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Sport Management Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/smr

Predicting spectators' behavioural intentions in professional football: The role of satisfaction and service quality

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 November 2011

Received in revised form 16 May 2012

Accepted 17 May 2012

Keywords:

Service quality

Satisfaction

Behavioural intentions

Spectators

Sport consumer behaviour

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationships among service quality, satisfaction and spectators' behavioural intentions, in the context of professional football. Using [Gronroos' \(1984\)](#) theoretical framework, service quality was conceptualized in terms of technical (outcome) and functional (process-related) quality. Outcome quality was measured with two dimensions: game quality and team performance, while five dimensions were used to measure functional quality (tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, access and security). Three hundred and fifty ($N=350$) spectators of a professional football game in Greece participated in the study. The results provided support of the two total service quality model used. Furthermore, outcome quality was shown to have a stronger influence on spectators' satisfaction levels than functional quality; finally, satisfaction was shown to partially mediate the relationship between service quality and spectators' behavioural intentions. These results contribute to our theoretical understanding of the factors that predict spectators' loyalty in professional football. Sport marketing implications are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Football attendance is probably the most popular leisure activity among European sport fans, generating huge economic revenues ([Andreff, 2007](#); [Ascari & Gagnepain, 2006](#); [Frick & Prinz, 2006](#)). More specifically, from 2002 to 2007, the top 20 European football teams attracted more than one million spectators in each of their league game. In terms of economic revenues, the top 20 football teams generated approximately €1.1 billion from match day revenues in 2010 ([Deloitte & Touche, 2011](#)). However, the challenge for sport marketers today is to retain this high demand. It has been reported recently ([Andreff & Szymanski, 2006](#); [Howard & Crompton, 2004](#); [Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007](#)) that competition among professional sport teams has been intensified because of the unstable economic environment in many countries, the emergence of new rival leagues of different sports, the competition from other leisure activities, the emergence of new technology, and an increased importance of selling broadcasting rights. As a consequence, the professional football industry becomes more complicated and unpredictable, forcing club marketers to develop effective strategies in order to motivate spectators to attend games, buy memberships, and purchase team products and services ([Theodorakis, Koustelios, Robinson, & Barlas, 2009](#)). It has been reported that investing on service quality and developing strategies in order to ensure spectators'

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satisfaction are among the main actions that sport marketers should design to motivate spectators to attend football games (Yoshida & James, 2010).

It has been proposed that spectator sports is an outcome-driven industry (Brady, Voorhees, Cronin, & Bourdeau, 2006); spectators' experience is, in a large degree, determined by the core product (the game itself); this is particularly the case in the context of European professional sports (Fort, 2000; Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008). However, the majority of service quality models that have been reported in the literature used mainly process-related dimensions to assess service quality and/or its interrelationships with spectators' satisfaction and loyalty (e.g., Hightower, Brady, & Baker, 2002; Lambrecht, Kaefer, & Ramenofsky, 2009; Lee, Kim, Ko, & Sagas, 2011; McDonald, Sutton, & Milne, 1995; Neill, Gezt, & Carlsen, 1999; Theodorakis, Kambitsis, Laios, & Koustelios, 2001; Theodorakis et al., 2009; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). These process-related dimensions mainly correspond to the peripheral or supportive element of the sport product, including the facilities, aesthetics, interaction with employees, parking, etc.

We argue that the outcome dimension of service quality is an important element of service quality in the sport spectatorship context. This construct has been recently included in service quality models in the sport spectatorship context. Brady et al. (2006) and Koo, Andrew, and Kim (2008) and Koo et al. (2009), in the contexts of professional and collegiate spectator sports, respectively, treated it as a uni-dimensional construct. In the three most recent studies, conducted by Clemes, Brush, and Collins (2011), Ko, Zhang, Catani, and Pastore (2011), and Yoshida and James (2010), outcome quality was treated as a multi-dimensional construct. However, these studies disagreed on the number of the dimensions that should be included to measure outcome quality, the nature of these dimensions, and also their influence on spectators' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The present paper aimed to contribute to the existing sport spectatorship service quality literature, by theoretically defining the outcome dimension of service quality in this context, proposing a two-dimensional scale to measure it, incorporating it in an integrated service quality model (Gronroos, 1984), and testing its influence on spectators' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Gronroos' (1984) two-dimensional model (functional and technical/outcome quality) was used as the theoretical framework of service quality. This model, and in relation to satisfaction and behavioural intentions, has not been previously applied in the context of professional football in Europe.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

2.1. Conceptualization of outcome and functional quality

Sport marketing theory (Milne & McDonald, 1999; Mullin, 1985; Mullin et al., 2007) describes the sport product as having two main aspects: (a) the core, which includes game related attributes, such as players' performance, game quality, team's characteristics and valence (e.g., the outcome of the experience itself) (Brady et al., 2006; Yoshida & James, 2010, 2011). This definition of core service quality has been used by Greenwell, Fink, and Pastore (2002), Tsuji, Bennett, and Zhang (2007) and Yoshida and James (2010), (b) the peripheral or supportive element, which includes elements related to the facility/stadium environment, the supporting services (e.g., parking, concessions) and the interactions between the spectators and the employees (McDonald et al., 1995; Theodorakis et al., 2001; Wakefield, Blodgett, & Sloan, 1996; Yoshida & James, 2010). Spectator sports, is, therefore, in a large degree, an outcome-driven industry (Brady et al., 2006). This outcome relates to spectator's experience of consuming the core product (game itself related attributes). This is particularly the case in European professional football in which the game itself and its outcome have a strong influence on spectators' experience (Fort, 2000; Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008).

