взаємодії зі споживачами.



КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

рекреаційна індустрія, поведінка споживача, методичний підхід, соціально-економічне оцінювання, якість послуг, задоволення клієнта.

1. Introduction

The development of the recreational industry and the active formation of the recreational services market contributed to the regulation of this sphere of activity and its transformation into an important socio-economic phenomenon, which plays an increasingly prominent role in the development of modern society. The growth of the population's needs for recreation, health improvement, restoration of physical and psychological resources, as well as the diversification of forms of leisure organization determine its active integration into the system of social relations, within which the recreational industry performs economic, social, cultural, health and communicative functions, contributing to improving the quality of life of the population, the development of human capital and the formation of a culture of active recreation. Clarification of the functional purpose of the recreational industry is a necessary prerequisite for determining the role of the consumer in the system of market relations, identifying factors that influence his behavior, as well as developing effective strategies for interaction with different groups of consumers. Research into motivation, preferences, expectations and consumer behavior models allows for the formation of effective mechanisms for supporting and stimulating demand for recreational services, increasing their competitiveness and adapting the offer to modern social needs. That is why the methodological substantiation of the socio-economic assessment of consumer behavior in the recreational industry is a timely, scientifically sound and practically significant area of research, the results of which can be used to ensure the sustainable development of the recreational sector and increase the efficiency of its functioning.

2. Literature Review

In modern publications, special attention is paid to various aspects of customer service management [4], processes of business relationships [25] and the formation of a company's reputation in the service sector [12]. There are some developments by researchers [2; 6; 15] regarding the positive socio-economic development of individual regions. Several studies [21; 24; 30] reflect the essence of consumer economic behavior during instability and provide recommendations for increasing customer trust and timely application of marketing strategies in the service market. In turn, the recreational industry is a relatively new industry that is only at the stage of formation, but as the authors note [7; 19] it has great potential. In our previous publications [27–29], the system of functioning of the recreational industry and the features of human resources management in recreational organizations were revealed. However, this area requires further scientific and methodological justification for the socio-economic assessment of consumer behavior in modern market conditions.

3. Problem Statement

The purpose of the study is to substantiate methodological approaches to the socio-economic assessment of consumer behavior in the recreational industry.

4. Methods and Materials

The methodological basis of the work is based on a combination of systemic, competency, comparative and interdisciplinary approaches, which provide a comprehensive study of the recreational industry. To implement the tasks set, a set of general scientific methods was used, including the processing and generalization of scientific publications, analysis of the regulatory framework and program documents. The study identified the main socio-economic and socio-cultural functions of the recreational industry; revealed the social aspect of consumer behavior and identified key motives in the field of recreational services; proposed approaches to measuring the impact of the quality of recreational services on the level of consumer satisfaction.

5. Results and Discussion

The socio-economic environment is one of the key factors that determines consumer behavior and influences the development and transformation of the recreational industry in modern conditions. Therefore, relying on the methodology of structural functionalism [17; 23], the task was set to identify the main socio-economic and socio-cultural functions of the recreational industry. Thus, the implementation of socio-economic functions in the recreational industry makes a significant contribution to the world economy in terms of generating income, solving employment problems, improving the quality of life of the population, and rationalizing the use of free time. The economic and social functions of the recreational industry are inseparable, since the former provide the necessary material base, and the latter fill the content of the provision of services in this direction. The socio-cultural functions of the recreational industry include the following:

- health and rehabilitation function, which represents prevention for various diseases, recovery of the body after injuries, improvement of the vitality of a person in general and its individual physiological systems;

- sports function – improvement of physical qualities and motor skills, general physical development and strengthening of the health of people regardless of gender, age, degree of physical development;

- aesthetic function – formation of a developed body that is in harmony with the spirit, improvement of the figure, weight correction and muscle mass gain;

- epistemological function – consuming services in the field of recreation, a person receives knowledge about performing exercises, proper nutrition, a healthy lifestyle, acquires motor skills and abilities;

- educational function – increasing motor activity through various types of fitness, yoga, breathing practices, which contributes to the development of the personality, strengthens willpower, forms the desire for perfection;

- relaxation function – maintenance and restoration of the body both on the physical and mental levels;

- communicative and socializing function – uniting interested persons in clubs based on interests, creating deeper interaction and increasing communication in everyday life;

- recreational function – satisfying people's needs for active recreation and leisure, rational use of free time, forming a healthy lifestyle;

- spiritual function – attracting people to the cultural values of different countries and peoples through the use of fragments of the art of national cultures (for example, practicing oriental martial arts, zumba, yoga, etc.);

- adaptive function – revealing functional reserves and adaptive capabilities of a person to labor activity, adverse living conditions, increasing working capacity.

