A Conceptual Analysis of Switching Costs: Implications for Fitness Centers

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Abstract: In facing fierce competition, fitness centers have encountered challenges of generating long-term economic sustainability. The construct of switching costs, which has garnered considerable attention as a sustainable strategy, suffers from conceptual confusion in the literature, limiting the applicability of the concept to fitness centers. The purpose of the study is to conduct a conceptual analysis of switching costs, thereby clarifying conceptual confusion and providing implications for fitness centers. To achieve the purpose, a conceptual analysis method was adopted, in which 376 switching costs articles were analyzed. The results show that (1) several terms have been used individually and interchangeably, (2) there is no consensus on the definition, (3) both unidimensional and multidimensional conceptualizations have been used, (4) model specification has rarely been done, and (5) a paucity of studies have been conducted in the context of the sport industry. Overall, we highlight the conceptual weaknesses of previous switching costs research and offer several recommendations and approaches to scholars who are interested in this line of research. Furthermore, the conceptual analysis brings attention to the importance of conceptualization (e.g., choosing a term, defining a construct) and how conceptual confusion might impinge on future research in the marketing literature.

Keywords: conceptual analysis; conceptual confusion; switching costs; fitness centers; business sustainability

1. Introduction

In line with the steady growth of the fitness industry over the years [1], there has been an increasing number of studies seeking to understand fitness consumers, e.g., [2–4]. Although such scholarly efforts have been made to identify factors that can generate long-term business sustainability, fitness centers suffer from a high consumer defection rate [5]. One of the primary factors behind such low retention rates is the high level of competition among fitness centers, which is itself the result of the easy-to-enter industry [6]. In this fitness market environment where other alternatives exist and where consumers become more demanding and less loyal, even a well-designed service offering and a consumer satisfaction program are not sufficient to achieve sustainable financial performance [7]. As such, retaining consumers in the mature fitness market has become a significant concern, and switching costs can serve as a tool to achieve business sustainability [8,9].

The concept of switching costs has received increasing attention within the marketing and management literature (see Figure 1). Such a growing interest derives from empirical evidence showing the critical role of switching costs in enhancing consumer loyalty, e.g., [8,10]. While providing quality service and creating satisfaction make it difficult for competitors to appeal to consumers, switching costs make it difficult for consumers to defect to competitors [8,11]. Therefore, practitioners should
gain control over consumer loss by developing switching costs as a crucial marketing strategy for organizations’ economic sustainability [8,9].

The breadth of a number of studies on switching costs, however, has led to the introduction of a plethora of conceptualizations (e.g., definitions, theoretical constructs) over the last few decades [12,13]. Such inconsistent conceptualizations are likely to increase construct proliferation and redundancy, and decrease the confidence in making inferences from findings in previous studies [14,15]. Currently, the dominant focus of switching costs research has been on empirical examinations rather than conceptual explorations of the meaning of switching costs. In other words, few attempts have been made to systematically summarize conceptual limitations and suggest future research directions. As a topic of a particular phenomenon grows, it is necessary to conduct a review of the accumulated knowledge to understand how the topic of interest has been developed and where it needs to move further [16]. Therefore, before applying the concept of switching costs in the fitness center context, it is imperative to examine how switching costs have been understood in the literature and clarify the current confusion of the concept.

As such, the purpose of the study is to undertake a systematic conceptual analysis of switching costs by using Tähtinen and Havila’s [17] conceptual analysis method (CAM). More specifically, we seek to illuminate conceptual limitations that exist in the switching costs literature. To this end, we provide the conceptual synthesis, a summary of conceptual confusion, and an outline of a future research agenda to move this area of research forward. A conceptual analysis helps achieve the goal by diagnosing conceptual confusion, providing conceptual clarity, and thus serving as a foundation for further inquiry in conceptualizing a construct [18]. The following research questions guide the current study: (1) How were switching costs termed? (2) How were switching costs defined? (3) How was dimensionality used? (4) How were switching costs models specified? and (5) In what contexts were switching costs examined?

