



# THE CONSUMER JOURNEY ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS AS MEDIATORS OF EXPERIENCE FOR THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF THE FITNESS BODY

A JORNADA DO CONSUMIDOR EM PLATAFORMAS DIGITAIS COMO MEDIADORAS DE EXPERIÊNCIA PARA A (RE)CONSTRUÇÃO DO CORPO FITNESS

LA JORNADA DEL CONSUMIDOR EN PLATAFORMAS DIGITALES COMO MEDIADORAS DE LA EXPERIENCIA PARA LA (RE)CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL CUERPO FITNESS

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – This study aimed to understand the consumer journey on digital platforms in order to clarify the experiences and touchpoints involved in consumption, centered around the purpose of (re)constructing the fitness body.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative, exploratory, and interpretative study was conducted through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Data were collected by means of in-depth interviews, with the intentional selection of fitness consumers.

**Findings** – The research highlights consumer touchpoints, showing that achieving objectives provides greater stimulation as a motivator of effort and reinforces the attainment of goals in the (re)construction of the fitness body. The main experiences identified with digital platforms were searching/researching, interacting, and purchasing. Moreover, consumer profile emerged as a determinant in platform use, signaling passive/active behavior in consumption relations. Instagram® was identified as the primary platform.

**Limitations/implications** – As a limitation, we note the intentional selection of participants who attend gyms and the decision not to extend the study to other actors involved, due to the focus on the consumer perspective. In terms of implications, we confirm that the accumulation of experiences generates cognitive support, functioning as a control point in the resumption of the journey, as well as the identification of essential experiences that form the foundation of touchpoints on digital platforms. We suggest future studies addressing other consumer journeys, different audiences, or deeper exploration of a specific experience, in addition to examining which actors exert greater influence on the consumer journey.

**Originality/value** – In conclusion, this research contributes to the identification of consumer experiences in the fitness journey with digital platforms and to the indication of essential interactions for achieving a higher goal. Furthermore, it emphasizes the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as an adapted tool for examining the consumer perspective.

**Keywords:** Consumer Experience. Consumer Journey. Touchpoints. Digital Platforms. Fitness Body.

 Karina de Sousa Marques

Master's

Universidade Federal de Pernambuco – Brazil

[admcinthiafrade@gmail.com](mailto:admcinthiafrade@gmail.com)

 Jeaninne Maria Monteiro de Freitas

Postgraduate

Universidade Federal de Pernambuco – Brazil

[jeanine.freitas@ufpe.br](mailto:jeanine.freitas@ufpe.br)

 Marianny Jessica de Brito Silva

PhD

Universidade Federal de Pernambuco – Brazil

[marianafepessoa@gmail.com](mailto:marianafepessoa@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

**Objetivo** – Essa pesquisa objetivou compreender a jornada do consumidor nas plataformas digitais, a fim de esclarecer as experiências e pontos de contato existentes no consumo reunidos em torno do propósito de (re)construção do corpo fitness.

**Desenho/metodologia/abordagem** – Pesquisa qualitativa, exploratória e interpretativa, realizada por meio da análise fenomenológica interpretativa com coleta realizada por entrevistas em profundidade com seleção intencional de consumidores fitness.

**Resultados** – Foram indicados os pontos de contato com o cliente em demonstração; objetivos alcançados proporcionam maior estímulo como motivadores do esforço e reforçam o alcance da meta na (re)construção do corpo fitness; foram encontrados o buscar/pesquisar, interagir e comprar como principais experiências com as plataformas digitais; e o perfil do consumidor surgiu como determinante no uso das plataformas, sinalizando o comportamento passivo/ativo nas relações de consumo. O Instagram® foi a principal plataforma indicada.

**Limitações/Implicações** – Enquanto limitação, indicou-se a seleção intencional dos participantes frequentadores de academias de ginástica e a não ampliação do estudo para outros atores envolvidos devido à opção da perspectiva do consumidor. Por implicações, o estudo certificou que o acúmulo de experiências gera suporte cognitivo atuante como ponto de controle na retomada da jornada e a identificação das experiências essenciais que formam o alicerce dos pontos de contato nas plataformas digitais. Sugeriram-se pesquisas em outros temas de jornada de consumo, outro público e o aprofundamento em uma experiência, objetivando examinar quais atores participam em maior influência na jornada do consumidor.

**Originalidade/Valor** – Por conclusão, o presente estudo contribui para a identificação das experiências na jornada do consumidor fitness com as plataformas digitais e a indicação das interações essenciais para alcançar um objetivo superior. Destaca-se, ainda, a utilização da análise fenomenológica interpretativa como ferramenta adaptada para analisar a visão do consumidor.

**Palavras-chave:** Corpo Fitness. Experiência de Consumo. Jornada do Consumidor. Plataformas Digitais. Pontos de Contato.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo** – Esta investigación tuvo como propósito comprender la jornada del consumidor en las plataformas digitales con el fin de esclarecer las experiencias y puntos de contacto presentes en el consumo, reunidos en torno al propósito de la (re)construcción del cuerpo fitness.

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque** – Investigación cualitativa, exploratoria e interpretativa, realizada mediante el Análisis Fenomenológico Interpretativo (AFI). La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo a través de entrevistas en profundidad, con selección intencional de consumidores fitness.

**Hallazgos** – Se presentan los puntos de contacto con el consumidor, mostrando que los objetivos alcanzados proporcionan un mayor estímulo como motivadores del esfuerzo y refuerzan el logro de la meta en la (re)construcción del cuerpo fitness. Se identificaron como principales experiencias con las plataformas digitales: buscar/investigar, interactuar y comprar. Asimismo, el perfil del consumidor emergió como determinante en el uso de las plataformas, señalando comportamientos pasivos/activos en las relaciones de consumo. Instagram® fue la plataforma principal indicada.

