

The Comparison of Service Quality in Public and Private Clubs in Lorestan Province using SRERVQUAL Model

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Abstract

This study aimed to compare the service quality of public and private clubs in Lorestan province using SRERVQUAL model. This was a descriptive- survey field study. The population consisted of 310 subjects including the managers and costumers of private and public clubs. The research tool was two questionnaires: standard questionnaire ($\alpha = 0/81$) which was used for studying the expectations and perceptions of consumers and researcher made questionnaire which was used for determining the five gaps rate of SERVQUAL model. Their validity and reliability was confirmed by professors. The results showed that there was great difference between public and private clubs in all dimensions of service quality (appearance /objective factors/validity/responsibility/trust)($P < 0.001$). The service quality in private clubs was higher. The Friedman test was used to rank the dimensions of service quality in private and public clubs. It showed the same results for both clubs in term of five factors of service quality. Also the comparison of gaps rate at significance level of ($p < 0.05$) showed that there was significant difference between private and public clubs ($p < 0/001$). However, it can be said that the gap rate in private clubs was considerably less than the gap rate in public clubs.

Key words: Private clubs, public clubs, Gap, service quality, SERVQUAL model

Introduction

The quality is one of the most important criteria for evaluating the services. It is a broad concept that different parts of the organization are committed to it (Bahrain et al., 2009). Its purpose is to boost the performance of organization with minimal costs to enhance

competitiveness. It tries to match whole the organization with the desired characteristics of customer. Thus, providing high quality services to customers is strategic issue in public and private organizations (Azar, 2009). Managers of service providing organizations are aware that high quality will lead to better performance and it has advantages such as good financial efficiency, customer loyalty, meeting the needs of customers, market share growth, and productivity of organizations (Ghanbarpour et al., 2012 & Theodorakis et al., 2013).

The research shows that in the past two decades, the interest to service quality has also been proposed in sports industry. Today, however, the quality of service is one of the headlines in the services management and sports marketing (2013, Wisniewski). In sport, the service delivery mainly focuses on customer (Romo, 2010). Therefore, due to increased competition among sports service providers in understanding customer expectations, the levels of these expectations, and the customer's desired value system, the sports organizations allow the service marketers to determine whether the provided services have an acceptable level of quality (Tatari et al. ,2014 & Robledo,2001).

In recent years, the private sector has been entered to the service sector, particularly sports service sector. With its non-competitive and exclusive background, the public sector considers the private sector as a new rival. Meanwhile, the service delivery in its desirable and appropriate way guarantees the survival of clubs in both sectors. Therefore, the expectations and demands of customers should be satisfied and their loyalty and satisfaction should be attracted (Bahia,2000).

Today, the public and private clubs are known as organizations that have an important role in providing services to youth, young adults, middle-aged and older people, and coaches and athletes as their customers (Fauziah,2014). Thus, these organizations should seriously improve service quality to satisfy their customers and meet their expectations (Damiuri et al., 2011).

In their study, Lee and Fauziah reported that the comparison of public and private clubs in terms of visual effects and tangible factors, the employee accountability, responsiveness to customers, and the reputation expected by the customers for these clubs may give feedback to each of these clubs. Therefore, these clubs may correct their deficiencies (Fauziah and Lee, 2014).

According to many researchers in physical education, the expectations of customers and users of the clubs has increased in comparison to the past (Theodorakis ,2013 & Aydemir,2013). The increased customers' expectations may be due to several factors such as increased awareness and knowledge of customers, advertisement of other sports organizations around the world, comparison of their situation with other top countries in this field, the performance of competitors, and so on. The second factor is environmental and includes political, legal, economic, social, and cultural factors which urge organizations to provide high quality services. In addition, by expanding access to the Internet, customers can easily obtain information from around the world; it has also led to rising of expectations (Aydemir,2013). The third factor is the nature of services. The assessment of services quality is difficult for their recipients, due to its characteristics. For this reason, customers assess the quality of services according to their physical evidence and the behavior and attitudes of employees. The fourth factor is the organization's internal factors. With their promotional activities, organizations raise the expectations and demands of customers. As a result, customer expects the promised services from the organization (Carrasco ,2012; Bai ,2013& Aydemir,2013). The fifth factor is the

benefits of service quality. It encourages organizations to provide high quality services (Chelladurai,2008). The increased efficiency and effectiveness in providing better service to customers leads to their repeated visits and increases their satisfaction and expands word of mouth advertisement for the organization (Aydemir ,2013&Tsaur,2014).