The structure of the current article is as follows. The next section briefly discusses the CAM, followed by method. In the method section, we discuss article identification, article inclusion criteria, and data analysis. Next, we present results and discussions about terminology, definition, dimensionality, model specification, and research context. Following this, contributions and limitations are stated, and this article ends with a conclusion.
2. Conceptual Analysis

To clarify the conceptual confusion of switching costs studies, we used the CAM [17]. Tähtinen and Havila [17] suggest the CAM as a way to comprehend, reflect on, and elucidate the conceptual confusion that exists in a marketing field. The CAM is useful in identifying various terminology, definitions, and dimensions used to refer to a single phenomenon, thereby helping researchers describe and possibly resolve conceptual confusion. As a first step, a concept review on switching costs was conducted by focusing on terminology, definitions, dimensions, specifications, and research contexts.

3. Method

3.1. Article Identification

The conceptual analysis began with extensive searches of previous switching costs studies. By following previous scholars, e.g., [17,19–21], we performed (1) a reference list search of prior meta-analytic studies, and (2) a keyword search of electronic databases. First, reference lists of the two meta-analytic articles of switching costs [20,21] were checked. The exhaustive lists of references provided by the meta-analyses formed the basis for the subsequent ancestry search. Next, we examined electronic databases (e.g., ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Google Scholar) using search the terms “switching costs” and “switching barriers” [20]. These two methods resulted in an initial retrieval of 908 articles (619 from the reference search of the meta-analytic articles and 289 from the database search), and 356 duplicates were removed.

3.2. Inclusion Criteria

A set of the selected 552 articles was further examined to obtain suitable articles for the present study [17]. To be eligible for the conceptual analysis, articles were required to (1) be published in a peer-reviewed journal, (2) be published in English, (3) be quantitative research, and (4) examine switching costs as the main construct (i.e., not a control variable). Qualitative research was not considered in this review because dimensionality, model specification, and a research context were unknown. In the first screening process, we removed 53 articles, which were either written in other languages, or were conference or proceedings papers. Next, 73 articles were excluded because switching costs were not examined. The remaining 426 full-text articles were further screened, in which 50 articles were removed because three articles used switching costs as a control variable, and 47 were not quantitative research (i.e., conceptual or qualitative). Through two screening procedures, a total of 376 articles were selected for inclusion in the conceptual analysis (see Figure 2 for a flowchart of this process).
3.3. Data Analysis

After identifying the pertinent articles, the next task was to determine (1) which terminology, definitions, and dimensions were used to describe switching costs, (2) how authors specified a switching costs model, and (3) what research contexts were based on. These were done via a word search in the PDF format; the search terms included “switching,” “barriers,” “defin,” “refer,” “dimension,” “reflective,” “formative,” and “context.” If the search provided nothing, the lead author read the article for further examination [17]. Extracted data were entered in a coding form in an Excel file and analyzed. Table 1 shows the coding categories of examples of articles that were chosen based on the representativeness of each category. Multiple definitions, dimensions, and contexts in an article were allowed because some researchers cited several definitions, conducted more than one study using different dimensions, and used different contexts. The research context categorization was based on PricewaterhouseCoopers’s (PwC) industry classification (https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries.html).
Table 1. Examples of Coding Categories for the Conceptual Analysis Method.

