

Increasing Membership Conversion through Effective UI/UX Design in Fitness Websites

Ionut TANASE*

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

**Corresponding author, ionut.tanase@mk.ase.ro*

Florina BOTEZATU

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

botezatuflor@gmail.com

Daniela MARINICA

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

dana.marinica81@gmail.com

Elena Florentina GREJDAN

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

elena.grejdan@yahoo.com

Abstract. *The purpose of this article was to investigate the power of an effective user interface on the effectiveness of fitness websites in converting visitors into members. Existing scientific literature tell us that elements such as visual appeal, clear navigation, persuasive call-to-action elements, transparent content, and responsive design are very important for building trust and influencing consumer behaviour. However, research focusing specifically on the fitness industry remains limited, and this study aims to address that gap. A mixed-methods research design was used. In the first phase, a heuristic evaluation was conducted using a comprehensive checklist that examined visual design and branding, navigation and information architecture, the effectiveness of call-to-action elements, content clarity and transparency, mobile responsiveness and performance, as well as trust and credibility indicators. In the second phase, a quantitative survey was administered to fifty potential customers who rated each website on a scale from one to five across these dimensions. The survey results were analyzed and compared against the heuristic evaluation findings to provide a robust overview of the websites' performance. The main findings show that the website with the most refined design, intuitive navigation, and strong trust signals achieved the highest ratings, whereas the website with a more cluttered layout and less persuasive call-to-action elements received lower scores. The study contributes to the field by offering some guidelines for improving website design and by validating theoretical models that link digital design with consumer behavior in the fitness industry.*

Keywords: fitness websites, user experience, conversion rate, UI design, customer trust.

Introduction

An impactful online presence is important for every fitness businesses seeking to attract and retain members. As the internet becomes increasingly competitive, website developers struggle to improve the design and functionality of their websites. Fitness websites that promote their facilities through their websites, with the final goal to gain members need to follow some strict UI and UX design rules to properly influence the decision-making process of the visitors. This paper investigates the influence of user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) design on the

DOI: 10.2478/picbe-2025-0311

© 2025 I. Tanase; F. Botezatu; D. Marinica; E. F. Grejdan, published by Sciendo.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.

effectiveness of fitness websites in driving membership conversions, with a specific focus on three popular Romanian gyms websites: Sweat.ro, Stayfit.ro, and WorldClass.ro.

The research of this has a dual approach: a heuristic evaluation based on established UI/UX best practices and a quantitative survey involving 50 potential customers. Through the use of these complementary techniques, the study seeks to offer both professional analysis and actual user input on important design elements, including navigation, visual appeal, call-to-action (CTA) efficacy, content clarity, mobile responsiveness, and trust indicators. Finding out how fitness websites' UI/UX components affect user trust and the possibility that visitors will become gym members is the main research issue driving this study. The study is based on the following primary hypotheses in order to answer this question:

H1: Better visual appeal and consistent branding positively correlate with higher levels of user trust and credibility.

H2: Clear and intuitive navigation, combined with well-designed CTAs, increases the likelihood of users engaging with the website and considering membership.

H3: Better usability, transparency in content, membership pricing, and robust mobile performance collectively contribute to a better overall user experience, thus increasing the conversion rates.

In short, this paper introduces a comprehensive analysis of how strategic UI/UX design can drive user trust and membership conversion, highlighting its importance for businesses operating in the digital age.

Literature review

Fundamental concepts

In the current literature, UI is defined as the mix of visual and interactive elements through which users interact with a digital product, while UX encompasses the overall experience, including satisfaction and ease of use, that results from this interaction (Robins & Holmes, 2008). Trust, in this domain, refers to the user's confidence in the reliability, credibility, and security of the website (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). Conversion rate is measured by the proportion of website visitors who perform a desired action—such as signing up for a membership—and is seen as a direct outcome of effective UI/UX design (Gabir & Karrar, 2018).

UI/UX design for fitness websites

The existing literature shows converging evidence on the critical factors for effective UI/UX design. Robins and Holmes (2008) argue that aesthetic appeal and professional visual design are some of the most important factors for establishing credibility, and an attractive, uncluttered interface can significantly improve a user's initial perception. This idea is supported by studies in e-commerce websites, for instance, McDowell et al. (2016) demonstrate that design elements that create a state of 'flow', an immersive and intuitive browsing experience that can improve conversion rates.

