Research on Dynamic Pricing Strategies of Sports Training Institutions Based on Customers' Perceived Value--The Case of StarStart Institution

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Abstract. The introduction of the 'double-decrease' policy has led to a surge in demand in the sports training industry, and research on how customers' perceived value affects the pricing strategies of institutions is of great significance to the pricing and decision-making of sports organisations. This research conducted in-depth interviews with 20 customers, 3 coaches, and 3 management staff of StarStart, and analysed the perceived value of customers, including price value, functional value, emotional value, and service value, and constructed a model of the influence of perceived value on the pricing of sports training institutions based on this model. The research results show that customers will judge the pricing of the institution according to their own perceptions and decide whether to consume or not, and that customers' willingness to consume directly affects the income of the institution, which makes the institution price based on the customer's perceived value.

1 Introduction

After the implementation of the 'double reduction' policy, the basic education industry has seen a major turnaround, with the policy strictly controlling subject-based training and stipulating a reduction of 83.83%, which has led to the creation of a large number of non-subject-based training needs [1]. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2022, the total size of the national sports industry (total output) will be 3,300.8 billion yuan, with an added value of 1309.2 billion yuan, and the added value of the sports service industry will be 918 billion yuan, accounting for 70.1% of the added value of the sports industry [2]. In the face of the growth in demand for non-disciplinary training, sports training in the course pricing strategy but there is no theory can be directly referred to. Traditional revenue management theories focusing on the airline and hotel industries cannot be directly adapted to sports training, which is a non-standardised industry with a high degree of emotional connection, and the high degree of interactivity in the course service leads to the limited applicability of the traditional model [3]. This research focuses on the customer's perceived value of course pricing in sports training organisations, using StarStart as an example, and

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obtains first-hand information through in-depth interviews with the management and customers of the organisation, and then conducts the research using the rooted theory approach. Customer perceived value in dismantling services is analysed and the relationship between the two is discussed. Based on previous literature, the research analyses the structure of customer perceived value in the sports training industry and proposes a pathway for the influence of customer perceived value on pricing in the sports training industry, which provides a theoretical reference for operators in the sports training industry when making pricing decisions.

2 Literature review

Parasuraman gave a model with four dimensions: quality, price, convenience, and emotion, thus laying the foundation for research in the service economy scenario [4]. Woodruff also put forward the situational value theory, showing that value judgement has dynamic situational dependence [5]. From the characteristics of sports training, domestic scholar Li Yan's shaped a three-dimensional value model covering 'physical strengthening, social development, and psychological adjustment' [6]. It is important to note that most of the existing research focuses on the dimension of value formation, and there is still a research gap on the value stratification mechanism and its dynamic adaptation mechanism with pricing strategy.

Dynamic pricing theory originates from the revenue management practice in the airline industry, and the EMSR model developed by Belo Baba has become a classic tool [7]. Kimes improved the accuracy of demand forecasting by 37% through the price elasticity segmentation method [8]. The dynamic pricing system developed by Cross & Higbie increased the occupancy rate of hotel rooms by 18%-25% [9]. Sales YJD et al. proposed that a qualitative method, such as completing a task, is the most effective way to improve the occupancy rate of hotel rooms. that research through qualitative methods such as task completion and the hard ladder method found that differences in consumers' perceptions of different coffee formats led to adjustments in product selection and marketing strategies, which in turn influenced consumer behaviour and brand positioning [10]. When the theory is transferred to the sports training scenario, the non-storability of the service product, the time sensitivity of the customer, and the subjectivity of the perception of value pose three major challenges.

Sports training is characterised by strong experiential (skill learning through physical practice), high emotional stickiness (trusting relationship between teachers and students) and low standardisation (curriculum design relying on coaches' experience), and Shirley Wang found that 65% of consumers believe that the current pricing fails to reflect the quality of the service through a case study [11]. Zhou Li proposed the concept of 'experience pricing', but did not develop an operational measurement system [12]. Such characteristics make it imperative for pricing strategies to go beyond the boundaries set by traditional revenue management theories.

3 Research design

3.1 Research methodology

Rooted theory is a qualitative research method with data collection and analysis as the main research process, which advocates extracting concepts from daily life experiences and social phenomena and constructing a final theory of substance theory through bottom-up induction [13]. Customer perceived value is processual to the pricing of sports training organisations,

and a more comprehensive and intuitive understanding of the influences that consumer perceived value produces in the pricing of sports training organisations can be gained through the Grounded Theory approach. This research used classical Grounded Theory coding methods including open coding, spindle coding and selective coding [13]. The information was obtained by conducting in-depth interviews with the respondents, refining the keywords through coding at the end of the interviews, and then combining the number of key occurrences with the interconnections between the keywords, and finally analysing the path of the influence of the customer's perceived value on the pricing strategy of the institution.

