

The Effects of Quality on Satisfaction and Customer Retention: An Examination of Participant Sport

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Relevance/significance of the topic to sport marketing

The role of service quality in recreational and fitness centers is crucial to the understanding of customer satisfaction and retention, and customer retention is critical to the success of recreational and fitness centers. Previous research has predominantly examined the correlation of consumers' satisfaction and behavioral attitudes across spectator events (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Inoue et al., 2017). Though the recreational and fitness center context is rarely studied, Theodorakis and colleagues (2014) found higher levels of perceived service quality among sport and fitness center patrons was related to higher customer satisfaction. However, we know little about which antecedents of quality have the most influence on customers' satisfaction as well as behavioral intentions. While researchers indicate customer satisfaction influences customer retention and willingness to engage in repeat business (Yoshida & James, 2010), there is no consensus on whether sport participants and sport spectators share similar consumer characteristics (Tokuyama, Greenwell, & Miller, 2016). With repeat business being a goal of sport organizations (Yoshida et al., 2015), the question becomes: How important is quality of service to the people who are customers *and* sport participants? With that in mind, the purpose of this study is to determine which targets of quality have the most influence on sport participants' satisfaction and repeat intentions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Service quality is defined as "the consumer's overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of the organization and its services" (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994, p. 77). Previous research has indicated that service quality may have a significant effect on intention of revisiting (Brady et al., 2006). In this sense, customer satisfaction with the service environment has been reported to have a significant impact on spectator's behavioral intentions (Wakefield et al., 1996). Moreover, a sport organization's ability to deliver quality services at an event is one of the major antecedents to attract club members and casual customers (Biscaia et al., 2016). Quality service is very

important to retaining customers as well as the generation of long-term benefits. In participant sports, customer satisfaction may differ because the customer is a participant consuming the product as it is being delivered.

Chelladurai and Chang (2000) proposed a framework for the analysis of service quality in sport and fitness clubs. Targets of quality are more important for fitness services, where the participants often interact between the service provider and product. Chelladurai and Chang's (2000) highlight five targets of quality: core service, physical context including the facilities and equipment in which the service is provided, client-employee interactions, inter-client interactions, and client participation.

Method and Results

The sample for this study consisted of adult league bowlers ($n = 392$) participating in league play. Items were adopted from previous service quality contexts to measure the following constructs: staff and management (Murray & Crilley, 1999), facility (Triadó, Aparicio, & Rimbau, 1999), other participants (Crawford et al., 2007), customer satisfaction (Madrigal, 1995), and behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000). Few studies address specific elements of participant sport; therefore, eight items were developed to address the quality of the core service. Items were developed to encompass the nature of participant sport within an organized league and the aspects of league organization salient to the participant. These items addressed aspects of league organization, league rules, competitiveness, starting times, scheduling, record keeping, and atmosphere. Data were analyzed using SPSS 24 and AMOS 24.

A confirmatory factor analysis indicated an acceptable fit for the data according to selected approximation fit indices ($\chi^2 = 788.585$, $df = 312$, $CFI = .934$, $TLI = .92$; $RMSEA = .06$). All factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$), ranged from .51 to .94, and greater than the recommended cut-off point of .50 (Hair et al., 2009). Moreover, all the CR values were above the recommended .70 threshold (Hair et al., 2009) and ranged from .83 to .94. Finally, none of the correlations between constructs was greater than .85, providing evidence of discriminant validity.

Customer satisfaction was regressed on the five targets of quality. Results of the full regression model were significant, and the independent variables accounted for 49.6% of the variance in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.496$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.489$, $F(5,322) = 62.511$, $p < .001$). Among the individual targets of quality, core service ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .001$) was more predictive of customers' satisfaction than other bowlers ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$) and management ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = .019$). However, facility ($\beta = 0.01$, $p = .924$), and staff ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = .243$) failed to significantly predict

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customer satisfaction. A hierarchical regression was used with customer satisfaction entered into the equation first followed by the five targets of quality entered as a block based on previous research (Cronin et al., 2000; Greenwell et al., 2002). Bonferroni's correction (i.e., $\alpha/\text{number of equations} = .025$) was used to address potential issues associated with family wise error rate. The change in R^2 was significant but small ($\Delta R^2 = 0.092$) indicating customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between quality and behavioral intentions.

Discussion/Contributions/Conclusions

The results from these two analysis suggest quality service leads to satisfied customers, and satisfied customers are more likely to participate in future bowling leagues. When viewed in isolation, our finding shows sport participants' perceptions of the league appear to be more profound and have a stronger influence on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. This finding suggested that participants were highly influenced by the structure, rules and procedures involved in a certain league. Previous research has indicated that the nature of the core sport product contributes to dramatic and exciting consumers' experiences (Howat & Assaker, 2016; Mason, 1999; Smith & Stewart, 2010). It is conceivable that a handicap procedure, prize fund, price to bowl, schedule of bowling (time and length), type of league, competitive balance, atmosphere, or the officials running the league may influence customer satisfaction as well as repeat intentions. A satisfactory core service and interactions with other members of the league are important factors to stimulate customer satisfaction and continued patronage.