

AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SERVICE QUALITY, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN RECREATIONAL SPORT CLUBS

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Abstract

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyze the relationship among service quality, members satisfaction and loyalty in recreational sport clubs.

The theoretical and conceptual basis for understanding the nature of the sport service quality is still in the developmental stage and till now there is not an accepted model to measure service quality in sport field.

Literature review

Torkildsen (1999) suggested that leisure clubs comprise three elements; they are leisure, recreation and play. Pleasure is regarded as the heart of the three components. This shows that customers expect to experience pleasure in the clubs and this shed light on to the importance of service quality and customer satisfaction.

Service quality is the most important and principal competitive weapon in the services industry (Khatibi, Ismail and Thyagarajan, 2002) and has been increasingly used as a strategy tool for effectively positioning the company (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Therefore, the services differentiate themselves by providing higher quality especially when the core service is similar such as banking, restaurants, airlines and hotels. In addition, service quality is believed to have positive impact on company's bottom-line performance (Caruana, 2002). Because the subjective, customer-oriented view toward quality is considerably more applicable to the intangible and heterogeneous features of service than the technical approaches, it has become the main approach to

assessing quality in the services literature (Schneider and White, 2004).

Methodology

This study investigates the service quality in one of the most prestigious sport complexes in Iran which is composed of 32 different sport clubs and examines the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Method of the research is descriptive and correlation kind. A pre-test with a sample of 12 members of the two clubs was carried out for checking the appropriateness of the wordings and meanings of the items.

The statistical population was the members of aerobic clubs. Population in this study was consisted 45000 members. A convenience sample (N=450) using simple random method was drawn from those members who had been using the clubs services in the last 2 years. Twelve clubs were selected in a random cluster way and totally 418 questionnaire were collected and usable. SERVQUAL questionnaire was used with minor modifications to ensure covering all aspect of services and word meaning; its validity was confirmed by 10 professors which were experienced in the field. Reliability of questionnaire also was calculated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\pm = 0/87$). The analysis of data was assessed in two distinct levels: descriptive and inference (Pearson correlation coefficient and linear regression).

Results & discussion

The result shows that there is a significant relationship between service quality and members satisfaction; service quality and members loyalty; members satisfaction and members loyalty in sport recreational complexes. Also among the service quality and members satisfaction factors, members satisfaction was identified as a more important predictive factor to membersn loyalty.

Service quality has long been recognized as the basic strategy for effective positioning and competitive advantage. This study identified service quality factors in sport clubs and its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. The finding in some aspects is different from other findings; this means that service quality may be different in country by country. It is suggested that researchers do the same research in different countries and regions and compare the results, finally build a service quality assessment tool (in recreation sports field) that could be used in a wider range of geography, with similarities in cultures, technologies, development and other affecting factors.

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