

The Effects of the Employment Status, Information Presentation, and Willingness to Help of the Service Provider on Perceived Service Quality and Organizational Attributes

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The role of volunteers is indispensable in sport and recreation. Regardless of the level of sports and the size of the organization or event, the involvement of volunteers is extensive. Researchers and practitioners alike have identified various advantages to having volunteers. However, the importance and non-monetary benefits of volunteer service have not been empirically explored while the economic worth of volunteers has often been calculated.

Service quality and the factors influencing sport quality in various areas of the sport industry such as employees, price, facility, concessions, game experience for sport events (e.g., Kelley & Turley, 2001) and program, employees/instructors, outcome, facility for recreational sport (e.g., Ko & Pastore, 2005) have been explored. Specifically, frontline service providers or their services have been pointed out as a significant determinant of service quality. Improving service quality by recruiting quality frontline service providers and training them to provide better customer service is relatively quicker, cheaper, and easier than renovating facilities or changing the core service (e.g., game results, physical improvement after an activity program). Thus, it is necessary to study the relationship of different employment statuses (volunteers or paid employees) and the attitudes of these service providers on perceived service quality and organizational attributes.

Perceived service quality is subjective and determined by the comparison between an individual's normative expectations of service and actual service (e.g., Parasuraman et al., 1988). Thus, individuals may have different expectation of volunteers' service from that of paid employees. Accordingly, their different expectation based on the employee's status may lead to different evaluation of service quality, which can be explained by expectation confirmation theory (Oliver, 1980). Further, positive perceived service quality may link to positive organizational image, which may attract more customers. Further, the customers' experience and evaluation of service may be influenced by two aspects: the technical (or core) performance and the relational (or human contact, functional quality) aspect of service (e.g., Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1996). Thus, both aspects of the service provider's performance (i.e., presence of information and attitude of the service provider) are incorporated in the model.

The purpose of this study was to examine:

- 1) the effect of the Employment Status of the service provider (volunteer vs. paid-employees) on service quality and organizational attributes;
- 2) the effect of Technical Aspects (presence of information vs. lack of information) on service quality and organizational attributes; and
- 3) the effect of the Relational Aspects (willingness to help vs. unwillingness to help) on service quality and organizational attributes

Two dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL; Parasuraman et al., 1998), which are relevant to service providers [Assurance ($\alpha = .89$) and Responsiveness ($\alpha = .87$)] and three organizational attributes including Perceived Organizational Support ($\alpha = .91$), Organizational Image ($\alpha = .93$), and Intention to Attend to a Game ($\alpha = .71$) are included as dependent variables.

The design of this research was a 2 (volunteer/paid-employee) x 2 (presence of information/lack of information) x 2 (willingness to help/unwillingness to help) between-subjects, factorial design. All of proposed eight scenarios, which included a service provider and a customer, lasted less than 2 minutes and were filmed at an actual game. All three factors were manipulated. Technical Aspects (presence of information/lack of information) and Relational Aspects (willingness to help/unwillingness to help) were manipulated by actors acting out different scenarios. Employment Status (volunteer/paid-employee) was manipulated by survey instructions during the experiments (e.g., the service provider in the video is a volunteer/paid-employee). The manipulation of different attitudes (the two different manipulations of Technical Aspects and Relational Aspects) was checked with a pre-test of 50 students. Two scenarios (presence of information x unwillingness to help, for both volunteers and paid-employees) were eliminated from further study due to the failure of proper manipulation. Each of the remaining scenarios (6 scenarios total) were shown to 461 college students (Females = 186, Males = 274, No Answer = 1) at

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a large southern university. After watching the videotape, the participants completed the questionnaire which asked about perceived service quality and organizational attributes.

With the use of the Wilks' criterion, Employment Status [$F(5, 451) = 2.36, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$] and Employee Attitudes [$F(10, 902) = 68.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .43$] were significantly related to the combined dependent variables. Also, the multivariate test indicated a significant interaction [$F(10, 902) = 1.89, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$]. Because only 2% of the variance in the combined dependent variables was explained by the interaction effect and only 3% was explained by the main effect of Employment Status, we focused on the main effect of Employee Attitudes. The univariate test indicated that Employee Attitudes was significantly related to all dependent variables, Assurance [$F(2, 455) = 339.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .60$], Responsiveness [$F(2, 455) = 189.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .45$], Perceived Organizational Support [$F(2, 455) = 317.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .58$], Organizational Image [$F(2, 455) = 451.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .67$], and Intention to Attend to a Game [$F(2, 455) = 7.86, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$]. The adjusted multiple group comparison (Bonferroni) test indicated that Employee Attitude I (presence of information x willingness to help) was significantly different from Employee Attitude II (presence of no information x willingness to help) and Employee Attitude III (presence of no information x unwillingness to help), and Employee Attitude II was significantly different from Employee Attitude III on Assurance. Furthermore, Employee Attitude III was significantly different from Employee Attitude I and II on Responsiveness. Also, Employee Attitude I was significantly different from Employee Attitude II and III, and Employee Attitude II was significantly different from Employee Attitude III on Perceived Organizational Support. Employee Attitude I was significantly different from Employee Attitude II and III, and Employee Attitude II was significantly different from Employee Attitude III on Organizational Image. Finally, Employee Attitude I was significantly different from Employee Attitude III on Intention to Attend to a Game.

Unexpectedly, Employment Status and the interaction term only minimally determined perceived service quality and organizational attributes. Our hypothesis that customers would perceive different levels of service expectation toward volunteers and paid-employees was not supported. Poor attitude (service) of volunteers, as well as that of paid-employees, negatively influenced customers' perceptions toward service quality and organizational attributes. Thus, sport organizations should focus on proper training on service quality for both paid-employees and volunteers. Further, the group comparisons of Employee Attitudes indicated that Relational Aspects (willingness to help/unwillingness to help) was the most critical factor for service quality and organizational attributes. In addition, Intention to Attend to a Game was least influenced by the independent variables. That is, the quality of service influences individuals' intentions to attend to a small degree but the core product (the game) is the main reason that the customers go to a game.