3.2 Data collection

From the 2024 membership list of StarStart institution, the main members are mainly adolescents, youths and middle-aged groups. Therefore, this research conducted in-depth interviews with 20 randomly selected members, 3 coaches, and 2 institution management personnel from the membership list using a semi-structured interview format. The first part is to interview the management of the institution, and a total of seven questions were designed, including: how the institution understands the customer's perceived value and what countermeasures are taken according to the customer's perceived value; the second part is to interview the coaches of the institution, and a total of six questions were designed to understand the coaches‘ communication with the customers and the coaches’ views on the institution's existing model; the third part is to interview the consumers (students or parents of students), and a total of six questions were designed. The third part is an interview with consumers (students or parents of students), with a total of seven questions designed to understand the customer's perception of pricing and the structure of the customer's perceived value; other questions were randomly asked in combination with the respondents' answers in all parts of the interview.

This interview was conducted on 22 April 2025 using a combination of online telephone and offline face-to-face interviews in response to respondents' time issues. The researcher ensured a more accurate understanding of the interviewees through semi-structured in-depth interviews and moderate follow-up questions during the interviews. The interviews lasted between 6 and 8 minutes, and the interviews were saved in text form on the spot with the consent of the interviewees. After the interviews were completed, the interview texts of 2 points of management, 2 coaches, and 15 customers were selected for coding analysis and text construction, and the remaining interview texts were used as a theoretical saturation test.

3.3 Coding analysis and model construction

3.3.1 Open coding

Through open coding by analysing and understanding the original textual material sentence by sentence and word by word, the original textual material was collated and analysed and given some conceptual labels, and the refined initial labels were then further normalised and generalised [12]. In this research, with the help of the NVivo15 tool, the coding operation was carried out on the original textual material derived from the interviews, from which 58 initial concepts and 13 subcategories were eventually collated. Table 1 shows the coding for all interviewees; Table 2 shows the obtained initial concepts and some interview examples.

Table 1. Respondent Codes.

Time of interviews	Interview Number	Subject of the interview	Place of interview	Format of the interview

2025/4/22	M1~M3	executive management	Institutional meeting room	semi structured
2025/4/23	I1~I4	training personnel	Institutional meeting room	semi structured
2025/4/22~2025/5/1	C1~C20	customer	Institutional meeting room	semi structured

Table 2. Formatting sections, subsections and subsubsections.

scope	Initial Concept	Number of Respondents	Number of occurrences	Statements of source material
Course Effectiveness	Learned knowledge	3	3	C4: I think it's just that I've already learnt some expertise in my classes.
	Inability to understand the course content	1	1	C5: Last time I went home and asked him what he had learnt and said that he couldn't understand some of what the coach said.
	Parents don't see results	1	1	C5: It still doesn't seem to be working very well, kids don't learn much.
	Parents see results	2	2	C1: Now look at my physical test scores rubbing up, every day to urge me to go to class.
	Stature Management	5	5	C2: I started out trying to build muscle, I'm too skinny myself.
	Pursuing progress in sports performance	5	5	C9: I heard that the results are more visible here so I thought I'd try here first.
Venue equipment	Training organisations pay attention to detail	2	2	C10: The locker room matching is hand cream.
	Professional equipment is available	8	12	C11: Secondly, I found out that they really have electric timers and professional starters.
Level of coaching professionalism	Pleased by improved performance in sports tests	4	5	C6: The waistline has shrunk by 3cm after only 5 classes, and the trainer helps to regulate the diet.
	Guaranteed class results	3	3	C13: The coach promises 'half of the money back if you don't beat the Academy substitutes in 15 sessions'.
	Successful cases	4	5	C1:Coach has brought out seniors with perfect scores in physical exams.
	Recognition of the course	3	3	C2:It's quite suitable.
	Recognition of the coach	10	18	C8:He recommended to me that the instructors here are quite responsible and have a high level of expertise.
Social attributes	Fitness atmosphere	3	6	C12:There are several people in the class who are about the same age as I am, and

