



THE INVESTIGATION OF THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION OF CUSTOMERS FOR DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF THE SPORTS CENTERS

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Abstract

In the world, development of the service sector is one of the factors that determine countries' level of development. The increasing competitive environment and urbanization, lead to the establishment of a new service sector to address people's need for physical exercises. For this purpose, we asked customers that go to sports centers to evaluate the service they received and tried to find out the factors that impacted the quality of this service. A total of 328 randomly selected people from Istanbul (%43,3 (142) female, %56,7 (186) male), participated in our study. We applied a survey called "Quality Perception and a Satisfaction Survey in Sports Center" to the participants. The survey questions contain these following categories; the state of the physical comfort of the gym, the quality of exercise equipment and exercise methods which are used in the gym, qualification and sentience of trainers of sports, the satisfaction levels of the participants to the gym, questions about traffic and car-park issues, the latter two being among the biggest problems of the city life. The results were statistically compared according to gender of participants. There was a statistically significant difference between males and females about the comparison of the responses to questions about traffic and parking problems ($p < 0,05$). We found that female participants had more troubles related to traffic and car-parking. The results of our study shows that there is a necessity to resolve traffic and parking related problems which would be partially solved if the location of the service was more reachable, not crowded and had adequate parking spaces.

Key Words: Sports centers, traffic, gender, satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

One of the factors determining the level of development of countries is the development related to the service sector. The relevance of service sector within international and national economies has been experiencing an increase for the past 25 years. When we take a look at the development rate of the service sector in countries around the world from 70s until today, it can be seen that the number of employers within this sector increased by 60% in USA and 40% in Japan (Bergman and Klesjö, 1994). Over time, it became necessary for the service sector to adhere to the quality practices that were already in place for the production sector so that it can contribute to the national economy of its country (Devebakan and Aksaraylı, 2003). There are various definitions for the word "service". In one definition, it is described as a product that is made so that it can provide for the consumers' needs and does not have the characteristics of a tangible material (Kurilof, 1993). Whereas in another definition, service is defined as economic activities that give rise to psychological, temporal, positional or structural benefits (Gözlü 1995). Another definition describes service as the

execution of work for someone else (Goetsch and Davis 1998, Devebakan and Aksaraylı, 2003).

One of the most basic methods that could be used to make a service company stand out from its competitors is to continuously provide a higher quality service compared to the competing businesses. Service businesses nowadays have a customer-oriented view of quality similar to production businesses. Big companies operating within the service sector are aware that a high quality of service would provide them with a high sales and profit potential which would then create a competitive advantage. Higher quality of service also results in an increase in costs. However, high-quality service coupled with high customer satisfaction and fidelity can make up for the costs brought along by the increase in quality (Yıldız, 2013).

Most of the time, it is hard for customers to evaluate the service quality after they have purchased and used the service. While in these kinds of services, it might be hard to do quality control, it is possible to increase and standardize service quality by finding qualified personnel, a good location and providing adequate staff training (Parasurmann 1985, Kuns and Lenmink 1996, Tek 1999, Uyguç 1998).

Being establishments that provide customer-oriented service, sports centers also have to pay close attention to customer satisfaction. Since consumers that are satisfied with the sports center would be more inclined to revisit the establishment, it is important for the services and products to be well-presented to the customers, in a way similar to other service businesses. Establishments not responding to this need will end up losing their customers.

When we take into account the fact that sports centers are currently regarded as being service businesses, increasing service quality for them also is important so that their business can get ahead of other sports centers. This study was based on a conceptual frame concerning the customers' perception of service quality within the sports sector and in this study, feedbacks of the customers that resided in the central areas at the Maltepe District of the Istanbul Province were evaluated.

