Examining Service Quality in Spectator Sport: A Cross-Cultural Study

Rui Biscaia, Universidade Europeia, Lisboa: CIPER, Universidade de Lisboa
Masayuki Yoshida, Biwako Seiki Sport College

Marketing

Thursday, June 4, 2015
8:30 AM

Abstract 2015-007

Providing high-quality services is paramount for sport clubs in order to build competitive advantages and to potenti...e of .64) and crowd experience.

This study was conducted in professional soccer settings in Japan and Portugal. The 31-item scale developed by Yoshida and James (2011) was used to assess service quality. This scale includes the constructs of player performance, opponent characteristics, frontline employees, facility access, seat space, game atmosphere, and crowd experience. Also, the 31-item scale proposed by Yoshida and James (2010) to assess behavioral intentions was used in order to examine nomological validity. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree, to 7=Strongly Agree). The first data collection was conducted in Japan. Data were collected from spectators attending a Division I game of the Japan Professional Football League. Questionnaires were randomly distributed in the stadium stands before the game started. Surveyors approached the potential respondents, explained the project, and asked for their participation. Of the 500 questionnaires distributed, a total of 489 surveys were collected. After data screening, 447 complete responses were deemed usable for data analysis. The second data collection was then carried out in Portugal. For the Portuguese sample, data were collected from spectators attending a soccer game from the first league and the procedures of data collection were the same as the first data collection. A total of 598 surveys were collected and, after data screening, 423 surveys were considered for data analysis. Data from both the Japanese and Portuguese samples were analyzed using AMOS 21.0. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the measurement model, and structural model estimation was performed to test the relationship between service quality dimensions and behavioral intentions.

The CFA results for the Japanese sample showed that the factor loadings of three items failed to exceed the cut-off point of .50 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009), and as such, were eliminated. Complementarily, the items loading the highest for each construct were selected to ensure reliability and parsimony of the model (Gladden & Funk, 2002) for the second data collection. After these scale refinement, the final model showed an acceptable fit to the data \( \chi^2(181)=513.99 \) (p<.01), \( \chi^2/df=2.84 \), CFI=.96, GFI=.90, TLI=.95, RMSEA=.06. The construct reliability values for all constructs were above the cut-off point of .60 (Baggozi & Yi, 1988), while the AVE values were greater than .50, and thus providing evidence of convergent validity. Evidence of discriminant validity was accepted given that the AVE value for each construct was greater than the squared correlations between that construct and any other (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The structural model also showed an acceptable fit to the data \( \chi^2(181)=513.99 \) (p<.01), \( \chi^2/df=2.84 \), CFI=.96, GFI=.90, TLI=.95, RMSEA=.06. The results indicated that player performance (\( \beta=.14, p<.05 \)), crowd experience (\( \beta=.28, p<.01 \)) and game atmosphere (\( \beta=.26, p<.01 \)) had significant positive effect on behavioral intentions. In the Portuguese context, the CFA results showed an acceptable fit to the data \( \chi^2(181)=359.63 \) (p<.01), \( \chi^2/df=1.99 \), CFI=.96, GFI=.93, TLI=.95, RMSEA=.05. The construct reliability and AVE values were above .60 and .50, respectively. With exception to game atmosphere (AVE=.64) and crowd experience.
(AVE=.52), the AVE values for the other constructs were greater than the squared correlations between these constructs and any other. Still, the correlation coefficient between game atmosphere and crowd experience (.76) was lower than the suggested criterion of .85 (Kline, 2005). Also, although the squared multiple correlation between game atmosphere and crowd experience (r=.57) was slightly higher than the AVE value of crowd experience (AVE=.52), additional support for discriminant validity was established by comparing the chi-square statistics when the correlation between the two constructs was free versus constrained to one (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). There was a statistically significant decrease in the chi-square value when the correlation was free ($\Delta \chi^2 = 130.04$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p<.01$). Thus, these tests provide evidence of discriminant validity. In order to test nomological validity, the structural model was examined. The results showed an acceptable fit to the data $[\chi^2(181)=359.63$ (p<.01)], $\chi^2$/df=1.99, CFI=.96, GFI=.93, TLI=.95, RMSEA=.05] and indicated that player performance ($\beta=.24$, p<.01) and crowd experience ($\beta=.46$, p<.01) were positive predictors of behavioral intentions. The service quality variables accounted for approximately 35% (R2=.35) and 42% (R2=.42) of the variance in behavioral intentions for the Japanese and Portuguese samples, respectively.

The findings provide initial support for the idea that Yoshida and James' (2011) model is appropriate to assess service quality in different spectator sport scenarios, while also suggesting that this model provides important insights for both scholars and practitioners managing service quality in spectator sport. From a managerial standpoint, even though the technical aspects of service (i.e. player performance and opponent characteristics) are not under the control of managers, a joint work to create measures favoring competitive balance may represent a vital issue to improve spectators' perceptions of the core sport product and the leagues' attractiveness (Koenigstorfer, Groeppel-Klein, & Kunkel, 2010). Also, the positive effect of player performance on behavioral intentions is in line with the idea that clubs should instill in their players a sense of honoring the team’s shirt in every game (Biscaia et al., 2013). In addition, this study highlighted the importance of the controllable dimensions of quality such as the functional (frontline employees, facility access and seat space) and aesthetic elements (game atmosphere and crowd experience) as these dimensions help managers enhance service quality at sporting events (Yoshida, James, & Cronin, 2013). For example, providing regular training to the staff members, ensuring good maintenance of the signs inside the stadium and in the surroundings, designing shuttle services to avoid difficulties related with traffic near the stadium and access to parks may represent important measures to improve spectators' perceptions of service quality. Also, the observed predictive effect of game atmosphere and/or crowd experience is consistent across Japan and Portugal and with previous studies suggesting that the creation of a positive ambiance inside the stadium is pivotal to trigger fans' favorable response towards their teams (Biscaia et al., 2013). Thus, managerial actions such as adding decorations related with the team and its achievements in the past, and interacting with the fans who promote supportive chants for the team will be effective in improving service quality in both Japan and Portugal. This study represents an initial step to understand cross validation of a service quality model, and provide numerous opportunities to continue advancing our knowledge of how to improve sport spectators’ perceptions of the quality of the service provided by their teams.