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A study of the relationship between the quality of services and customers' satisfaction with the recreational sport programs with regard to the moderating role of identity

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, recreational sport courses in the universities form an important element in providing the students with sport services. The quality of such services can leave a telling effect on the social and personal life of the students and their spare time, too. The present study aims at highlighting the relationship between the quality of providing such services and students' satisfaction with recreational sport courses with regard to the moderating role of identity in Islamic Azad University, Iran. Accordingly, 800 selected students from Islamic Azad University voluntarily responded to the questionnaire of Scale of Service Quality in Recreational Sports [SSQRS]. Findings of Pearson Correlation Factor test and Z showed that when added to the quality of service provision, Identity had a meaningfully interactive effect [$P < 0.005$], so that a higher identity feels more satisfaction. When added to the quality of interaction, too, identity had a meaningful effect [$P < 0.005$], so that a higher identity gains more satisfaction, and finally when we add it to the quality of result, identity produces a meaningfully interactive effect [$P < 0.005$], so that a higher identity feels satisfaction. Generally, our final results prove that identity has a meaningfully moderating role in the relations between the quality of provided services, the quality of result, the quality of interaction and the felt satisfaction.

Key Words: The quality of services, satisfaction, identity, recreational sports.

INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, many universities throughout the world have spent large sums of money on building new recreational sport complexes or expanding their older ones. Washington State University, for instance, has devoted a land of about 14875 m. building a recreational center for the students, spending a sum of 39 million dollars. National Intramural Recreational Sport Association [NIRSA], which is a non-state institution, has 740 institutes as its members which together provide 94 percent of recreational sport programs for the universities [1]. Nowadays, recreational sport programs are an integral part of the sport services provided for the students. Therefore, the quality of such services can certainly have great effects on the personal and social lives of the students and their spare time [2]. Intramural recreational sport courses are the base of significant experiences in the life of the students. The effects of such extra-curriculum activities on the total experiences of students have been extensively approved of [3]. Regarding the university spare time also, it is for a long time that experts have rightly approved of the positive profits that students may get out of attending recreational sport courses. It is suggested that taking part in such intramural recreational sport activities plays an important role in the students' evolution toward success [4].

Based on reports released from NIRSA, participation in recreational sport programs can result in keeping students' sense of integrity and making for a feeling of cooperation and collaboration in them. It also helps create a sense of group belonging as a major factor in keeping the students active, as they can make, through such activities, a relationship with the campus life and activities, because based on Social Identity Theory, people tend to place themselves into different social classes [5].

As the quality of recreational sport services can surely have great effects on the social and personal life of the students and their spare time activities, this variable has, through the years, undergone different definitions while there is not yet a general consensus concerning its definitions and implications. The quality of provided services, for example, has been defined as the difference between what one may first expect of different aspects of services and what a he/she actually gains from them [6]. The most usual definition of quality, however, is based on a traditional concept according to which quality is a customer's perception of the superiority of a service. That is to say, quality is the knowledge that a customer gains by using a service. This definition is based on the presupposition that a customer perceives of a service's quality based on the realized function of that service and also their past experiences of its consumption. Therefore, the quality of services is sorted and determined based on customer's appreciation [7].

Ko and Pastor [2007] have provided a model for evaluating the perceptions of a user of a service's quality and satisfaction with the recreational sport programs and spare time activities. This model consists of four aspects: quality of the program, quality of interaction, quality of result and that of environment. Quality of the program: refers to a range of plans, time of their function and the relevant ease of accessing information related to them. Quality of interaction: is about the mutual relation of clerk-customer and the process of providing the services. Quality of result: refers to any physical change experienced by the users of a service, the positive social experiences which they gain after using the provided services, and their evaluation of whether the services have been good or not. Quality of the environment; refers to the dominant mood, design of the buildings and the available equipment.

Many of the related studies generally suggest that quality of the services is in fact a prediction of customers' satisfaction and their behavioral intentions [8]. Cornin et. al [2000] have considered satisfaction as connection between the quality of services and behavioral intentions. Gilbert et. al [2006], conducting a research for studying and determining the effects of sport services and facilities in dormitories, used the Quality and Importance of Recreational Services [QIRS] questionnaire to be filled by 179 volunteer students. Having gathered the data, they then concluded that such variables as services, program, facilities, recreational sport experiences, and availability of equipment all had positive effects in creating a sense of satisfaction in the users. Tae Wook Chung [2006] in his Ph D thesis, "The Moderating Role of Social Interactions in the Relationship between the Perceived Quality of Services, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Citizenship Behavior", among the participants of intramural recreational sports, arrived at the following concluding points: such factors as quality of the service, clerk-customer interaction, value and worth, friendliness and sociability, environmental conditions, understanding and appreciation all together can be used for predicting the total quality of the services. Moreover, both the perceived quality of the services and the customers' satisfaction can, in general sense, predict the customer citizenship behavior. Also, while the felt quality of services has positive effects on customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction has both positive and negative effects on the felt quality of the services. The moderating role of interaction is also tangibly seen in the relationship between the total appreciation of quality and customer's total satisfaction.

