Assessing Spectator Perceptions of Service Quality at a Medium-Sized International Sporting Event

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Considerable investment has been poured into promoting sporting events by federal, state and local authorities. In particular, many cities and nations have interests in hosting international sport events (Moon, et al., 2011) whether as a way to attract tourists and thus boost the local economy (Getz, 1998; Smith, 2005) or just to enhance the image of the destination (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003; Green, Costa, & Fitzgerald, 2003). While much of the literature on sporting events has focused on examining the impact mega events bring to the immediate community (DongFeng & Wilson, 2014; Kaplanidou, et al., 2013), less attention has been given to understanding the processes and outcomes of mid-sized sporting events. Taks et al. (2011) suggest that medium size events can benefit the local community and are less likely than mega-events to impact exchange rates and/or other import and export competing industries. These types of events are also less likely to induce a crowding out effect and carry fewer security costs.

Today, sport consumers have high expectations regarding the quality of events and quality service is critical for sport organizations to remain sustainable. Event quality has been investigated in sport related to small-scale outdoor sport events (Tzetis, Alexandris, & Kapsampeli, 2014), high school football (Byon, Ziemnik, Lam, & Zhang, 2011), men’s and women’s basketball games (Kim, Ko, & Park, 2013), fishing experiences (Pierskalla, Ramthun, Collins, & Semmens, 2013), taekwondo (Ko, Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2010), price tiers within the sport industry (Reese & Kerr, 2013), and professional soccer in Iran (Foroughi, Anuar, & SungHyup, 2014). While studies have focused on international sporting events, mega-events, and service quality, little research has focused on studying the quality of medium-sized international sporting events.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to assess the spectator perceptions of quality and satisfaction of a medium-sized international sporting event. A secondary purpose of the study is to modify and refine the existing Scale of Event Quality for Spectator Sports (SEQSS) as developed by Ko et al. (2011). This study also aims to further extend the work of Ko et al. (2011) by examining additional service touch points and incorporating satisfaction and intent to return as part of its empirical analysis.

Methods
An adapted version of the SEQSS as proposed by Ko et al. (2011) was administered to spectators attending the 2014 ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships at Deep Creek in Western Maryland. This was a four-day mid-sized event with average attendance of about 8,000 spectators. The SEQSS measured service quality within Major League Baseball by five dimensions of game, augment service, interaction, outcome, and environment, and each dimension was measured by two to three sub-dimensions. The modified questionnaire included SEQSS’s sub-dimensions and additional service point dimensions (parking and process) recommended by a panel of experts along with demographic information. The researchers for this study set-up a tent at the World Championships and collected data from participants during the course of the four-day event. In this respect, subjects were recruited using a mall intercept or street intercept method (Gates & Solomon, 1982; Miller, Wilder, Stillman, & Becker, 1997). Permission to collect data for the study was obtained from the Deep Creek 2014 Organizing Committee and incentives were provided to attract respondents.

Results
Data was collected from 420 spectators who attended the event. After deleting 31 incomplete surveys, 389 usable surveys remained for data analysis. The average age of respondents was 47.59 with an almost equal number of female
Reliability tests were conducted with dimensions of SEQSS. The results of Cronbach’s alpha showed that three existing dimensions of ‘operating times’ (α=.44), ‘entertainment’ (α=.37), and ‘design’ (α=.63), and one new dimension of ‘process’ (α=.53) did not meet the minimum criteria of .70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Therefore, these dimensions were eliminated from further analysis. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using MPlus 7.2 to test the SEQSS model with a total of 10 sub-dimensions. Results from CFA showed the chi-square test was significant ($\chi^2=597.46$, df =260, p<.01), but Kline (2002) stated that the chi-square test is very sensitive to large sample sizes (Kline, 1998). Therefore, other fit indices were examined and they indicated that the measurement model was acceptable to the data: chi-square/df= 2.30, CFI =.93, SRMR = .051, and RMSEA=.058 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 1998). Except for “sociability 3 = .65”, “valence3=.62”, and “ambience3 = .61”, the other 22 items made the conservative threshold of .70. However, one of the five dimensions of service quality, ‘game’, explained by ‘skill (.48)’ and ‘information (.43)’ showed low loadings. Furthermore, a structural model was tested where service quality leads to respondents’ satisfaction, which further influences intention to return. The overall model fit was acceptable with the data (chi-square/df= 2.63, CFI=.91, NNFI=.91, SRMR = .062, and RMSEA=.065).

Discussion
At the time of submission, this study was still in progress. Our initial findings suggest there are substantive differences between the quality dimensions within Ko et al.’s. (2011) SEQSS pertaining to a professional sporting event in comparison to a medium-sized canoe slalom world championship event. In particular, the results of the measurement model showed that the factor loadings for ‘game’ were low for this event. This might suggest that some scale modifications are needed for this type of event or indicate that the importance of dimensions differs for service quality depending upon the type of event. Specifically, it may suggest that dimensions related to the “game” such as skill performance, operating time and information are less important within the context of this medium sized event in comparison to a professional sporting event.