**Limitaciones/implicaciones** – Como limitación, señalamos la selección intencional de participantes asistentes a gimnasios y la no ampliación del estudio a otros actores involucrados, debido a la opción por la perspectiva del consumidor. En cuanto a las implicaciones, confirmamos que la acumulación de experiencias genera un soporte cognitivo que actúa como punto de control en la reanudación de la jornada, así como la identificación de experiencias esenciales que constituyen la base de los puntos de contacto en las plataformas digitales. Sugerimos futuras investigaciones sobre otras jornadas de consumo, con distintos públicos, o con un mayor nivel de profundización en una experiencia específica, además de examinar qué actores ejercen mayor influencia en la jornada del consumidor.



**Originalidad/valor** – En conclusión, contribuimos a la identificación de las experiencias en la jornada del consumidor fitness con las plataformas digitales y a la indicación de interacciones esenciales para alcanzar un objetivo superior. Se destaca además la utilización del Análisis Fenomenológico Interpretativo como herramienta adaptada para examinar la perspectiva del consumidor.

**Palabras clave:** Experiencia de Consumo. Jornada del Consumidor. Puntos de Contacto. Plataformas Digitales. Cuerpo Fitness.

## INTRODUCTION

The innovation of digital technologies has revolutionized how individuals seek information and perform consumption activities (Afonso, 2021). Many consumers combine different channels to search for product information and subsequently complete purchases (Orús, Gurrea, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2019). Multiple online and offline touchpoints are constantly experienced by consumers during their consumption journeys, generating frequent interactions with products and services that still require more in-depth analysis (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Fernández et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2020).

In this article, the consumer journey is understood as the process undertaken to achieve specific consumption objectives (Becker et al., 2020; Hamilton & Price, 2019). It is represented by a set of experiences that arise in response to stimuli (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020) and is directly linked to experiential marketing (Schmitt, 2011). Thus, it encompasses consumer actions before, during, and after purchase (Kranzbühler et al., 2018; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), which reveal consumer behavior aimed at achieving a higher-order goal (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020).

With digital evolution, touchpoints have expanded and diversified, providing organizations with a rich environment for building relationships with potential customers. Digital platforms have become spaces of experience that may contribute to sustaining competitive advantages

(Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016). Understanding how these experiences are digitally constructed and shaped is essential for organizations to develop more relevant, personalized, and engagement-oriented strategies.

Experiences capture the processual nature of consumption through what the consumer feels (Becker, 2018), making them indispensable elements of the journey, digital interactions, and their touchpoints, thereby offering opportunities to investigate consumer behavior (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019; Voorhees et al., 2017). From this perspective, observing how consumers perceive and integrate their digital experiences can provide greater detail about journeys, touchpoints, and their connections (Gasparin et al., 2022).

Among the goals that orient consumer journeys, the fitness body stands out—a body shaped to conform to standards, measures, and fashions (Silva & Farias, 2022). Today, valued bodies are docile and domesticated, as individuals seek the ideal physique: slim, slender, defined/muscular, and communicative of beauty, health, effort, and success. Such ideals reposition individuals within social cycles, marking status through the sacrifices endured to achieve fitness (Silva & Farias, 2022; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). This goal drives consumption and consumer experiences (Følstad & Kvale, 2018; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), becoming a lifestyle involving diets, exercise, and aesthetic procedures often encouraged on digital platforms (Silva & Farias, 2022). The purpose of (re)constructing the body gains relevance given the overvaluation of appearance, where digital trends seek to convey messages of physical standards associated with well-being and personal pleasure (Andrade, 2003; Leitão & Gomes, 2018).

By adopting the experiential perspective of the journey through digital platforms, we examine the path consumers follow to reach their goals, a process supported by social theories



(Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg et al., 1995). The journey toward the fitness body is thus characterized by experiences that emerge in response to stimuli within and beyond touchpoints, arising from the pursuit of a desired lifestyle (Becker et al., 2020).

In this way, we identify experiences that help explain consumer goals, behaviors, and touchpoints with digital platforms that sustain interactions, keeping them aligned with the overarching goal of (re)constructing the fitness body. Hence, this study aims to understand the consumer journey in the (re)construction of the fitness body through digital platforms.

The body cult reflected in the market moves trillions in the global economy, with Brazil being a leading country in revenue generation (IHRSA, 2019). This justifies the choice of fitness as a representative phenomenon of consumption experiences that model and reconstruct social status and roles within the economy of the adjusted body. Combined with digital journeys, platforms reduce barriers to market access, enabling crucial interactions between organizations and clients, which in the fitness sector remain underexplored (Censo Fitness, 2022). Moreover, studies indicate that fitness culture images in digital environments reinforce exposure to idealized bodies, accentuating the consumption of ideas as symbolic capital and visual commodity (Alvarenga et al., 2025), requiring research that deepens the understanding of these dynamics.

Theoretical and observational studies on fitness consumer behavior have largely adopted quantitative methods through medical bibliometrics or basic qualitative approaches (Hill & Peters, 2004; Lee & Skerrett, 2001; Silva & Farias, 2022). Addressing this gap, our empirical study offers a consumer-centered perspective, innovatively applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore consumer-platform interactions. In contribution, we provide insights into underlying aspects of the journey, offering

evidence on how and why digital fitness journeys may be effective in promoting health and achieving wellness goals.