Based on Social Identity Theory, people tend to place themselves into different social classes such as religious sects, various gender and age groups, organizations membership, and representative classes [9]. Ashforth & Mael [1989] state that these social classifications allow the individual to have a means for defining others and also helps him/her to place and define him/herself in accord with the social milieu. Social Identity Theory also believes that when a person's identity is threatened, he/she gives powerfully defensive responses to that threat based on his/her identity. [10] Shank & Wallacecarr [2009] have recently conducted a study on the quality of services in free time sport activities in universities and students' satisfaction with them, considering the moderating role of identity. A regression analysis of the findings well indicates that when we add it to the quality of result, identity produces a meaningfully interactive effect ($P < 0.005$), so that a higher identity feels satisfaction. It also has a meaningfully interactive effect ($P < 0.005$) on quality of the program, so that a high identity gains low satisfaction. There is not, however, any meaningful relation between identity and quality of interaction, or quality of physical environment. According to Aguinis (2004) the range of R^2 is statistically meaningful between 0.01 to 0.02, the addition of identity,

however, causes the range of R^2 to extend to 0.21 for the quality of result and 0.005 for quality of the program. Generally speaking, that is, the moderating role of identity explains satisfaction 2.1 and 0.5 percent higher than the distribution of satisfaction explained by the quality of result, and program, respectively.

While university-based researches consider social identity as related to team identity, [11] the role of social identity and its relation with the quality of services of and satisfaction with the intramural spare time courses has not so far been studied in Iran. And in other countries worldwide either we do not have many studies done on it. In the present research, therefore, we have intended to study the quality of services of and satisfaction with intramural recreational sport programs so as to see if identity can actually have a moderating role in the relationship between the quality of service of and satisfaction with recreational sport programs offered in the Islamic Azad University, Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

The subjects of this study were all the students of all the branches of Islamic Azad University throughout Iran ($N=777188$) from among whom 800 ones were selected as the statistical community of the study based on a class random sampling. The data-collecting tool was SSQRS questionnaire, which consists of 37 questions scaled based on the 5-value scale of Lucret (1=quite disagree to 5= quite agree). In this questionnaire 7 questions, from 1 to 7, are devoted to the quality of the program, 7 more are assigned to the quality of interaction, from question 8 to 14, also 7 questions are to measure the quality of result, from 15 to 21; 10 questions, from 25 to 34, are for the quality of environment; 3 questions are devoted to identity, from 22 to 24; and finally the 3 remaining questions, from 35 to 37, are left to satisfaction. In order to check the validity of its content, the questionnaire was first handed out to some professors of physical education majoring in the specialized field of sports management. Their content and lexical amendments helped us clarify some ambiguous points and complete or correct some more questions. Further suggestions from supervising professors were also usefully considered in the final editing of the questionnaire. Then 60 such questionnaires were handed out among the subjects, and after collecting the answers, their stability was calculated using cronbach's alpha, which showed a stability of 0.94.

Statistical Methods

For a statistical description of the study's variables, such factors as mean, and standard deviation were used. For an illative analysis of the variables and testing the hypotheses of the study, Kolmogorov Smirnov test, Levene test, and parametric correlation factor of Pearson were applied. Finally for comparing the relations, we used the Z test. All statistical analyses were done using SPSS/18 software and the level of meaningfulness for refuting the zero hypothesis was set to be $\alpha=0.05$.

RESULTS

Regarding the statistical description of study's variables based on sex-differentiation, the findings in table 1 show that the means of all variable were higher than the average line. In each case, males reported signification higher. As we can see form table 2, the correlation factor between the quality of services and satisfaction with them is 0.51 which is then reduced to 0.40 after the addition of identity. For testing this hypothesis, the correlation factor was first changed into Z_r and was then analyzed using Z test. Because the perceived Z is greater than the critical Z, the zero hypotheses is refuted, and so we can conclude that identity has played a meaningfully moderating role in the relation between the quality of provided services and satisfaction.

