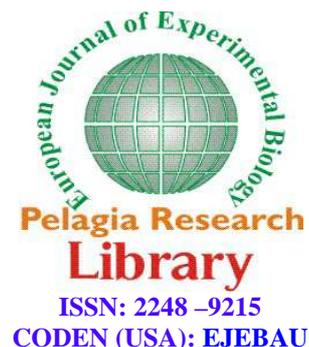




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## The relationship between perception of service quality and intent to return in spectators of Gonbad Kavoods autumn horse racing

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to investigate relationship between perception of service quality and intent to return in spectators of Gonbad kavoods autumn horse racing. The research method in this study was descriptive and correlation method. The population of the study consisted of all spectators of Gonbad Kavoods autumn horse racing (N=3865). The sample size was considered by using random selection method that according to Morgan table 350 spectators was selected as subjects. For this purpose, Sport Service Quality Questionnaire developed by Chen Liu (2008) and Spectators Intent to Return Sport Events Questionnaire developed by Shonk (2005) were used. Descriptive and inferential statistics methods for data analysis were used. The findings showed that between perception of service quality and intent to return in spectators of Gonbad kavoods autumn horse racing, there is significant positive correlation.*

**Keywords:** Service Quality, Spectators, Horse Racing.

### INTRODUCTION

Sport involvement includes two major forms: direct participation in sport and physical activities; and, the spectatorship and fandom of any sport games, which is widely recognized as one important type of leisure behavior. Both forms are considered to have major economic, social, and psychological implications [1].

Sport spectatorship represents a predominant form of leisure behavior [2]. Spectators could reduce stress and get entertainment from sport event so it could relax body and mind. Spectator sport also increase social integration and culture experience. Kao (2002) pointed out that sport spectators were benefits to individuals from three aspects: (1) balancing life experience; (2) developing the meaning of life; (3) improving quality of life. Therefore, attending sport events not only could gain entertainment, relieve emotion, and increase sport knowledge, but also interact with others to receive group identification and develop interpersonal relationship [3].

Spectators who enjoy spending time at an event are assumed to be more likely to return to that or a similar event [4, 5]. Conversely, negative experiences are likely to reduce their desire to stay at the event, may cause them to leave early and to not to return. Event services such as trade fairs, motor shows, and sporting events, generally require customers to spend extended periods of time in the physical surroundings of the service provider [5].

In all of these above cases, the perceived quality of the market demand (e.g., the game itself, the players' performance) and the service property (i.e., the physical environment) may play an important role in determining consumer satisfaction, which in turn, influences how long they stay at the event, how much money they will spend, whether they will return in the future, and whether they will re-patronize the event's organizer [6]. Likewise, other aspects of an event, such as food, charity, staff, scoreboards, and access may partly determine whether sports

spectators will stay for the entire event or lose interest and leave early. Unlike a comparable expenditure on most tangible products, attendance at a sporting event assumes an intention to remain at the service event for an extended period of time [7].

Spectators play an important role for player's performance in sport event. Kelly (1996) mentioned that the players are motivated by enthusiasm of the watchers. Cheng *et al.* (2004) also pointed out that number of spectators would influence player's performance. Moreover, sport development could benefit from spectators' support. Hence, spectators were a very significant element to fulfill a successful competition in sports [3].

Given the importance of spectator sporting events, providing appropriate services for these individuals is important. Services provided at a sport setting are quite different from other forms of services [8]. In a sport setting, Stotlar (1993) emphasized that "professional and amateur sports teams; health and fitness centers, arenas, and country clubs are all engaged primarily in providing sport-related services". Service providers should develop a professional attitude to maximize the benefits of their business. The needs and wants of sport customers are constantly changing and unpredictable, making quality services in sport more elusive than most realize [9].

By conducting an exploratory factor analysis, Kelley & Turley (2001) identified nine important dimensions of service quality in sporting events: (1) Employees, (2) Price, (3) Facility access, (4) Concessions, (5) Fan comfort, (6) Game experience, (7) Showtime, (8) Convenience, and (9) Smoking [10]. Theodorakis *et al.* (2001) have had success in the measurement of service quality in the sport setting. They developed the service quality instrument called SPORTSERV, which measures spectator's perceptions of service quality in professional sports. The 22 items on the instrument include the following dimensions of service quality: (1) access (four items: for example, parking being available outside the stadium), (2) reliability (four items: for example, the team delivering its services as promised), (3) responsiveness (six items: for example, the team's personnel providing prompt service), (4) tangibles (six items: for example, the stadium being visually appealing), and (5) security (two items: for example, feeling safe inside the stadium). The SPORTSERV scale is a perception-performance based measurement [11].

Shonk (2006) in a research investigate service quality, satisfaction and the intent to return among tourists attending a sporting event. Results showed that there is an overall perception of sport tourism quality (ST Quality) which significantly contributes to a tourist's perceptions of satisfaction. Moreover, satisfaction was found to significantly contribute to a tourist's decision to return to a sporting event and/or to a particular destination [12].

As with other organizations, sports organizations follow unified principles in all divisions and aim to offer high quality services to their customers [13]. In this regard, attention to services that provided to spectators can influence spectators' satisfaction, and, consequently, affect their decision to return sporting events.