This article is organized as follows: After this introduction, the next section addresses the consumer journey, touchpoints, and experiential consumption. Subsequently, we examine the relationship between digital platforms, body cult, and the fitness lifestyle. Methodological procedures are then described, followed by results and discussion. Finally, conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for future research are presented.

## THE CONSUMER JOURNEY

A consumer's journey is portrayed by the set of experiences maintained throughout their life (Becker et al., 2020). The scope and nature of these experiences, as a research phenomenon, are understood quite differently across fields of literature (Jaakkola et al., 2022). Research focusing on experiences as responses to managerial stimuli often views customer experience primarily as the result of supplier–customer interaction along the journey (Helkkula, 2011; Patrício et al., 2011). When considering experience from the perspective of an individual's consumption process and the ways it relates to community, practice, symbolism, and identity (Akaka & Schau, 2019; Arnould & Price, 1993; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), the lens adopted is that of the consumer (Becker et al., 2020).

Becker and Jaakkola (2020) identify the consumer journey as the set of customer experiences arising from responses and reactions to stimuli both within and outside controlled touchpoints. A journey is thus characterized as the process through which customers progress to achieve specific purchasing or service objectives (Becker et al., 2020; Hamilton & Price, 2019). In this study, we relate the fitness lifestyle to consumption experiences mediated by digital platforms.





The consumer journey encompasses multiple interactions, which may be direct or indirect, and are referred to as touchpoints—that is, the points where the customer and the service provider or its offering “meet” (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019; Voorhees et al., 2017). A journey toward a fitness lifestyle involves various customer activities, ranging from interactions with friends, family, and private social networks to those facilitated by digital platforms, which are triggered by multiple experiential consumption stimuli (Schmitt, 2011).

Experiential consumption spans relationships with diverse types of organizations or service providers, such as gyms, health professionals, food companies, influencers, individuals with fitness lifestyles, and apps for specific activities—all of which are mediated through digital platforms (Schmitt, 2011). With touchpoints conceptualized as interactions (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), these occur for consumers either directly or in mediated forms, which this study seeks to identify in order to describe the journey from the consumer’s perspective.

It is important to note that a journey is composed of both extraordinary experiences and routine, everyday consumption practices (Carù & Cova, 2003). Such experiences become clearer as research succeeds in describing them through their touchpoints, especially as mediated by digital platforms (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Gentile et al., 2007).

By examining consumers within their fitness lives, we identify their experiences, which touchpoints and “social media” are important and representative in constructing this journey, and how the consumer journey is shaped by their relationship with technology. This includes direct and indirect interactions with service offerings before, during, and after the primary service encounter (Voorhees et al., 2017), pointing to ways of supporting the various interactive actors who assist consumers in achieving their objectives of constructing or maintaining the fitness body through digital platforms.

## DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND THE CULT OF THE FITNESS BODY

Digital platforms are understood as a business model that leverages technological connectivity to enable interaction among people and organizations within an ecosystem (Parker et al., 2019). In this article, we refer to them particularly as a set of networked communication business media that operate through the internet and include Facebook®, Instagram®, YouTube®, among others (Meikle, 2016). They are recognized as channels of interaction that provide convenience, broad availability, and low cost for those involved (Momany & Alshboul, 2016; Roth & Zawadzki, 2018; Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). In addition, they have enabled faster informational dynamics in people’s daily lives (Mheidly & Fares, 2020).

When using platforms, consumers seek to research goods and services, but they also feel engaged with the brands they use and with other consumers (Hanna et al., 2011). This engagement and proximity, generated by daily virtual interactions, provide opportunities for consumers to learn about others’ opinions, skills, and lives (Vogel et al., 2015), and, above all, to relate more closely to the body standards and ideals they value most.

Social identification leads to recognition activities, where stereotypical perceptions of self and others may foster the pursuit of outcomes traditionally associated with group formation and the reinforcement of identity antecedents (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This perspective is applied to socialization in organizations and, when personally reflected by fitness consumers on digital platforms, it triggers stimuli with multiple effects along the journey. Thus, we observe that digital strategies promoting health and fitness lifestyles, when emphasizing individual responsibility, often overlook the social, cultural, and political dimensions of digital technology use (Lupton, 2014).

There is a constant demand for a model or body standard that drives individuals toward



their fitness goals. The pursuit of an ideal body image—one that communicates beauty, health, sensuality, and success as a means of positioning oneself in the social sphere—reveals the effort to demarcate position and define behaviors (Silva & Farias, 2022; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). In daily routines of striving for the (re)construction of the fitness body, consumers are motivated toward exploratory actions that help them achieve their goals.

The relationship with digital platforms is highly individualized. Due to their reach and influence on consumption (Fuchs, 2017), they can facilitate or hinder the promotion of experiences. An important question that arises is how these experiential and embodied forms of knowledge can resist the biopower of data in the digital world (Fotopoulou & O’Riordan, 2017). In this scenario, understanding how these experiences intersect with bodily representations and daily practices becomes essential. By identifying how consumers perceive their body models, habits, and lifestyle practices—and the standards they develop in relation to digital media—while acknowledging that an idealized body reflects social and contextual norms (Silva & Farias, 2022), we enter the fitness lifestyle of (re)constructing the body.