We, therefore, propose that any service quality model in the context of sport spectators should include dimensions to measure their experience on consuming both the core and the peripheral elements of the product. In the current paper we used the constructs of outcome and functional quality (Gronroos, 1984), in order to conceptualize sport spectatorship service quality. These two dimensions are defined in the following sections.

2.1.1. Outcome quality

The outcome dimension of service quality refers to what the customer receives, that is what is left for the customer, after the production–consumption process is over. The outcome dimension of service quality was first proposed by Gronroos' (1984) and more recently by Brady and Cronin (2001), who used the term outcome quality. This dimension has been largely overlooked in the sport spectatorship literature. The studies of Clemes et al. (2011), Ko et al. (2011) and Yoshida and James (2010) are the only ones that used the outcome quality in a multi-dimensional nature in the context of sport spectatorship. They, however, both disagreed on the measurement of this construct and its relationship with spectators' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. In more details, Yoshida and James (2010), in two studies among spectators of college football in the U.S. and professional baseball in Japan, proposed that outcome quality should be measured by the dimensions of player performance, opponent characteristics and game atmosphere. However, in this study the outcome quality was not examined in relation to spectators' behavioural intentions. Furthermore, the player performance and opponent characteristics dimensions failed to predict spectators' satisfaction. Ko et al. (2011), on the other hand, proposed that sociability and valence are the two dimensions that should be included within the outcome quality. However, in their study there was no attempt to examine the relationship between outcome quality and spectators' satisfaction and behavioural intentions in order to validate it. Finally, Clemes et al. (2011) proposed the dimensions of game quality, match day entertainment and social environment in order to measure outcome quality. It could be argued that the match day entertainment does not clearly

correspond to the core product. This is probably the reason that this dimension was not supported by their final model. Furthermore, no attempt was made in this study to examine the direct influence of service quality dimensions on spectators' behavioural intentions.

In the current study we propose the dimensions of game quality and team performance to be included within the outcome element of service quality. These dimensions clearly correspond to the core product in spectator sports, as defined by a number of authors and researchers (Milne & McDonald, 1999; Mullin, 1985; Mullin et al., 2007). Furthermore, both these dimensions are the common ones that were proposed in the three studies (Clemes et al., 2011; Ko et al., 2011; Yoshida & James, 2011), which were reviewed above.

2.1.2. Functional quality

The functional quality relates to peripheral element of the service quality (Gronroos, 1984). It includes elements related to the facility/stadium environment, the supporting services (e.g., parking, concessions) and the interactions between the spectators and the employees. The sport facility environment contains elements, such as aesthetics (i.e. design), accessibility, security, space/functions, while employees' quality refers to their competence, attitude and behaviour (McDonald et al., 1995; Theodorakis et al., 2001; Wakefield et al., 1996; Yoshida & James, 2010). The functional dimension of service quality is well represented in the SERVQUAL model. Based on the disconfirmation paradigm and their gap model, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) originally proposed that customers use 10 determinants (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, communication, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, understanding/knowing customer, and access) as criteria to assess the quality of a service. This framework served as the basis for the development of the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), with five dimensions: tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. Parasuraman et al. (1988) suggested that researchers could use the SERVQUAL model to measure service quality in various service settings, or modify the instrument, according to context-specific characteristics. Researchers have adapted and/or modified SERVQUAL to measure service quality in almost all segments of the sport industry (Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Kasiara, 2001; Crompton, MacKay, & Fesenmaier, 1991; Howat, Absher, Crilley, & Milne, 1996; Wright, Duray, & Goodale, 1992). In the context of spectator sports this model can be traced in the work of McDonald et al. (1995), Lee et al. (2011), Theodorakis and Alexandris (2008), Theodorakis et al. (2001, 2009), and Wakefield and Blodgett (1996, 1999).

Despite its popularity, SERVQUAL has received criticisms mainly because of the absence of the outcome dimension (Kang & James, 2004; Powpaka, 1996). It is to be noted, that a number of researchers have argued that the outcome dimension is missing from this model (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Mangold & Babakus, 1991; Richard & Allaway, 1993). Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1991), however, argued that reliability tends to be judged after the service has been delivered, and it could be described as an outcome dimension. This argument, however, is questionable.

The functional dimension of service quality is also seen in the model of Brady and Cronin (2001), as it corresponds to the interaction and physical environment quality. The interaction dimension refers to the employee–customer relationships, while the physical environment dimension refers to the interactions between the service environment and the customer.