				they chatter together after practice.
	referral from an acquaintance	4	5	C11:Ex-teammate practised here to 52.3 seconds and dragged me straight here.
	Getting on well with the coaches	1	1	C2:We get along almost as well as friends.
	With friends	2	2	C3: I have friends here.
	Trying to make friends	2	2	C4: Then working out alone at home feels rather boring.
Price perception of customers	Parents think it's expensive	1	1	C1:My mum muttered at first that PE lessons were so expensive.
	Willingness to accept partial price premium	11	14	C19: I'd buy it if it went up to 750.
	Acceptable price	6	8	C9:I'm still happy with this price.
	Prices that exceed expectations are difficult to accept straight away	9	10	C12:I'd have to weigh it up if it really costs more than 200 a session.
Customer Feedback Methods	Feedback from the applet	2	2	C2:Coach Yang told me earlier that he would make a small programme where you can spit on it.
	Online Feedback	10	10	C6: Suggestions directly in the course group @ the coach.
	Feedback in person	12	12	C12:Just go to the receptionist.
Willingness to Renew	Unwilling to renew classes	2	2	C10:Not renewing for a penny increase! That price is enough to hire a college private tutor for two months.
	Willingness to renew classes	2	2	C14:It will be, because it seems that I am losing quite a lot of weight now.
customer demand	lesson time	2	2	C12:It would be nice to add a weekly morning exercise class!
	Training feedback	4	4	C11: Post a weekly strength training index chart.
	Programme of the course	4	4	C7:It's time stuck right, no delay in writing assignments for two classes on the weekend.
	Course Booking	1	2	C2:There's also the fact that it's hard to get an appointment with Coach Yang's lessons these days.
	distance travelled	3	3	C6:Close to the company, just turn the corner after work, save time.
	Need more professional guidance	6	8	C19: Set up a counselling hotline for tournament competitors.

	Need for more venues	2	2	C13: Opening of night venues.
	Need for more infrastructure	10	12	C19:Third, add two liquid nitrogen recovery chambers.
	Need more communication	2	2	C5:Last time I went home and asked him what he had learnt and said that he couldn't understand some of what the coach said.
	Need for network guidance	2	2	C1:And can you record some short home training videos?
Transferring customer price perceptions	Few permanent coaches	1	1	M3: the most headache is the coach mobility new rash in front of members asked 'this barbell piece is not online shopping 9.9 free shipping that batch,' on the spot the loss of a large single.
	Cue the customer to compare prices	1	2	M3: We have a 'Facility Satisfaction Scoreboard' in the locker room, which is scanned and redirects you to the Purchasing Department's price comparison link.
	Taking care of the customer's emotions	1	2	M1:The key is to shift the price difference to non-quantifiable services so that participants feel that there is an emotional value to being expensive.
	Make customers feel fair	1	1	M1: Preparing to implement 'tiered pricing': Bronze tier: Clearly priced basic courses to meet the needs of price-sensitive individuals. Silver tier.
	Make customers feel like they are getting a bargain	2	9	M3: Reduced free cotton swabs in changing rooms but introduced 'sports first aid kit' value-added service.
	customers compare prices	1	2	M1: Social media apps have become a major source of price leaks, with students sharing contracts and comparing prices.
Coaching deficiencies	Class times and customer reservations	1	1	I3: We mainly need to communicate privately with members regarding their class times.
	It is difficult to accommodate every customer's schedule	3	3	I1: During class, I could hear that they didn't really like early morning training.
	It is difficult to provide adequate guidance to each student	2	3	I1: I am not able to provide very detailed care to each student.

Services offered	More focus on lifestyle	1	1	I3: There are also some members whom I give guidance on lifestyle matters.
	impart knowledge	1	1	I3: I will explain some basic principles to him in more detail during class.
	Get along well with customers	1	2	I3: How can I put it? Just treat them as friends.
	There are no scheduling issues with group lessons.	1	1	I1: I don't have other coaches to coordinate different students' classes.
	Improve targeting of customers	2	2	I1: Pay more attention, I plan to add more tests later.
marketing tactics	Assessing customer purchasing power	1	1	M1: Like a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner taking a pulse, assess the anxiety level of students based on their attire and social media posts to prescribe appropriate treatment.
	Perceiving customers	1	3	M1: It relies on parents' extreme perception of value in terms of 'saving lives by raising grades.'
	sales pitch	3	5	M1: Fitness newbies promote expensive personal trainers who claim to 'cure rounded shoulders.'
	Course pricing varies from person to person	1	2	M3: It's similar to a hot pot restaurant selling seafood. Some people think that beef tripe should be sold at a bargain price, while others are willing to pay three times as much for air-freighted wagyu beef. Our boss likes to use this analogy.
cost reduction	Customers unable to identify equipment costs	1	2	M3: We deliberately mix imported and domestically produced equipment when purchasing. For the same Pilates class, members who use Balanced Body equipment pay 200 yuan more per person than those who use Yiwu equipment, and they feel that their core muscles are activated more precisely.
	Strict cost control	1	1	M3: From bidding on yoga mats to reporting damage to foam rollers broken by instructors, even the brand of cockroach poison in the