The research results of Koozechian (2009) and Chia-Ming (2008), each of them separately studied about the quality of service in clubs and fitness centers, showed that there were significant differences between what customers expect from a club (ideal situation) and what the club offers (the status quo) (Kouzechian et al., 2009 & Chia-Ming & et al., 2008).

In a model, Seyed Javadin et al. (2010) showed that service qualities of clubs or athletic complex and the level of customer satisfaction affects on their loyalty (Seyed Javadin et al., 2010).

In his study, Chelladurai (2008) found that visual effects and tangible factors can attract more customers to the club (Chelladurai,2008).

In their studies on the quality of private clubs, Sadeghi and Hasani (2011) found that if the quality of provided services will be better in terms of five dimensions, the manager and staffs will be better in terms of job creativeness (Sadeghi Boroujerdi,2011).

In their study, Rajabi et al. (2011) showed that if the quality of provided services by the clubs will be better, the customer satisfaction would be much higher (Rajabi et al., 2011).

Comparing the service quality in public and private gym and fitness clubs, Sajjadi et al. (2011) found that there is significant difference between the service quality of private and public organizations; private clubs were significantly higher in all five dimensions (Sajjad et al., 2011).

In their study, Theodorakis et al (2013) concluded that if the services quality will be better in the stadiums and the football clubs, the football fans will have more favorable and pleasant behavior, they will be more willing to buy the brand of club, and return of investment will be more for the club (Theodorakis et al., 2013).

In a study on the service quality of public clubs, Ehsani, Kouzechian and Tatari (2014) found that there is a significant difference between the desired and current status in all dimensions of service quality in public clubs (visual effects and tangible factors, reputation, responsibility, confidence and assurance, empathy). The analysis showed that in all five gaps, the gap rate is negative and significant (Tatari & et al.,2014).

The SERVQUAL model studies service quality in five dimensions of visual effects and tangible factors, reputation, responsibility, confidence and assurance, and ultimately empathy. These five dimensions generally measure the service quality. The following conceptual model is provided by SERVQUAL and her colleagues. It is used in this study too.