In conclusion, it could be argued that the over-emphasis of the sport spectator service quality literature on the measurement of the functional quality and the limited attention on the definition and the measurement of the outcome quality is a major limitation. The present paper aimed to address this limitation by proposing a two-dimensional model of outcome and functional quality. As previously discussed, two dimensions were used to measure outcome quality (game quality and team performance); five dimensions were used to measure functional quality (tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, access and security). These dimensions are typical and have been used in the majority of previous studies that measured the process part of service quality in a spectator sport setting (Hightower et al., 2002; Lambrect et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 1995; O'Neill et al., 1999; Theodorakis et al., 2001, 2009; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999).

2.2. Service quality and customer satisfaction

The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction has been widely studied in the service literature. It is widely accepted today that service quality and satisfaction are related, but they are also distinct constructs; service quality influences but not fully predicts customer satisfaction (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

In the context of spectator sports, the satisfaction that results from attending a game has been shown to be an important indicator for developing fan loyalty and increasing a team's revenues (Koo et al., 2009). Yoshida and James (2010, p. 340) defined spectators' satisfaction as "a pleasurable, fulfilment response to the entertainment of the sport competition and/or ancillary services provided during the game". While it is widely accepted that service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction, this relationship is not fully established in the sport spectator literature, due to the different service quality models that have been used to measure it, and the difficulties in defining the sport product. The majority of studies used process-related dimensions of service quality (i.e. personnel behaviour and physical environment quality) to predict customer satisfaction, and overlooked the outcome factors of the sport experience (e.g., Hightower et al., 2002; Lambrect et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 1995; O'Neill et al., 1999; Theodorakis et al., 2001; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). This is probably due to the difficulties that sport managers face to control game related aspects of the sport product (Brady et al., 2006).

The studies of Brady et al. (2006), Greenwell et al. (2002), Tsuji et al. (2007) and Yoshida and James (2010) are the only ones that investigated the influence of both process and outcome dimensions of service quality on spectators'

overall satisfaction with the sport event experience. Although all the above studies provided evidence that the outcome dimension of service quality significantly influences satisfaction, their results are not easily comparable, and they are somewhat mixed in terms of the elements of the outcome quality that influence spectators' satisfaction. This is due to the differences in the conceptualization of outcome quality, the different measurement scales used, and the different contexts of their studies. [Brady et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Tsuji et al. \(2007\)](#), for example, found that game related factors (i.e. outcome, core service quality) had the strongest effects on satisfaction, while [Greenwell et al. \(2002\)](#) found that peripheral aspects of service (i.e. functional quality) had the strongest influence. It has to be emphasized that outcome quality in the above studies was treated as a uni-dimensional construct. Furthermore, [Greenwell et al. \(2002\)](#) used Minor League Baseball as their setting; their sample included fans from a team of a city with little history in the sport of baseball; this might be a reason for fans placing less emphasis on the outcome of the game. Finally, even the time of the period that the data were collected might relate to the results of the study. As [Greenwell et al. \(2002\)](#) noted, in the end of an unsuccessful season functional elements of quality might be more important for fans than outcome ones.

Addressing the disagreements in the results of the above studies, the present study aimed to investigate the influence of both outcome and functional quality on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. We propose that that game-related factors (i.e. game quality) will have a stronger effect on spectators' satisfaction than process-related aspects of the sport experience, as reported by [Brady et al. \(2006\)](#), [Koo et al. \(2008\)](#), and [Tsuji et al. \(2007\)](#). Subsequently the following hypothesis was set:

Hypothesis 1. Outcome quality has a stronger impact on spectators' satisfaction than functional quality.

2.3. Service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty

It has been reported that positive perceptions about the quality of services leads to customer satisfaction, which in its turn leads to positive behavioural intentions ([Carlson & O'Cass, 2010](#); [Dabholkar, Shepherd, & Thorpe, 2000](#)). The relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions is well documented by researchers across different service settings ([Anderson & Fornell, 1994](#); [Anderson & Sullivan, 1993](#); [Athanassopoulos, Gounaris, & Stathakopoulos, 2001](#); [Bolton & Lemon, 1999](#)). However, the interaction between service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty is still a controversial issue. [Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman \(1996\)](#) proposed a direct relationship between service quality and behavioural intentions, while [Cronin, Brady, and Hult \(2000\)](#) reported that service quality influences behavioural intentions through satisfaction. Furthermore, [Cronin and Taylor \(1992\)](#) reported that customer satisfaction is a stronger predictor of behavioural intentions than service quality, while [Oliver \(1999\)](#) argued that customer satisfaction is the link between service quality and behavioural intentions.