				changing rooms requires my signature. The boss calls this 'logistics pricing authority.'
	Make full use of the venue	1	3	M3: Sell at a low price at 8 a.m. to retired elderly men and women who do square dancing. For the elderly women who do square dancing, we basically do not charge a fee, as it serves as publicity for us. At 8 p.m., we package it as an 'urban stress-relief night training' at a high price.

3.3.2 Spindle coding

The purpose of axial coding is to develop main categories and subcategories based on open coding, and to discover and establish connections between categories. These connections can be logical relationships or process relationships [13]. Through research and analysis of the internal logic of 13 subcategories and 58 initial concepts, five main categories were derived. Table 3 shows the main categories, and their connotations obtained through axial coding.

Table 3. The main categories derived from the main axis coding

main category	**subcategory**	**inner meaning**
transaction cost	customer perception of price	Customers' most intuitive perception of institutional pricing.
	Customer renewal intention	Whether customers continue to consume at the institution.
Course content	Classroom effectiveness	Customers' immediate impressions during classes and the benefits gained after completing the course.
	Venue facilities	Whether the venue equipment provided by the institution is complete and professional.
	customer demand	Customers' needs beyond the services provided by the institution.
social attribute	gym atmosphere	The overall environment and atmosphere during classes directly affect the experience and motivation of fitness enthusiasts.
	social intent	Customers want to socialise during class or socialise because of attending class.
	social environment	Do customers have a comfortable social environment?
Coaching services	Professionalism of coaches	The coach's level of expertise in the subject they teach and their overall quality as a coach.
	Coach's rhetoric	The coach's words can, to a certain extent, change the customer's willingness to pay and bring them closer to the coach.

	Teaching methods	The methods and forms used by coaches to achieve teaching objectives and impart knowledge and skills.
	customer feedback	Customers communicate their needs to institutions and the manner in which they communicate.
	Targeting customer needs	Coaches adjust their teaching methods to meet the different needs of different customers.
Institutional pricing	Perceiving customers	Institutions perceive customers' ability to pay.
	Shift customer price perception	The institution uses various means to blur customers' perceptions and make them feel that they are getting more than their money's worth.
	reduce costs	The institution maintains profits by reducing costs and implementing dynamic pricing for different customers.

3.3.3 Selective coding

Selective coding is the final stage of grounded theory, integrating the results of previous coding to extract core categories from the previously summarised five main categories, 13 subcategories, and 58 initial concepts. This process outlines the overall logical relationships, clarifies the contextual conditions and behavioural phenomena, and thereby constructs a comprehensive theoretical framework. As shown in Table 4, the classic relational structure of the main categories and their connotations.

Table 4. Classic Relationship Structure of Main Categories.

classical relational structure	**Connotation of the relationship structure**
Institution pricing → customer value perception → whether customers consume → institution revenue	Institution pricing will be based on their own perceptions of 'value for money' and the final choice of whether to spend will ultimately affect the institution's revenue.
Price value → customer perceived value	The basic utility of the service, i.e. its technical performance or physical attributes that directly satisfy the functional needs of the customer, is part of the components of the customer's perceived value.
Functional value → customer perceived value	The customer's post-consumption gains and the experience during consumption are also part of the customer's perceived value.
Emotional value → customer perceived value	Emotional needs of customers beyond functional needs, including the heart value of self-expression and social connection; this is also part of the customer's perceived value.
Service value → customer perceived value	The additional experience derived around the core function enhances user satisfaction through the service process, emotional interaction, and is one of the components of the customer's perceived value.

Organisations → Decision making → Pricing, shifting or enhancing customers' value perceptions based on their perceived value	The impact on the institution's revenue makes it necessary for the institution to base its pricing on the customer's perceived value or to use means of shifting and enhancing the customer's perception of value
Customer perceived value → feedback → institution	Customers will use different means and institutions to give feedback based on their perception, which can be broadly categorised into online and offline feedback.