As we can see form table 3, the correlation factor between the quality of result and satisfaction is 0.53 which is then reduced to 0.39 after the effect of identity is added. For testing this hypothesis, the correlation factor was first changed into Z_r and was then analyzed using Z test. Because the perceived Z is greater than the critical Z, the zero hypotheses are refuted, and so we can conclude that identity has played a meaningfully moderating role in the relation between the quality of result and satisfaction.

As is shown in table 4, the correlation factor between the quality of interaction and satisfaction is 0.50 which is then reduced to 0.40 after the effect of identity is added. For testing this hypothesis, the correlation factor was first changed into Z_r and was then analyzed using Z test. Because the perceived Z is greater than the critical Z, the zero

hypothesis is refuted, and so we can conclude that identity has played a meaningfully moderating role in the relation between the quality of interaction and satisfaction.

Table1. Statistical description of the study's variables based on gender differentiation

variable	gender	mead± standard deviation	minimum	Maximum
Quality of providing services	Male	3.13± 0.72	1.29	4.71
	Female	3.02± 0.72	1.14	4.86
	sum	3.08± 0.72	1.14	4.86
Quality of interaction	Male	3.38± 0.75	1.43	5.00
	Female	3.31± 0.74	1.43	5.00
	sum	3.35± 0.74	1.43	5.00
Quality of result	Male	3.73± 0.72	1.43	5.00
	Female	3.66± 0.77	1.43	5.00
	sum	3.70± 0.75	1.43	5.00
Quality of environment	Male	3.23± 0.76	1.30	5.00
	Female	3.16± 0.71	1.30	5.00
	sum	3.20± 0.74	1.30	5.00
satisfaction	Male	3.28± 0.91	1.00	5.00
	Female	3.21± 0.94	1.00	5.00
	sum	3.25± 0.95	1.00	5.00
Identity	Male	3.88± 0.73	2.00	5.00
	Female	3.72± 0.77	2.00	5.00
	sum	3.70± 0.75	2.00	5.00

Table2. Results of comparing correlations

statistical	Correlation factor, zero degree	Correlation factor, Partial	comparing correlations		
			Zob	Zcr	result
R	0.51	0.40	2.29	1.64	Ho refuted
Zr	0.56	0.43			

Table3. Results of comparing correlations

statistical	Correlation factor, zero degree	Correlation factor, Partial	comparing correlations		
			Zob	Zcr	result
R	0.53	0.39	3.57	1.64	H0 refuted
Zr	0.59	0.41			

Table4. Results of comparing correlations

statistical	Correlation factor, zero degree	Correlation factor, Partial	comparing correlations		
			Zob	Zcr	result
R	0.50	0.40	2.51	1.64	H0 refuted
Zr	0.55	0.42			

Table5. Results of comparing correlations

statistical	Correlation factor, zero degree	Correlation factor, Partial	comparing correlations		
			Zob	Zcr	result
R	0.48	0.41	1.55	1.64	H0 accepted
Zr	0.52	0.44			

As is shown in table 5, the correlation factor between the quality of environment and satisfaction is 0.48 which is then reduced to 0.41 after the effect of identity is added. For testing this hypothesis, the correlation factor was first changed into Z_r and was then analyzed using Z test. Because the perceived Z is less than the critical Z, the zero hypothesis, which says that identity does not have a meaningfully moderating role in the relation between the quality of environment and satisfaction, is approved of.

DISCUSSION

The present study has, in fact, extended the scope of Social Identity Theory into a science about intramural recreational sports, social identity theory, sports management, and marketing strategies. Theoretical implications of this study well highlight the point that identity plays as a moderating variable in the relationship of the four mentioned aspects of the quality of services and satisfaction with them. As there has not been any serious researches in this regard in Iran [that is about the moderating role of identity and its effects on the quality of services and satisfaction with such services], and we found just one such study conducted by Shank & Wallacecarr (2009) abroad, it is absolutely suggested that more studies be done on this case so as to be on a firmer ground. As it is clear from table 2, identity has a meaningfully moderating role in the relation between the quality of offered courses and customers' satisfaction with them because the correlation factor between the quality of provided services and satisfaction with them is 0.51 which is then reduced to 0.40 after the addition of identity. As we can see from table 2, identity has a meaningfully moderating role in the relationship between the quality of given courses and satisfaction, and evidence to this is the fact that the correlation factor between the quality of given courses and satisfaction is 0.51 which is then reduced to 0.40 after the controlling effect of identity is added. This finding of the study greatly supports the importance of offering recreational sport courses in the universities, gives ample impetus toward studying the results of giving such services to the users, and knowing about such other cases as methodologies, service programs and marketing measures. As Shank & Wallacecarr (2009) have concluded in their research that identity, when added to the quality of a program, has a tangibly interactive effect, so that a high identity gets low satisfaction. Ko and Pastor (2007) have also found that identity has a meaningfully interactive effect when applied to the quality of program, as for example, the case of high identity and low satisfaction. As the quality of providing a recreational sport service is closely connected to a range of plans, time of its being effectuated, and the relative ease of accessing the information related to those services, great attention should be paid to designing and planning recreational sport activities in the universities of Iran.

