

Sport Events and Tourism

Review Track Chair: Ruth Crabtree

Application of the Multilevel Service Design Method to Redesign a Sport Event

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Aim

Recently, scholars from the service management sector proposed that the creation of compelling experiences, throughout a customer's journey, is vital for the success of organizations (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Despite the fact that sport services are highly experiential, the concept of customer experience received little attention from sport and event management researchers (Funk, 2016). By applying the multilevel service design (MSD) model (Patricio et al., 2011) in the context of a sport event, we aimed first to understand the key determinants of customer experience, and second to redesign the customer journey in an effort to improve runners' overall participation experience.

Theoretical Background

Based on the definition put forward by Verhoef et al. (2009, p.32), customer experience in sport events is a holistic and dynamic construct that encompasses a runner's cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical responses to the sport event's multiple touch points and channels of purchasing. To describe customer experience in such a complex service system, a systematic service design approach deems appropriate (Patricio et al., 2011). The MSD's scope is to address the experience of customer by developing the service offerings on three hierarchical levels: (i) the service concept, (ii) the service system, and (iii) the service encounter. The method does not solely focus on the firm's (i.e. event organizer) service offerings but addresses the service experience provided by other organizations associated with the particular event (Patricio et al., 2011).

Methods

The MSD method was applied in the context of an international recurring running event that attracts more than 20,000 runners. Initially, a research team comprised by event managers and researchers was created to analyze the current service offerings and to identify potential solutions that will improve runners' experience. To further understand participants' experience throughout their customer journey, two qualitative methods were conducted: 14 semi-structured interviews and five focus groups ($N = 34$) with runners who had different past experience of the event and levels of running involvement. The six phase thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze data.

Results

Step 1: Studying the levels of a runner's experience. Information derived from the two qualitative methods, along with observations and a walkthrough used to map the overall customer journey and to develop the event's service offerings. *Step 2: Designing the event's service concept.* Based on the value constellation experience, the event's service concept was developed. The proposed customer value constellation included elements traditionally associated to the event organizer (e.g. registration), but also new ones provided by other service providers such as training plans, and suggestions for post-event entertainment. *Step 3: Designing the event's service system.* In this step all experience factors and service encounters were identified. Briefly those were: needs for running, seek information, registration and payment, pre-event preparation and practice, collection of bag, transportation and parking, pre-event entertainment, the race, post-event entertainment and results. *Step 4: Designing the event's service encounters.* Each service encounter was analyzed in order to understand how value is co-created from the interactions between the organization and participants. Suggestions made by runners were used to redesign each service encounter. Finally, each service encounter was illustrated using the service experience blueprint diagram (Patricio et al., 2008).

Conclusion and Implications

To improve participants' overall experience, we redesigned an existing sport event by applying the MSD model. To the best of our knowledge, no prior studies have proposed this holistic interdisciplinary service design method to improve a complex sport service system such as an international running event. Regarding managerial implications, the application of the MSD assisted event's organizers to fully understand participants' customer journey through different touch points and channels. Eventually, the organizers were able: (i) to redesign existing and provide new service offerings on the value constellation, service experience and service encounters levels of experience, and (ii) increase collaboration with external partners (e.g. local municipality, public transportation authority) in an effort to provide seamless experiences to participants across the whole purchase cycle.

References

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