

Consumer Experience Quality in Participant Sports: An Empirical Examination of a Japanese Marathon Event

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Aim

There is abundant service quality research in the context of participant sport (e.g., Theodorakis et al., 2015; Du et al., 2015). However, little attention has been paid to the empirical examination of consumer experience quality, which is a consumer's holistic response above and beyond simply the quality of service, but rather resulting from various experiences across multiple touchpoints (Yoshida, 2017). Therefore, this study aimed to provide empirical evidence for the built-in validity of consumer experience quality (Yoshida, 2017) and its impact on event experience, event-related identification, and behavioral consequences in the context of a Japanese marathon event.

Theoretical Background

Our conceptual framework is based on that proposed by Yoshida (2017). According to his framework, consumer experience quality in sports was divided into four qualities: (1) Core product quality, (2) service quality, (3) social network quality, and (4) relationship investment quality. However, the last quality was not included in this study because marathon events are annual, thus making it difficult for both participants and organizers to develop a mutual relationship. In the context of a once-a-year event, relationship quality does not fit the idea of relationship investment quality that is normally strengthened by regular communication with consumers (De Wulf et al., 2001).

Service quality directly influences event satisfaction and positive affect (Yoshida, 2017). As noted by many researchers (e.g., Yoshida & James, 2010; Du et al., 2015), event satisfaction is related to event-related identification and behavioral consequences. In addition, positive affect increases event-related identification (Madrigal, 2003) and behavioral consequences (Yoshida et al., 2014, 2015). Based on the above discussion, the twenty-seven hypotheses were formulated and empirically tested in this study.

Methodology

Data were collected from 434 participants at the Ako city marathon in Japan. First, core product quality was measured by six items with two underlying factors: "marathon characteristics and programs" and "physical change" based on the Ko and Pastore (2005). Second, service quality was measured using fifteen items to capture the two dimensions of "event staff" and "service environment" adapted from previous literature (Theodorakis et al., 2015; Du et al., 2015). Third, social network quality was measured using five items based on Ellison et al. (2007). Fourth, event experience was composed of two factors: "event satisfaction" and "positive affect," and the items to measure these factors were adapted from previous research (Yoshida & James, 2010; Lacey & Close, 2013). Fifth, two types of event-related identification were operationalized in this study: "event identification" and "event community identification" based on Filo, et al. (2012) and Yoshida et al. (2015). Finally, behavioral consequences included four factors: "performance tolerance," "prosocial behavior," "management cooperation," and "behavioral loyalty" based on previous studies (Yoshida et al., 2014; Yamaguchi et al., 2015).

Results and Discussion

Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach, we first analyzed the measurement model. The CFA result indicated an acceptable fit with the data, with $\chi^2 / df = 2.73$, CFI = .88, and RMSEA = .063. Composite reliability was above the recommended threshold of .60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). With regard to AVE, although two factors, "marathon characteristics and program" and "service environment," were slightly smaller than the recommended standard of .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), the other factors exceeded the .50 cutoff. Overall, the measurement model was in the acceptable range.

The results of SEM revealed an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 / df = 3.43$, CFI = .83, RMSEA = .075). The laying out of marathon characteristics and programs had positive effects on event satisfaction ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$) and positive affect ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$). The results also showed that physical change had an influence on positive affect ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$), but physical change did not affect event satisfaction. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that service environment was found to be an important factor to increase event satisfaction ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$). Additionally, event satisfaction was positively associated with event community identification ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), performance tolerance ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$), and behavioral loyalty ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$). Although positive affect did not influence event satisfaction, it was a significant predictor of event identification ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) and event community identification ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$). Moreover, the effects of event identification on performance tolerance ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$), prosocial behavior ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$), management cooperation ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$), and behavioral loyalty ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) were positive and significant. Finally, event community identification had a strong effect on performance tolerance ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$), prosocial behavior ($\beta = .67$, $p < .001$), management cooperation ($\beta = .60$, $p < .001$), and behavioral loyalty ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$).

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