Using rooted theory to summarise and analyse the main and sub-categories, as well as the underlying concepts, the 'Path Model of Customer Perceived Value on Institution Pricing' has been developed. The core category narrative can be summarised as follows: after learning about the institution's pricing, customers judge whether to consume according to their perceived value, which affects the institution's revenue and then forces the institution to price according to each customer's perceived value or use a variety of means to strengthen the consumer's perception of the pricing value to facilitate the transaction; and customers who have already consumed the product will also provide feedback to the institution based on their own perception. Institutions will also use the same strategy to facilitate the continued consumption of customers after they understand their needs from the feedback of customers. At the same time, the perceived value of the customer is constantly changing due to factors such as transaction cost, course content, social attributes, coaching services, etc. Based on this 'story line', this research has constructed a 'path model of customer's perceived value on institution's pricing' as shown in Figure 1.

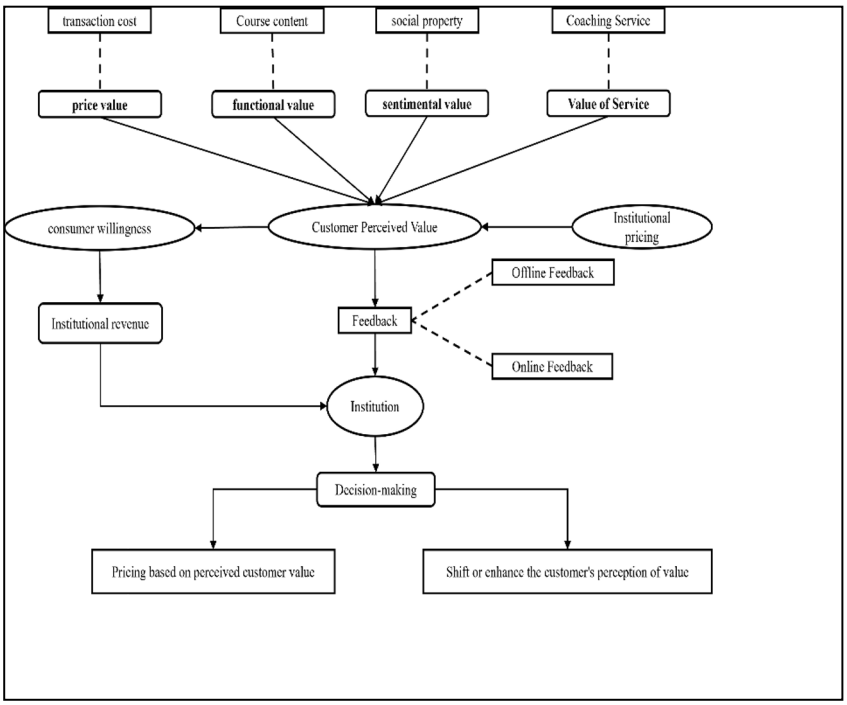

Fig. 1. A path model of customer's perceived value on institution's pricing.

3.4 Theoretical saturation test

Using nearly one third of the original interview text data selected in advance to test the saturation of the theory, after open coding, spindle coding, selective coding and comparison found that there were no new concepts or concepts or categories that could affect the 'core category', so it can be considered that the theoretical model constructed in this research has reached the theoretical saturation. Therefore, it can be concluded that the theoretical model constructed in this study has reached theoretical saturation.

4 Model interpretation and analysis

4.1 Customer perceived value institution profiling

Through the collation of the original textual information from the interviews, it was found that price value, functional value, emotional value and service value are the important components of customers' perceived value. Price value, functional value, emotional value and service value, as their core dimensions, jointly construct the customer's perception of value system.

Price value directly affects customer perception through perceived price comparison. Price sensitivity and word-of-mouth directly promote repurchase intention [14]. For example, C8 has stated 'After I took a few lessons, I think this price is a little higher, and I'm okay with that.' indicating a significant difference in price value. The finding that price-related promotions and quality uncertainty have a significant effect on consumers' perceived savings, where promotions-oriented consumers have higher perceived savings than prevention-oriented consumers when quality uncertainty is high, and vice versa, allows firms to be more targeted in designing sustainable price promotional strategies for the successful introduction of new products.

