

Customer Service Dimensions On Satisfaction: MLB Season Ticket Holders' Perspective

Lee, Cindy¹; Bang, Hyejin²

¹West Virginia University, USA; ²Florida International University, USA

E-mail: cindy.lee@mail.wvu.edu

Making customers happy and satisfied is important for any organization since it is directly related to customer retention. The quality of product would play a critical role in customer satisfaction. However, providing consistently high quality product is challenging in the sport context due to sport sports' characteristics of "service". For example, quality of games played by sports teams cannot be controlled, therefore it fluctuates by game. This means that customers are not always satisfied with the quality of games (service). Considering the fluctuating product quality, customer service becomes more important for "service" products.

The importance of customer services is even more emphasized for season ticket holders who are more invested than others (Greenwell, Fink & Pastore, 2002). Especially for major league sport teams retaining season ticket holders is critical due to the limited size of target market who can afford the price of season tickets. Therefore, making season ticket holders satisfied is critical for major sport teams, and when it comes to the discussion of customer satisfaction, the concept of "service quality" becomes relevant (Liu, Guo, & Lee, 2011).

There are different dimensions in service quality. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985)'s exploratory research revealed that there are ten potentially overlapping dimensions which later refined to five dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). This study examined the importance of these dimensions on season ticket holders' overall satisfaction with the ticket representatives who are the direct contact points for season ticket holders in their ticket purchase, renewal, and resolving other potential issues. Among five dimensions, the dimension of "tangibles" indicating physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel, was not included since the interactions between assigned ticket representative and season ticket holders are over the phone in most cases. Therefore, this study will examine the importance of four dimensions (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) on season ticket holders' overall satisfaction with the customer service provided by ticket account representative.

For this study, a season ticket holders' annual survey (n = 1,149) from a Major League Baseball (MLB) team located in the Northeastern region of the United States was used. Season ticket holders ranged from full season tickets to 10 games per season (total eight different types). The survey contained questions to measure season ticket holders' satisfaction level and to grasp their various behaviors. To measure satisfaction level with the assigned ticket representative, aforementioned four dimensions of service quality were measured using a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

Among 1,149 respondents, the majority were male (n = 795, 69.2%), married or partnered (n = 750, 65.3%) and Caucasian (n = 1,001, 87.1%). Only 739 (64.3%) answered the portion of customer satisfaction with ticket representative. Others opted not to answer these questions due to reasons like "cannot remember the name of the assigned ticket executive", "do not have enough to evaluate" or "ticket representative was changed over time".

Overall, the mean scores for each dimensions marked relatively high: overall satisfaction with the ticket account executive (M = 4.30, SD = .98), reliability (M = 4.48, SD = .90), assurance (M = 4.33, SD = .87), empathy (M = 4.48, SD = .79), and responsiveness (M = 4.51, SD = .86).

The data were analyzed with multiple regression analysis with dependent variable of overall satisfaction with independent variables of reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness. The result of the regression analysis showed that all four dimensions were significant predictors for customer satisfaction with assigned ticket representative ($F_{(4, 734)} = 532.27, p < .001, R^2 = .74$). Specifically, empathy was the most contributing factor on satisfaction ($\beta = .35$), followed by reliability ($\beta = .30$), assurance ($\beta = .17$), and responsiveness ($\beta = .09$). The relative importance of each dimension on season ticket holders' satisfaction was discussed and its possible reasons were discussed in the context of this specific MLB team.

The results of this study provide insights on different dimensions and its relative importance on costumers' satisfaction on customer service representative. Focusing on "interaction" aspect of service, more discussion and interpretation of the results will be provided along with the implication of the study.

References

- Greenwell, T. C., Fink, J. S., & Pastore, D. L. (2002). Perception of the service experience: Using demographic and psychographic variables to identify customer segments. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 11(4), 233–241.
- Liu, C., Guo, Y. M., & Lee, C. (2011). The effects of relationship quality and switching barriers on customer loyalty. *International Journal of Information Management*, 31, 71–79.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V., & Berry, L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(4), 41–50.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. (1988). SERVQUAL: a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 64, 12–40.