In the context of spectator sports, there is limited research on the interactions between and among the three constructs ([Yoshida & James, 2010](#)). In this context, evidence regarding the relationships among service quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions can be found in the studies of [Koo et al. \(2008\)](#), [Yoshida and James \(2010\)](#) and [Brady et al. \(2006\)](#). Adopting [Gronroos' \(1984\)](#) model, [Yoshida and James \(2010\)](#), in a study among Japanese and American baseball and football spectators, found that functional and outcome quality influenced first the service and game satisfaction and then spectators' behavioural intentions. It is to be noted that Yoshida and James did not measure the direct effect of service quality dimensions on behavioural intentions. In a study among spectators of an action sport event, [Tsuji et al. \(2007\)](#) found that satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between core and peripheral service quality and spectators' future intentions. Using [Brady and Cronin's \(2001\)](#) service quality model, among collegiate basketball spectators, [Koo et al. \(2008\)](#) found that service quality dimensions (interaction, physical environment, and outcome) influence overall service quality perceptions, which in turn had a direct effect on spectators' behavioural intentions and an indirect one, through satisfaction. Using a similar conceptualization, in a study among fans from various spectator sports in the U.S., [Brady et al. \(2006\)](#) reported that spectators' satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality perceptions and their behavioural intentions. In this study, the researchers used only valence as an indicator of outcome quality, arguing that in several outcome-driven services (i.e. spectator sports) the outcome of the experience (i.e. valence) is the key driver of customer satisfaction.

Acknowledging the inadequacy of single indicators (i.e. repurchase intentions) to sufficiently capture customers' future behaviours, [Zeithaml et al. \(1996\)](#) presented a multi-dimensional behavioural intentions model. Based on the above model, [Cronin et al. \(2000\)](#) and [Yoshida and James \(2010\)](#) proposed the use of three favourable indicators (attend team's future games, recommend team's games, remain loyal to the team) to capture behavioural intentions in the context of spectator sports.

Based on research findings from the service ([Bloemer, de Ruyter, & Peeters, 1998](#); [Cronin et al., 2000](#); [Cronin & Taylor, 1992](#); [Dabholkar et al., 2000](#)) and spectator sports literature ([Brady et al., 2006](#); [Tsuji et al., 2007](#); [Yoshida & James, 2010](#)) we hypothesized that satisfaction mediates the effect of outcome and functional quality on spectators' behavioural intentions.

Hypothesis 2. Spectators' satisfaction (partially or completely) mediates the effect of outcome and functional quality on their behavioural intentions.

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

After winning European football championship in 2004, the interest of Greek spectators in football has been increased. As a consequence, the top 16 teams created the Super League in order to provide the highest standards for the organization of the professional championship, to promote football and its image, to increase attendance, and to maximize profits for its stakeholders and partners. From its first season (2006–2007) the Super League reported a 38% increase on attendance, selling approximately two millions tickets during the 2009–2010 season.

Data were collected using a convenient sampling method in a football game of the Super League in Greece. A supervisor and ten trained research assistants were placed in all stadium gates to ensure representation of all spectators (Robinson, Trail, Dick, & Gillentine, 2005). Participants completed the questionnaires prior to the beginning of the football game. Three hundred and fifty ($N = 350$) spectators participated in the study, of whom 314 were males and 36 were females. Their mean age was 34.19 ($SD = 11.35$), ranging from 17 to 69 years. On average, participants attended almost seven games of their favourite team during the last football season. Finally, 45% of the respondents were season tickets holders, while the rest 65% bought single-game tickets.

3.2. Measures

Service quality. Service quality was assessed using a 28-item context-specific scale, measuring both functional and outcome quality dimensions. In order to measure the functional quality, five process-related dimensions were adapted from SPORTSERV (Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008; Theodorakis et al., 2009): tangibles (i.e. stadium is visual appeal), responsiveness (i.e. personnel provides prompt service), reliability (i.e. services are delivered as promised), access (i.e. car parking availability), and security (i.e. feel safe inside the stadium). Two outcome-related dimensions were developed to measure outcome quality, based on the work of Koo et al. (2009), Brady et al. (2006), and Yoshida and James (2010): team performance (i.e. players perform well executed plays), and game quality (i.e. competitiveness of the game). Each service quality dimension comprised four items.

It should be noted that the composite score of each of the five process-related dimensions was used to define the latent factor functional quality. Similarly, the composite score of each of the quality-process dimension was used to assess the latent factor outcome quality (see Fig. 1). This decision was based on the following two considerations. First, using the composite scores instead of the items scores increases the estimated parameters to sample size ratio leading to enhanced stability of the derived results. Second, the use of composite scores, in order to assess the two latent factors – functional quality and outcome quality –, leads to a more parsimonious model; this is because fewer direct or indirect paths need to be estimated.

Satisfaction. Spectators' satisfaction was measured with four items (i.e. I am happy about my decision to attend this game), adapted from Brady et al. (2006). In line with Brady et al. (2006), satisfaction was measured with reference to the last game attended. Since this scale has not been previously used in Greece, a back-translation technique was used. Two bilingual sport management scientists translated the English version into Greek. The Greek version was re-translated into English by two other bilingual sport scientists. At the end, a Greek teacher qualified in English compared the two versions to ensure that the two versions are conceptually equivalent.

Behavioural intentions. Four items were adapted from Zeithaml et al. (1996) to capture spectators' positive behavioural intentions. An example of item was "How likely is to attend team's games in the future". A similar scale has been used by Cronin et al. (2000) and Yoshida and James (2010).

In all scales, respondents were instructed to indicate the extent of their agreement with each item, using a seven-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7).