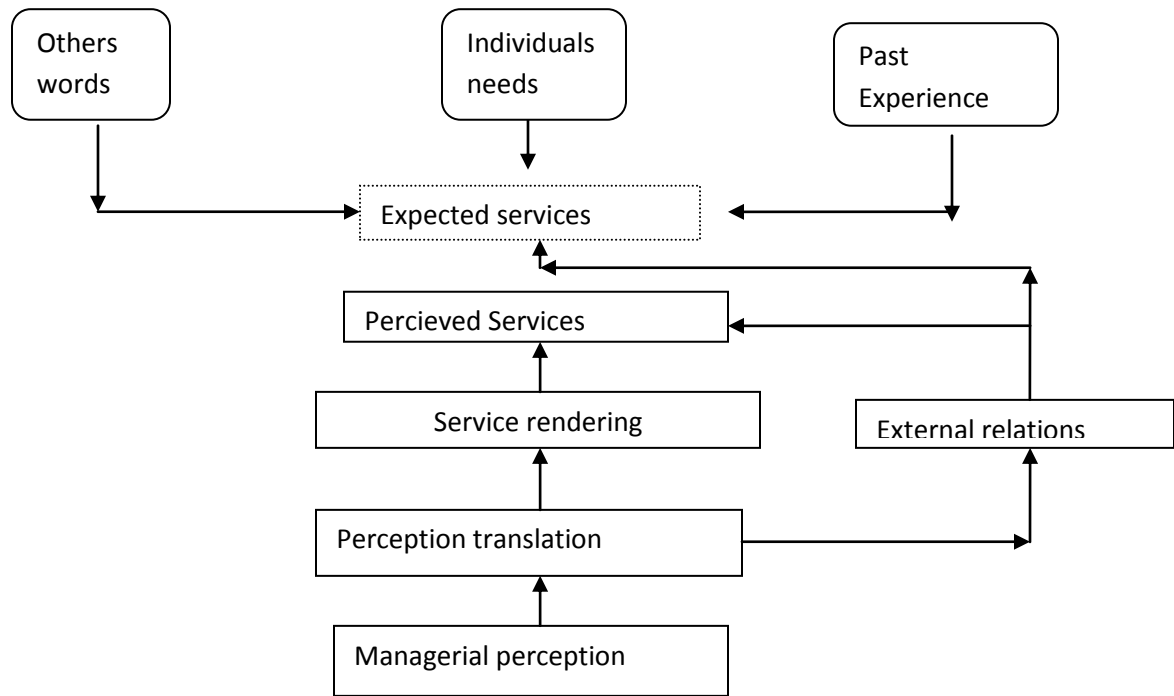


Figure 1. The conceptual model of research (SERVQUAL model)

The SERVQUAL model has five gaps (1998, Parasuraman & et al.,1998). According to model designers, if these gaps decrease or move to positive, the service quality will be better; and if they increase and move to negative, the service quality will be more unfavorable. Depending on data collection tools and averages obtained from the population, if the extent of these gaps will be intermediate and it will be near to determined standard rate, the service quality will also be average or median (Parasuraman & et al.,1998).

Considering the necessity of services quality and its high importance in continuous improvement of public and private clubs in order to meet the expectations of customers, this study aims to compare the services quality of public and private clubs using SERVQUAL model to answer the following questions:

What is the difference between public and private clubs in current and ideal situation in terms of 5 factors of service quality (responsibility, trustworthiness, visual effects and tangible factors, assurance, empathy)?

Based on SERVQUAL model, how is the five gaps rate of service quality in the public and private clubs? How these gaps are compared in public and private clubs?

Research Methodology

This was a descriptive- survey field study. The population consisted of 190 public and private clubs in Lorestan province (142 private clubs and 48 public clubs). The sample was selected using multi-stage sampling method. First, using random cluster sampling method, 6 cities (Khorramabad, Kouhdasht, Nurabad, Dorud, Poldokhtar, Aligudarz) which had 60 private clubs and 28 public clubs were selected. Then, using Morgan table, 52 clubs were selected from 60 private clubs and using bias sampling method, all of the 28 public clubs were selected.

Considering the number of their customers and managers which approximately and based on the statistics of Physical Education organization in the province was 1,600 subjects, the final sample, according to Morgan table, was selected to be consisted of 310 cases. The data were collected using SERVQUAL questionnaire consisted of 22 items in 5 sections including physical and tangible factors, reputation of customers to the club, the club's responsibility and accountability to customers, confidence of customers to the club, guarantee of commitments by the club, and empathy between the customers and the club. They were set based on the Likert continuum (5 option scale). The samples in the first stage expressed their expectations and in the second stage expressed their perceptions. Using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, their reliability was obtained to be 0.81 ($\alpha = 0.81$). A researcher made questionnaire was also used to evaluate the five gaps in service quality of private and public clubs. It consisted of 22 items; but after being modified and reviewed by experts in sports management ($n = 12$), the items reduced to 17 questions. Using Cronbach's alpha, its reliability was obtained 0.85 ($\alpha = 0.85$). However, 3 questionnaires were distributed in private clubs among customers who had activity more than two years at the club. Finally, the analysis was performed on 310 collected questionnaires. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, standard deviation, descriptive diagrams, etc., the Kolmogorov- Smirnov test to determine the normality of data, the independent t-test to compare the quality of service in private and public clubs and their five gaps, and finally the Friedman test for prioritizing the service quality factors. The SPSS 18 software was used to analyze the data.

Results and findings

All distributed questionnaires were returned. After analyzing data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the normality or non-normality of data distribution. The results showed that data distribution was normal in all dimensions. The independent t-test was used to compare the service quality of public and private clubs. Below, you can see the results.

