

Service Quality and Satisfaction within Campus Recreation: The Moderating Role of Identification

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Introduction: According to the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA), there are currently 663 institutional members residing on college campuses within the United States. These campus recreation programs offer a varied and broad number of services such as intramurals, special events, tournaments, sports clubs, family activities, open and informal recreation, instructional classes, fitness assessment, outdoor recreation, and personal enhancement programs (Stier, Schneider, Kampf, Haines, & Wilding, 2005; Weese, 1997).

Prior research suggests that participation in recreational sports assists in student recruitment (Latawsky, Schneider, Pederson, & Palmer, 2003), persistence (Astin, 1993), and a sense of community (Dalgarn, 2001; Downs, 2002). In this respect, "establishing membership and a sense of belonging in a community is a critical component of retention" (Wade, 1991). Although there is a lack of empirical evidence related to social identity and campus recreation, anecdotal evidence suggests that many students feel a connection with their on-campus program. According to social identity theory, individuals classify themselves into various social categories or groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

Decision-makers at colleges and universities throughout the country have built recreational sport facilities for their students in an effort to increase enrollment and improve services (Miller, Noland, Rayens, & Staten, 2008). Campus recreation programs are heavily dependent upon their customers who are primarily comprised of students, faculty and staff (Ko & Pastore, 2007). Increasingly, campus recreation directors face the pressures of serving a complex group of students, parents, patrons and donors who are expecting more long-term results for their money (Cooper & Faircloth, 2006). In consideration of these pressures along with the pivotal role of recreation on college campuses, campus recreation managers are continually seeking to enhance and improve the quality of their services (Osman, Cole, & Vessell, 2006).

Theoretical Framework: Service quality has been defined as the "difference between what is expected from each of the service dimensions and what a consumer perceives he or she receives from them" (MacKay & Crompton, 1988). Scholars have argued that service quality contributes to customer satisfaction (Grönroos, 1990; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008), customer loyalty (Kandampully, 1998; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990) and repurchase intention (Fornell, 1992). Service quality in sport has been studied by scholars within the context of health and fitness centers (Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2004; Chelladurai, Scott, & Haywood-Farmer, 1987), sport centers (Kim & Kim, 1998), golf courses (Crilley, Murray, Howat, March, & Adamson, 2002), recreation and leisure facilities (MacKay & Crompton, 1988), spectator sport (Greenwell, Fink, & Pastore, 2002a, 2002b; Kelley & Turley, 2001), and sport tourism (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008; Thwaites, 1999; Thwaites & Chadwick, 2005).

In relation to recreational sport, Ko and Pastore (2004) conceptualized a model of service quality comprised of four dimensions: a) program quality; b) interaction quality; c) outcome quality; and d) environment quality. Osman, Tian-Cole and Vessel (2006) examined the impacts that the ambiance of the campus recreation facility, operations quality and staff competency had on user satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Ko and Pastore (2007) developed a model to assess customer perceptions of service quality and satisfaction in campus recreation programs. Most studies have suggested that service quality is antecedent to satisfaction and behavioral intention (Fornell, 1992). While scholars have examined social identity as it relates to team identification (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002), the role of social identification and its relationship to service quality and satisfaction within campus recreation has not been studied. We hypothesize that identification will moderate the relationship between service quality and satisfaction. Thus, college students who highly identify with their campus recreation facility will report higher levels of satisfaction with their campus recreation program regardless of the level of service.

Methodology: A cross sectional research design will be employed in this study. Data will be collected from a random sample of campus recreational users attending a university within the Middle Atlantic region of the United States. Subjects will be asked to respond to a 40-item questionnaire administered on-line using Qualtrics software. A total of 38 items on the questionnaire stem from a modified version of Ko and Pastore's (2007) Scale of Service Quality in Recreational Sports (SSQRS). The remaining 2 items are drawn from a modified version of Wann and Branscombe's (1990) team identification questionnaire. The items on the questionnaire will be verified by a panel of experts comprised of professors and industry practitioners within campus recreation. Upon revising the questionnaire, the instrument will be field tested by a group of students enrolled in sport management

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courses. The data received from the questionnaires will be subjected to analyses using SPSS and AMOS software for conducting structural equation modeling.

Discussion: The proposed study seeks to further expand the literature by expanding the scope of social identity theory and adding to the body of knowledge within services marketing. The theoretical implications of the study will shed insight into the causal relationship between variables. In particular, findings from the study will reveal the relationship between identification, service quality and satisfaction. From a practical standpoint, the study will help campus recreation managers to identify potential service failure touch points. The study will also assist campus recreation managers in determining the need for marketing efforts which would help to build student identification with the campus recreation program.