The core embodiment of functional value is the effectiveness of the course, the professionalism of the equipment, such as C2 has said 'I'm not just talking about getting in shape, I've learnt a lot of just, like the anatomy kind of the human body structure, which has given me the ability to discern some of the fitness knowledge on the internet'

Emotional value is a core source of high premiums, which are realised through trusting relationships and social recognition. The emotional connection of sports training institutions is difficult to replace with standardised services, which provides room for institutions to differentiate their pricing. For example, C2 once said, 'My coach is Coach Yang, and I am very comfortable taking lessons with him, and we get along almost as well as friends, and when we have time, we'll ask to come out to play, but he's usually quite busy'; the personal relationship built between the coach and the customer, as well as the institution's social relationship, provide support for the high pricing of the course.

The value of service runs through the whole service process including pre-sale, service and after-sale, and the strategy of low cost and high perception amplifies the value of service and achieves the double optimisation of cost control and value perception. Price-related promotions and quality uncertainty have a significant impact on consumers' perceived savings [15]. For example, M1 has also said that 'the key is to transfer the price difference to non-quantitative services, so that learners feel that there is an emotional value to being expensive'.

4.2 Interrelationship between customer perceived value and institutions

Customers 'intention to consume based on perceived value affects institution revenues causing institutions to base pricing on customers' perceived value or employ means to shift or enhance customers' value perception. The quality of multichannel integration plays a key role in enhancing online perceived value and promoting online purchase intention [16]. C14 has mentioned that 'yes, because so far it seems that I have lost quite a lot of weight, and the results are quite noticeable'. Consumption willingness has a direct impact on the institution's revenue M3 mentioned that 'the biggest headache is the high turnover rate of trainers, the new rash in front of the members to ask this barbell piece is not Taobao 9.9 free shipping that batch, on the spot the loss of a large order'. Eventually institutions will start to give customers the perceived value of pricing due to the impact on revenue M3 has mentioned that 'almost hot pot restaurant selling seafood some people feel that the tripe should be cabbage price, some people are willing to pay three times as much for the air transport of Wagyu beef, our bosses like this analogy'.

4.3 Strategies used by institutions in response to customer feedback

Institutions will refer to the feedback of customers who have already consumed so as to price based on the perceived value of the customer or adopt the means of transferring or enhancing the customer's perception of value: pricing based on the perceived value of the customer or adopt the means of transferring or enhancing the customer's perception of value; so as to continue to maintain the willingness to consume. M1 has said that 'the sale of courses will not be told to the Golden Tier: to create a "Star Choice Membership". The illusion that there will be a course consultant will be handwritten greeting cards for New Year's holidays. And M1 also said, 'If the white-collar workers complained about the small shower room, we will be changed into a fast changing system after exercise, packaged into the value of 299 time management programme; and I found that some members love to sun circle purchasing equipment with LED lights, the price of the course is automatically increased by 15% of the photography exclusive fee.

5 Conclusion

Research has shown that customer's perceived value plays an important role in constructing pricing. Customers' perceived value has been researched into: price value, functional value, emotional value, and service value. Customers will judge whether to choose to consume based on their own perception of the price after learning about the institution's pricing, which affects the institution's revenue, which makes the institution use the strategy of transferring customer perception, improving customer perception and adjusting its own pricing based on customer perception to facilitate the transaction; and the customers who have already consumed the product will also give feedback to the institution based on their own perception, and the institution will also use the same strategy to facilitate the customers to continue to consume the product based on their own feedback. The organisation will then use the same strategy to facilitate the customer's continued consumption.

The research found that the perceived value of the customer directly affects the customer's consumption decision and that institutions need to balance revenue and customer value through dynamic pricing. Institutions can flexibly adjust pricing based on customers' real-time perceptions of course content, social attributes, and so on. At the same time, institutions will also adopt the signing of enhanced services, increase additional benefits to enhance the customer's perception of the value of price, functional value, service value. And customer

perceived value changes with external factors, institutions need to constantly iterate pricing strategy.

Theoretical Contributions: First, a model of how customer perceived value affects an institution's pricing strategy is constructed, which comprehensively shows the path of customer perceived value's influence on an institution's pricing strategy. Second, it analyses the components of customer perceived value and enriches the theory of customer perceived value and institution pricing strategy. Thirdly, there is little research on customer perceived value in previous studies of sports training institutions, an industry with high customer emotional connection, and the theories derived from this study can effectively serve as a reference for sports training institutions to move from understanding customer perceived value to pricing based on customer perceived value.

The shortcoming of this research is that it is based on the rooted theory, and future research can further validate this research using quantitative methods such as SEM.

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