Thus, digital platforms function as facilitators of functional access, tools, and means of connection between the consumer and the product or service, supporting the achievement of their goals. It is important to emphasize that the idea of the journey precedes the understanding that it is composed of multiple experiential relationships, subordinated to a higher goal that serves as a source of learning (Becker et al., 2020). Therefore, the fitness lifestyle consumer uses available platforms as support for performing tasks and routines such as physical activities in pursuit of their superior goal: the fitness body. Studies demonstrate that individuals who are regularly active possess greater bodily vigor and are less prone to developing health problems (Löllgen & Papadopoulou, 2018). The modifica-

tion or maintenance of a fitness body suggests specific consumption habits (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

This pursuit of the ideal body is also associated with physical and mental well-being. In this sense, platforms are useful for managing the desired social reflection and act as instruments of devotion to the idealized body. Regarding aesthetic experiences related to body models, the dissemination of posts reveals vanity and fitness body goals, suggesting that these are authentic experiences aligned with the self (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), in the pursuit of belonging to established beauty ideals (Barros & Oliveira, 2017).

In seeking physical conditioning associated with well-being and with proven health benefits (Lee & Skerrett, 2001), many consumers engage in the (re)construction of the fitness body, which entails different forms of interaction with digital platforms (Becker et al., 2020). When lacking knowledge about how to achieve this idealized body, digital consumers tend to engage in physical and emotional practices that require sacrifice and transformation. Such practices aim not only at achieving aesthetic results but also at constructing a symbolic narrative of bodily form and adjustment (Scott et al., 2017), functioning as social justification for their efforts and choices.

Consumers searching for information on exercises and restrictive diets—often reinforced by the “no pain, no gain” ideology (Van Hooft et al., 2019)—tend to adopt strict discipline, involving practices that may even be painful, but which justify the satisfaction of reaching their goal. This posture reveals an expansion of the perspective on fitness consumers, demonstrating that there is no single linear path to achieving the ideal body. Instead, the journey is diverse and multifaceted, uniquely constructed by each individual in pursuit of their higher purpose (Becker et al., 2020). Therefore, we emphasize the diversity of experiences and touchpoints that must be identified and considered in a non-linear manner within this journey (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). These are always linked to some stimulus belonging to the



consumer’s established fitness lifestyle.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Given that this research aims to understand the fitness consumer journey, we adopted phenomenology (Smith & Osborn, 2015), using narratives, images, and records gathered by the researchers during interviews with consumers who experience the fitness lifestyle (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). This lifestyle is characterized by routines centered on physical exercise—often taken to extremes—dietary regimens, restrictions, and even aesthetic surgeries (Silva & Farias, 2022). Accordingly, the study was exploratory and detailed, with consumers describing their experiences in their own words, placing events in the foreground so that activities and interactions with actors appeared more relevant from their perspective (Becker, 2018).

Thus, we employed the interpretative paradigm from a phenomenological perspective to understand what occurs in the consciousness of the consumer as a being, and how they perceive their own journey (Smith & Osborn, 2015). To enable processual visualization, given the multidimensional and context-specific nature of experiences, the interviews were guided by Becker’s (2018) perspective, which emphasizes the consumer within their holistic process, incorporating contributions from consumer perspectives in experiential consumption (Schmitt, 2011).

Data collection was carried out through phenomenological, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions that enabled physical, mental, and emotional expression by respondents (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The in-

terviews were recorded with authorization and conducted either via Google Meet or in person at a location chosen by the respondent. They were complemented by field notes, images, and records of the participants, which allowed access to contextual evidence about the observed journey (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

For a broader and systemic perspective (Becker, 2018), respondents were asked to provide images that represented the specific meaning of the lifestyle shaping their journey of (re)constructing the fitness body (Penn, 2000). Personal images or digital platform posts served as supporting evidence of how consumers adopted and incorporated the researched lifestyle (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). The techniques applied reflected the researchers’ efforts to capture the consumer’s way of life, ensuring that the multiple actors and touchpoints were identified and meaning production clarified (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Penn, 2000). Thus, the context of the journeys was aligned with Becker and Jaakkola’s (2020) recommendations to identify life relations and achieve the holistic understanding required for capturing the consumer’s perspective.

The selection of participants followed the fitness concept under observation, drawn from locations typically frequented by this consumer segment (Becker, 2018). Intentional sampling was conducted with individuals who adopt and identify with the fitness lifestyle in their daily lives (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Smith & Osborn, 2015). The number of interviewees was consistent with phenomenological research and aligned with the depth required for interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Their characteristics are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1  
Characteristics of respondents.

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Format	Profession/Occupation
R1	Male	32	Google Meet	Teacher
R2	Female	31	Google Meet	Pharmacy Manager
R3	Male	NR	In person	Accountant
R4	Female	40	In person	Public Servant
R5	Female	29	Google Meet	Civil Engineer and Model
R6	Female	41	Google Meet	Public Servant

Source: Authors (2023)



Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection, requiring ongoing and continuous reflection. As interviews were recorded and transcribed, new questions emerged and were evaluated (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This process followed a logic of repetition and deepening in identifying experiences, as proposed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which allows for adaptation, applies double hermeneutics, and links findings to patterns in cognitive psychology (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This approach is appropriate for analyzing consumer behavior, as experiences are also grounded in individualized learning processes.

The interviews were transcribed, enabling the identification of eight categories of experiences, which emerged through free induction and were linked to the theoretical foundations supporting the study (Becker et al., 2020; Silva & Farias, 2022; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). The fitness journey experiences were grouped into topics organized by similarity according to phenomenological and theoretical categories (Becker et al., 2020; Smith & Osborn,

2015). The researchers adopted a more nuanced approach to defining customer experience, emphasizing the intended types and the intensity of responses (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020).

This research adhered to quality verification and data reliability procedures, including transcript reviews, triangulation among authors during analysis, and writing revisions (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Such measures sought to provide insights that could inform enhanced value propositions for consumers, organizations, the market, and society.

