Service Quality, Perceived Value, Satisfaction, and Intention for Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Among Spectators in Motor Boat Racing

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Living different types of lifestyles has escalated people’s desire to see and experience a similar diversity in the sports they consume (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). Motor boat racing is one of the modern sports that have been introduced to sports viewers through this diversification of interest in sports. However, while participation in leisure sports has generally been increasing over the years, the number of boating participants has decreased from 31.9 million in 2007 to 17 million in 2012 in the United States (US) (SBRnet, 2013).

Regardless of increasing interest in this context, no research study has examined the relationship between service quality and other psychological factors such as perceived value and customer satisfaction in the context of motor boating racing. Consequently, no research is available relative to the importance of the operational environments of motor boating racing. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and intention for word-of-mouth among spectators of motorboat racing.

Specific objectives of the current study were fourfold: (a) to examine the service quality of motor boat racing and perceived value; (b) to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction; (c) to examine the relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction; and (d) to examine the relationship between customer satisfaction and intention for word-of-mouth.

Service quality is recognized as one of the primary topics in service management and marketing (Gronroos, 1984). It provides a critical background and additional clues for a customer-oriented marketing strategy in the business of sport (Lee et al., 2011; Shilbury, Quick, & Westerbeck, 2009). The literature in service quality suggests that because spectators’ expectation in service quality generally has increased, entrepreneurs in recreation sports like motorboat racing would need to find a competitive edge for providing high service quality to consumers to meet their needs (Lee, 2000; Peng & Wang, 2006). Likewise, analyzing components that consist of service quality is important for companies to establish positive relationships with customers (Carlson & O’Cass, 2010; Cook & Thompson, 2000). In today’s society, service demands have come to be specialized and tailored especially for their consumers. Such methods distinctly appear in the sports areas where service quality management has actively been introduced and promoted (Papadimitriou & Karteroliotis, 2000). Recently, in the sport context, Moon et al. (2013) conducted a study on the theoretical relationships among service quality, perceived value, destination image, and behavioral intention associated with sporting events. They found that service quality had a positive influence on perceived value. Howat and Assaker (2013) also found that perceived quality had a positive influence on perceived value among the users of public aquatic centers.

Using convenience sampling, a questionnaire was distributed to individuals who were either in attendance or had previously attended a motor boat racing event in Korea. After a draft of the questionnaire was developed, a pilot test was conducted to assess discriminant validity and reliability of the scale. After examining the desired psychometric properties of the questionnaire, data collection was conducted. A total of 462 usable surveys were collected. The survey questions were derived from Bitner (1990), Grönroos (1993), and Brady and Cronin (2001) and consisted of 13 items related to service quality. They measured the following: five questions in the environment area, four questions in the technique area, and four questions in the function area. To measure perceived value, three questions were modified from Sweeney and Soutar’s questionnaire (2001). Three items were modified from Oliver (1980) to measure satisfaction and four word-of-mouth (WOM) items were adapted from Zeithaml et al. (2003). All of the questions about service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction used a five-point Likert-type scale from (1) ‘rarely likely’ to (5) ‘highly likely’ except for the questions on satisfaction.
Descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were performed using SPSS 19.0 to identify the underlying structure of the overall items used in this study. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model and the SEM was used to examine structural relationships among the variables to test the research hypothesis once the validity of the measurement model was confirmed by the CFA with the MPLUS 6.11 program.

From the EFA, six factors were retained with a total of 23 items: three factors related to service quality, one factor related to perceived value, one factor related to customer satisfaction, and one factor related to word-of-mouth. After conducting the CFA analysis on the model suggested by the EFA, the model suitability indexes were obtained as follows: Chi-square per degrees of freedom = 2.81, CFI = .902, RMSEA = .063, SRMR = .061, and TLI = .889. With respect to the structural relationships, path coefficients were examined among the service quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and WOM. All of the direct and indirect paths were statistically significant (P < .05). The service quality had positive effects on perceived value (β = .65, p < .01) and satisfaction (β = .83, p < .01). Therefore, H1-2 were supported. Perceived value had positive effects on customer satisfaction (β = .39, p < .01), indicating that H3 was supported. The path from customer satisfaction to intention for WOM was positively and statistically significant (β = .41, p < .01), indicating that H4 was supported.

The current study examined the structural relationships among service quality, perceived service quality, satisfaction, and spectators' intention for word-of-mouth in the context of motor boat racing. The empirical examination of the proposed variables provides some insights for practitioners to establish an operational plan and marketing strategy for motor boat racing spectators. Comparable to the literature, statistically significant relationships were consistently found among the perceived service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and motor boat racing spectators’ intention for word-of-mouth use. It is also worth noting that provided service quality had a bigger influence on customer satisfaction mediated by perceived service quality. This result suggests that it is necessary to make additional efforts to enhance the motor boat racing spectator's perceived service quality. These efforts should also be used as a strategy to achieve word-of-mouth advertising through enhanced customer satisfaction. Participation and spectatorship in recreation sports including motor boat racing is growing in countries like Korea despite research in this field being very limited. More research is necessary in this area in order for both researchers and practitioners to generalize findings on service quality, perceived value, satisfaction and word-of-mouth from American literature in other sports to different contextual venues in other countries such as motor boating in Korea.