3.3. Model specification

Based on prior research two mediation models were postulated and tested. Both models consisted of four-factor latent, namely functional quality, outcome quality, satisfaction and spectators' behavioural intentions. The first model examined the full mediation hypothesis (Bloemer et al., 1998; Brady et al., 2006; Dabholkar et al., 2000; Yoshida & James, 2010). In particular, satisfaction was hypothesized to have a direct effect on spectators' behavioural intentions. In turn, satisfaction was determined by two exogenous factors, namely functional quality and outcome quality. The second model examined the partial mediation hypothesis (Cronin et al., 2000; Li & Petrick, 2010; Tsuji et al., 2007). This model was derived from the first model by adding two direct effects from functional quality and outcome quality to fan's behavioural intention. The partial mediation model is depicted in Fig. 1.

3.4. Data analysis

Given that we were interested in examining the pattern of association among latent constructs structural equation, modelling procedures were employed. Following suggestions made by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step approach was employed. In the first step, a measurement model tested the suitability of the observed measures to define their

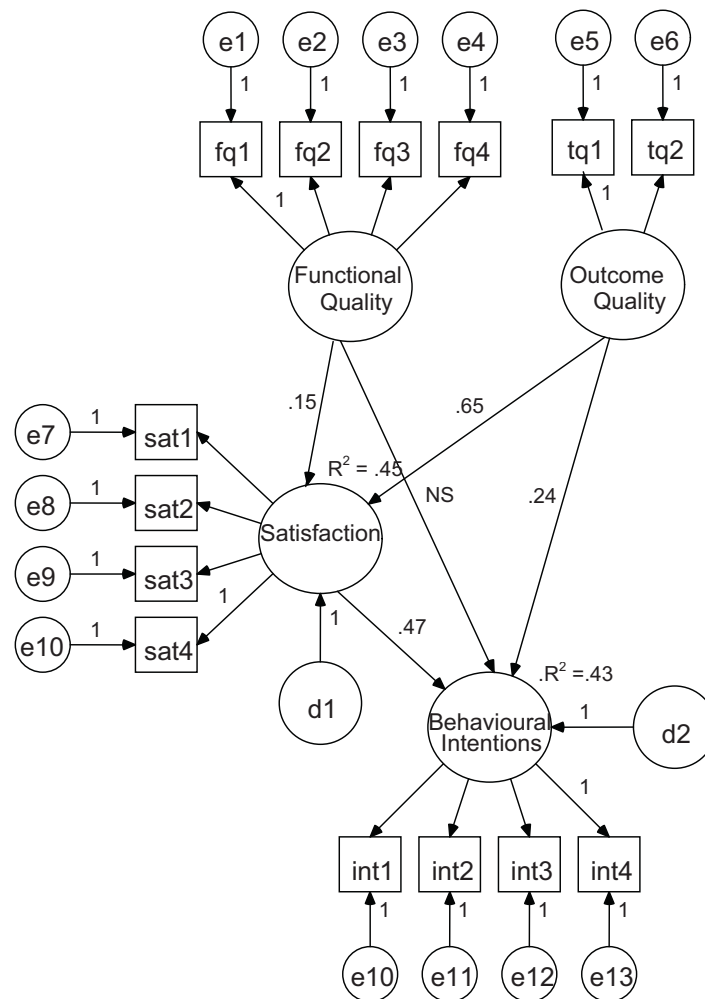


Fig. 1. The partial mediation model. Note: tq1 = composite score of game quality, tq2 = composite score of team performance, fq1 = composite score of tangibles, fq2 = composite score of responsiveness, fq3 = composite score of access, fq4 = composite score of reliability, and fq5 = composite score of security.

posited latent constructs. On the following step, a structural model examined the causal relations among the latent constructs.

The assessment of the fit of the empirical data to the proposed models was examined using multiple criteria in order to evaluate different aspects of the adequacy of the postulated models (Hoyle & Panter, 1995). Thus, apart from the chi-square statistic, an absolute fit index, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) along with its 90% confidence interval, and an incremental fit index, the comparative fit index (CFI) were used. The first fit index assesses the departure from the best fitting model which has a fit of 0, whereas the latter assesses the proportionate improvement in fit by comparing the examined model with a more restricted, nested baseline model. Values close to .06 for RMSEA, and .95 for CFI were considered as indicative of a relative good fit between the observed data and the hypothesized model (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model

Reliability estimates and a confirmatory factor analysis via EQS (Bentler, 2005) were used to evaluate the psychometric properties of the measurement model. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were satisfactory (>.70) for all scales ranging from .76 to .88. Additionally, composite reliabilities values were all above the suggested .60 threshold (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), with the exception of outcome quality, which was marginally below .59. Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, internal consistency estimates, composite reliabilities, and correlations among constructs.

Item skewness values ranged from −1.79 to .20 and item kurtosis values ranged from −3.12 to 3.34. An exploratory analysis of the above values along with the use of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test of normality showed that all variables were not normally distributed. The Mardia's (1970) coefficient of multivariate kurtosis was 79.28, and the normalized estimate

Table 1
Internal consistency, composite reliabilities and correlations for the examined latent factors.