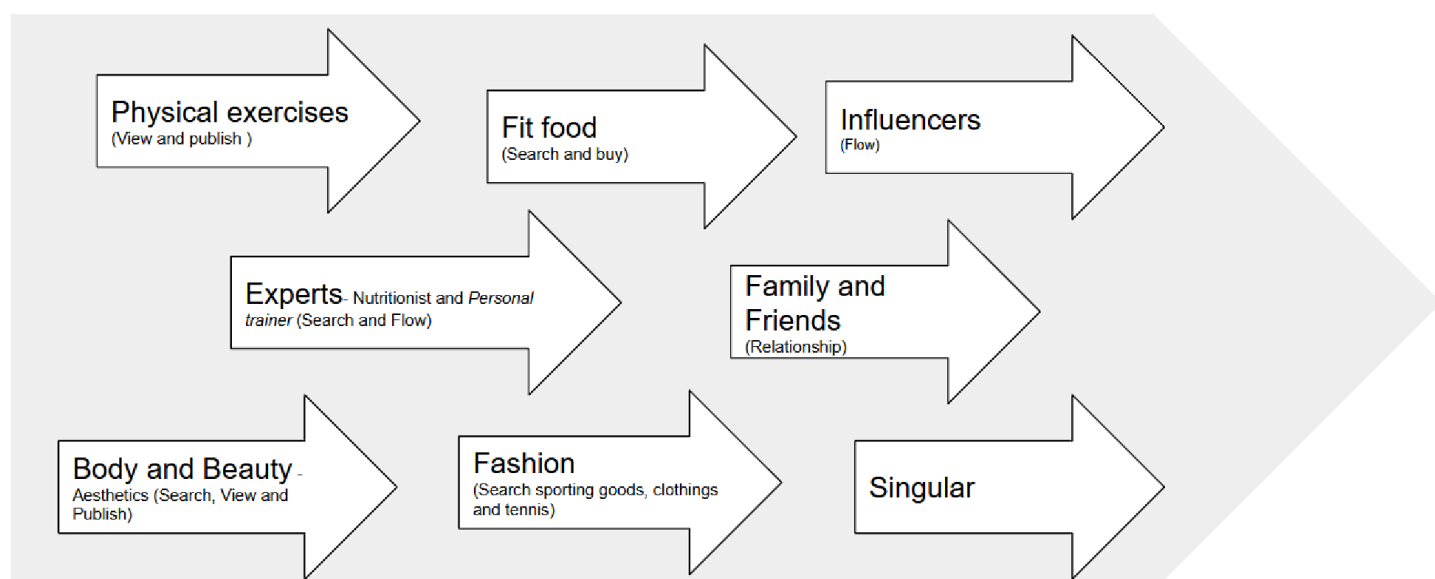
## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### Fitness Experience and Digital Platforms

We drew on the model established by Becker et al. (2020) to relate, through its arrows, the experiential themes and interests reported by the interviewed consumers (Figure 2). From the outset, we recognized that the primary goal of participants' journeys was the (re)construction of the body through the fitness lifestyle.

**Figure 2**

*Experiences in the consumer journey toward the (re)construction of the fit body*



Source: Authors, adapted from Becker et al. (2020).





Throughout their online navigation, fitness consumers' experiences were connected to practices, information, interactions, and goods and services representative of the fitness lifestyle. In this sense, we identified experiences linked to physical exercise, fitness-related nutrition, body and beauty, apparel, influencers, specialists, family and friends, and other specific experiences.

For exercise-related experiences, participants described viewing, following, and posting content, videos, and live streams on digital platforms that encouraged physical activity. Consumers may define new subordinate goals when they perceive that their current strategies are not reducing the discrepancy between their present condition and their higher-order goals (Becker et al., 2020).

Regarding fitness-related nutrition, participants sought content on recipes and even described purchasing food with the intention of reproducing such meals. These experiences encompassed the before, during, and after of food acquisition (Kranzbühler et al., 2018; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), including the emergence of desire, ingredient search, purchase, and recipe preparation, often culminating in posting content.

Experiences with apparel followed a similar process, though centered on the intention to align with the visual standards of the idealized fitness body as portrayed on digital platforms. Respondents highlighted their choices of brands and fashion trends. Experiences with influencers were characterized by following individuals who inspired them through lifestyle, body shape, beauty, and health, in attempts to emulate practices and behaviors. Following influencers emerged as the most subjective type of experience, shaped when consumers accept as authentic the co-produced fantasy created by viewing influencers' routines on digital platforms (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 2011).

Experiences involving specialists reflected the technical knowledge consumers wished

to acquire. These interactions suggested a need to follow recommendations and seek technical references or solutions for their routines. Thus, the impact of authentically following influencers and specialists was to foster cognitive responses (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) that guided consumer behavior toward the idealized body, much like the imagery found in gyms of strong, muscular, sculpted, sensualized, and media-idealized bodies (Pontes et al., 2022).

In body and beauty experiences, aesthetics were central. Consumers sought to achieve specific body ideals, posting content motivated by vanity, positive reinforcement, or to showcase milestone achievements. These experiences were seen as authentic to the self (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), reflecting contemporary society's continuous pursuit of belonging within the beauty standards dictated by the "tyranny of aesthetics" (Barros & Oliveira, 2017).

Nevertheless, digital platforms also reflect people's realities and serve as effective channels for sharing difficulties and achievements. Experiences with family and friends were mediated by reactions and emotions that could either strengthen or weaken relational bonds, both within and beyond digital platforms. Participants indicated that even authentic posts could trigger interactions with friends or family that diverted them from their goals or distanced them from their journey.

