

The Effect of Perceived Service Quality on Customer Loyalty in Sports-Fitness Facilities

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the effect of service quality on customer loyalty in sports-fitness facilities. The sample of the research consisted of 311 individuals, 165 males and 146 females, who were members of 6 sports – fitness centers in Istanbul and Niğde. In the research, a questionnaire containing 3 parts was used as a data collection tool. In the first part, the items defining the research group were included. In the second part, "Scale of Perceived Service Quality of Sports-Fitness Centers" developed by Uçan (2007) was used. In the third part, the "Customer Loyalty Scale" developed by Zeithaml et al., (1996) and adapted into Turkish by Savaş (2012) was used. SPSS 22 program was used in the analysis of the data, while detailed graphic statistics were used for demographic data, scale scores, and regression analysis was used for relational analysis. When the descriptive statistics results of the research were examined, it was observed that the perceived service quality sub-dimension scores and customer loyalty scale scores were above the mean. Looking at the relational analysis part of the research, it was determined that interaction, output and program quality in sports-fitness facilities had a significant positive effect on customer loyalty. According to these results, it was suggested that sports facilities should give importance to interaction, output and program quality to ensure customer loyalty.

Keywords: Sports facilities, Sports facility management, Service quality, Customer loyalty

Spor- Fitness Tesislerinde Algılanan Hizmet Kalitesinin Müşteri Sadakatine Etkisi

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı spor- fitness tesislerindeki hizmet kalitesinin müşteri sadakatine olan etkisinin araştırılmasıdır. Araştırmanın örneklemini İstanbul ve Niğde ilinde bulunan 6 spor – fitness merkezine üye 165 erkek, 146 kadın toplam 311 birey oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada verilerini toplamak için içeriğinde 3 bölüm yer alan bir anket kullanılmıştır. İlk bölümde araştırma grubunu tanımlayan maddelere yer verilmiştir. İkinci bölümde Uçan (2007) tarafından geliştirilen "Spor- Fitness Merkezlerinin Algılanan Hizmet Kalitesi Ölçeği" yer almıştır. Üçüncü bölümde de Zeithaml vd., (1996) geliştirilen Savaş'ın (2012) Türkçeye uyarladığı "Müşteri Sadakati Ölçeği" bulunmaktadır. Verilerin analizinde SPSS 22 programı kullanılmış, demografik veriler ve ölçek puanları için tanımlayıcı istatistiklerden faydalanılırken, ilişkisel analizler için çoklu regresyon analizinden faydalanılmıştır. Araştırma tanımlayıcı istatistik sonuçları incelendiğinde algılanan hizmet kalitesi alt boyut puanları ve müşteri sadakati ölçeği puanlarının yüksek olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Araştırmanın ilişkisel analiz kısmına bakıldığında Spor-fitness tesislerinde etkileşim, çıktı ve program kalitesinin müşteri sadakati üzerinde anlamlı bir pozitif etkiye sahip olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu sonuçlara göre spor tesislerinin müşteri sadakati sağlayabilmek adına etkileşim, çıktı ve program kalitelerine önem vermeleri önerilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Spor tesisleri, Spor tesis işletmeciliği, Hizmet kalitesi, Müşteri sadakati

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, in all service sectors, service quality is the most demanded by consumers. A high level of unique quality is an important way to win customers and make them loyal for a long time (Urban, 2009). For this reason, managers aim to provide high-quality sports services with a good atmosphere and a pleasant ambience to obtain loyal customers in sports facilities. Considering the service sector, the fact that finding a new customer is financially and organisationally much more difficult than maintaining an existing customer is accepted by service providers (Caslavova et al., 2018). With the increasing interest in fitness facilities, competition has begun to emerge among businesses providing fitness services. For this reason, meeting customer expectations with customer-oriented approaches has become important in terms of sustainability in fitness facilities (Çatı et al., 2010; Çiftçi & Çakmak, 2018). Based on this, the theoretical foundations of this research were determined as sports facilities, service quality and customer loyalty.