Among the marketplace of sports centers which is competitive and cost-oriented when it comes to providing services, it is of utmost importance for these businesses to identify, measure and evaluate their service quality so that they can gain the upper hand in the competition and maintain their presence. For this purpose, we asked the customers of these businesses to evaluate the service they are being offered and tried to determine the factors that play a role on the service quality.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Research Group

Participants are made out of 328 individuals who voluntarily agreed on taking the survey and were chosen randomly at the Maltepe District of the Istanbul Province. 43.3% (142) of the participants were female whereas 56.7% (186) of them were male.

Data Collection Tool

“Survey for Quality Perception and Satisfaction in Sports Centers” (Yaşar Y. 2013) was used as a research data collection tool. In order to provide a more up-to-date approach and a broader perspective, new questions(validated) were added and some modifications were made by us to the survey. This survey has questions that consist of personal features such as age, sex, sports age andfor how long they have been going to their sports centeras well asa total of 35 statements regarding the determination of service quality and satisfaction in sports centers prepared according to the 5-point Likert Scale. The study was conducted by evaluating the information about the participants based on the data collected via the aforementioned survey form.

Data Collection

The survey was conducted with face to face encounters by the researcher on random individuals who voluntarily agreed on taking it for use in research, at the Maltepe District of the Istanbul Province. The surveys took 22 days to conduct. 4 of the questions were demographic, 6 concerned changing rooms, 4 were about the area where sports-related activity takes place, 6 about tools and equipment, 5 about trainers, 5 about other staff, 5 related to personal information and 3 about the location of the center, with a total of 40 questions.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed under the IBM SPSS statistical package 22 software, frequency (f) and percentage (%) values were calculated and tabularized. The means and standard deviations of all the measurements were calculated. The differences between group means were determined using test for independent samples. A *p* value of 0,05 was considered statistically significant.

All the average values concerning the participants and the answers they provided were statistically calculated. Survey questions were investigated one by one and sex-related differences were sought after.

RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency and percentage distribution of the participants based on sex

		18-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40+
GENDER		N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)
Age	FEMALE	57(40,1)	39(27,5)	17(12)	13(9,2)	16(11,3)
	MALE	20(10,8)	66(35,5)	47(25,3)	24(12,9)	29(15,6)

A two-parameter distribution of ages of the male and female who participated in the survey was established (Table 1).

Table 2. Frequency and percentage distributions of the participants according to their duration of sporting activity

		0-6 months	7-12 months	13-24 months	25-36 months	36+ months	P
For how long have you been doing sports?	SEX	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	
	FEMALE	39(27,5)	56(39,4)	29(19,7)	9(6,3)	10(7)	0,562
	MALE	58(31,2)	68(36,6)	34(18,3)	19(10,2)	7(3,8)	

There is no statistically significant difference between male and female when it comes to their duration of sporting activity ($p > 0,05$) (Table 2).

Table 3. Frequency and percentage distributions of the participants according to their membership duration

		0-6 months	7-12 months	13-24 months	25-36 months	36+ months	P
For how long have you been a member of this gym?	GENDER	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	
	FEMALE	59(41,8)	43(30,5)	25(17,7)	8(5,7)	6(4,3)	0,448
	MALE	84(45,2)	59(31,7)	24(12,9)	14(7,5)	5(2,7)	

There is no statistically significant difference between male and female when it comes to their membership duration ($p > 0,05$) (Table 3).

Table 4. Frequency and percentage distributions and p-values of the participants according to the answers they provided on the categories of traffic and parking-related issues

		Highly Disagree	Disagree	Indecisive	Agree	Highly Agree	P
		N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	
I think that accessing this center is easy and suitable.		19(13,5)	24(17)	37(26,2)	40(28,4)	21(14,9)	0,049
	MALE	12(6,6)	26(14,2)	55(30,1)	56(30,6)	34(18,6)	
I think that it is easy to park your car when you come to this center		23(16,3)	16(11,3)	43(30,5)	41(29,1)	18(12,8)	0,038
	MALE	14(7,7)	26(14,2)	52(28,4)	57(31,1)	34(18,6)	

The questions of Quality Perception in Fitness Centers Survey that we used in our study were divided under 5 categories. These are: questions describing the physical comfort state of the fitness center, questions that demonstrate the quality of the used equipment and practice methods, questions that demonstrate the level of competence and awareness of the gym trainers, questions that show the level of satisfaction of the participants going to the sports center and questions that delve upon traffic and park-related issues which are in fact the biggest problems of today's city life.