| Author (Year)           | Term                                                                 | Definition        | Dimensionality | Specification                     | Context                                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Ping (1993)             | Switching costs                                                     | Self-made         | Unidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Manufacturing                               |
| Jones et al. (2000)     | Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers   | Self-made         | Unidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Financial services; technology, media, and telecommunication |
| Colgate and Lang (2001) | Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers   | Others            | Unidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Financial services                          |
| Jones et al. (2002)     | Switching costs                                                     | Self-made         | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Financial services; personal service industry |
| Burnham et al. (2003)   | Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers   | Self-made         | Multidimensional | 2nd-order not specified           | Personal service industry; technology, media, and telecommunication |
| Patterson and Smith (2003)| Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers | Self-made         | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Personal service industry; health care services; hospitality and tourism |
| Ranaweera and Prabhu (2003)| Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers| Bansal and Taylor (1999) | Unidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Technology, media, and telecommunication |
| Whitten and Wakefield (2006)| Switching costs                                                          | Self-made         | Multidimensional | 2nd-order not specified           | Technology, media, and telecommunication |
| Balabanis et al. (2006) | Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers   | Jones et al. (2000) | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Retail                                      |
| Jones et al. (2007)     | Switching costs                                                     | Not reported       | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | General service industry; Financial services; personal service industry; technology, media, and telecommunication; health care services; automotive industry; hospitality and tourism; sport industry |
| Colgate et al. (2007)   | Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers   | Burnham et al. (2003) | Unidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Hospitality and tourism                     |
| Han, Back, and Kim (2011)| Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers | Dick and Basu (1994); Ping (1993) | Unidimensional | 1st-order not specified           | Hospitality and tourism                     |
Table 1. Cont.

| Author (Year)          | Term                | Definition          | Dimensionality | Specification                                         | Context                          |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Barroso and Picón (2012) | Switching costs    | Self-made           | Multidimensional | 2nd-order formative with 1st-order reflective         | Financial services              |
| Blut et al. (2014)     | Switching costs    | Bendapudi and Berry, 1997 | Multidimensional | 2nd-order not specified with 1st-order not specified | General service industry         |
| Carter et al. (2014)   | Switching costs    | Burnham et al. (2003) | Multidimensional: 3rd-order formative with 2nd-order formative with 1st-order reflective | Retail                          |
| El-Manstriy (2014)     | Switching costs    | Burnham et al., (2003); Jones et al. (2007) | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified                               | Financial services               |
| Piha and Avlonitis (2015) | Switching costs | Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers | Multidimensional but aggregate construct | 1st-order not specified | Financial services |
| Xie et al. (2015)      | Switching costs    | Not reported        | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified                               | Hospitality and tourism         |
| El-Manstriy (2016)     | Switching costs    | Not reported        | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified                               | Personal service industry; hospitality and tourism |
| Temerak (2016)         | Switching barriers | Jones et al. (2000) | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified                               | Financial services               |
| Ghazali et al. (2016)  | Switching costs    | Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers | Patterson and Smith (2003) | 2nd-order not specified with 1st-order not specified | Retail                          |
| Blut et al. (2016)     | Switching costs    | Porter (1980); Others; Ping (1993) | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified                               | Manufacturing                    |
| Chuah et al. (2017)    | Switching costs    | Others              | Unidimensional | 1st-order reflective                                  | Technology, media, and telecommunication |
| Parganas et al. (2017) | Switching costs    | Not reported        | Unidimensional | 1st-order not specified                               | Sport industry                   |
| Baloglu et al. (2017)  | Switching costs    | Interchangeable use between switching costs and switching barriers | Jones et al. (2000) | 1st-order not specified                               | Hospitality and tourism         |
| Bergel and Brock (2018) | Switching costs   | Bendapudi and Berry (1997) | Multidimensional | 1st-order not specified                               | Financial services: personal service industry; transport and logistics |
| Chang et al. (2020)    | Switching costs    | Self-made           | Unidimensional | 1st-order not specified                               | Technology, media, and telecommunication |

Note. References that do not appear in the main text are shown in Appendix A.
4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Terminology

Conceptual confusion is created when researchers adopt a variety of terms to refer to a single phenomenon without clear elaboration [17]. The results of the conceptual analysis show that the study of switching costs lacks terminological clarity, as different terms have been used to represent the concept of switching costs. Although 57.2% of scholars (n = 215) used the term switching costs, switching barriers (2.9%; n = 11); termination costs (0.5%; n = 2); and switching difficulties (0.3%; n = 1) were also used. Furthermore, switching costs and switching barriers were often used interchangeably (38.8%; n = 146).

