

A service quality model in spectator sports: reflective or formative structure?

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Purpose of Study

In 1997 the European Association for Sport Management chose service quality to be the main theme to its congress in Madeira, Portugal. Despite the fact that during those 20 years numerous publications have advanced our understanding of service quality, the conceptualization and operationalization of this construct are still debated (Martinez & Martinez, 2010). Today, at the heart of this debate lies the formative - reflective issue. Hence, the purpose of this study is to discuss formative and reflective service quality models in sports and to test empirically both perspectives.

Theoretical Background

Researchers agree that service quality is a performance-based, primarily cognitive evaluation made by the customer of a series of service attributes and the service experience (Berry, Parasuraman, & Zeithaml, 1988; Brady & Cronin, 2001). Even though researchers rather unanimously proposed that service quality is multidimensional construct, they have examined the relationship between service quality and its dimensions from two different perspectives. Using the formative perspective, some sport management scholars (Howat & Asaker, 2013; Theodorakis, Kambitsis, Laios, & Koustelios, 2001) proposed that service quality is formed by a number of context-specific dimensions, while others used a reflective approach. In this sense, Ko and Pastore (2005) proposed a multilevel model, in which, overall service quality was a higher-order factor defined by four primary dimensions, which in turn, were defined by 11 sub-dimensions.

Methods

Data was collected during a football game of the top professional league in Greece. More information on the sample characteristics and the study context could be found in Theodorakis, Alexandris, Tsigilis and Karvounis (2013). Participants completed the 28 item SPORTSERV inside the stadium prior to the football games. SPORTSERV captures both functional (i.e. process) and outcome quality via seven dimensions: Personnel, access, security, reliability, tangibles, game quality, and team performance.

Results and Discussion

Based on previous conceptual models proposed by Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz (1996) and Ko and Pastore (2005) a multilevel reflective model was postulated and tested. In this model, overall service quality was defined by two primary dimensions namely functional quality and outcome quality, which in turn, were defined by five (personnel, access, security, reliability, and tangibles) and two (game quality and team performance) sub-dimensions respectively. Results indicated that all factor loadings were in excess .6 and all composite reliability estimates were greater than .70. In terms of model fit, the analysis showed that not all goodness of fit indices were satisfactory ($\chi^2 = 600.31$, $df = 344$, $CFI = .941$, $SRMR = .117$,

$RMSEA = .046$, 90% CI = .040 - .052, $AIC = 3578.98$). Based on recent theoretical advancements (Martinez & Martinez, 2010) and findings from Howat and Asaker (2013) a formative model was also tested. In this model, service quality was formed by functional and outcome quality. Functional quality was formed by personnel, access, security, reliability, and tangibles. Outcome quality was formed by game quality, and team performance. Results indicated that the data fitted the model well: ($\chi^2 = 528.93$, $df = 329$, $CFI = .955$, $SRMR = .047$, $RMSEA = .042$, 90% CI = .035 - .048, $AIC = 3517.53$). Comparing the results from the analyses, it seems that the formative service quality model outperforms the reflective one. Concluding, this study provided some empirical evidence that support a formative structure. Despite the ongoing debate among researchers, "the growing acceptance of formative measurement has the potential to reflect a paradigm shift in the manner in which we conceptualize and analyze latent phenomena" Kyle and June (2015, p. 354). Finally, the results of the present study will hopefully advance sport management scholars' understanding of what is perceived service quality and how to measure it.

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