Variables	α	CR	1	2	3
1. Behavioural intentions	.88	.91			
2. Satisfaction	.88	.91	.63 ^b (.45–.81)		
3. Outcome quality	.78	.59	.53 ^b (.39–.67)	.68 ^b (.52–.84)	
4. Functional quality	.76	.77	.17 ^a (.04–.30)	.36 ^b (.21–.51)	.45 ^b (.31–.59)

Note: Confidence intervals reported in parentheses ($\varphi \pm 2\sigma_e$).

^a $p < .05$.

^b $p < .01$.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and CFA item statistics for behavioural intentions, satisfaction and service quality dimensions.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis	<i>t</i> -Values	Factor loadings	Error term	SMCs
Behavioural intentions								
Item 1	5.45	1.43	–.83	.02	11.22	.71	.70	.50
Item 2	5.82	1.46	–1.37	1.29	8.91	.85	.51	.73
Item 3	6.23	1.12	–1.73	2.50	7.87	.88	.46	.78
Item 4	6.23	1.16	–1.79	3.34	9.66	.83	.55	.68
Satisfaction								
Item 1	4.7	1.44	–.48	.01	11.18	.71	.69	.51
Item 2	5.48	1.43	–.78	.14	10.04	.81	.58	.65
Item 3	5.37	1.52	–.79	.03	7.68	.88	.45	.79
Item	5.47	1.52	–1.00	.42	9.40	.84	.54	.70
Outcome quality								
Game quality	5.28	1.08	–.52	.02	6.22	.81	.58	.66
Team performance	5.79	.92	–.80	.66	7.77	.76	.64	.58
Functional quality								
Tangibles	3.68	1.57	.20	–1.00	10.34	.61	.79	.37
Responsiveness	4.54	1.45	–.37	–3.12	10.91	.55	.83	.30
Access	4/51	1.58	–.41	–.65	10.51	.59	.80	.35
Reliability	4.85	1.23	–.49	.45	10.78	.57	.82	.32
Security	4.57	1.35	–.29	–.32	7.91	.74	.66	.56

was 29.14. According to Bentler (2005) normalized estimate values greater than five indicate departures from normality. Thus, the assumption of multivariate normality was untenable. Based on the above, it was decided to use the Sattora–Bentler scaled χ^2 statistic. Results indicated an acceptable fit of the model to the data: S–B $\chi^2 = 226.15$, $df = 84$, $p < .001$, S–B $\chi^2/df = 2.69$, CFI = .919, RMSEA = .074, 90% RMSEA CI = .062–.085. All factor loadings were above $>.50$ and the critical ratios were all significant ranging from 6.22 to 11.22, indicating evidence of convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Rahim & Magner, 1996). Correlations among the four latent constructs were moderate in size ($<.60$) indicating initial evidence of discriminant validity (Kline, 2011). Anderson and Gerbing (1988, p. 146) suggested that “assessment of discriminant validity is to determine whether the confidence interval (\pm two standard errors) around the correlation estimate between the two factors includes 1.0.” As presented in Table 2, all the confidence intervals developed do not include the value of 1.0, thus providing further evidence of discriminant validity.

4.2. Structural model

It was hypothesized that both functional and outcome dimensions of service quality would positively influence spectators' satisfaction, which in turn would positively influence their behavioural intentions (full mediation model). Goodness of fit criteria indicated an acceptable fit between the data and the model: S–B $\chi^2 = 199.09$, $df = 85$, $p < .001$, S–B $\chi^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = .935, RMSEA = .065, 90% RMSEA CI = .054–.077. Results concerning the partial mediation model showed also a acceptable fit, S–B $\chi^2 = 190.63$, $df = 83$, $p < .001$, S–B $\chi^2/df = 2.29$, CFI = .938, RMSEA = .064, 90% RMSEA CI = .052–.076. Given that the two examined models are nested a chi-square difference was employed to compare them. The S–B $\Delta\chi^2$ difference was statistically significant (S–B scaled difference = 10.04, $df = 2$, $p = .006$) suggesting that the partial mediation model had a better fit in comparison to the full mediation model.¹ Thus the partial mediation model was selected as the most tenable.

¹ The free-ware program SBDIFF.EXE was used to calculate the difference between the two examined models. Additional information can be found at the <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/~psy086/dept/sbdiff.htm>.

Findings indicated that both service quality dimensions had a significant and positive effect on spectators' satisfaction: $\beta = .15$, $p < .01$ for functional quality, and $\beta = .65$, $p < .001$ for outcome quality. For spectators' satisfaction 45% of the variance was accounting for by the two quality dimensions. However, outcome quality exerted a stronger effect on satisfaction than functional quality providing support for [Hypothesis 1](#). [Hypothesis 2](#) proposed that satisfaction will mediate (or partially mediate) the relationship between service quality dimensions and behavioural intentions. The path from satisfaction to behavioural intentions ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$), and the direct path from outcome quality to behavioural intentions ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) were significant. On the other hand the direct path from functional quality to behavioural intentions did not reach statistical significance. The above results suggested that the relationship between service quality dimensions and behavioural intentions was partially mediated by satisfaction, accounting for 43% of the variance associated with behavioural intentions. Results of the structural equation modelling are depicted in [Fig. 1](#).