The use of different terms referring to a single phenomenon arises from the act of clumping ostensibly similar, but fundamentally different, concepts [14]. For example, Jones, Mothersbaugh, and Beatty [22] (p. 441) stated that “switching costs can be thought of as barriers that hold customers in service relationships.” Baloglu, Zhong, and Tanford [23] (p. 852) submitted that “[s]witching costs are one type of negative switching barrier.” However, the distinction between switching costs and switching barriers is unclear as both terms have a negative connotation, and there is little theoretical rationale regarding why switching costs are one of the barriers, not the other way around. Discussion about the conceptual similarities and differences between switching costs and switching barriers has not been provided in the literature [24]. Tähtinen and Havila [17] expressed a similar concern by noting that switching and termination have been interchangeably used, although they refer to the same phenomenon.

Such construct proliferation and ambiguity result in several ramifications. First, term proliferation weakens construct clarity [15]. When there exist different terms referring to a single phenomenon, researchers are left with confusion and misinterpretation of findings [15]. Second, term proliferation and ambiguity stall scholarly advancement and theory development by hindering the establishment of a common language [25,26]. A common language, which is a prerequisite within a research community for exchanging ideas and research findings, serves as knowledge accumulation [25,26]. In a situation where different terms representing a similar thing exist, “researchers cannot agree on or communicate the basic elements of a phenomenon . . . the accumulation of knowledge cannot occur” [25] (p. 352). Therefore, future scholars should be cognizant of using a term between switching costs and switching barriers, and the interchangeable use of the two terms should be avoided.

Recommendation 1: Future research in fitness centers should avoid an interchangeable use of the two terms of switching costs and switching barriers.

4.2. Definition

A diverse collection of definitions exists in the switching costs literature. The most commonly cited definitions come from Jones et al. [11] (10.8%; n = 47), followed by Porter [27] (9.4%; n = 41) and Burnham et al. [28] (9.4%; n = 41). Jones et al. [11] defined switching costs as “consumer perceptions of the time, money, and effort associated with changing service providers” (p. 262). Porter [27] defined switching costs as “one-time costs facing the buyer of switching from one supplier’s product to another’s” (p. 10). Burnham et al. [28] defined switching costs as “the onetime costs that customers associate with the process of switching from one provider to another” (p. 110).

The results of the close examination of switching costs definitions reveal several limitations. First, 21.7% of scholars (n = 94) did not explicitly provide a conceptual definition e.g., [9,29]. This is a major omission because a formal definition of a construct is a starting point for theory development [25]. Second, the term “costs” is vague in terms of its boundary. For example, in often-cited definitions, Burnham et al. [28] and Porter [27] defined switching costs as costs associated with switching from one provider to another. Clemes, Gan, and Zhang [30] (p. 526) referred to switching costs as “a catch-all phrase” having a variety of costs when changing a service provider. As the researchers did not specify
what costs are, there is room for several forms of costs. In such a case, future scholars are likely to interpret the meaning of costs on their own, weakening the accuracy of what they build upon prior work [17]. Furthermore, such statements are considered a tautological definition where the definition simply explains the term of the concept (i.e., switching costs) by reiterating the concept itself (i.e., costs incurred via switching) [25,31]. Because a tautological definition impedes articulating the meaning of a construct, researchers have cautioned against defining a construct using such statements [25,31,32].

Similar to the point made in the previous section, the unclear boundary between switching costs and switching barriers was observed in definitions. Jones et al. [11] may be the primary contributors to the definitional ambiguity between the two constructs. In addition to defining switching costs, Jones et al. [11] proposed the definition of switching barriers as “any factor, which makes it more difficult or costly for consumers to change providers” (p. 261). Several researchers have used the definition of switching barriers as if it were interchangeable with switching costs, e.g., [23,33]. However, there are some drawbacks to blindly using the two definitions interchangeably. First, the definition of switching barriers is too broad and all-inclusive. There is confusion about what switching barriers do and do not refer to [34]. For instance, if switching barriers represent any factor that makes it difficult to switch [11], there are multiple ways to define switching barriers depending on what researchers include in the category of any factor. As a concept cannot encompass and integrate all possible meanings [35], specific attributes of what barriers are should be limited. A good conceptual definition “requires not just a one-sentence definition, but a broader specification of the meaning and entailments of the systematized concept” [36] (p. 532).