Table 1. Independent t-test to compare the quality of service in public and private clubs (P <0.05)

The quality of services variables	The club type	Comparing the current situation (perceived) of quality of service				Comparing the favorable situation (expected) of quality of service			
		M	t	df	P	M	t	df	P
Visual effects and tangible factors	Public	17.05	16.66	310	0.001	24.09	0.41	304	0.68
	Private	22.06				23.84			
Reliability	Public	22.01	10.03	310	0.001	31.56	0.49	309	0.62
	Private	26.30				31.78			
Accountability	Public	15.21	8.70	309	0.001	24.85	0.19	306	0.85
	Private	19.32				24.71			
Confidence and assurance	Public	8.53	2.63	308	0.009	11.95	0.71	308	0.47
	Private	9.43				12.09			
Empathy	Public	13.53	9.60	310	0.001	20.13	0.50	30.8	0.61
	Private	17.42				20.39			
Quality of Service	Public	76.45	14.58	308	0.001	112.4	0.33	304	0.74
	Private	94.61				113.1			

As you can see in the above table, there is significant difference between the quality of services in public and private clubs. The perceived quality of service (available) in private clubs is significantly better than the public clubs (p <0.001). But, it is interesting thing to note that there was no significant difference between private and public clubs in all there was no significant difference between private and public clubs service quality (expected) dimensions (p <0.74).

The Friedman test was used to rank the dimensions of service quality in public and private clubs. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Friedman test for ranking the services quality in public and private clubs

Public clubs	The order of dimensions	.1 Reliability	Visual effects and tangible factors .2	.3 Accountability	Empathy.4	.5 Confidence and assurance
Private clubs	The order of dimensions	.1 Reliability	Visual effects and tangible factors .2	.3 Accountability	Empathy.4	.5 Confidence and assurance

Also, the t-test was used to compare the five gaps rate at significance level ($p < 0.05$). The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 3. Results of independent t-test to compare the five gaps of SERVQUAL model in private and public clubs

Gaps	Club type	N	Mean	Mean difference	Sig
1 Gap	Private	155	2.5694	0.29355	0.001
	Public	155	2.2758		
2 Gap	Private	155	3.0516	0.41126	0.001
	Public	155	2.6403		
3 Gap	Private	155	2.5226	0.52042	0.001
	Public	154	2.0022		
4 Gap	Private	155	2.9957	0.97405	0.001
	Public	154	2.0216		
5 Gap	Private	155	2.6882	0.64731	0.001
	Public	155	2.0409		

According to Table 3, there are significant difference between private and public clubs ($p < 0.001$) in all the gaps. It can be said that the gap rate in private clubs is significantly lower than gap rate in public clubs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Due to their critical role in maintaining and improving the health of people in the community, the sports organizations should improve the quality of their services effectively (2014, Tatari Hasan Gawyar & et al). One of the main ways to assess the quality of their services is getting feedback from their customers and measuring their expectations and perceptions (2012, Conner). According to Parasuraman et al., if the gap between expectations and perceptions will be less, the service quality is desirable and vice versa (Parasuraman & et al.,1998).

This study compared the service quality of private and public clubs in Lorestan province using SERVQUAL model. The descriptive findings showed that the number of samples from both genders was the same public and private clubs and both men and women were almost equally selected. This makes the results be generalized to the population with a higher percentage of confidence (Seyed Javadin et al., 2010). The purpose of exercise among most of the subjects (35.5%) in public clubs was fitness; health was in the next rank. While, the purpose of exercise among the subjects (32.9%) in private clubs was health; the fitness was in the next rank. Since all of the subjects were active in the clubs for over two years, the obtained results may be accepted with higher confidence. In his study on the service quality in fitness clubs, however, Chia-Ming found that if the activity history of athletes in the club will be more, acceptable results may be reported on the service quality of the club (Chia-Ming et al.,2008).

