Relationship Among Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, and Renewal Intentions in Recreation Theme Park in Greece

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Abstract

Theme parks are a very popular form of recreation around the world. They are focused on one or more central themes and they are expected to attract significant investing interest in the following years. The purpose of this research was to study the effect of service quality concerning the satisfaction of the participants in a theme park and their renewal participating intentions. The survey involved 272 adults in a theme park. The questionnaire of Chang and Lee (2004), adapted to the needs of the theme park, was used to evaluate the quality, the satisfaction and the renewal intentions of the participants. Results showed a significant positive relationship among quality, satisfaction and renewal intentions, while partial correlations showed moderate positive relationship among these factors, the management of the theme parks should take all this into account for the proper designing and improvement of the services they provide.

Keywords: service quality, customer satisfaction, renewal intention, recreation theme park, Greece

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Introduction

The service quality is a particularly important issue in the bibliography of marketing since the idea of the service quality is related to the customer satisfaction and renewal intentions (Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis & Grouios, 2004a; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). During the last decades, the service quality, customer satisfaction, and the loyalty are very important issues which have attracted great interest by contemporary researchers of sports marketing (Alexandris et al., 2004a; Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Kasiara, 2001; Alexandris & Palialia, 1999; Chelladurai & Chang, 2000; Costa, Tsitskari, Tzetzis, & Goudas, 2004; Howat, Abser, Crilley, & Milne, 1996; Kim & Kim, 1995; Papadimitriou & Karteliotis, 2000; Theodorakis & Kambitsis, 1998; Yfantidou, Tsernou, Michalopoulos, & Costa, 2011).

To measure service quality, various models by marketing researchers have been developed and have been widely used in the private and public sector in the market for sports and recreation, as well as in the tourism industry. One model in the literature of marketing services is the SERVQUAL of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). According to this model, the quality can be measured by identifying gaps that exist between customer expectations before using the service and their perception of the completion of service. Crompton, MacKay, and Fesenmaier (1991) used this model to develop an instrument for measuring service quality in entertainment.

Another model also measuring the service quality that has thrived in entertainment proposed by Brady and Cronin (2001). The model includes three factors: a) the interaction quality which concerns the interaction relationship which grow between the customer and the staff. Researchers include three more sub- dimension in this dimension: response, behaviour and the staff training, b) the quality of the physical-material environment which includes the sub- dimension: facilities design (and their details, such as equipment, etc) environment (ambient) conditions (the temperature, the feeling, the music) and social environment (the relationships that develop among the customers), and c) the result quality which concerns the characteristics according to which the customer consider the service quality provided satisfying or not. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) developed a comprehensive model for the identification of gaps between

the quality expected by customers (before using the services) and the quality perceived by customers (after using the service).

What is of great concern to the researchers in the field of sport and recreation is the relationship there might be between the quality of the offered service and the customer satisfaction. Another concern is the behavioral intentions that are developed after participation in any activity.

When behavioral intentions are appropriately analyzed, they can predict real behavior up to a high degree (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). According to Zeithaml et al. (1996), when the customer perception for the service is high, behavioral intentions are favourable and strengthen the relationship of customer with the organization. On the other side, when evaluation of service quality is low, behavioral intentions of the customers are not favourable with the organization. As a consequence, behavioral intentions are indicators which show whether customers will continue or stop occupying themselves with the service.

According to Zeithamal et al. (1996), the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction and future behavioral intentions is an indirect way of helping to clarify the interaction between them. The relevance of these concepts was included in theoretical models (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991) and examined in empirical studies by many researchers from the broader field of services (Boulding, Karla, Staeling & Zeithaml, 1993; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Taylor & Baker, 1994). With few exceptions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), these researchers seem to agree on one thing: the level of service quality affects the willingness of customers to take positive actions for the company. The measurement of these positive effects is an important process that preoccupied researchers in recent years as the behavioural intentions are associated with the development of dedicated and loyal customers.

Among the researchers who supported the relationship between quality and satisfaction with the intentions and behaviour are Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000), who investigated this relationship in six different industrial markets: a) sports fans, b) participants in sports activities, c) entertainment d) health institutes, e) long distance transports and f) fast food chains. The reference to intentions included three questions: a) the likelihood of recurrence of the service, b) the possibility of setting up the service to a friend, and c) the possibility of being designated as the service's future first choice. This model was applied and was checked for suitability as a whole, as well as

individually for each type of industrial market, through which it was found a significant correlation between quality and satisfaction on behavioural intentions.