5. Discussion

The present paper aimed to apply an integrated service quality model in the context of professional football. Both the dimensions of outcome and functional quality were included in the model and were tested in relation to spectators' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. As previously discussed, the outcome dimension of service quality has not been adequately developed in the sport literature. Studies have provided mixed results both on its measurement and its influence on spectators' satisfaction and behavioural intentions ([Brady et al., 2006](#); [Clemes et al., 2011](#); [Ko et al., 2011](#); [Koo et al., 2008](#); [Yoshida & James, 2011](#)).

Our study contributes to the literature, first, by proposing two clear dimensions (game quality and team performance) for the measurement of outcome quality. These dimensions were successfully incorporated within an integrated model of service quality, as the one proposed by [Gronroos' \(1984\)](#) in the general services marketing literature. Both the functional and the outcome dimensions of service quality were found to be reliable, valid and applicable in this context. As previously discussed, in the present study the functional dimension covered the sub-dimensions of tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, access and security. These are typical dimensions that have been used in the majority of previous studies in a spectator sport setting ([Hightower et al., 2002](#); [Lambrecht et al., 2009](#); [Lee et al., 2011](#); [McDonald et al., 1995](#); [O'Neill et al., 1999](#); [Theodorakis et al., 2001, 2009](#); [Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999](#)) and describe the process part of service quality.

A second theoretical contribution of the study relates to the clarification of the relationship between the two dimensions of service quality (outcome and functional) and spectators' satisfaction. As discussed, previous studies have provided mixed results. While the results indicated that both the dimensions (outcome and functional) contributed to this prediction, the outcome dimension was the one with the strongest influence, which support our first hypothesis. These results are in line with the study of [Brady et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Tsuji et al. \(2007\)](#), and are in contrast with the study of [Greenwell et al. \(2002\)](#), who reported that the functional quality had the strongest influence on satisfaction. It should, therefore, be proposed that the outcome quality is an important dimension in the context of professional sports and should not be overlooked in future studies.

A third theoretical contribution of our study relates to the support of the overall theoretical model proposed; for the first time, empirical evidence on the direct influence of outcome quality (measured with two dimensions) on spectators' satisfaction, and on their total influence on spectators' behavioural intentions was provided. The results clarified that outcome quality has a stronger influence on spectators' satisfaction than functional quality; furthermore, satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between service quality and spectators' behavioural intentions. As previously discussed, mixed results had been reported so far for the above relationships. For example, [Zeithaml et al. \(1996\)](#) proposed a direct relationship between service quality and behavioural intentions, while [Cronin et al. \(2000\)](#) reported that service quality influences behavioural intentions through satisfaction. In the sport spectator literature, [Theodorakis and Alexandris \(2008\)](#) reported weak direct relationships between service quality dimensions and behavioural intentions.

Regarding our second hypothesis, we found that spectator satisfaction only partially mediated the relationship between service quality dimensions and behavioural intentions, since the outcome quality dimension also had a direct effect on spectators' behavioural intentions in the context of professional football in Greece. A possible explanation is that cultural differences may influence consumers' evaluations of the service experience ([Brady, Robertson, & Cronin, 2001](#); [Tapp & Clowes, 2000](#)). Using samples of service consumers from five different countries, [Brady et al. \(2005\)](#) found a direct influence of service quality on behavioural intentions only among consumers in two out of the five countries in their study.

From a managerial standpoint, it should be noted that the technical aspect of service quality is difficult to be controlled by the marketers of clubs, and it is less predictable than the functional dimension ([Clemes et al., 2011](#)). It is clear that the marketing director of a professional sport club has almost no influence on the selection of the players of the team, the strategy of the game, the style of playing, etc., since these are decided by the coaching team. This shows the difficulties that marketers of professional football clubs face when they try to develop, sell and market their product. We, therefore, propose that marketing directors should, in some way, participate in the club's strategic decision-making. The management of professional football clubs should understand and recognize that the game quality, the quality of the

players, and the performance of the team, are important elements of service quality and their product; they influence spectators' satisfaction and loyalty, which is an ultimate objective for the financial stability of every club. Therefore, they have, to some degree, involved marketing directors in the strategic decision making process. Furthermore, targeted communication strategies can be developed to influence spectators' perceptions about the technical aspects of service quality. The history of the team, the quality of the players, the personality of the coach, and the brand of the team are issues that should be communicated. Finally, it could be argued that the outcome dimension of service quality relates to the way that each professional league is organized and marketed by the league administration body. "Close" and exciting games that target the affective dimension of spectators' attitudes (Madrigal, 1995), for example, means that the league has competitive teams; this is something that should be promoted by league officials. Furthermore, perceptions about fairness and equal treatment of the teams from referees and the league administration bodies play an important role in the development of the outcome dimension of service quality (Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008).