Other research that is specific to the fitness industry, has analysed the balance between pragmatic and hedonic aspects of software design. Catalán Ubero et al. (2024) found that while users value the pragmatic features (such as usability, clarity, and functionality) of a fitness app, the hedonic attributes (such as visual aesthetics and overall pleasure) play an important role in increasing the engagement. In a similar point of view, Oyibo and Vassileva (2021) showed that persuasive design features, such as those that emphasize goal setting, rewards, and social

competition, can increase the perceived utility of an application, thus increasing user interaction and potential conversion even when usability factors are moderately met.

Gabir and Karrar (2018) contribute by empirically linking specific UI/UX components, such as ease of navigation, quality of information, and technical performance, with better conversion rates, as their findings suggest that even minor improvements in these areas can have a measurable impact on user behavior, reinforcing the importance of a meticulously designed user interface that meets the practical needs of visitors while also providing an aesthetically pleasing experience.

The identified gap in current research

Most of the reviewed literature point to a general idea: an effective UI/UX design characterized by clarity, visual appeal, and intuitive navigation, improves user trust and increases conversion rates. However, most these studies have primarily focused on mobile applications or broader e-commerce platforms, with few investigations dedicated exclusively to fitness websites that act as a landing page for marketing purposes, having different goals such as app downloads or new memberships. While research such as that by Catalán Ubero et al. (2024) and Oyibo and Vassileva (2021) provides valuable insights into fitness applications, the specific impact of UI elements on trust, customer acquisition and membership conversion rates in the context of fitness websites remains underexplored.

This gap in the current literature tell us that the unique requirements and user behaviors associated with fitness services may not be fully addressed of by existing models. As a consequence, there is a need for further investigation into how specific UI design elements, specific to the fitness industry, can be optimized to enhance credibility and drive membership conversions. The goal of our research is to address this gap by offering a detailed analysis of UI design components within fitness websites, thereby contributing a new perspective to the evolving discourse on UI/UX design in this niche digital market.

Methodology

Our study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to evaluate the user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) of three leading fitness websites in Romania—Sweat.ro, Stayfit.ro, and WorldClass.ro, with the aim of understanding how these design elements influence potential customers' trust and membership conversion rates.

The research was conducted in two phases:

1. Benchmarking analysis (Heuristic Evaluation)

In the first phase, a detailed heuristic evaluation was performed on the selected websites. This qualitative assessment was guided by a structured UI/UX checklist derived from established literature (e.g., Robins & Holmes, 2008; Gabir & Karrar, 2018). The checklist examined these criteria, including:

- **Visual Design & Branding:** Assessment of color schemes, typography, imagery, and overall aesthetic coherence.
- **Navigation & Information Architecture:** Evaluation of menu clarity, ease of accessing membership details, class schedules, and other relevant information.
- **Call-to-Action (CTA) Effectiveness:** Analysis of the visibility, wording, and strategic placement of CTAs.

- **Content Clarity & Transparency:** Review of the presentation of membership information, pricing details, and trust-building content.
- **Mobile Responsiveness & Performance:** Examination of website functionality on mobile devices, including load times and layout adjustments.
- **Trust & Credibility Indicators:** Consideration of elements such as testimonials, security badges, and contact information.

2. Quantitative survey

In the second phase, an online survey was administered to 50 potential customers to capture user perceptions quantitatively. Participants were asked to rate each website on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) across the same UI/UX dimensions used in the heuristic evaluation. The survey included both Likert-scale questions, allowing respondents to provide detailed feedback on:

- Overall visual appeal and branding.
- Ease of navigation and accessibility of key information.
- Effectiveness of CTAs in guiding user actions.
- Clarity and transparency of the content.
- Mobile responsiveness and technical performance.
- Trust and credibility indicators.
- Overall likelihood of considering a gym membership based on the website experience.

The study is guided by the following research hypotheses:

- H1: A higher overall visual appeal and clear branding are positively associated with increased trust and perceived credibility.
- H2: Effective navigation and well-designed CTAs are correlated with a higher intention to convert visitors into members.
- H3: Superior usability, transparency, and mobile performance enhance the overall user experience, thereby increasing the likelihood of membership consideration.

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period. The survey responses were collected through an online platform, ensuring ease of participation and access. Quantitative data were processed using Microsoft Excel to calculate mean ratings and descriptive statistics for each criterion. These data provided a numerical comparison of user perceptions across the three websites.

Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent. Data were collected anonymously to ensure participant privacy, and all findings were used.

Results and discussions

In this section the author presents the main findings of his/her research. It is important to use critical thinking in order to analyze realistically the results obtained, and how the research hypotheses have been validated or not. Also, it is important to compare results of present research with results obtained in similar research, by using the literature in the domain. If the paper presents a theoretical model or theory, the discussion should be about the way the new conceptual contribution can be applied and how it compares with some similar models or theories.