Second, if a concept theoretically exists and is well defined, one knows exactly what is being measured [17]. However, switching barriers remain an abstract entity without being directly measured. This is due to the poor- or no-construct definition that allows for deficient and contaminated measures [34]. If a construct is ambiguously and broadly defined, measures are likely to be flawed because the definition fails to capture all essential properties on which measures are based [31]. What follows is a mismatch between constructs and measures [35,36]. The concept of switching barriers suffers from both deficient and contaminated measures. Previous scholars did not explicitly measure the switching barriers construct by using it as an unmeasured second-order factor, e.g., [7,37] or an overall abstract concept having multiple constructs (e.g., switching costs), e.g., [11,38]. When switching barriers were measured, researchers relied on mixed measures that overlapped with switching costs items [39,40]. Constructs sharing measurement items are subject to construct redundancy [26]. Therefore, using the construct of switching barriers by equating it with another concept of switching costs is problematic.

In sum, a variety of definitions that are ostensibly different but theoretically identical with each other, compounded by broad and tautological statements, is likely to result in confusion and a misinterpretation of findings [14]. As switching costs constructs have been defined and measured inconsistently, their empirical results lack precision. Thus, the absence of a formal definition of switching costs impinges on the generalizability and accumulation of knowledge [14]. The foremost task for future switching costs researchers is to develop and provide an explicit definition.

**Recommendation 2:** Future research in fitness centers should (1) develop a definition of switching costs, (2) specify what costs mean, (3) avoid an interchangeable use of the two definitions of switching costs and switching barriers, and (4) use switching costs rather than switching barriers.

### 4.3. Dimensionality

In line with the inconsistent use of terms and definitions, the conceptual analysis shows that there is little agreement on the dimensionality in the switching costs literature. That is, both unidimensional (78.5%; n = 296) and multidimensional (21.5%; n = 81) approaches have been employed, and different types of dimensions were proposed. First, many types of multidimensional models have been developed. For example, researchers have modeled multidimensional switching costs as first-order...
multidimensional constructs, e.g., [13,41], a second-order construct, e.g., [42–44], and a third-order construct [45].

Second, some dimensions proposed by different researchers overlap each other under different names. For example, El-Manstrly [12] drew a comparison between two sets of widely used dimensions developed by Burnham et al. [28] and Jones et al. [22]. According to El-Manstrly [12], the two studies used different labels for their multidimensional constructs, many of which share the same themes. For example, economic risk cost coined by Burnham et al. [28] is similar to uncertainty costs termed by Jones et al. [22], as both involve perceived risks about a new service’s performance. Learning costs [28] are identical to post-purchase behavioral and cognitive costs [22], as both refer to perceived time and efforts that are expected to be spent on learning a new service provider’s system after switching.

Finally, some researchers conceptualized switching costs as having multiple distinguishable dimensions and measured each dimension, but then they modeled switching costs as an overall construct level rather than dimensional levels, e.g., [7,46]. For instance, Colgate and Lang [47] defined switching costs as time, monetary, and psychological costs, but they used a unidimensional construct, failing to capture the three distinct characteristics. Chuah et al. [7] also measured time, money, psychological, and physical switching costs but treated them as a global switching costs construct. Such an approach, however, ignores unique information that different factors (e.g., time, money) provide because each construct’s estimated value blend with each other [48]. Thus, the conceptualization of different types of switching costs as one universal first-order construct is conceptually and methodologically problematic [48]. Therefore, future researchers should determine whether a switching costs construct in fitness centers is unidimensional or multidimensional. With multidimensional constructs, researchers should avoid treating the constructs as a global construct.

Recommendation 3: Future research in fitness centers should (1) determine whether switching costs constitute unidimensional or multidimensional constructs and (2) avoid modeling multidimensional constructs as a global construct.

