Measuring Spectators' Evaluations of a Sporting Event to Determine Loyalty

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The purpose of the current study was to determine if different evaluative measures (in this case, motivation, importance, transaction satisfaction, quality, value, and word of mouth) form one construct when examining specific areas (in this case, the festival village, music/concerts, and athletes/competition) of an event, or if subjects are able to differentiate between these constructs when examining specific areas of an event. Additional purposes of the study included: to develop a scale for measuring festival attendees' evaluation of the event, and to examine the relationships between these evaluations and attendees' overall satisfaction and loyalty.

While the vast majority of studies have examined the overall (as opposed to individual/transaction level) quality, satisfaction and value of services (Cronin et al., 2000), it has been argued that for festivals, various portions of the events should be evaluated separately (Crompton & Mckay, 1997). Additionally, extremely high correlations have been found between evaluative measures (Cronin et al., 2000), suggesting that they might not always be distinctly different constructs in the minds of respondents. Thus, it might make more sense to treat transaction level measurements as the same construct, while examining different portions of an event (instead of using global measures) the satisfaction. One industry in need of better evaluative measures, and an understanding of customer loyalty is the festival and event industry. With a majority of festival and/or event attendees coming from the local area (Lee, 2004), extending into new markets is quite difficult, making it imperative for festival management to concentrate on customer retention strategies. Thus, the first hypothesis was:
H1: Evaluative items from different domains will load on the event attraction they are describing, and will not load on items from the same domain, evaluating different attractions.

It was also hoped that with the use of chosen items measuring motivation, importance, quality, value, transaction satisfaction, and word of mouth, that a reliable and valid scale for measuring the overall quality of an event could be established, which led the researchers to a second hypothesis:
H2: Evaluative items from different domains (i.e., motivation, importance, quality, value, transaction satisfaction, and word of mouth) can be utilized to create a reliable and valid measure of the quality for the festival village, music/concerts and athletes/competition at an event.

Since, MacKay and Crompton (1988) argue that satisfaction is not a useful exogenous variable, and that satisfaction has been argued to be an excellent global (overall) measure of a service (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), the third hypothesis was:
H3: The construct(s) formed by measuring the motivation, importance, quality, value, transaction satisfaction, and word of mouth items for the festival village, the music/concerts and the athletes/competition, will all be positively and significantly related to overall satisfaction.

Since satisfaction has consistently been shown in the literature to be a good predictor of customer loyalty, the final hypothesis was:
H4: Event attendees overall satisfaction will be positively and significantly related to their loyalty to the event.

Thus the current study postulates that items related to motivation, importance, quality, value, transaction satisfaction, and word of mouth can be used to form a reliable and valid measure of the overall perceived quality of three different aspects of an event; that these evaluations are related to the overall satisfaction with the event; and that the overall satisfaction with the event is related to one's loyalty to the event.

Respondents to the current study (N=359) were attendees at the first event of the Dew Action Sports Tour held in Louisville, Kentucky, which was sponsored by Panasonic. The sample consisted of a predominance of single (57.6%), Caucasian (91.0%) males (63.6%). Members of Generation Y (ages 12 to 24) made up 44% of the sample, which included a majority (54.6%) of persons who had attended at least some college. Respondents' average were 31.7 years old, had a medium household income of $40,000 to $59,999, and traveled (on average), 31.7 miles to attend the event. A questionnaire was constructed based upon a review of relevant literature and research question generation.

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In order to examine the four hypotheses, the analysis of the data was conducted in three steps. First, exploratory factor analysis was conducted in order to determine the structure of the evaluative items (hypothesis 1). Then, the reliability and validity of the resultant factors, and the measures used (including satisfaction and loyalty) were further examined with the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Finally, the rest of the hypotheses were examined with the use of structural equation modeling, to examine the relationships between the resultant evaluation factors, and respondents' overall satisfaction and loyalty to the festival.

Results of the study revealed that evaluation items loaded strongly on the attraction they were measuring instead of on similar items. This finding supports the argument of Crompton and MacKay (1997) who suggested that festivals consist of multiple events, within the main event and these portions should be evaluated separately. It was further found that a reliable and valid scale for measuring festival attendees' evaluations of a festival could be created. The scale should be useful to festival management, as they can learn which items load most saliently on each factor, they can determine which attributes/attractions are most valuable, and they can derive an overall evaluative score for each attraction measured. It was additionally found that the evaluative factors of the three attractions (music and concerts, festival village, and athletes and competition), significantly (p. < .01) predicted the overall satisfaction of visitors, but did not explain a majority of the variance. A final finding of the study is that attendees' overall satisfaction was strongly related with their loyalty to the event. While this finding is consistent with Murray and Howat (2002), and multiple others, and lends credence to striving for satisfied customers. More research is certainly necessary in order to determine all of the derivatives of festival attendees' loyalty.

In conclusion, the current study has methodological (i.e., how to measure evaluative items), theoretical (how attendees’ cognitively view evaluative items) and managerial (i.e., which items are most important) implications. It is hoped that future research can assist in determining a better scale for measuring evaluative items to be included (i.e., by using an exhaustive list and reducing via scientific methods), that future studies assist in better explaining the determinants of festival attendees' satisfaction, and that a more holistic study examining festival attendees' loyalty be conducted.