

Does Better Service Quality Mean More Fans?: Moderating Role of Relationship Quality on Link between Service Quality and Sport Consumption Behaviors.

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The sports business industry is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the United States. However, at the same time, some critical problems have emerged. Current research emphasized that both professional and collegiate sport organizations should cope with serious problems such as spiraling costs, a saturated market place, economic disconnect, and emergence of new technology (Howard and Crompton, 2005). As a saturated sports market place, success of the sports organization depends on the degree to which the organizations can satisfy their customers with service quality (SQ) (Ko & Pastore, 2004).

Considerable amount of research support that the high quality services is critical to increase customer satisfaction (e.g., Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann 1994; Dagger & Sweeney 2007) and the satisfied customers are more likely to purchase, become more associated with the organization, and do not defect when price increases (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann 1994). Another research area that helps to solve the current sport industry problems is relationship marketing (RM; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 1998). Successful RM improves customer loyalty and firm performance through stronger relational bonds (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder, & Iacobucci 2001). In addition, the organizations make more profit through reducing their customer defection rate (Reicheld & Sasser, 1990).

Among the various issues in RM, this research will focus on relationship quality (after this RQ). Relationship quality defined as an "Overall assessment of the strength of a relationship, conceptualized as a composite or multidimensional construct capturing the different but related facets of a relationship" (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006, p138). The relationship quality concept is an important research topic for following reasons: it can distinguish successful relationships, identify the problems and how those problems should be addressed and key predictor of company performance such as customer loyalty, word of mouth and expectation of continuity (Kim, 2008). Previous studies have found that service quality positively influenced consumer behaviors such as increased probability of purchase (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman., 1996), purchase intentions (Petrick & Backman, 2001), positive word-of-mouth (Petrick & Backman, 2001), customer satisfaction (McDougall, & Levesque, 2000), customer loyalty (Petrick & Backman, 2001), and the realization of a competitive price premium (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Similarly, various studies have shown that successful RQ positively effect on the consumer behavior. Higher level of relationship quality resulted in positive attitude toward brand extension (Park, 2002) and repeat purchase of the products (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997).

In sport management realm, Kim (2008) initially investigated the relationship between RQ and sport consumer behaviors. This research found that RQ significantly affected consumption behaviors, such as intention for attendance, media consumption, and licensed merchandise consumption. This finding was consistent with previous research finding in general marketing research, which typically found that RQ have positive impact on purchase intentions and actual purchase (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006; Fournier, 1994). Although previous research has shown that RQ and SQ are critical drivers of consumer behavior (e.g., Petrick & Backman, 2001; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Fournier, 1994; Park et al., 2002; Kim, 2008). Limited research has investigated how RQ and SQ interact with each other to influence the sport consumption behavior. Customer characteristics (e.g., demographic & situational) have an important effect on the level of consumer behavior (Johnson and Fornell 1991; Mittal and Kamakura 2001). Specifically, there is no research examining moderating role of RQ on the relationship between SQ and sport consumer behaviors. It is easy to see that sport consumers who perceive higher level of RQ are less influenced by SQ in consumption decision than those who perceive lower level of RQ (Kim, 2008). Therefore, we expect that RQ will moderate the relationship between the SQ and various sport consumption behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to empirically test the potential moderating effect of RQ on the relationship between SQ and consumer behaviors in spectator sport context.

Data will be collected from undergraduate and graduate students who attend a women's college basketball game in southeastern United State. Face-to-face self administered survey mode will be used and the cluster sampling method will be used to avoid duplicating respondents. The instrument used in the study will be Scale of Service Quality in Recreational Sport (SSQRS; Ko & Pastore, 2005) and Sport Consumer-Team Relationship Quality scale (Kim, 2008). To test measurement model of RQ and SQ, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) will be conducted. Cronbach's alpha value and average variance extracted will be utilized to ensure the internal consistency and construct reliability respectively. Model fit indices such as RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and SRMR will be used to evaluate overall fit of hypothesized model. Next, simultaneous equations will be analyzed to examine the predictive power of RQ and SQ. Finally, we will test the moderating effect using latent variable scores following Joreskog's (2000) and Schumacker's (2002) analysis protocols. Theoretical and managerial implication will be discussed.