

# SPORT EVENT PARTICIPATION AND HAPPINESS: THE ROLE OF SERVICE QUALITY

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## Aim of paper

The topic of this research focuses on the role of happiness as an outcome of actively participating in sport events and investing time and physical resources to the process. Specifically, and given the sparse research on the variables that can influence happiness as an outcome of an experiential purchase, this study examines how specific aspects of the sport event consumption experience relate to happiness with that experience. The importance of such research lies in the potential impact smaller scale sport events can have for a person overall happiness levels and thus his/her quality of life.

## Literature review

Sport event participation belongs to the realm of experiential “purchases” given that it requires a registration fee as well as for some participants travel expenses to come to the event. The outcome of the investment is the participation experience and the associated pleasure with that consumption process described by Desmeules (2002) as happiness with a purchase. Research suggests that happiness with purchases should be viewed as a marketing goal and should be connected to perceptions regarding overall quality of life (Sut, 2003). Given the role of happiness as a precursor of overall quality of life in an experiential purchase setting, there is certainly a need to understand the factors that influence the happiness construct in an experiential setting such as sport event participation. Early research focusing on the role of leisure activities in psychological well-being found that satisfaction with the leisure activity was the most important predictor of happiness (Brown, Frankel, & Fennell, 1991). The sport event experience directly relates with the provision of the event services, thus service quality components, which based on relevant literature include physical environment quality, interaction quality, and outcome quality (Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2004; Chen et al., 2012). Based on the literature above, this study tests the following hypotheses in the context of a running event and from an event participant standpoint: H1: Interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality dimensions influence runners' satisfaction; H2: Runners' satisfaction mediates the relationship between interaction quality, physical environment quality, and partially mediates the relationship between outcome quality and happiness.

## Methodology, research design and data analysis

Data were collected in May 2012 from participants of a small-scale running event. Participants of the present

study ran either a 5K or a 10K race. Event organizers provided contact information for the population ( $N = 982$ ). An email invitation with an embedded link generated 310 responses (response rate = 31.5%). Service quality was measured using a modified context-specific scale adapted from Alexandris, et al. (2004) featuring three dimensions: Physical environment quality (four items), interaction quality (four items), and outcome quality (3 items). A four-item satisfaction scale was used to evaluate runners' overall satisfaction with this sport event experience. A three-item happiness scale was used to measure happiness. Service quality and satisfaction were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), while runners rated happiness on a five-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Structural equation modeling was used to test the model using EQS 6 and applying the two-step modeling approach. Model fit was evaluated using four goodness-of-fit indices:  $\chi^2$ , Comparative Fit Index, Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with its 90% confidence interval (CI).

## Results

The measurement and structural model results provided for an acceptable fit of the model to the data. The hypotheses were supported. Two service quality dimensions, physical environment and outcome quality had statistically significant influence on runners' satisfaction accounting for 81% of its variance. Outcome quality exerted the stronger impact on satisfaction and coupled with satisfaction explained 71% of the variance in runners' happiness.

## Discussion, implications and conclusions

This paper aimed to test how perceptions of service quality in a sport event context influence satisfaction with the event experience and the happiness with the “purchase”. The results contribute to the literature by revealing the heightened importance of the outcome quality on both overall satisfaction with the event experience and the notion of happiness with the participation. An implication that rises directly from these results relates to orienting the management of events toward the improvement of components related to outcome quality or physical and interaction components (Brady & Cronin, 2001) with the goal to market sport event participation as a benefit to a happier lifestyle with immediate effects on quality of life.

Note: given the space limitation, thorough details will be provided for all parts of this abstract during the oral presentation.

## References

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