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Critical Perspectives

Influence of curriculum quality and educational service quality on student experiences: A case study in sport management programs



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ABSTRACT

Building upon the American Customer Satisfaction Index model, the current study initially explored the influence of educational quality of Sport Management programs (including curriculum quality and educational service quality) on student educational evaluation. The results of confirmatory factor analysis show that four major dimensions of curriculum quality in Sport Management education, and five dimensions of educational service quality. The results of structural relationship model indicated that the influence of curriculum quality and educational service quality first leads to a change in students' perceived quality; this change in perceived quality further directly impact loyalty and indirectly impact loyalty via satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the number of institutions of higher education around the world has grown remarkably (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; U.S. Department of the Treasury & U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Universities UK, 2012). Marketing strategies to attract students have become much more competitive (Zhang, Han, & Gao, 2009). Meanwhile, students are more often treated like (and consider themselves) consumers who purchase educational products from institutions (Cardoso, Carvalho, & Santiago, 2011; Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, & Reinhardt, 2010). This trend has forced higher education providers to pay attention to student perceptions rather than focusing exclusively on the outlook of university administrators (Ivy, 2001; Vaira, 2004). Therefore, effectively meeting the growing demand for high-quality education among students has become a crucial agenda for numerous educational institutions (Altbach, Gumpert, & Berdahl, 2011; LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005), especially for the young but rapidly developing disciplines such as Sport Management

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(Chalip, 2006; Parkhouse & Pitts, 2004).

The current study explores the major antecedents that contribute to student evaluations of educational quality and the consequences of those evaluations for Sport Management programs in higher education. According to the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) model (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996), perceived quality plays a crucial role in individuals' affective (e.g., satisfaction) and conative (e.g., loyalty) responses. In higher education, quality as perceived by students primarily involves two components: curriculum quality (Aman, 2009; May Jr, 2010; Temizer & Turkyilmaz, 2012) and educational service quality (Asaduzzaman, Hossain, & Rahman, 2013; Hanaysha, Abdullah, & Warokka, 2011; Hasan, Ilias, Rahman, & Razak, 2009). Therefore, in the current study, curriculum quality and educational service quality were hypothesized to exert a positive influence on satisfaction and other behavioral responses of Sport Management majors. Three phases comprised the study: (a) hypothesizing the relationships among student perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty based on a comprehensive literature review; (b) assessing the reliability of measurement scales found in existing literature; and (c) empirically testing the proposed structural relationship model.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sport Management education

Since 1966 when the first Sport Management program was initiated at Ohio University (Parks, Quarterman, & Thibault, 2011), the discipline of Sport Management has been experiencing a significant development, especially over the past decade. According the report of North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), 166 universities/colleges in United States offered the Sport Management education in 2003 (Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008). In 2015, this number has tripled to 473 (NASSM, 2015). On a global scale, the Sport Management education is also thriving. The number of international Sport Management program identified by NASSM has increased to 79 in 2015, nearly doubling the program number in 2003. Additionally, there are some international programs out of NASSM's statistics. For example, more than 20 Chinese educational institutions offer the Sport Management major in 2015, but only one university is included on NASSM's list. Although the growth of Sport Management education is remarkable, it is still a relatively young field compared with the mature disciplines (e.g., Physics, Management, and English), leading to very few research endeavors focusing on its educational quality. Therefore, the current study aims to enrich this research topic by identifying the major components of perceived quality in Sport Management education and exploring their influences on student experiences.

2.2. American Customer Satisfaction Index model

Initially introduced by Fornell et al. (1996), ACSI (see Fig. 1) is a general theoretical framework for assessing customer satisfaction. In ACSI, three major antecedents (i.e., perceived quality, perceived value, and customer expectation) and two consequences (i.e., complaint and loyalty) of satisfaction were identified. In higher education research, students are regarded as customers who purchase educational products from institutions (Cardoso et al., 2011; Singleton-Jackson et al., 2010). Therefore, the application of ACSI to Sport Management could shed light on the best way to assess student perceptions and help program administrators improve student experiences based on those perceptions.

In the current study, a revised ACSI was used to construct the relationship model between perceived quality and several key variables that capture the educational experiences of students (i.e., perceived value, student satisfaction, and student loyalty). The modified model omits "complaints" and focuses exclusively on positive relationships. In addition, because the links from customer expectations to perceived value and customer satisfaction are weak, customer expectations could be safely omitted (Blogger, 2009). For the revised ACSI model, perceived quality of curriculum and educational service within Sport Management programs are the antecedents of perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty. Student loyalty, representing current and future support intention, is an outcome variable. Perceived value and satisfaction were hypothesized to mediate the influence of perceived quality on loyalty.

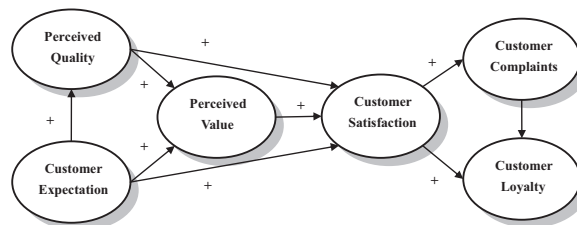


Fig. 1. American Customer Satisfaction Index Model (Fornell et al., 1996).

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