

**The Moderating Effect of Commitment on the Event Quality and Revisit Intention Link: A Comparison Between College Men's and Women's Basketball Events**

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Introduction

College sport is one of the most popular leisure activities in North America. In 2010-11, NCAA Division I revenue was \$845.9 million (NCAA.org.). However, among various NCAA sports, only football and men's basketball made profits, while women's sports could not make a profit. Even one of the most successful women's basketball teams in Division 1-A, the University of Connecticut's Women's basketball team, (which set a college basketball record of 90 consecutive wins and won its third consecutive women's championship), had a \$723,900 deficit in fiscal year 2010 (Eichelberger, 2011). The main reason for the gap between men's and women's sport revenue is a lack of major sponsorship (e.g., television and marketing rights fees). Only men's sports (e.g., football and men's basketball) have broadcasting contracts. The women's sports teams are forced to rely more on in-game income (e.g., ticket sale, concession, merchandised consumption, etc.) because of the lack of major sponsorship revenue.

To help collegiate athletic programs increase their in-game income, this research focused on event quality. Prior research has indicated that event quality is an important factor in overcoming the severe competitive market environment (Kelly & Turley, 2001; Ko & Pastore, 2004; Lee, Kim, Ko, & Sagas, 2010). Prior research suggest that high quality service significantly influences customer satisfaction (Mull, Bayless, & Jamieson, 2005; Dagger & Sweeney, 2007) and customer satisfaction leads to actual consumer behavior (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006).

Although prior research suggested that high levels of service quality and consumer behavior have a positive relationship, recent research reports have claimed that merely providing high quality service to customers is not sufficient to attract customers to sport events (Theodorakis et al., 2009). To make up for current service quality research limitations, this study examined the moderating effects of commitment on the relationship between event quality factors and revisit intention. Prior research has suggested that committed customers are tolerant of service failure (Evanschitzky et al., 2011), maintain relationships (Cook & Emerson, 1978; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ross, James, and Vargas, 2008), and increase future consumption intention (Kim, Trail, & Ko, 2011).

Furthermore, current research also investigated different event quality perceptions between men's and women's college basketball spectators. Kahle, Duncan, Dalakas, and Damon (2001) indicated that men's sports fans and women's sports fans have different social values. According to Kahle et al.'s research, fans of men's sports were highly rated in self-fulfillment, while women's sports fans rated self-respect as their preferred value. Similarly, with Kahle et al.'s research, men's and women's sports fans might have different service quality perceptions. However, limited research has investigated the comparison of event quality perceptions between men's and women's sport fans.

Against this background, the present study is intended to provide academics and practitioners with a better understanding of consumer behavior in the context of spectator sport events by examining (a) the relationship between event quality perception and revisit intentions and (b) the difference in event quality perceptions between a highly committed fans and a less committed general spectators in both men's and women's college basketball events. It is important for managers in college athletics to understand the different perceptions of event quality between men's sport fans and women's sport fans for the development of effective market strategies to increase in-

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game income.

### Method

Data were collected from spectators at a large Southeastern university at two men's collegiate basketball games ( $n = 312$ ) and two women's collegiate basketball games ( $n = 282$ ). To measure spectator's event quality perceptions and revisit intentions, the researchers modified and used four factors (game performance, in-game entertainment, staff quality, and physical surrounding) from Ko, Zhang, Cattani and Pastore's (2011) Scale of Event Quality for Spectator Sport (SEQSS), Mahony et al.'s (2000) Psychological Commitment to Team (PCT) scale, and Fink, Trail, and Anderson's (2002) revisit intention items.

### Results

Reliability tests and a confirmatory factor analysis were performed to establish the reliability and validity of the measurement scale. The measurement model yielded an acceptable model fit ( $\chi^2 = 363.90$ ,  $df = 142$ ;  $RMSEA = .075$ ;  $SRMR = .04$ ;  $CFI = .96$ ). Cronbach's alpha estimates ranged from .87 (women's basketball; in-game entertainment) to .98 (women's basketball; re-visit intention).

To formally test if there was a significant structural difference of service perceptions between highly committed fans and general spectators on both collegiate women's and men's basketball spectators, multi-group SEM was conducted using AMOS 18.0. In men's basketball, both highly committed fans and general spectators were significantly influenced by game performance (men's:  $\beta = .28$ ; women's:  $\beta = .70$ ) and staff quality (men's:  $\beta = .09$ ; women's:  $\beta = .24$ ). On the other hand, in women's basketball, highly committed fans were only significantly influenced by game performance ( $\beta = .41$ ), while general spectators were affected by in-game entertainment ( $\beta = .43$ ), staff quality ( $\beta = .24$ ), and physical surrounding ( $\beta = .06$ ).

Among the four event quality factors, game performance ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $p < .01$ ), in-game entertainment ( $\beta = .34$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and staff quality ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) significantly and positively influenced customers' revisit intentions. Current research findings were consistent with prior research regarding the effects of the core service (McDougall & Levesque, 2000). However, the actual outcome of a sport event is not under the control of marketers (Mullinn, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). Therefore, sport event managers need to focus more on the other event quality factors (i.e., in-game entertainment, staff quality). In addition, the physical surrounding did not significantly influence consumers in the current research. This result might due to the uniqueness of college sport (i.e. inexpensive overall price and familiar facility).

### Implications

We believe that this research will contribute to the sport marketing literature by enhancing a deeper understanding of spectators in college sport events. Additionally, the findings of this study can be used as empirical data for market segmentation in both collegiate men's and women's spectator sport and for developing customized event marketing strategies.