For a better explanation of the research results the author may use graphical illustrations or tables.

Table 1. Heuristic evaluation of the websites

Criteria	Sweat.ro	Stayfit.ro	WorldClass.ro
Visual Design & Branding	- Modern, vibrant color scheme - Dynamic, energetic imagery - Slightly cluttered in some areas	- Clean, minimalistic design - Effective use of whitespace - Consistent branding	- Polished, professional aesthetics - High-quality images - Consistent visual language and strong brand identity
Navigation & Information Architecture	- Intuitive overall navigation - Some key details (membership info, schedules) may require extra clicks	- Logical layout with clear sections - Easy access to membership, schedule, and location detail	- Robust structure with clearly defined sections - Quick access to essential pages (membership details, pricing, locations)
Call-to-Action (CTA) Effectiveness	- CTAs are present but sometimes blend with the design - May benefit from increased contrast	- Well-placed and clear CTAs - Persuasive wording that guides users effectively	- Strong, prominent CTAs - High visibility and clear action instructions - Strategically placed throughout the user journey
Content Clarity & Transparency	- Clear messaging overall - Membership information is easy to understand, though some details could be expanded	- Transparent and concise content - Detailed explanation of membership benefits	- Comprehensive, well-organized content - Transparent pricing and policies clearly outlined - Effective persuasive copy that highlights key benefits
Mobile Responsiveness & Performance	- Mobile design is functional - Some slight layout issues on smaller screens	- Responsive design with smooth mobile navigation - Fast load times and optimized performance	- Excellent mobile performance - Fully optimized design across all devices - Consistent user experience on both desktop and mobile
Trust & Credibility Indicators	- Displays testimonials and basic trust signals - Could further emphasize social proof and security badges	- Effectively uses customer reviews and security badges - Clear information about policies and contact details	- Strong emphasis on credibility - Ample trust signals, including detailed testimonials, verified certifications, and comprehensive “About Us” sections that build trust

Source: Authors’ own research.

The heuristic evaluation, based on our structured UI/UX checklist, revealed the following insights:

Visual design & branding: WorldClass.ro was noted for its polished aesthetic, consistent use of color and typography, and high-quality images that effectively resonates with the fitness brand. In contrast, Sweat.ro was observed to have a more cluttered layout, while Stayfit.ro maintained a clean and minimalistic approach.

Navigation & information architecture: WorldClass.ro provided a clear, intuitive structure with quick access to essential details (e.g., membership options, class schedules, and locations). Stayfit.ro also performed well in this area, whereas Sweat.ro required more effort from users to locate critical information.

Call-to-Action (CTA) effectiveness: The placement and design of CTAs on WorldClass.ro were found to be prominent and persuasive. Stayfit.ro presented effective CTAs as well, but Sweat.ro’s CTAs tended to blend into the overall design, potentially reducing their impact.

Content clarity & transparency: WorldClass.ro and Stayfit.ro both provided clear and comprehensive content, with transparent membership details and pricing information. Sweat.ro, while informative, could benefit from a more straightforward presentation.

Mobile responsiveness & performance: All three websites demonstrated a responsive design; however, WorldClass.ro consistently provided a smoother mobile experience with faster load times and a well-adapted layout.

Trust & credibility indicators: Trust-building elements, such as testimonials, security badges, and clear contact information, were most effectively integrated into WorldClass.ro, followed by Stayfit.ro. Sweat.ro showed a lower level of these indicators.

Table 2. Quantitative research results

Question/ Average / 5	Sweat.ro	Stayfit.ro	WorldClass.ro
How would you rate the overall visual appeal and branding of the website?	3.8	4.2	4.5
How easy was it to navigate the website and locate key information?	3.5	4.0	4.3
How effective are the call-to-action (CTA) elements in encouraging membership?	3.7	4.1	4.4
How clear and transparent is the content (membership details, pricing, etc.)?	3.9	4.0	4.2
How would you rate the mobile responsiveness and performance of the website?	3.6	4.3	4.5
How trustworthy and credible does the website appear?	3.8	4.0	4.6
Overall, how likely are you to consider joining the gym based on the website?	3.5	4.1	4.4

Source: Authors' own research.

The quantitative data largely corroborate the findings from the heuristic evaluation. WorldClass.ro consistently scored highest across all categories, particularly in visual design, mobile responsiveness, and trust, which are key drivers for user engagement and conversion. Stayfit.ro received moderate to high ratings across most criteria, while Sweat.ro scored relatively lower, especially in navigation and CTA effectiveness.