Thus, a recreational service is an activity of a performer to provide material, household and socio-cultural services to the population, which could satisfy their physical needs, which contribute to the involvement in a healthy lifestyle and increase the functional capabilities of consumers of recreational services. A conceptual analysis of the sphere of recreational services confirms the fact of its social institutionalization in modern society and provides grounds for its consideration from the point of view of the functioning of such independent organizations as a fitness club, which carry out activities to attract consumers of their services. Identification of the characteristics, properties and functions of this service allows us to conclude that the nature of consumption of this service will be largely determined by its specificity, the features of interaction between market actors and the social significance of recreational services for the consumer. Consumers are an important subject of this market, since for the successful operation of a fitness club and increasing the competitiveness of the organization, it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of consumer behavior.

Currently, in sociological science, a separate methodology of sociological research on the problem of studying consumer behavior has developed. The study of consumer behavior in the recreational services market involves resorting to theoretical approaches of the sociology of consumption. Of course, it is advisable to operationalize the concept of “consumer behavior” with an indication of its social aspect.

Within the framework of the phenomenological concept [10], consumer behavior is “a set of signs and indicators that characterize the actions of consumers, including their consumer preferences, frequency of purchase of goods or services, consumption structure, methods of using income”. The process of implementing these actions (it is usually called the consumer decision-making process) consists of several stages:

- awareness of the need (the purchasing process begins with the buyer feeling the need for a product or service);
- information search (the second stage of the decision-making process, it can be described as a motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or obtaining information from the external environment);
- evaluation and selection of purchase alternatives (comparison of possible options in terms of potential purchase benefits and selection of the most suitable of the alternatives);
- purchase (purchase of the selected option);
- consumption (use of the purchased product);
- post-purchase evaluation of the product (awareness of how satisfied the consumer is with his purchase and the results of its use);
- repurchase (purchase of the same product based on a positive previous experience of its consumption);
- release (removal of an unused product or remnants of its use).

Based on the above provisions, from the point of view of the sociological approach, consumer behavior in the field of recreational services is a series of interrelated social acts that people perform to satisfy their needs for physical activity. The main concepts (acts) of consumer behavior in the field of recreational services include: consumption motives, the process of searching for information about a product or service, factors for choosing a supplier, consumer preferences and expectations, consumer behavior models characterized by the frequency, duration and systematic use, as well as the level of satisfaction with the service and the features of forming loyalty to the supplier and the service itself. Thus, modern directions of sociological science cover the process of consumer decision-making about purchase, starting with awareness of need, search and evaluation of alternatives and ending with perception of the process of acquisition, consumption, level of satisfaction with purchase and refusal from it, as well as analysis of individual characteristics of consumers (knowledge, perception, motivation, preferences, values and lifestyle), influence of social factors and strategies of consumer behavior.

In the sociological tradition, the subject also becomes the behavior of various social communities in the process of consumption. Within the framework of sociology, consumer behavior is analyzed as a process in its specific historical context; consumption is considered not by a person, but by consumption at the level of social groups and society as a whole. The main role in consumer behavior is played by the individual characteristics of the consumer and the social environment to which he belongs or would like to belong. His behavior is determined by such social factors as socio-demographic characteristics, class affiliation, culture, fashion, reference groups, etc. Based on this, the methodology for studying consumer behavior in the recreational services market should be based on sociological theories that could describe, interpret and predict people's behavior.