In our results, a statistically significant difference was found between male and female concerning the answers given to the question "I think that accessing this center is easy and suitable." which belongs to the category of questions that delve upon traffic and park-related issues ($p < 0.05$) (Table 4). It was deduced that women had more accessibility-related issues than men.

A statistically significant difference was found between male and female concerning the question "I think that it is easy to park your car when you come to this center." which belongs to the same category as the one above ($p < 0.05$) (Table 4). In light of the answers provided to this question, it was concluded that women faced more parking-related issues than men.

There was no statistically significant difference between male and female in other categories that Quality Perception in Fitness Centers Survey that we used in our study. These categories were: questions describing the physical comfort state of the fitness center, questions that demonstrate the quality of the used equipment and practice methods, questions that demonstrate the level of competence and awareness of the gym trainers, questions that show the level of satisfaction of the participants going to the sports center ($p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

Service is defined as the work-related interaction between the institution serving to provide customer satisfaction and the customer themselves (Ramaswamy, 1996, Çeto, 2016).

Service quality is the best way to understand how satisfied customers are with the business' services (Çeto, 2016). Moreover, high service quality means that the customer would be more willing to come back for the service and continue their membership (Rosender, 1989).

In establishments that work on a membership based system and require continuity, there are various factors that affect the service quality. Among these factors are: the physical condition and location of the business; staff performance; specifications of tools that are being used and the business' attitude. In our study, we conducted the survey for the customers' perception of quality in sports centers, which focused on these factors and examined customer satisfaction based on these categories. In our survey, we also asked the customers to provide an answer and commentary on questions related to the environmental condition of the business, accessibility of its location, sufficiency and organization of its parking space. The customers were also asked to

provide answers and commentaries about the sufficiency and cleanliness of resting and changing rooms, sufficiency of showers and hot water and sufficiency of ventilation and lighting. Among other factors, information was gathered from customers on the sufficiency, diversity and adequacy of the used tools and equipment. Furthermore, they were asked to provide answers on the efficacy of the practiced exercise programs and their satisfaction from them. They were also asked to answer questions on their opinions about the competence of the working staff and the relationships of the latter with the customers. There was no statistically significant difference between males and females ($p>0.05$) on their satisfaction about the physical condition of the business, sufficiency and diversity of the used equipment, efficacy of the applied exercise program and competence and customer relationships of the working staff. There were numerous studies conducted on satisfactions related to these categories in sports centers (Çeto, 2016, Çoban, 2002, Uçan, 2007). However, in our study, besides the abovementioned categories, customers were asked to respond to the questions “I think that accessing this center is easy and suitable.” and “I think that it is easy to park your car when you come to this center.” that we defined as the environmental factors of sports centers. We investigated the presence of a statistically significant difference between men and women related to the answers provided on this context.

When it comes to the sex-related statistics of the abovementioned questions of the survey used in our study, a statistically significant difference ($p<0.05$) was found between men and women regarding the ease of access to the center and organization of parking spaces, both of which are environmental factors of the business. No statistically difference between sexes was found in other categories ($p>0.05$).

There are numerous studies conducted on sex-related differences in customer satisfaction (Uçan, 2007, Savaş, 2012, Greenwell, 2004, Theodorakis, 2004). Most of these studies also found that the percentage of men going to sports centers was higher than that of women. This means that men are more interested in sports-related activities and can access these centers more easily. In our study, it was found that even in developed and metropolitan cities, women are experiencing problems related to access, traffic and parking when they are going to sports centers. According to the results of our study, more women would be encouraged to go to sports centers if we ease their access to these locations at all times. Sports centers should be located at places that are safe, easy to access and don't have any parking-related issues.

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