Since the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the distribution of data and the results showed the normality of the distribution, the parametric tests were used for subsequent analyses. The results of inferential analysis showed that in the ideal situation (expected), there were no significant difference between public and private clubs in five dimensions averages at significance level of ($p < 0.05$) [$p < 0.76$]. According to Parasuraman and his colleagues, this lack of difference suggests that in the desired or expected situation, the customers' expectation is considered. According to Sajjadi et al, it is natural that there is no difference between the desired situations of two clubs; this is consistent with the findings of present study (Sajjadi et al., 2012).

However, there is significant difference between private and public clubs in all five dimensions of service quality in perceived situation. The total average of quality services at private and public clubs was 94.61 and 76.45, respectively. The independent t-test showed a significant difference between the service quality of public and private clubs and mentioned averages [$p < 0.001$]. These results are consistent with the research results of Sajjadi et al (2011); comparing the service quality of public and private body building clubs, they also found that there was significant difference between the service quality of both clubs and the quality of provided services by private clubs were better than public clubs (Sajjadi et al., 2012). Also, these results are consistent with the results obtained by researchers such as Gorji and colleagues (2013), Rajabi et al (2011), Seyed Javadin et al (2010), Tatari et al (2014), Bai et al (2013), and Boroujerdi et al. (2011). They also found that from the perspective of customers, private clubs have more acceptable service quality (2013, Johan, Sayed Javadin et al., 2010, 2014, Tatari Hasan Gawyar & et al, 2013, Bai & et al, 2011, Sadeghi Boroujerdi).

The Friedman test was used to prioritize the quality of services in private and public clubs. The obtained averages indicated that both clubs have the same priorities for quality of service. The reputation obtained the first priority with an average of 4.80 in public clubs and with an average of 4.67 in private clubs. This finding is consistent with the results of Knop (2013). He also found that building a reputation is the most important factor for the success of club in

attracting customers (2013, Knop & et al). The confidence to the club was the last priority from the perspective of customers and managers with mean 1.07 and 1.05 in public and private clubs, respectively. This is consistent with the research of Choi et al. (2013) and Murray (2012). They also found that confidence had the least importance (Cui & et al.,2013 & Murray et al.,2012).

However, the t-test was used to compare two private and public clubs in terms of five gaps rate at significance level of ($p < 0.05$). The results showed that are significant differences between private and public clubs in all the gaps ($p < 0.001$). It can be stated that the gaps in private clubs was significantly less than the gaps in public clubs. This is consistent with the findings of Lee. Studying the services quality of sports clubs, he found that public clubs have a weaker position than private clubs in terms of the difference between the expected service and perceived service (fifth gap) (2014, Lee). In this regard, Fauziah conducted a research on the service quality of public and private clubs. He concluded that there is no difference between private and public clubs in the first gap (the difference between expected customer service and management perceptions of customer expectations) and the second gap (the difference between the management perceptions of customer expectations and service quality standards). However, he also stated that there is significant difference between private and public clubs in the third gap (the difference between the standards of service quality and timely delivery of services), fourth gap (the difference between provided services and commitment to the customer), and the fifth gap (the difference between the expected service of customers and perceived services by them). The present study is consistent with this finding (2014, Fauziah).

According to the results of present study, the researchers suggest that the managers of public clubs improve the quality of their services by using SERVQUAL model and institutionalizing this model in their organization. They, therefore, may ask about different expectations of their customers through inquiry, filling out the forms, writing comments about the expected quality of services, and etc. In this way, they may increase their perceptions of customer expectations (reducing the first gap). The managers should be aware of world standards and identify the service quality standards to further increase their understanding in this area (reducing the second gap). They should try to meet the national and international standards in delivery of services to the customer, because due to power of media and invasion of information in today world, customers are more or less aware about the standards of their field (third gap). They should always be committed to their commitments to customers. When customers see honest in the words and deeds in club, they tend to come back and stay (fourth gap). They should pay attention to factors such as improving environmental quality, using modern equipments, the use of skilled trainers and technicians, to meet the demands of customers, and improving communication skills. Therefore, the available quality will be preserved, the quality will be promoted, more customers will be attracted, and the gaps will also significantly reduce.

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