Thus, the process of consuming recreational services from the point of view of the presented concepts reflects the complexity of this socio-economic phenomenon. Therefore, when consuming recreational services, it is advisable to rely on different methodological approaches. This will allow analyzing the features of consumer behavior in the recreational services market, as well as identifying social factors that influence choice and motivation.

Consumer motivation refers to incentives to satisfy physiological and psychological needs in the form of purchasing and consuming a product or service. In the study of consumer behavior, it is generally accepted that the consumer does not buy the service itself, but the satisfaction of the motive for its consumption and solving the problem. Therefore, when building customer attraction strategies, the emphasis is usually placed on identifying motivation. It is this that forms the basis for forming an offer, advertising messages, etc. Understanding why a consumer goes for a particular service, what needs prompted him to do this, not only allows you to build the right strategy for attracting customers, but also to explain and predict the behavior of consumer groups.

The difficulty in studying motives is that some of them are hidden from the researcher, and a conclusion about their existence can be made only by interpreting the behavior of individuals. Based on this, in the sociology of consumption it is customary to distinguish two groups of motives of consumer behavior: explicit motives and hidden (latent) motives. The first are usually measured with open questions: "Why do you use this service?" The second – using complex analytical methods. Within the framework of the above, we will present the following methods and assessment scales.

Multidirectional scaling – determining motives using several scales of various motives.

Projection method – direct responses of respondents project unconscious feelings, relationships, and latent motives: association method (dictionary association), completion (completion of a sentence, completion of a story), interpretations (caricature method, third-person method, reaction to a picture, psychographics), focus group method.

Thus, the study of motivation is based on two methodological approaches: quantitative and qualitative. Within the framework of the first approach, researchers believe that motivation should be studied in the same way as various behavioral facts, using survey methods. Supporters of the second, on the contrary, propose to abandon the use of structured questionnaires and statistical analysis in the study of motivation problems, and to conduct an in-depth analysis of motives based on qualitative and projective methods. However, both of these approaches have their limitations. In survey methods, these are the difficulties of studying motivation problems (construction of relevant scales for measurement, respondents' tendency to socially desirable answers, etc.). In the socio-psychological approach, the problem lies in the inability to identify group, socially conditioned motives and behavioral reactions. In this regard, the optimal approach to motivational research should be considered a combination of different methods. The author [18] tested the ideal scheme of such a combined study. Qualitative studies allow consumers to independently talk about their motives or demonstrate them during testing. As a result, the researcher receives a wide range of various motives that determine the consumer behavior of a particular person. But how widespread they are among all consumer groups, which are the least important, and which are the most important, the answer to this question can only be given by quantitative studies that allow us to assess the significance of each motive and ranking in social groups. Thus, the study of the structure of consumer behavior motives allows us to solve several research problems, including:

- a) classify various motives for purchasing and consuming goods;
- b) form adequate motivational complexes that contribute to the further promotion of goods and increasing sales.

In this regard, consumer satisfaction becomes the driving force of consumer behavior. In the work [16], interpreting the phenomenon of consumer satisfaction, it is proposed to consider it within the framework of two approaches: "appraisal" ("appraisal") assumes that joy is closely related to the quality of services and its perception; "need-oriented" – interprets satisfaction in close connection with motivation and involves satisfying stated needs during classes.

The first approach links consumer satisfaction with the impact of service quality on customers' behavioral intentions. Its author is an American researcher [20], who interprets consumer satisfaction as a set of cognitive and emotional reactions to the service received. According to this approach, after using the service, consumers compare their previous expectations with the actual result. If the real experience exceeds the customer's expectations, a positive perception of the service and a high level of satisfaction are formed. This will mean a high level of satisfaction and their willingness to use this service in the future. On the other hand, if customer expectations are much higher than subsequent experience, then in this case satisfaction drops sharply. Then consumers will look for alternative offers for making a new purchase.

To measure the impact of quality on consumer satisfaction, specially developed scales and adapted scales for the recreational industry are used as tools. Let us give some of them as an example.

The SERQUAL model (abbreviation for Service Quality) was developed by scientists from the University of Texas [20]. This model is based on consumers comparing their expectations and actual perception of a product or service in 22 aspects, grouped into five components of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, persuasiveness, empathy and tangibles. The questionnaire used consists of two parts, one of which uses Likert scales to identify customer expectations regarding the listed criteria, and the second part similarly records the perception of this service according to the same indicators.

