Service Quality and Its Consequences: An Integrative Review and Analysis of the Literature in Spectator Sports

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Relevance of the topic to sport management
Service quality is among the most researched concepts in the sport management literature due to its role for creating competitive advantages in the marketplace (Ko, Zhang, Cattani, & Pastore, 2011). The delivery of high service quality is a focal point in spectator sports, because consumers’ judgments of service delivery influence perceived value (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000), satisfaction and behavioral intentions towards the sport organization (Yoshida & James, 2010). However, although there is a general agreement that service quality has a multidimensional nature, its conceptualization has not been unanimous among researchers. In addition, there are contradictory results related to the role of each service quality dimension on perceived value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. For example, Cronin et al. (2000) argued that overall service quality is an antecedent of perceived value, but Yoshida, James and Cronin (2013) reported that not all service quality dimensions predict perceived value. Theodorakis and Alexandris (2008) observed that security was not linked to spectators’ behavioral intentions, while Biscaia, Correia, Yoshida, Rosado and Marôco et al. (2013) reported this attribute was an important predictor. In another example, Biscaia et al. (2013) did not observe a significant relationship between stadium employees and satisfaction, but Yoshida and James (2010) found a predictive effect of stadium employees on service satisfaction. All these relationships rise from different conceptualizations of service quality and provide ambiguous conclusion regarding the role of service quality in spectator sports. To address this gap, it is vital to integrate the knowledge across individual studies to better understanding the relationships between these variables. Thus, the purpose of the current study is to provide a systematic review of the research about service quality, value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions in spectator sports.

Review of relevant literature
Service quality can be defined as an attitude or global judgment about the superiority of a service (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). A variety of service quality scales have been proposed in spectator sports. For example, Theodorakis and Alexandris (2008) developed the SPORTSERV including five attributes (tangibles, responsiveness, access, reliability, and security) focused on the peripheral attributes of service delivery. This scale was then refined by Theodorakis, Tsigilis and Karvounis (2013) through the inclusion of attributes to better capture the core product quality. Building on Brady and Cronin (2001), and recognizing that aesthetic elements play a key role in sport events, Yoshida and James (2011) proposed and empirically tested a model of service quality with the aesthetic, functional and technical dimensions that has been used in subsequent studies (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2013).

Perceived value. Perceived value is generally defined as the ratio of perceived benefits (e.g., price, time and/or effort) to perceived sacrifices (service quality and customer tastes) (Teas & Argawal, 2000). Yoshida et al. (2013) further refer that consumers’ value assessments should consider the emotional, social, and utilitarian benefits of the sporting event. From a managerial perspective, the measurement of perceived value is important as it contributes to understand how to promote long-term relationships with consumers (Clemes, Gan, & Ren, 2011).

Satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction is experiential and has been described as a summary of cognitive and affective reactions about service encounters (Martin, O’Neill, Hubbard, & Palmer, 2008). Jones and Suh (2000) refer that satisfaction can be measured either as a transaction-specific (e.g., game) or an overall level (e.g., cumulative games during the season). In spectator sports, Yoshida and James (2010) highlight the need to differentiate between service satisfaction and game satisfaction. Regardless of the approach, there is a general agreement that satisfaction is a key
aspect to understand spectators’ behavioral intentions towards the teams (Biscaia et al., 2013).

Behavioral intentions. As noted by Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996), behavioral intentions can represent either favorable (e.g., positive word-of-mouth, loyalty to company or willingness to pay more) or unfavorable outcomes for an organization (e.g., negative word-of-mouth, propensity to switch to competitors or decrease the amount of business to the company). In spectator sports, the assessment of behavioral intentions has been mainly focused on the positive outcomes. It often represents spectators’ intentions to attend future games, recommend them to others, and purchase team products and services, being suggested as a criterion to understand the success of sport organizations (Yoshida & James, 2010).

Conceptual framework
On the basis of the current on-going literature search, service quality is conceptualized into core product quality, functional quality and aesthetic quality. Core product quality is defined as a consumer’s judgement about the overall excellence or superiority of sport-related attributes (Yoshida, 2017), while functional quality refers to a consumer’s perception of the overall excellence or superiority of the interactions between the consumer, frontline employees, and facility functions (Yoshida & James, 2011). In turn, aesthetic quality is related to a consumer’s perception of the hedonic attributes of a service environment, ancillary services, and promotional activities (Yoshida & James, 2011). The outcomes of service quality in this proposed framework include perceived value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Perceived value is defined as a consumer’s assessment of a product based on the trade-off between what is received and what is given up (Zeithaml, 1988). Satisfaction is measured through an overall perspective and refers to a consumer’s pleasurable, fulfillment response to the entertainment of sport competition and ancillary services provided at sporting events (Yoshida & James, 2010). Finally, behavioral intentions are manifested by the willingness to perform a diverse set of behaviors and are defined as a consumer’s favorable intentions to recommend the team to others, attend the team’s future sporting events, and remain loyal to the team (Cronin et al. 2000; Yoshida & James, 2010).

Implications
Previous studies have used different conceptualizations of service quality in spectator sports and presented contradictory evidence about its predictive role on perceived value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Due to the extant research exhibiting mixed results, and the increased competitiveness in the sport marketplace for consumers, a framework allowing a subsequent meta-analysis of the relationships between service quality, value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions represents an important step to guide researchers and managers’ actions. A good impression caused by a sporting event can determine the intention to continue supporting the team in the future (Yoshida et al., 2013). Thus, understanding the dimensionality of service quality in spectator sports and the associated outcomes is vital for sport managers in attracting new consumers and nurture relationships with existing ones. The core product quality, functional quality and aesthetic quality dimensions have been suggested to provide a good basis for understanding service quality in spectator sports (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2013; Santos et al., 2016; Yoshida, 2017; Yoshida & James, 2011), and testing their predictive effects is of paramount importance for researchers and managers. This study represents an initial step towards a clarification of the relationships between service quality dimensions, perceived value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions in spectator sports.