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Assessing Internal Service Quality in IT departments of sports organizations: Case study of National Olympic & Paralympics Academy

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IT departments in every company are service providers to company's employees and end users. The IT department is now enabling and supporting the interactions of both internal clients and external supply chain partners with a wide range of services, including hardware/software selection and installation, systems development and maintenance, web design, network, helpdesk, and training (Kettinger & Lee, 2005; Pitt et al., 1995). In a recent survey, it was showed that email and websites of sport organizations are two of the three most important media which sport marketers can focus upon to enhance their marketing plan (Bigdely & Honari, 2009). IT departments in a sport organization will implement sport marketer's plans via these outlets; hence higher quality within IT departments can increase the effectiveness of sport marketer's overall marketing plan. Also, many other services like online ticket selling, forum management, training coaches and athletes to use modern fitness test devices, etc in sport organizations represent the duties of IT departments. Assessing service quality will lead to identifying any shortfalls (the what), and lead marketers to root causes (the why) to implement appropriate corrective actions (the how).

When the service quality construct was investigated in the IT field, most studies adopted the customer-oriented (company's employees) view of service quality (e.g., Jiang et al., 2002; Kettinger & Lee, 1994; Kettinger et al., 1995; Kettinger & Lee, 2005; Pitt et al., 1995; Watson et al., 1998). To our knowledge, no research to date has investigated the service quality of IT departments in the sports organizations. SERVQUAL model was used in this paper to assess the quality of internal IT services in NOPA of I.R.IRAN.

In the first phase, to enhance reliability, the SERVQUAL questionnaire, was adapted by a group of IT employees and managers of other departments of NOPA to include their opinion. Then 10 of Tehran University IT professors checked out the content of adopted questionnaire and provided feedback. Out of 65 distributed questionnaires, 48 were returned and usable. Freidman test to rate the gaps of 22 questions showed no significant differences between them, and Cronbach's Alpha confirmed the reliability of questionnaire, $\alpha=93$.

Exploratory factor analysis and Rotated Component Matrix were conducted to identify five dimensions of service quality in IT department of NOPA of I.R.IRAN. The extraction method was principal component analysis and rotation converged in 12 iterations. Rotation method was Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. The five new dimensions were named considering the content of the questions which were related to each dimension.

The research results indicate that, although SERVQUAL principles are applicable to IT services, the service quality dimensionality is different. The research derived four new dimensions for service quality expectations of IT services: Expertise, Availability, Time Commitment and Supportiveness. A fifth dimension is the Tangibles dimension, which is retained from SERVQUAL. Furthermore the results indicate that the Supportiveness dimension was the most important dimension in this research context, while the Tangibles dimension was the least important.

Sport managers can benefit from the method and results of this paper to assess the service quality of their IT department, find the weakness of their service and correct them. They may also increase the quality of service in the areas that are most important to consumers. In the action plans of sport marketers, it is crucial to have practical outlines, the results of this research is a practical guideline for them to arrange their action plans base on it. As the National Olympic and Paralympic Academy of I.R.IRAN uses the latest updated technologies in its IT department, it seems that the findings of this research may be generalized to other regions equipped with latest technologies. It is recommended that researchers conduct the same research in different sport organizations using other models of service quality assessment like SERVPERF and Normed Quality, then compare the results and identify global dimensions of service quality of IT departments within sport organizations.