The main tool for measuring quality is the overall quality coefficient, which is calculated as the difference between all perception points and all expectations from 22 questions. In this case, zero values of quality coefficients indicate an approximate coincidence of expectations with actual perception. Positive coefficient values indicate exceeding expectations, negative ones indicate insufficient implementation of the characteristic. Using 22 quality coefficients, you can obtain an overall satisfaction coefficient, based on which private coefficients are calculated. The fewer negative values of the quality coefficients for different components, the higher the overall quality of the service, and vice versa. Depending on the quadrant, consumers can be divided into 4 groups: agreed satisfied, agreed dissatisfied customers, inconsistent satisfied and dissatisfied customers. As a result, it becomes possible to build a satisfaction map depending on two indicators - consistency and satisfaction level.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that the SERQUAL model was developed as a universal method for measuring service quality and some scales do not apply to recreational services. These services are mainly characterized by their program offerings. The absence of this important aspect in the SERVQUAL scale has become the reason for several researchers to develop alternative measurement tools that could be used to assess the quality of service in the recreational industry.

The SAFS scale (Scale of Attributes of Fitness Services) is the first scale that allowed us to study the influence of fitness service characteristics on customer satisfaction. In 1987, together with his colleagues, the author of this method [9] tested many characteristics of a fitness club on clients in Canada. As a result, only 30 items were selected based on correlation criteria, characterizing 5 criteria of fitness services: professionalism of staff; price indicators; quality of service by staff, environment, and additional services. The measurement method involves assessment on a 7-point Likert scale. A significant factor is the environmental factor and there are some differences in its assessment by gender. The environmental factor was assessed as the most important, but women also noted the importance of the professionalism of staff for this criterion.

The QUESC (Quality Excellence of Sports Centers) scale was created in 1995 based on a study [13] conducted in Korea. It included 33 items measuring the quality of service of sports centers according to 11 criteria: atmosphere, staff, relationships, reliable employees, availability of information, proposed programs, personal approach, price, discounts, clarity, stimulation, and convenience. The factors were determined based on the analysis of specialized literature on the problem of measuring service quality and using a focus group. The SQFS (Scale of Quality in Fitness Centers) scale is used to assess satisfaction with the quality of fitness services [8]. It constitutes a multidimensional model that includes nine main components: interpersonal interaction between customers, customer interaction with staff, variety and quality of the offered programs, atmosphere during service, management orientation to ensure high quality of service, physical environment of the establishment, influence of other visitors, effectiveness of problem solving and service recovery, as well as general perception of quality of services provided.

The second approach is based on the postulate that consumer satisfaction is a reflection of satisfaction of customer needs. Thus, the authors [3], studying the field of leisure, defined satisfaction as a positive perception or positive feelings that appear in a person after consumer choice and participation in recreational processes. A positive feeling comes from satisfaction with the result or satisfied need. According to this approach, consumer satisfaction from recreational activities is the result of gaining positive emotions and awareness of achieving the desired goal.

Another area of research that can be considered within the framework of both approaches is the influence of the social environment on the formation of satisfaction. Within the framework of this area, a series of studies [26] was conducted in 2012 in Greece. For this purpose, the OCP (Other Customers Perception) scale was adapted for the consumption of fitness services [5]. The scale covered three key variables: the similarity of customers, their appearance and behavioral characteristics. Based on the research conducted, the author concluded that the level of satisfaction of consumers of recreational services largely depends on how they perceive other visitors to the fitness club and evaluate their behavior.

The recreational services market is characterized by low rates of development, instability of consumer demand and a significant level of customer churn. In this regard, when studying consumer behavior in this market, it is important to pay special attention to the analysis of consumer loyalty, since it is one of the key factors ensuring the stability and competitiveness of enterprises.