Horse racing has a long history in Iran. The tournament will still be held in Iran. Gonbad Kavoos is one of the cities where the tournament is held. Many spectators see this tournament each year. Attention to this tournament in two seasons (spring and fall) can attract large spectators. So the present study aims to investigate relationship between perception of service quality and intent to return in spectators of Gonbad Kavoos autumn horse racing.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Method:** In view of the goal, the research is applied (functional), and in view of methodology, this research has descriptive, correlation method which was performed by field approach.

**Statistical Population and Sampling:** The population of the study consisted of spectators of Gonbad Kavoos autumn horse racing in 2013 (N=3865). The sample size was considered by using random selection method that according to Morgan table 350 spectators was selected as subjects.

**Instrument (s):** For collecting data, two questionnaires were used, Sport Service Quality Questionnaire developed by Chen Liu (2008) with 25 questions that have closed answer and Spectators Intent to Return Sport Events Questionnaire developed by Shonk (2005) with 8 questions that have closed answer. The Sport Service Quality Questionnaire has five subscales: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. To calculate the reliability of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted. The results showed a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha=0.868$  for Sport Service Quality Questionnaire and  $\alpha=0.914$  for Intent to Return Sport Events, which indicated the consistency of measurement.

**Data Analyses:** SPSS software was used to analyze the data. As to the statistical measures, descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and tabulations were used to describe the data. Inferential statistics including Kolmogorove Smirnov and Pearson correlation formula were used to test the hypotheses.

## RESULTS

After distributing the survey questionnaires, finally 314 questionnaires were returned.

**Table1. Subjects experience to see Gonbad Kavoos horse racing**

|                       | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Under 1 year          | 43        | 13.7    |
| Between 1 to 3 years  | 48        | 15.2    |
| Between 4 to 7 years  | 91        | 29      |
| Between 8 to 11 years | 58        | 18.5    |
| More than 12 years    | 74        | 23.6    |

Table 1 illustrates the results of descriptive statistics. As can be seen, most of attending frequency is belonging to group between 4 to 7 years.

**Table2. Result of Kolomogorove Smirnov test to verify data normality**

| Variable                      | Statistic | N   | Sig   | Test result |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----|-------|-------------|
| Sport Service Quality         |           | 314 | 0.071 | Normal data |
| Intent to Return Sport Events |           | 314 | 0.065 | Normal data |

To test if data were normally distributed the Kolmogorove-Smirinove Test was used. Results in Table 2 show that Sport Service Quality data ( $P=0.071$ ) and Intent to Return Sport Events data ( $P=0.065$ ) are normal.

**Table3. Relationship between Service Quality and its subscales with Intent to Return**

| Variables       | Intent to Return |       |       |                |
|-----------------|------------------|-------|-------|----------------|
|                 | N                | r     | P     | r <sup>2</sup> |
| Tangibles       | 314              | 0.086 | 0.068 | 0.007          |
| Reliability     | 314              | 0.428 | 0.001 | 0.18           |
| Responsiveness  | 314              | 0.432 | 0.001 | 0.19           |
| Assurance       | 314              | 0.312 | 0.001 | 0.10           |
| Empathy         | 314              | 0.472 | 0.001 | 0.22           |
| Service Quality | 314              | 0.463 | 0.001 | 0.21           |

Pearson correlation formula was run to examine the relationship between service quality and its subscales with intent to return in spectators of Gonbad kavoos autumn horse racing.

Table 3 illustrates the results of Pearson correlation test. Regarding the results in Table 3, there is a no relationship between Tangibles agent and Intent to Return ( $r=0.086$ ,  $P\leq 0.068$ ). Also, the results of correlation coefficient shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between Reliability and Intent to Return from the spectators' perspective ( $r=0.428$ ,  $P\leq 0.001$ ). Between Responsiveness and Intent to Return there is a positive correlation ( $r=0.432$ ,  $P\leq 0.001$ ). In addition, there is a positive and significant relationship between Assurance and Intent to Return from the spectators' perspective ( $r=0.312$ ,  $P\leq 0.02$ ). Finally, observed a positive correlation between Empathy and Intent to Return ( $r=0.472$ ,  $P\leq 0.001$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study provides some interesting findings that help us further our knowledge of various services provided within the Gonbad kavoos autumn horse racing.

The results revealed a significant correlation between service quality and intent to return in spectators of Gonbad kavoos autumn horse racing. Also results revealed among service dimensions, there is no relation between tangible agent and spectators' intent to return.

According to Theodorakis *et al.* (2001) who found the tangible aspect of service quality as an important predictor of customer satisfaction and repurchase intention, managers in a service based organization should make major improvements in all the aspects of service in order to enhance the level of overall service quality when the resources are limited. To be effective, the factors of service quality should be prioritized based on the findings of this study to

provide competitive advantages in delivering superior levels of customer satisfaction that may positively influence the intent to return. Holding Sport competitions needs appropriate sport facilities. Making the appropriate sport facilities also affects the quality of the competition and attracts large spectators. Given the history of the horse racing tournament in Gonbad kavoo, it is recommended tournament officials attempt to build a new sports complex for this tournament.

The sport service marketers should manage the five dimension service quality of service marketing in order to reinforce the desired attitudes and behavior during service delivery. Additionally, researchers can also enrich the theoretical foundation for the relationships among the study variables by utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM).

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