Alexandris et al. (2001) argued that the provision of service quality is very important for keeping people in a sports activity, based on a survey involving 300 individuals from private gyms of Thessaloniki. Accordingly, Alexandris, Dimitriadis, and Markata (2002) argued that people usually stop an activity when they do not see positive results in their health.

Baker and Crompton (2000) investigated the association between quality and satisfaction by the returning of visitors to a program or recreational activity. The participants were 141 guests at the annual festival and the factors measured were quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The latter factor had two dimensions: the commitment and intention to pay more. The results showed that both the quality and satisfaction have a major effect on both dimensions of behavioural intentions.

Chang and Lee (2004) constructed a tool for assessing service quality, customer satisfaction and renewal intentions. This scale was applied in sports centres in the USA and consists of 15 items, five of which relate to quality, five to satisfaction and five to renewal intention. Results showed satisfactory internal coherence of the three factors of the questionnaire: a) service quality (a = .90), b) customer satisfaction (a = .90) and c) renewal intention (a = .83), providing encouraging indications for the use of the scale. Also, researchers have argued the importance of the relationship between quality and satisfaction regarding the intention of repeating participation.

Howat, Crilley, and Mcgrath (2008) suggest a model for the relationship between service quality, overall satisfaction and customer loyalty in two public water parks in Australia. The results showed that the quality factors: overall facility, staff and the benefits of relaxation, have a significant relationship with the overall satisfaction, which in turn affects the loyalty intentions (willingness to recommend the centre to others and visit it again). The researchers report that satisfaction has a role of mediation between service quality and commitment of the participants.

The Lee, Kim, Ko, and Sagas (2011) used a part of the scale of Chang and Lee (2004), to investigate the relationship of quality, satisfaction and intention to repeat golf courses, as well as the influence of sex. The survey involved 528 members from five private golf courses in South Korea and the results showed a high correlation between the three concepts. The highest correlation between quality and satisfaction factor was

"care" to men and "response" to women, while between the quality and intention of the agent "care" for men and "look" for women.

Although there are numerous models which have been developed to assess factors associated with service quality and customer satisfaction, there are several studies that have investigated the relationship between quality and satisfaction regarding the prediction of intention for resumption of services at sports venues (Alexandris et al., 2004a; Alexandris et al., 2001; Chang & Lee, 2004; Chelladurai & Chang, 2000; Zournatzi, 2007). Also, there are few studies that investigated this relationship in outdoor recreation (Astrapellos, Costa & Astrapellou, 2010; Kontogianni, Kouthouris, Barlas & Voutselas, 2011; Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005), while research in Greece examining the relationship of service quality, satisfaction and intention of participants to resume participation in recreation theme parks is limited.

Theme Parks

They are special tourism infrastructure facilities, which are demarcated lands, within or outside populated areas in which a variety of services are offered to visitors around one or more themes. They provide a wide range of entertainment to the visitors. They can be organized around a central theme or more themes, from the fields of entertainment, arts, history, especially the local historical tradition or economic history, mythology, tradition or contemporary fiction, literature, film, arts, culture in general, science, technology, and ecology. The architecture, planning and interior design of outdoor spaces should be distinguished due to cultural and aesthetic quality. Also, they must be environmentally friendly, and can be connected to the main theme or sub-themes of the park. The concept of theme parks includes entertainment water parks provided they meet the technical specifications of the theme parks (FEK 2086 (29-9-2009)).

They are a very popular form of recreation in the world. They are centred around one or more central themes and an important tourist attraction for the area in which they are installed and, in general, the host country. The theme parks will be a major attraction of investor interest, create new jobs and contribute to the development of less until today, developed areas (Modrego, Domenech, Llorens, Torner, Martinez, Abellan, & Manuel, 2000).

It is one of the industries that have grown the most in Europe in recent years due to increased demand for leisure and entertainment. The best example is the Euro Disney

in France with over 12 million visitors annually. However, the oldest, but also very popular, Blackpool Pleasure Beach in England should not be forgotten, which attracts more than seven million visitors annually (Modrego et al., 2000). Depending on the number of visitors per year are categorized as follows: a) small theme parks up to 250,000 visitors, b) medium theme parks from 250,000 to 1,000,000 visitors and c) large theme park with over one million visitors (International Association of Amusement Park and Attraction, 2008).