The combined analysis from both the heuristic evaluation and the survey validates our research hypotheses:

- H1: Visual Appeal and Trust - WorldClass.ro's superior visual design (4.5) and high trust ratings (4.6) support the hypothesis that better visual appeal and consistent branding enhance user trust and credibility.
- H2: Navigation, CTAs, and Conversion Intent - The findings indicate that effective navigation and well-designed CTAs (WorldClass.ro: 4.3 for navigation and 4.4 for CTA effectiveness) are positively correlated with a higher overall likelihood of membership consideration (4.4). This aligns with the hypothesis that improved usability in these areas can drive conversion.
- H3: Usability, Transparency, and Overall Experience - Higher ratings in content clarity, mobile responsiveness, and transparency on WorldClass.ro (4.2, 4.5, respectively) suggest that superior usability and clear presentation of information are critical to enhancing the overall user experience and fostering membership interest.

These results are consistent with previous research (e.g., McDowell et al., 2016; Oyibo & Vassileva, 2021), which underscores the importance of a high-quality UI/UX design in enhancing user trust and conversion rates. The comparative approach adopted in this study not only validates the established theories but also provides actionable insights tailored to the fitness industry in Romania.

In summary, the research indicates that a strategic focus on improving visual design, navigation, and trust indicators can significantly influence potential customers' decisions to engage with a fitness website and ultimately convert into members. The identified gaps in Sweat.ro, in particular, suggest targeted areas for improvement that could lead to higher conversion rates.

Conclusion

Our study has offered a niched analysis of the UI/UX elements of three prominent fitness websites in Romania through a mixed-methods approach that combined heuristic evaluation and a quantitative survey of 50 potential customers. The findings indicate that websites with a good visual design, intuitive navigation, and clear trust indicators, as exemplified by WorldClass.ro, tend to perform significantly better in driving user engagement and enhancing the likelihood of a visitor to consider getting a membership.

The integration of heuristic evaluation and survey responses offers better empirical support for the notion that superior UI/UX design directly influences trust and conversion rates. The structured checklist and the comparative analysis provide actionable insights for fitness website designers and managers, highlighting specific areas—such as CTA placement, content clarity, and mobile responsiveness—that can be optimized to improve overall user experience. In alignment with the previous research (e.g., McDowell et al., 2016; Oyibo & Vassileva, 2021), our study reinforces existing theories on the relationship between design quality and user behavior, while also addressing a gap in the literature concerning the fitness industry in Romania. The importance of this work is located in its potential application across the fitness industry, by adopting the recommendations derived from this research, gyms and fitness centers can increase their online presence, improve user satisfaction, and ultimately increase membership rates. Additionally, the methodology presented here can serve as a model for future studies in similar online markets. That being said, there are a few limitations to note and be acknowledged. Our survey, only included 50 people, which might not capture the perceptions of most users. While detailed, the heuristic evaluation, is still subjective and might benefit from additional user testing in a live setting.

Also, since our research focused solely on Romanian websites (and within the Romanian culture), the findings might not be the same in other countries. Future studies could involve a larger, more diverse group of respondents, try out different experimental designs to see how specific changes affect conversion, and look at how a better user experience impacts customer retention over time. Overall, this study highlights how important good UI and UX design are for fitness websites and offers both new insights and practical steps for improving digital engagement and membership conversion.

References

- Andriessen, Catalán Ubero, A.J., Valcarce-Torrente, M., Gálvez-Ruiz, P. & Angosto, S. (2024). Análisis de la experiencia de usuario (UX) de una fitness app según género [Analysis of the user experience of a fitness app by gender]. *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte*, 19(60), pp.187–197.

- Flanagin, A.J. & Metzger, M.J. (2007). The role of site features, user attributes, and information verification behaviors on the perceived credibility of web-based information. *New Media & Society*, 9(2), pp.319–342.
- Gabir, H.H. & Karrar, A.Z. (2018). The effect of website's design factors on conversion rate in e-commerce. In: 2018 International Conference on Computer, Control, Electrical, and Electronics Engineering (ICCCEEE), pp.1–6. IEEE. DOI: 10.1109/ICCCEEE.2018.8515842.
- McDowell, W.C., Wilson, R.C. & Kile, C.O. (2016). An examination of retail website design and conversion rate. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(11), pp.4837–4842.
- Oyibo, K. & Vassileva, J. (2021). Relationship between perceived UX design attributes and persuasive features: A case study of a fitness app. *Information*, 12(9), p.365.
- Robins, D. & Holmes, J. (2008). Aesthetics and credibility in web site design. *Information Processing & Management*, 44(1), pp.386–399.