4.4. Model Specification

Once a construct is formally determined as either unidimensional or multidimensional, the next conceptual question is concerned with the nature of the relationship between indicators and a construct, or between lower- and higher-order dimensions [49]. This model specification includes two possible ways. First, the direction of causality flows from a construct (higher-order constructs) to indicators (lower-order constructs) [49,50]. (The term causality is used not to imply that the relationship is necessarily causal [Edwards & Bagozzi, 2000] but to better provide the conceptual understanding. Such measurement models are termed reflective [51], meaning that indicators, or lower-order constructs are reflective manifestations of an underlying construct [52].

Second, the direction of causality flows from indicators (lower-order constructs) to a construct (higher-order constructs) [49,50]. This type of measurement model refers to formative [51], meaning that a construct (higher-order constructs) is formed by its measures (lower-order constructs) [49,52]. In this case, each unique facet of indicators (lower-order constructs) combines to form (or produce) an underlying construct [49,50].

Appropriate model specification is crucial in both theory development and testing [53]. According to MacKenzie et al. [49] and Jarvis et al. [50], the model misspecification significantly biased structural parameter estimates, leading to inappropriate conclusions of hypothesized relationships. Therefore, relationships between a construct and its measures, and between lower- and higher-order constructs should be appropriately specified [50,52,53].

In the switching costs literature, previous scholars have neither explicitly specified a measurement model nor reached an agreement on the specification of switching costs models. The vast majority of scholars (87%; n = 327) who used the first-order construct failed to specify the relationship between a construct and its measures. Only 7.9% of researchers (n = 30) using a first-order construct reported
the model specification as either reflective ($n = 28$) or formative ($n = 2$). Similar results were found in research using a higher-order construct. Some scholars ($2.9\%; n = 11$) conceptualized switching costs as a second-order model but did not explicitly define the relationship between the second- and first-order constructs. There were seven researchers (1.9%), on the other hand, who specified a higher-order switching costs model as a second-order formative construct with first-order reflective constructs. Furthermore, there is little consensus on the specification of models. For instance, researchers modeled switching costs as (1) first-order multidimensional constructs e.g., [7,13], (2) a second-order formative construct with first-order reflective constructs, e.g., [42,54], and (3) a third-order with second-order formative dimensions with first-order reflective constructs [45]. Jarvis et al. [50] and MacKenzie et al. [49] suggest four criteria in determining model specification: causality direction, interchangeability, covariation, and nomological net. By using the criteria, future scholars should specify a switching costs model in fitness centers.

**Recommendation 4:** Future research in fitness centers should specify a switching costs measurement model.

4.5. Context

Switching costs were examined in a variety of business contexts. The most frequently used industry was technology, media, and telecommunication (32.4%; $n = 139$), followed by financial services (19.8%; $n = 85$) and retail (14.9%; $n = 64$). There is, however, a lack of interest in the switching costs topic in the sport industry (0.7%; $n = 3$), despite the consistent publications in other fields. Parganas et al. [29] examined switching costs in the European professional soccer context. Colgate et al. [38] used fitness centers as one of eight industries under investigation. Suwono and Sihombing [55] examined switching costs in Indonesian fitness centers. However, the two studies [38,55] directly adopted switching costs constructs that were developed for other contexts without taking into account unique characteristics that might exist in fitness centers.

There are two reasons why a specific switching costs model for fitness centers is needed. First, there has been concern about borrowing a construct from other research contexts [25,56]. Although the practice of borrowing concepts and theories has its own merits (e.g., interdisciplinary richness), the primary limitation is that it often ignores contextual differences that exist in different service sectors [25]. Zhang et al. [56] emphasize the importance of applying and developing concepts from other disciplines to a specific sport management context. Second, researchers have stressed the need for developing a context-specific switching costs model. This is because consumers’ decision-making processes of switching are complex [47], as consumers in different service sectors perceive varying types of switching costs differently [10,22]. While there exists a set of switching costs dimensions pertinent to various service contexts, they might lack applicability to fitness centers [57]. Therefore, it is necessary to (1) identify which particular switching costs are present in the fitness centers context and (2) develop and validate a measurement for switching costs based on fitness center-specific dimensions.

**Recommendation 5:** Future research in fitness centers should (1) identify context-specific dimensions, and (2) develop and validate a measurement for fitness centers.