Loyal consumers are those who have been customers of a particular company for a long time, which is confirmed in the works [11; 14]. Customer loyalty is based on a positive experience from

consuming a product or service. Thus, according to the author's formulation [1], loyalty is a "measure of consumer commitment to a brand." He believes that in a situation of price policy changes or some restrictions, a high degree of loyalty reflects the likelihood of the consumer not switching to another brand.

Thus, in the consumption of services, two types of loyalty should be distinguished: behavioral and loyalty associated with the consumer's attitude to his purchase. Behavioral loyalty is manifested in using the service permanently, but in the absence of commitment. In such a situation, the consumer easily switches to another company at the first opportunity. Loyalty associated with attitude, on the contrary, implies the consumer's interest in consuming the service of this particular company. In such a situation, consumption takes place over a very long period of time.

It should be noted that consumer loyalty in the recreational industry is difficult to measure, since almost no client uses the services of the same club all the time. However, in order for a company to have a chance to survive in a competitive market, it must form its own circle of loyal customers. And this is not a random process, but the result of long-term painstaking work of specialists. As you know, it is more profitable to keep an old client than to attract a new one.

Customer loyalty in the recreational industry is measured as the highest degree of satisfaction. Consumer loyalty is a characteristic of commitment and the highest degree of satisfaction. Therefore, the satisfaction of consumers of recreational services should be measured within the framework of two approaches: "evaluative" - satisfaction as a result of the quality of the service provided and "needs-oriented" - satisfaction as the ability of this service to satisfy the client's requests and personal needs. It should be noted that they do not exclude each other, but complement each other. Within the framework of the "evaluative" approach, the satisfaction of customers of fitness clubs is formed under the influence of such characteristics of this service as: the environment of the fitness club (the atmosphere in the halls, at the reception and in the locker rooms, etc.), the quality and breadth of choice of equipment, the safety of classes, the range of services, the quality of services, pricing policy, social ties, the level of service by the trainer and other club staff, the quality of the environment of people in the fitness club, etc. Obtaining knowledge about the attributes of a recreational service that shape customer satisfaction allows you to identify problem areas in the work of a fitness club and improve them to increase customer loyalty, as well as identify those that are directly competitive advantages for attracting new customers. Within the framework of the "needs-oriented" approach, the degree of satisfaction of customer needs and their emotions that arise in the process of receiving a recreational service is measured. The data obtained serve as the basis for making practical management decisions, as they allow you to assess the overall effectiveness of a recreational service, investigate current trends in consumer behavior and forecast future demand for recreational products. Thus, the assessment of service quality and customer satisfaction can be measured using a large number of methods and scales. They prove that customer satisfaction in the recreational industry is influenced by many indicators. At the same time, the strength and nature of the influence depend on the market structure itself and the specifics of recreational services, which explains the fact of the differences obtained in the described studies.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the recreational industry as a socio-economic phenomenon, during which its characteristics, subjects, functions and socio-economic conditions of development were identified, allowed us to clarify the concept of recreational services in the sociological aspect. The conceptual analysis of recreational services confirms the fact of its social institutionalization in modern society and provides grounds for its consideration from the point of view of the functioning of fitness clubs as independent organizations that carry out activities to attract consumers of their services. Considering the specifics of the object of research and based on the considered provisions of the sociology of consumption to understand consumer behavior, it is advisable to interpret consumer behavior in the recreational services market as a series of interrelated social acts that people perform to satisfy their needs for physical activity. From a sociological perspective, consumer behavior in the recreational services market should be considered as a complex process that includes consumption motives, searching for information about a product or service, factors for choosing a supplier, consumer preferences and expectations, features of consumption models (frequency, duration and regularity of

use), as well as the level of satisfaction with the service received and the formation of loyalty to the supplier and the service itself.

The recreational industry uses various methodological approaches to measuring and evaluating key components of consumer behavior, in particular motivation and customer satisfaction with recreational services. Motivation research is carried out using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods allow us to reveal the diversity and depth of motives for consuming recreational services, while quantitative methods allow us to determine the significance of individual motives, establish their priority and trace the features of manifestation in different social groups. The results obtained form an information basis for making effective management decisions, as they contribute to assessing the overall effectiveness of recreational services, identifying current trends in consumer behavior, and forecasting future demand for recreational products.

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