As is presented in the table 3, the findings of our study also suggest that identity has a moderating role in the relationship between the quality of results and satisfaction because as we note the correlation factor between the quality of result and satisfaction is 0.53 which is then reduced to 0.39 after the controlling effect of identity is added. This finding of ours agrees with that of Shank & Wallacecarr (2009) who have also proposed that when added to the quality of result, identity produces a meaningfully interactive effect, so that a higher identity comes up with greater satisfaction. As mentioned before, quality is the physical changes experienced by the users of a service, the positive social experiences which they gain after using the provided services, and their evaluation of whether the services have been good or not. [12,13] based on the theories of Gronroos (1984) also, quality of result is the main product of a company, that is, what a customer actually gains out of his/her interactions with that company. Therefore, it seems natural enough that most of the participants in the spare time sport programs in the universities should expect to make advancement in their both physical fitness and their social interactions. As Dalgarn (2001) has rightly pointed out the social bearing of intramural recreational sport plans is an important consideration for the participants. That is why we also emphasize that those responsible for the maintenance and management of recreational sport complexes in the universities of our country, Iran, should keep in their minds the fact that students with high identity are usually the regular attendants of such centers. They are usually so determined in their intentions that they would not want to lose even one session of the assigned practice. Therefore, all such courses and activities should be so carefully organized that they can provide the best possible results for the participants so as to keep them as the regular members of the centers [14,15,16].

As is shown in table 4, identity has effected a meaningful moderation in the relation between the quality of interaction and satisfaction, because the correlation factor between the quality of interaction and satisfaction is 0.50 which is then reduced to 0.40 after the effect of identity is added. This finding of ours does not accord with that of Shank & Wallacecarr (2009), and reason for this discord is most probably lack of interaction between clerks and

participants, and the fact that there has not been a lively and interesting environment prepared for them. As we know the quality of interaction depends on the mutual clerk-customer [student] relationship, on the relationship among the customers (students), and how the services are offered. [17,18] Also, with regard to the important role of clerks and authorities related to the recreational sport centers in Iranian universities, such as encouraging and solving the problems of the students, helping the improvement and development of sport facilities in such centers, having friendly interactions and relations with the participants, providing an agreeable and pleasant environment and respecting the regulation, they should be obliged to carefully study the planned models and policies of the centers and be well-informed in this regard so as to make fruitful interactive relation with the customers and thereby increase and maintain their satisfaction and regular attendance.

As is indicated in table 5, identity does not effect any meaningful moderation in the relation between the quality of environment and satisfaction because the correlation factor between the quality of environment and satisfaction is 0.48 which is then reduced to 0.41 after the effect of identity is added. For testing this hypothesis, the correlation factor was first changed into Zr and was then analyzed using Z test. And as the perceived Z was less than the critical Z, the zero hypothesis, which points to the non-moderating role of identity in the relation between the quality of environment and satisfaction, is approved of. Studies of Shank & Wallacecarr (2009) also show that when added to the quality of environment, identity does not make for any meaningfully interactive effect, that is to say, a high identity does not guarantee satisfaction. And as the quality of environment involves such cases as the prevailing atmosphere and design of the building and the availability of the necessary equipment [19,20], and considering the unavoidable restraints in our case study (economic conditions, students' motivations, and sport equipment) it is strongly suggested that those responsible for deciding and planning for the recreational sport activities, pay extra attention to the factors involved in the quality of environment such as cleanliness, careful designing and maintenance of those centers, and also supplying modern and safe equipment and facilities so that they may help increase the participants' satisfaction and keep their regular attendance.

CONCLUSION

Generally, our final results prove that identity has effected a meaningful moderation in the relation between the quality of program, quality of interaction, quality of results and satisfaction. But identity does not effect any meaningful moderation in the relation between the quality of environment and satisfaction

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