The functional dimension of service quality has been widely discussed by previous researchers (McDonald et al., 1995; Theodorakis et al., 2001, 2009; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996, 1999). It is something that, in a way, is under the control of the management of the club. Issues related to the stadium, such as the design, space, safety, and atmospherics, as well as the supportive services, such as parking, accessibility, concessions and in game competitions are important aspects of the functional dimension of service quality (Wakefield et al., 1996). It should be noted that Yoshida and James (2011) provided an even more specific definition of functional quality, by making a distinction between functional quality and aesthetics quality. The former was defined only by elements related to frontline employees and facility functions, while the latter was defined by the elements of ancillary products and aesthetics environment. In the present study aesthetics quality was included within functional quality. While the quality of most of the elements of functional quality (e.g., the stadium) is considered today as more or less standard in professional sports in North America, they are not still well developed in some European countries (including Greece, Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008; Theodorakis et al., 2001).

In conclusion, the present study provided empirical evidence that outcome quality, as measured by the team performance and game quality dimensions, is an important element of the service quality construct in the context of spectators' sports, and has a strong influence on spectators' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. In this line, the theoretical framework provided by Gronroos' (1984) was shown to be applicable in this context. Finally, the results revealed the important role of satisfaction in the development of spectators' future behaviours. By understanding the major drivers of spectators' loyalty, sport managers could improve the sport event experience for them; this is an important step in their attempt to increase attendance and profits (Li & Petrick, 2010).

6. Limitations and future research

Several limitations of the study should be addressed. First of all, the data were collected from spectators of one professional team, which means that results are only indicative and cannot be generalized. Future studies should use larger samples, including spectators of more professional football teams, to allow results to be generalized with more confidence. Furthermore, the cultural element of the study should be acknowledged. As previously discussed, the vast majority of studies conducted on service quality in spectator sports come from North America. The sport administration system in the North American market, as well as the needs and expectations of sport spectators, are different than the European market, which it is not unified (Melnick & Wann, 2011; Rubingh & Broeke, 1998). Subsequently, cross-cultural studies should be conducted in future, to study differences and similarities in service quality models across countries and continents.

The similarities and differences between spectators' perceptions of service quality on different sports (e.g., basketball, volleyball, motor sports) is also an issue that should be investigated in future studies. This requires the testing of the application of the service quality model on spectators of different sports. In this line, the measuring of outcome quality might be shown to be context-specific, related on the nature of the specific sport and the expectations of the spectators. This is what has been proposed by Gronroos (1984), when he developed the original generic model of service quality. Ko et al. (2011) also suggested that future researches should rely on operational models that include context-specific characteristics (i.e. in contrast to banks and department store, sport events are self service environment) in an effort to enhance our understanding of service quality in different sport contexts.

As previously discussed, service quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions are three constructs used in the present study. There are more constructs, which have been proposed in the literature, to interact with quality and satisfaction and influence fan's decision-making, and were not included in the present study. Examples are image (Gronroos, 1984, 1990, 2001) perceived value (Cronin et al., 2000), team brand associations (Ross, 2006) and team brand personality (Tsiotsou, 2012). Gronroos (1990, 2001), for example, argued that image plays the role of a filter that influences positively or negatively customers' overall perceptions of quality, suggesting that since customers might have multiple experiences with the organization and its services a dynamic aspect such as image should be considered as well.

Finally, more consequences of service quality and satisfaction should be investigated in future studies. Behavioural intentions are a standard variable that have been used by the majority of studies so far. In our study, behavioural intentions

were measured using a multi-item measure combining revisit intentions and word of mouth (recommend) intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Yoshida & James, 2010). Researchers who wish to further explore customer loyalty should use a separate scale for each discrete facet of this construct (Howat, Crilley, & McGrath, 2008; Soderlund, 2006). Furthermore, constructs, such as switching behaviour, complaining behaviour (Zeithaml et al., 1996), as well as brand line extensions (Ross, 2006), and fan attachment (Funk & James, 2006), could be examined in relation to service quality and fan satisfaction.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank the two anonymous SMR reviewers for their constructive comments which helped improve the quality of this paper.

Appendix A. Scale items

Behavioural intentions

Likelihood to say positive things about [named team]
Likelihood to encourage friends to attend
Likelihood to attend games in the future
Likelihood to consider [named team] as your first choice when attending games in the future

Satisfaction

Happy with my decision to attend this game
I did the right thing to attend this game
Overall, I think this game was a satisfying experience
Overall, satisfied with my decision to go to the game

Game quality

Competitiveness of the games
Games are usually fast and flowing
High level of play
Spectacular games

Team performance

Players perform well executed plays
Team plays hard all the time
Team has good win/lose record
Team has great results this season

Tangibles

Stadium is visual appealing
Cleanliness of the stadium
Stadium provides comfortable seats
Existence of amenities/concessions (i.e. bars, restaurants)

Responsiveness

Provide prompt service
Willingness to assist
Best interest of spectator at hearts
Give individual attention

Access

Car parking availability
Public transport availability
Ease of entry and exit
Accessibility of stadium

Reliability

Delivering services as promised
General trustworthiness
Services provided right the first time
Response to complaints/problems

Security

Feel safe inside the stadium
Feel safe surrounds the stadium
Feel safe during game
General sense of freedom from danger when attending games

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