Thus, it became evident that the overarching objective resonated as something greater: a transformation of life into becoming a new person (Becker et al., 2020). Posting a photo served as positive reinforcement for reaching milestones in the fitness body (re)construction journey. Hedonic consumers seek or learn through stimuli—especially in digital environments, where certain aspects are highly valued and reinforced through frequent platform use (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Krupczak & Veiga, 2024). Specific experiences were linked to unique and private goals,



involving posts, likes, and interactions that reflected individual behaviors, tastes, and preferences (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 2011). These experiences were not always connected to the higher-order goal of the fitness journey and often emerged as distractions in participant accounts.

Because participants accessed and regularly engaged with digital platforms, we identified macrothemes that significantly shaped body (re)construction and defined the fitness journey through digital touchpoints. These emergent ca-

tegories straddled a continuum between internal (personal) and external, as well as positive and negative, influences on consumers.

The categories reflecting more personal and private experiences were directly tied to life histories, lifestyle, motivation, personal profile, and frequency of platform interactions. External categories were associated with relationships with family and friends, the pursuit of an ideal body, or platform preferences. Figure 3 presents a summary of categories with descriptions and excerpts from participants.

**Figure 3**  
*Categorias emergentes, descrições e relatos.*

Category	Description	Excerpt
Life history	How consumers began and the length of their journey.	R1 – “I’ve always had this struggle with losing weight. Always! My whole life has been like this.”
Lifestyle	Choices related to exercise, diet, preferences, efforts, sacrifices.	R2 – “I’d set a time of day. Since we were at home, I’d set aside an hour. Trainers had a schedule, I think at 7 p.m. And I’d follow those exercises, watching the live sessions.”
Personal profile	How consumers indicate they relate to digital platforms.	R3 – “I wanted to use them less. I think I’m kind of addicted to digital platforms. Because I’m always working, always online!”
Motivation	How they direct behavior toward goals.	R5 – “I get frustrated when I can’t stick to the diet, but I actually enjoy it, you know? I like having goals and routines. It’s important!”
Platforms	Platforms used and reasons for usage.	R4 – “I usually watch YouTube videos, mainly to check if I’m doing the right strokes or kicks.”
Usage frequency	Time dedicated to routines and activities on platforms.	R2 – “Usually I take longer. Training is longer on Saturdays and so are the posts. Since I have more free time, I dedicate myself better.”
Relationships with family and friends	How they reference family and friend relationships.	R5 – “I remember my older sister. I always watched her and pretended to train with her. I really have this bond with my sister.”
Ideal body	Identification with a body standard perceived as fit.	R1 – “Just this pursuit of the ideal body will keep me going! I’ll continue using the media, as I said, for suggestions, always filtering what inspires me.”

Source: Authors (2023).



Life history emerged as contextualization and was linked to most themes, except for platform choice and frequency of use. This category encompassed personal conflicts related to weight, physical and mental health, food, exercise, and family and social relationships. It defined the overarching purpose—the motivation driving consumers toward the superior goal of body (re) construction.

Participants with stronger goal orientation reported enduring longer on their journeys (Becker et al., 2020). They also indicated challenges connected to physical health (e.g., weight, preexisting conditions) or mental health (e.g., anxiety). Consequently, they developed routines and practices that helped them stay close to their targets, using digital platforms to reinforce positive behaviors. Platforms were thus perceived as touchpoints that appealed to internal consumer emotions, ranging from slightly positive moods to deeper connections with brands, people, or digital services (Schmitt, 2011).

When lifestyle was addressed, often intertwined with life history, interpretations of consumer behavior were clearer. Goal-setting and translation into daily routines—diet, exercise, body care, and mental health practices, whether aesthetic or health-oriented—emerged as essential factors in sustaining fitness body (re)construction (Becker et al., 2020).

Personal profile functioned as a determinant of digital platform use, indicating whether consumers were more reserved and passive or active and expressive in their interactions. Concerns about privacy, access to personal information, and time spent on social media were also relevant. Personal assessment depended on comparing expectations with stimuli derived from interactions across different touchpoints (Gentile et al., 2007).

The main digital platforms in the consumer fitness journey were Instagram®, WhatsApp®, and YouTube®, with Instagram® highlighted as the primary platform for achieving fitness goals. Participants also emphasized that family and friend relationships mediated through platforms had direct impacts on consumer behavior. Family- and friend-related touchpoints were the most cognitively reflective and shaped additional experiences, being closely tied to cultural contexts that influence consumer journeys (Schmitt, 2011).

These relationships either strengthened persistence in fitness routines or created obstacles to achieving the ideal body. Motivation toward the superior goal was directly influenced by the stimuli and rewards generated through these digital interactions, reinforcing small achievements along the way (Becker et al., 2020).

It is important to note that the richness of themes identified in the interviews gave rise to several categories, some of which were not addressed here for a more holistic view. However, participants highlighted that personal experiences, whether they brought them closer to or further from their goals, always served as learning opportunities. This finding supports Becker et al.'s (2020) framework of touchpoints, in which goals are directly related to experiences that may or may not produce new consumer behaviors.

Although digital platform experiences can be complex, it is relatively easy to distinguish whether touchpoints are active or passive. Active touchpoints promote action, while passive ones involve receiving actions or influences from others. Interviewees identified these possibilities as posting and reposting photos, stories, and videos; viewing photos, stories, and videos; liking and commenting; and purchasing products and services via digital media.