Table 2 reports the results of the CAM, and Table 3 summarizes future research recommendations and approaches that were discussed in each section of the results.
Table 2. Results of the Conceptual Analysis Method.

| Category | Frequency | Percentage | Specification | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|---------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Terminology | | | | 1st-order not specified | 327 | 87.0 |
| Switching costs | 215 | 57.2 | 1st-order reflective | 28 | 7.4 |
| Switching barriers | 11 | 2.9 | 1st-order formative | 2 | 0.5 |
| Switching costs and switching barriers | 146 | 38.8 | 2nd-order not specified | 11 | 2.9 |
| Termination costs | 2 | 0.5 | 2nd-order formative with 1st-order reflective | 7 | 1.9 |
| Switching costs and termination costs | 1 | 0.3 | 3rd-order formative with 2nd-order formative with 1st-order reflective Context | 1 | 0.3 |
| Definition | | | Financial services | 85 | 19.8 |
| Porter (1980) | 41 | 9.4 | Personal service industry | 16 | 3.7 |
| Burnham et al. (2003) | 41 | 9.4 | Technology, media, and telecommunication | 139 | 32.4 |
| Jones et al. (2000) | 47 | 10.8 | Health care services | 20 | 4.7 |
| Heide and Weiss (1995) | 16 | 3.7 | Automotive industry | 9 | 2.1 |
| Dick & Basu (1994) | 15 | 3.5 | Hospitality and tourism | 42 | 9.8 |
| Bendapudi and Berry (1997) | 14 | 3.2 | Retail | 64 | 14.9 |
| Ping (1993) | 6 | 1.4 | Energy industry | 7 | 1.6 |
| Jones et al. (2007) | 15 | 3.5 | Transport and logistics | 24 | 5.6 |
| Others a | 112 | 26.2 | Sport industry | 3 | 0.7 |
| Self-made | 33 | 7.6 | Manufacturing | 1 | 0.2 |
| Not reported | 94 | 21.7 | General service industry | 15 | 3.5 |
| Dimensionality | | | Not reported | 5 | 1.2 |
| Unidimensional | 296 | 78.5 | | | |
| Multidimensional | 81 | 21.5 | | | |

Note. a Articles that were cited less than 10 times.

Table 3. Future Research Recommendations and Approaches.

| Recommendations | Research Approaches in the Fitness Center Context. |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1: Future research in fitness centers should avoid an interchangeable use of the two terms of switching costs and switching barriers. |
| - Researchers should be cognizant of choosing a term. |
| - Researchers should not interchangeably use terms of switching costs and switching barriers. |
| 2: Future research in fitness centers should (1) develop a definition of switching costs, (2) specify what costs mean, (3) avoid an interchangeable use of the two definitions of switching costs and switching barriers, and (4) use switching costs rather than switching barriers. |
| - Researchers should not interchangeably use definitions of switching costs and switching barriers. |
| - Researchers should use a term and definition of switching costs rather than switching barriers. |
| - Researchers should develop a definition of switching costs for fitness centers by using a systematic method (e.g., Gilliam and Voss, 2013; Podsakoff et al., 2016). |
Table 3. Cont.