According to a survey by International Association of Amusement Park and Attraction (IAAPA) in 2008, the total number of the largest theme parks in Europe amounts to 308, of which only four are in Greece. The total number of visitors to these parks in 2008 rose to 145.5 million, with expected revenues of 4.3 billion euros and the number of employees reached 47,590 people. On the revenue side, France ranks first with 33% of total revenues in Europe, followed by Germany and England with rates of 17% and 14% respectively. In countries with large numbers and revenue are Spain, Denmark, Holland, Italy and Sweden. These eight countries are estimated to represent 93% of total revenue and 88% of all visitors. In Greece there were 4 major theme parks with a total of 2.1 million visitors and revenues estimated 13.6 million, just 0.3% of the whole of Europe. From the above we can easily deduce the amount of the economic benefits for the countries from the activity of the recreation theme parks and this alternative form of recreation.

The purpose of this research was to study the relationship between service quality and satisfaction of participating in theme park and the formation of their intention to resume participation. The lack of such researches in Greece reveals their importance because: α) its conclusions can be used by all those involved in order to apply the appropriate course of action to attract and keep the participants, and b) while researching parameters such as the characteristics of the population, the tendencies, the needs and generally the profile of the customers of the particular park, information was collected that can modify services according to the customers' needs.

Methodology

Sample

The subjects of this study were adult participants from the Greek water park which is a private company (theme park) in Zakynthos. Of the 400 questionnaires, 313 participants responded for a 78.25% return rate. Of this number, 41 questionnaires were

eliminated as a consequence of incomplete responses and thus removed from the sample.

Therefore, 272 (68%) questionnaires used for the purpose of the present study. The sample included 126 (46.3%) men and 146 (53.7%) women. They ranged in age from 18 to 59 years (M = 33.2 years, SD = 10.25).

Questionnaire

To assess service quality, customer satisfaction and renewal intentions, an instrument developed by Chang and Lee (2004) was used. The particular questionnaire was adapted to the needs of the recreation theme park. Its reliability and validity has been checked in previous researches (Bodet, 2006; Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005). The instrument contains three subscales: a) service quality (5 items, e.g., The recreation park provides reliable service), b) customer satisfaction (6 items, e.g., I am satisfied services provided to the park), and c) renewal intentions (7 items, e.g., If I had to do it again, I would choose another recreation park). The response options are on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree.

Demographics: The final part of the instrument included information regarding demographic characteristics of the participants (e.g., sex, age, income status, marital status, education level, occupation).

Procedure

The method chosen to assess service quality, customer satisfaction, and renewal intentions was that of self-completed questionnaires. Researchers informed all participants that their participation was completely voluntary and the individual responses would be held in confidence. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha coefficients, Pearson correlations, and partial correlations were chosen as the most appropriate method for purposes of this study. Partial correlation was used to investigate the correlation between the customer satisfaction and the renewal intention without the influence of the service quality, as well as the correlation between the service quality and the renewal intention without the influence of the customer satisfaction.

Results

The reliability of the instrument subscales was measured with Cronbach's alpha coefficients. It was found that the Cronbach alpha coefficients were .91 for service quality subscale, .90 for customer satisfaction subscale, and .90 for renewal intention

subscale. Table 1 provides detailed information regarding demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic information regarding participants' characteristics.

	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Gender			**Marital status**		
Female	146	53.7	Single	98	40.1
Male	126	46.3	Married	147	59.9
Age			**Education level**		
18-24	61	26.9	Primary School	29	12.8
25-34	54	23.8	Secondary School	83	36.6
35-44	78	34.4	Bachelor degree	72	31.7
44 and>	34	14.9	Post Graduate	43	18.9
Income status			**Occupation**		
545 $ and<	19	8.9	Student	53	23.0
546-1022 $	45	21.0	Civil servants	60	26.1
1023-1635 $	45	21.0	Private servants	82	35.7
1636-2725 $	29	13.6	Others	35	15.2
2725 $ and>	28	13.1			

Correlations between the factors of the questionnaire

To investigate the relationship of service quality, customer satisfaction and renewal intentions linear bivariate correlation (Pearson correlation) and partial correlation were used.

