Assessing Senior Consumers’ Satisfaction with Service Quality of Community Recreation Centers

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Introduction

Retaining customers by improving service quality has been considered as a key factor for successful public recreation service providers (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Among various consumer groups, seniors have been identified as a heavy user group that spend at least 7 hours per week for their leisure time at community recreation centers (Noe & Uysal, 1997). Therefore, it is important for service providers at community recreation centers to understand the consumption behaviors of seniors. Seniors’ satisfaction with service quality, in particular, is critically important for public service providers to develop an effective marketing plan to attract more seniors at community recreation centers. Although considerable body of research in the sport marketing literature has focused on the nature of service quality and its relationship to satisfaction and future intention of customers, there has been limited research regarding seniors and public recreation contexts. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to assess senior users’ satisfaction with service quality of community recreation centers.

Theoretical Framework

Service quality can be defined as a set of tangible and intangible attributes the customer recognize, uses, and experiences (Collier, 1994). Many service factors have been shown to influence the satisfaction that customers experience with a service. However, there has not been much consensus in the literature as to which service factors best explain and predict the satisfaction for recreational users. Although the number of service factors influencing customers’ satisfaction, the proposed theories that have received significant attention in literature can be classified into four general categories: (a) program quality, (b) information quality, (c) facility quality, (d) relational service quality, and (e) value (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Kim, 2004; Ko & Pastore, 2005; Murray & Howat; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008; Yusof, See, & Yusof, 2008). While these studies have helped establish a foundation of service quality, there has not been measurement scale developed to assess senior users’ perception of service quality on their satisfaction level.

Methods

Participants. A total of 242 seniors from 5 different community recreation centers in the Midwest region part of the US participated in the current study. Four different recreational programs (e.g., Yoga, Tai-Chi, Daily exercise, swimming, aerobic, mini-hustle during recreational program hours, etc.) from the five community centers were randomly selected for the study. Questionnaires were distributed in each program and collected before the programs started by ten trained surveyors, including the researcher. Of the 242 participants, females represented 69.8% (n = 169) and males made up 30.2% (n = 73), and the average age of the participants was 65.5 years old. In term of race, the largest sub-groups of the participants were African American (57.4%) and white (41.7%). In addition, more than 80% of the participants have income level between $25,000 and $45,000.

Instrumentation. The instrument developed for this study was a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections; demographic variables and satisfaction with the service quality of community recreation centers. Twenty-four items were categorized into 5 primary dimensions to assess service quality: Facility, service, information, experience, and program. These five dimensions have been used by numerous researchers on service quality related studies (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Kim, 2004; Ko & Pastore, 2005; Murray & Howat; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008; Yusof, See, & Yusof, 2008). A 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly agree) to 6 (Strongly disagree) was used to measure participants’ satisfaction with service quality on. Survey items were drawn from the Scale of Service Quality in Recreational Sport (SSQRS) developed by Ko and Pastore (2005) and Service Tourism Quality (STQ) proposed by Shonk (2008). A global measure of satisfaction was utilized to assess overall satisfaction
level at recreational community centers with 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 6 (Very satisfied). The Cronbach's alpha supported the reliability of all scales ranged from .90 to .95 and moderate correlations were found among the variables.

Data Analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 16.0) was used for analyses. A reliability analysis was conducted to and then the researchers examined descriptive statistics for the service quality subscales and overall satisfaction. A series of multiple regression analyses was employed to predict overall satisfaction level with the five dimensions of service quality. Standard regression coefficients were used to assess the relative degree of impact on the level of sport spectator involvement.

Results

Descriptive statistics revealed that senior users of recreational community centers had a moderately high satisfaction (M = 4.14, SD = .769) level. Specifically, among the five primary dimensions of service quality, the results indicated that the program quality (M = 4.23, SD = .80), such as instructor effectiveness, contents, and organization, was the most influential factor on the satisfaction with service quality of community recreation centers, followed by facility (M = 4.19, SD = .74), intangible service (M = 4.18, SD = .75), experience (M = 4.15, SD = .82), and information (M = 4.10, SD = .80). In order to examine the relationship between the five dimensions and the overall satisfaction, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The result found that the program quality (b = .45, t = 4.62, p < .01) and the intangible service factor (b = .372, t = 3.82, p < .01) had a significant influence on the overall satisfaction level. However, facility (β = .13, t = 1.68, p < .09), service information (β = -.07, t = -.81, p < .42), and experience (β = .04, t = .34, p < .73) had no significant influence on the overall satisfaction level.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the service providers should focus on the quality of programs, such as providing a variety of recreation programs and recruiting high quality instructors, and intangible services, such as courtesy of staff and instructors, to improve the service quality of the community recreation centers for seniors. By doing so, public recreation centers will successfully accomplish their long-term objectives. Thus, it is recommended for directors and marketers of public recreation centers to attempt to identify and establish a profile of their users’ behaviors to effectively communicate with their target market in terms of their needs and wants.