| Recommendations                                                                 | Research Approaches in the Fitness Center Context.                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3: Future research in fitness centers should (1) determine whether switching   | - Researchers should identify whether a switching costs construct in fitness centers is unidimensional or...        |
| costs constitute unidimensional or multidimensional and (2) avoid modeling      |                                                                                                                 |
| multidimensional constructs as a global construct.                             |                                                                                                                 |
| - Researchers should identify whether a switching costs construct in fitness   |                                                                                                                 |
| centers is unidimensional or multidimensional by using a qualitative method    |                                                                                                                 |
| (e.g., interviews, open-ended questions).                                      |                                                                                                                 |
| - For multidimensional constructs, researchers should not treat them as a      |                                                                                                                 |
| global construct.                                                              |                                                                                                                 |
| 4. Future research in fitness centers should specify a switching costs         | - Researchers should specify the relationship between measures and a construct between lower- and higher-order... |
| measurement model.                                                             |                                                                                                                 |
| - Researchers should specify the relationship between measures and a construct |                                                                                                                 |
| between lower- and higher-order constructs by using suggested criteria (Jarvis |                                                                                                                 |
| et al., 2003; MacKenzie et al., 2005).                                         |                                                                                                                 |
| 5. Future research in fitness centers should (1) identify context-specific     | - Researchers should identify switching costs dimensions for fitness centers by using a qualitative method...     |
| dimensions, and (2) develop and validate a measurement for fitness centers.    |                                                                                                                 |
| - Researchers should identify switching costs dimensions for fitness centers   |                                                                                                                 |
| by using a qualitative method (e.g., interviews, open-ended questions).        |                                                                                                                 |
| - Researchers should develop a scale of switching costs for fitness centers by  |                                                                                                                 |
| using a rigorous scale development procedure (e.g., MacKenzie et al., 2011).   |                                                                                                                 |

5. Contributions and Limitations

In the marketing and management literature, the construct of switching costs has widely been examined to help organizations maintain long-term business sustainability (see Table 1). However, little research on switching costs has been conducted in the context of the fitness industry, although the industry has encountered intense competition and thus needs strategic initiatives. By recognizing that the existing conceptual confusion of switching costs weakens the applicability of the construct to fitness centers, the current study sought to shed light on the conceptual limitations of the switching costs literature and provide guidance to future researchers.

Our conceptual analysis contributes to the sport management and switching costs literature. First, sport management scholars have begun to call for theory development, e.g., [56,58,59], interdisciplinary research [60], and better statistical and methodological applications [61]. However, there has been little discussion on the issue of conceptual confusion, possible consequences of it, and how to address it. By synthesizing decades of research on switching costs and by analyzing it using the CAM [17], we identified several conceptual issues of the switching costs construct, discussed potential ramifications, and suggested future research directions. By doing so, we add to the sport management literature by highlighting the importance of conceptualization (e.g., choosing a term, defining a construct) and how conceptual confusion might impinge on future research.

Second, the findings from the present study are useful for switching costs researchers. We sought to clarify the conceptual confusion that exists in the construct of switching costs. By conducting the conceptual analysis of 376 switching costs articles, we show several issues that need to be addressed. The fundamental problem involves the ambiguous meaning of the concept. As Table 2 illustrates, there is a lack of conceptual clarity despite a number of articles published over the decades. One of the
major threats to switching costs researchers is the lack of confidence in drawing inferences from prior studies and in comparing findings derived from different conceptualizations (e.g., terms, definitions). As prior knowledge serves as a foundation for future research [15], our state-of-the-art review about the conceptualization of switching costs provides scholars interested in this line of research with directions for addressing the conceptual limitations and advancing the current knowledge of switching costs. Based on the results, we offer several recommendations and approaches to assist future researchers in examining switching costs in fitness centers.

As for the limitation of the present study, we delimited (1) electronic databases for the article search and (2) review articles to a peer-reviewed journal written in English and quantitative research. Thus, it is possible that the present study omitted articles (e.g., books, proceedings) from other electronic databases that may have complemented or contradicted some of the conclusions drawn from the current study.

6. Conclusions

The concept of switching costs can open various research avenues for fitness marketing and consumer behavior. However, the conceptual confusion that exists in the switching costs literature hinders researchers from applying the concept in the fitness center context. To address the limitation, we conducted the conceptual analysis and provide those wishing to examine switching costs with a clarification of the current state of knowledge about switching costs across various disciplines. Such a research synthesis is useful for future researchers in different fields in conceptualizing switching costs. Furthermore, the current study helps future researchers apply the construct of switching costs in the context of fitness centers. The practical importance of creating long-term financial sustainability of fitness centers and over-reliance on satisfaction and service quality in the fitness literature [19] necessitates the adoption of the concept of switching costs. We seek to clarify the understanding of the switching costs construct and propose future research directions for its use in the further development of theory and empirical examination in fitness centers.

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Appendix A

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