Linear bivariate correlation (Pearson correlation).

The means, standard deviations, Cronbach alpha coefficients, and Pearson correlation coefficients for the variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha and Pearson correlations.

Subject	M	SD	a	Service Quality	Customer Satisfaction
Service Quality	5.80	0.89	.91		
Customer Satisfaction	5.87	0.79	.90	.906*	
Renewal Intention	5.73	0.85	.87	.868*	.865*

*$p < .001$

The presentation of results can be concluded that participants have a positive perception of the service quality (M = 5.80), satisfaction (M = 5.87), and renewal intentions (M = 5.73). Results also showed that there is a high positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (r = .906, p <.001) quality and intention (r = .868, p <.001), and satisfaction and intention (r = .865, p <.001). This confirms the close relationship between the three concepts.

Partial correlation.

The partial correlation analysis can be used to: a) declare variables which intervene in the relationship between two variables, b) reveal false relationships among variables, c) uncover non-existent relationships between variables and d) detect real, but hidden relationships among variables. In the present study, to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the formation of their intention to resume participation, there were two partial correlations. Table 3, shows the partial correlation between service quality and renewal intention to control variable customer satisfaction, as well as the partial correlation between customer satisfaction and renewal intention to control variable service quality.

Table 3. Partial correlations.

control variable	correlation	r
service quality	customer satisfaction - renewal intention	.396**
customer satisfaction	service quality - renewal intention	.372**

** $p < .001$

The results showed that there is a moderate positive correlation between satisfaction and renewal intention ($r = .396$, $p < .001$), and between the quality and renewal intention ($r = .372$, $p < .001$) with highest, the relationship between satisfaction and renewal intention ($r = .396$, $p < .001$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the correlations and partial correlations showed a moderate relationship between the previous concepts. The findings of the study support the existing theory on the relationship between quality and satisfaction with behavioral intentions (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Based on these findings sports marketers should first of all understand the needs of the participants in recreation theme parks. Then, they could offer high quality services and customer satisfaction so that there would be renewal intention and positive advertising of the park (word of mouth).

More specifically, linear correlations showed the highest correlation between the quality and satisfaction, which is confirmed by previous research from the field of fitness centres (Zournatzi, 2007). Partial correlations showed statistically significant correlation between quality and intention and between satisfaction and intention with the second best relationship the one between satisfaction and intention.

The results of this study are in agreement with the results of Zournatzi (2007), who conducted a survey to members of private gyms in Greece, using the same instrument and found high levels of significance for both relations, most notable the relationship between satisfaction and intention. Researchers using the same instrument concluded that the relationship between satisfaction and intention is stronger than the relationship between quality and intention. This is supported by research done in private USA gyms (Chang & Lee, 2004), in recreation areas, such as ski resorts (Barlas, Mantis, & Koustelios, 2010), golf courses (Lee et al., 2011), and water parks (Howat et al., 2008).

Taking into account the results it can be concluded that participants have a positive perception of the service quality, satisfaction and renewal intention. In terms of the responses the following conclusions were reached: The highest price obtained "satisfaction", followed by "service quality" and "renewal intention".

Findings from the results of this research could be used as a useful tool in planning and implementing recreational activities in the theme parks. It is recommended that researches be done about customers' desires because the ways of using free time change, depending on the messages and the financial standards of every period. As the

product changes the tools and methods should be adapted to the new needs of the market. Developing new recreation activities and improving or replacing those already existing, is also recommended. Providing accompanying services to improve their quality the full and constant training of the staff specializing in the motivation and involvement of the participants, as well as promoting activities addressed to families, are also recommended.

However, there are limitations to the present study because respondents were selected from only one recreation theme park in Zakynthos, and therefore, the results may not represent all participants' recreation theme parks. For this reason, the results can only be regarded as indicative rather than representative of the population of the recreation theme parks in Greece, although the survey sample was not small and the data collection was done in a representative way.

Moreover, further research is needed to understand the relationship between quality, satisfaction, and renewal intention in recreation theme parks. It is proposed in future research to categorize thematic parks depending on size and subject matter, a comparative study of recreation theme parks, of the same or different thematic interest, can strengthen our conclusions.

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