The Influence of Customer Participation on Customer Satisfaction in the Sport Service Encounter: A Mediating Effect of Perceived Staff Competence

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A goal for customer and staff in the sport service encounter is interaction between two parties in order to create the mutual value rather than one-sided service sales (Shin & Choi, 2006). Because service encounter is a “dyadic interaction between service provider and customer” (Suprenant & Solomon, 1987) the satisfaction at the sport service encounter is highly depending on human resources; staff and customer (Joo, Kang & Jung, 2013). In this concept, sport customer can be not just a consumer who simply use the service, but also be the partial employee who complete the service by participating the service process to choose the preference in order to fulfill own interests (Namasivayam, 2003).

Customer participation can be viewed as a customer’s behavior to provide physical, psychological and emotional resources and information in the service process (Rodie & Klein, 2000). Customer participation is a significant factor to manipulate the level of staff competency (Mohr & Bitner, 1995; Jeong, 2006). In addition, customers participating in the service encounter are likely to increase satisfaction throughout the service in general compared to non-participating customers (Cemak & File, 1994, Seo & Ahn, 2008). Nonetheless, there are few studies on which characteristics of the customer participation affect the ability of staffs and customer satisfaction (Eum & Kim, 2004). Although Seo and Ahn (2008) proposed the four dimensions of the customer participation; active effort, communication effort, sympathy effort, and compliance effort, no study has been conducted to examine the impact of each dimension on both the behavior of staff and the quality of service encounter.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine the role of each dimension of customer participation toward the perceived staff competence and customer satisfaction within a service encounter model. Based on above discussion, the objectives of this study were to: (a) investigate the impact of each characteristic of customer participation on the perceived staff competence on the sport service encounter, (b) empirically examine the link between perceived staff competence and customer satisfaction and (c) analyze the mediating effect of perceived staff competence between customer participation and customer satisfaction.

This study was conducted in the context of sport service encounter and the target population for the study was individuals who were taking the personal training (PT) service at a fitness center because this service has been acknowledged as a good example of sport service due to the nature of relationship between fitness trainer and customer. Online survey method was employed to collect the data. A total of 281 individuals participated in the study. Measures for Activity Effort (3 items), Communication Effort (4 items), Sympathy Effort (4 items) and Communication Effort (4 items) from Seo and Ahn (2008), Choi (2010) were used. To measure Perceived Staff Competence, 6 items taken from Doney and Cannon (1997) and Choi (2012) were modified for the purpose of the study and used. To measure the Customer Satisfaction, 2 items from Ramsey and Sohi (1997) and 2 items from Jung (2006) were modified and used.

CFA was performed using the AMOS 21.0 and the model fit the data very well ($\chi^2$/df = 386.86/194 = 1.99, p<.001, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .96, SRMR = .04). The measurement scales showed adequate psychometric properties as indicated by all significant factor loadings in the predicted direction (p < .05), AVE values ranging from .48 for Activity Effort to .76 for Customer Satisfaction and reliability coefficients ranging from .73 for Activity Effort to .93 for Customer Satisfaction. In addition, difference between $\chi^2$ value of constraint model and unconstraint model exceeds 3.84 supporting the threshold for discriminant validity (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). After CFA was conducted, the structural equation model (SEM) analysis were applied to test the research hypotheses. The structural
The proposed research model in this study presents a theoretically and empirically adequate analysis of customer participation in the context of sport services. The results provide empirical support for service encounter that customer participation has a significant impact on the service provider’s ability compared to other factors due to its dyadic interaction (Yoon, Seo & Yoon, 2004). Individuals who are actively and sympathetically participating in the service encounter are likely to perceive higher staff competence. Moreover, the result supports our proposition that sport consumers who have higher level of participation in the service process would have a greater chance to be satisfied with the service they are involved with.

This study contributes to the cumulative knowledge in the sport management and service marketing. First, this study enriches sport management literature by examining the impact of customer participation on the service provider’s competence. Second, this study augments four dimensions of customer participation play different roles within the context of service encounter. Third, this study suggests the influence of attribute customer participation might be differed by the feature of service point of contact. Fourth, this study has its significance that it provides evidence for influence of customer participation on the staff competence simultaneously in a single model.

From a practical perspective, by identifying the key dimensions of customer participation involving with perceiving staff competence, the research provides a strategic idea for sport service organization. Also, this study has its meaning by showing the interpersonal attributes among the sport service point of contact customer participation, so in that way it can support the importance of psychological components that ensures the reciprocal action between the customer and the employee.