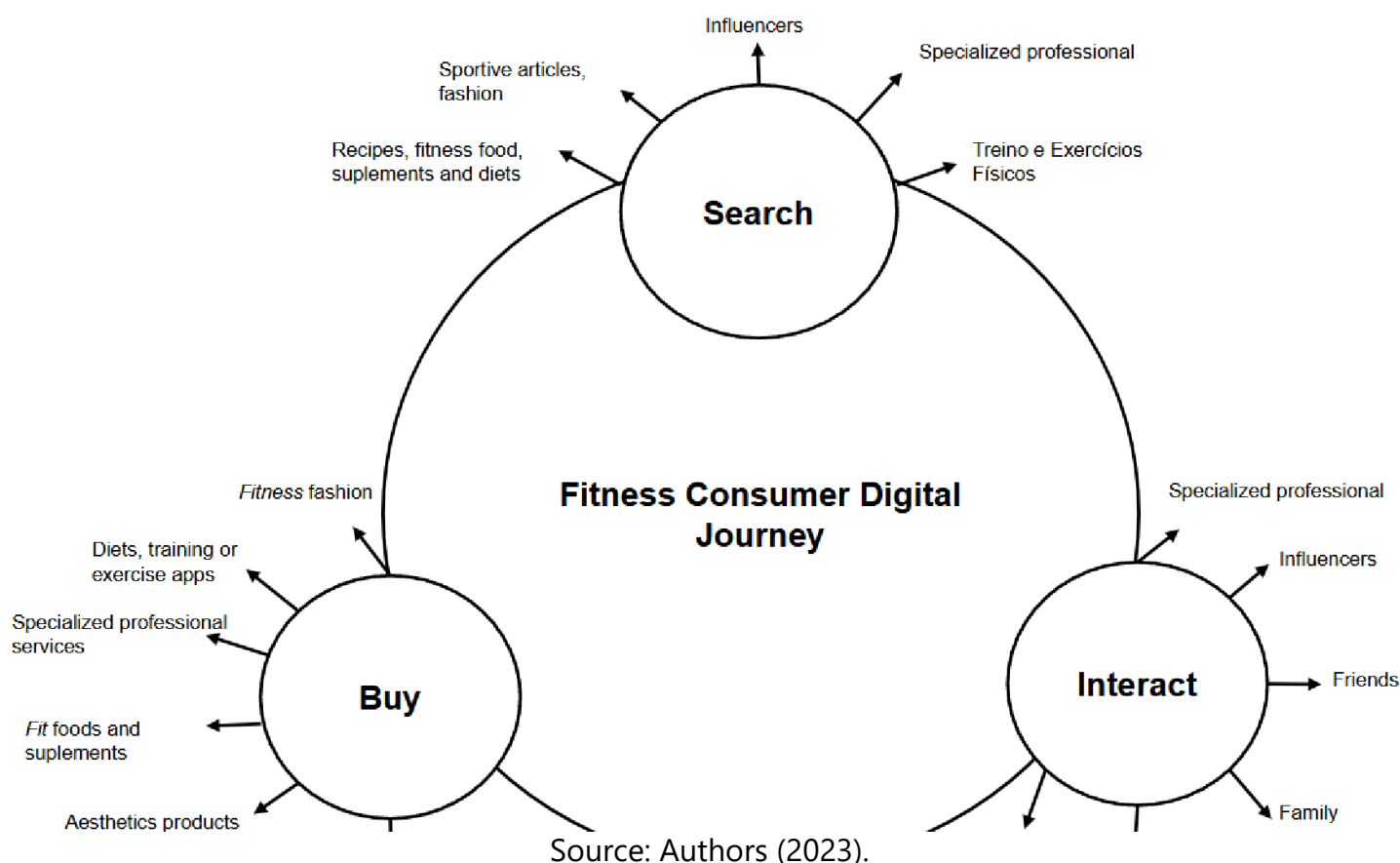
## Touchpoints and the digital fitness journey

By identifying touchpoints, we interpreted consumer statements that indicated moments of interaction with platforms within each type of experience. This allowed us to relate positive and negative touchpoints to typical journey experiences and to verify recurring behavioral patterns among respondents. These findings enabled us to develop a model of the consumer journey toward the fitness body.

We recognized a cyclical journey, filled with experiences that did not follow a specific order of events but clustered into three main stages: searching/researching, interacting, and purchasing. Understanding the consumer journey toward the (re)construction of the body as a higher-order goal, we present Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Touchpoints in the consumer perspective of the fitness body (re)construction journey*



The experience of searching/researching is closely linked to clarification, knowledge, or information sought by the fitness consumer when reflecting on a particular need. This experience involves looking for information, examining details, and discovering ways to achieve a specific goal. Selecting the correct touchpoint stimuli is a challenging managerial task (Schmitt, 2011). In

this experience, touchpoints included searching for recipes, food, supplements, and diets; sporting goods—often to stay informed about new products; the best materials for exercise performance; and fitness fashion, motivated by the desire to feel appropriately dressed, comfortable, and attractive as a form of personal motivation.





Thus, the digital platform itself functioned as the touchpoint, either by directly addressing consumer needs in summarized form or by redirecting them via links to more detailed information. In seeking advice and guidance from professionals—such as nutritionists, personal trainers, or influencers connected to the fitness lifestyle—consumers used platforms as direct touchpoints, often focusing on videos or explanatory posts. These interactions elicited multisensory imagery within consumers (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). In addition, consumers described examining exercise videos and training routines in order to later execute or correct their own workouts, with platform touchpoints consisting of posted videos or links leading to apps with structured exercise programs.

In the purchasing experience, we identified consumer actions and relationships with products and services during acquisition. Platforms often acted as indirect touchpoints when company links redirected users to shopping apps, through which fitness-related products and services—especially those related to aesthetics and fashion—were purchased. Emotional arousal, considered a primary motivation for consuming certain classes of health-related products and services, was central to these experiences, particularly regarding fitness conditioning and healthy eating (Cristancho Triana et al., 2024; Holbrook, 1980).

Beyond diets and exercise programs promising to accelerate progress toward the ideal body, touchpoints included the purchase of supplements, fitness foods, and sporting goods—the latter often associated with fashion, such as gym clothing or sneakers perceived as trendy. Purchasing experiences were accompanied by high positive expectations but could also turn negative when unmet, often attributed to platform issues, purchasing mechanisms, or discrepancies between the advertised and delivered products. In the digital era, individuals aspire to be actors rather than passive consumers, and customers report more memorable experiences when their

senses are actively engaged (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Thus, even when the platform served as an indirect touchpoint, it could facilitate both purchasing and interacting—such as when consumers expressed dissatisfaction through reactions to products or services.

The interacting experience reflected consumers' processes of socialization, in which complex systems educate members into a certain worldview and reinforce adherence to shared customs (Hirschman, 1983). Interests and opinions were often related to lifestyle aspects (Cristancho Triana et al., 2024). Relationships with influencers—perceived as close acquaintances due to the way participants followed them—and with professionals such as nutritionists and personal trainers revealed shared values that influenced desires for products and services (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Cristancho Triana et al., 2024). When digital platforms presented training sessions and recipes, participants reported using them in real time, translating into positive motivation when executed successfully, though failures often resulted in frustration or even humor.

Within the interacting category, family and friends emerged as distinct touchpoints, intentionally separated in the graphical model. These interactions included conversations, exchanges of ideas, invitations, likes, and comments that reinforced consumer motivation. However, when interactions were negative—such as criticism or discouraging comments—they were treated differently. Negative feedback from friends was often dismissed or avoided through direct responses or disengagement, whereas negative feedback from family evoked deeper issues, including trauma, memories, and frustrations, sometimes causing consumers to distance themselves from their journeys temporarily or permanently.

Beyond the framework presented in Figure 4, it is important to note that digital platform touchpoints do not follow a strict order or appear in every journey toward the fitness body. Instead,



they emerge based on each consumer's personal profile, life history, and lifestyle, and may occur simultaneously or independently.

The form in which touchpoints appeared often influenced whether experiences were perceived as positive or negative, as indicated in interview accounts. Thus, the same touchpoint could be classified in both ways. Feelings of joy, peace, lightness, happiness, pleasure, excitement, tranquility, vanity, and self-esteem were associated with positive touchpoints. Conversely, anxiety, discomfort, frustration, sacrifice, stress, fatigue, obligation, and discouragement were associated with negative experiences. These findings highlight how consumers' perspectives consistently linked experiences to feelings, sensations, and emotions.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article reinforces Becker et al.'s (2020) argument that consumer journeys must be goal-oriented in order to be effectively managed. The interviewees demonstrated that achieving objectives provides stronger motivation for effort, thereby reinforcing goal attainment. For digital consumers, platforms serve as essential touchpoints in this process and are embedded in daily routines, offering support and guidance in actions that shape their experiences. When positive, these touchpoints construct the pathway that leads toward the primary goal; when negative, even temporarily, they can create stimuli that divert consumers from the journey but still serve the purpose by functioning as learning opportunities for route adjustments and better-controlled journeys.

The consumer accounts allowed us to verify that accumulated experiences generate cognitive support, which functions as a control point when the journey is resumed after setbacks. This emerged as a recurring theme across all interviews, highlighting the empirical contribution of

this study from the consumer's perspective.

Another contribution was the identification of essential experiences and the design of a model for the consumer journey in pursuit of the (re)construction of the fitness body. The experiences defined in this study—search/research, interact, and purchase—together with their descriptions reinforced through participant accounts, offer insights into consumer behavior in relation to digital platforms. These findings can inform practical and social initiatives aimed at encouraging more conscious use of these platforms, prioritizing higher-quality, health- and well-being-oriented content that fosters healthier engagement with technology. In this way, we established the foundation of digital platform touchpoints, indicating that even when accumulated life experiences appear contrary to a consumer's current goal, it is still possible to remain in a cycle of continuous approximation toward the target, provided that platform use is functional. This dynamic is illustrated in Figure 2, which depicts the cyclical nature of the fitness consumer journey.

The journey is not built solely on success or extraordinary experiences but also on the guidance and repetition of effective behaviors. Frequently, initial frustrations emerge in consumer responses to their own persistence, but these ultimately form a foundation that strengthens and directs them toward achieving their goals.

Whether the fitness goal reflects aspirations for health, well-being, or an ideal body, identifying relevant interactions that affect digital platform experiences sheds light on broader consumer journey objectives. As limitations, we highlight the intentional sampling of gym-goers identified as fitness consumers, as well as the exclusion of other actors in the experience due to the focus on the consumer's own perspective. Nevertheless, it is recognized that other actors may also influence the consumer journey.



We suggest future research on additional consumer journeys to identify touchpoints more broadly, as well as deeper exploration of specific experiences within the fitness journey. Furthermore, we recommend examining which actors exert the greatest influence on this consumer journey and how their involvement affects touchpoint experiences and behaviors. Finally, we propose expanding investigations to more diverse cultural contexts, beyond paid fitness establishments, and incorporating consumers' use of images and videos to enrich the analysis of experiential data.

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