Rapidly developing sports centers have to meet the needs of consumers in order to satisfy them (Howat et al., 1996; Yıldız et al., 2018). For this reason, sports facility businesses, regardless of public or private, had to constantly renew themselves and increase their service diversity to achieve their goals such as social integration and spreading sports. This necessity leads to the emergence of more modern and high-quality facilities and causes the standards to rise (Ceyhun, 2008). We can define sports facilities as all kinds of structures that can organise sportive activities (Güçlü, 1998; Sunay, 2016). Sports facilities include all kinds of building groups designed for exercise, sports training and sports competitions in different sports branches. There are many different sports facilities such as stadiums, arenas, gymnasiums, tracks, open spaces, pools and support facilities (Wondemagnegn & Zemikael, 2022). Fitness facilities are also service-oriented businesses. They provide their consumers with an experience by providing sports services (Eskiler & Safak, 2022). The sports facility business is defined as units that can produce and at the same time offer sportive services by bringing together elements related to production (Serarslan, 1998). From a broad perspective, Katırcı (2012) defined the sports facility business as "a social, economic and technical unit that enables the implementation of sports activities, brings together production factors to obtain social benefits and/or profit and produces sports services". Even though sports facility enterprises make a profit from the services they provide, their main aim is to meet the sportive needs of individuals. Especially in sports facility enterprises established by the state, the primary aim is providing social benefit by spreading sports to large masses (Ekenci & İmamoğlu, 2002). For this reason, service quality is seen as an important competitive tool for sports facilities.

Based on this, the concept of quality has many different dimensions and also a very comprehensive structure. For this reason, when the literature has been examined, we observe that there are many studies on conceptualising and explaining the concept of quality (Goestch & Davis, 2003). The concept of quality can be evaluated in two groups: Product and service quality. Qualities such as durability, appearance, functionality, interchangeability, repairability, storage and testability are the characteristics of product quality. When we look at service quality, it is expressed as a measure

of the extent to which the service provided meets the expectations of consumers. Providing a quality service can be considered as meeting consumer expectations (Akgül et al., 2009; Parasuraman et al., 1994). Although the concept of service quality is an element that has recently gained popularity around the world, it is gaining importance as one of the main components of organisational structures (Gürbüz & Gücal, 2020; Peitzika et al., 2020). When we look at the origin of the concept of service quality, we see that there are service and quality concepts (Ramya et al., 2019). Service can also be defined as activities or benefits that do not result in any property offered by one group to another (Kotler & Armstrong 2003; Yıldız, 2009). Quality is defined as a dynamic process that can meet or even exceed expectations depending on the product, people, service, process and environment, as well as adding value to products in a way that provides a competitive advantage (Goestch & Davis 2010; Knowles, 2011). In general, service quality can be expressed as the result of the comparison of consumers' experiences and expectations for the service they will consume with the quality of the service they have received (Naik et al., 2010). When we investigate the concept of service quality in the literature, we observe that "SERVQUAL", "SERVPERF" and "Grönroos" models appear (Gürbüz & Ergülen, 2006). While the studies on service quality in the business world have been increasing continuously since the early 1980s, the value of this issue in the field of recreation and sports services has started to gain importance in recent years. For this reason, it has recently started to become one of the topics of interest in the sports marketing literature (Tsitskari et al., 2006). If we conceptualize the service quality in sports services in terms of literature, we can define it as the degree to which the sportive services can meet and exceed the expectations of the customers (Çimen & Gürbüz, 2007). Sports services are generally evaluated in two categories as sports services for spectating and participation (Chelladurai, 1994; Yıldız, 2009). Many service quality models for both categories have been developed and continue to be developed by researchers working in this field.

Fitness centers are a developing area in the sports and health sector, and the positive effects of these centers on human physiology and psychology (Yıldız, 2011). Considering the changing situation and increasing competition of sports organizations, it has become necessary to understand both the needs and demands of customers (Farrelly et al., 2008; Pashaie et al., 2022). Therefore, good relationships with sports consumers can increase both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Kumar & Reinartz, 2012). Customer loyalty is perhaps considered as the most essential structure that enables customers to purchase a product again (Caruana, 2002; Javadein et al., 2008). It is very important to understand the factors associated with customer loyalty in fitness centers (Garcia-Fernandez et al., 2018). In this respect, customer loyalty is seen as a key factor that provides a competitive advantage (Bharadwaj et al., 1993; Javadein et al., 2008). Sports - fitness businesses operating in the form of service businesses are institutions where the needs related to healthy living and sports are met. Like businesses in other sectors, fitness businesses have to meet the demands and needs of consumers. For this reason, studies to measure and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty are important in terms of profitability and competitive advantage (Yıldız, 2012). Customer loyalty can be defined as the continuity of repurchasing a product that the consumer has purchased (Chiou et al., 2002). Customer loyalty can also be defined as the state of having positive intentions towards the product and experiencing psychological commitment in

addition to purchasing the product (Yıldız, 2012). In another definition, customer loyalty is defined as the consumer's determination to use the goods or services of an enterprise without being affected by sectoral competition factors (Baytekin, 2005). Yurdakul (2007) stated the components of the customer loyalty concept as "customer satisfaction, service quality, market share, customer value and replacement cost". In this research, the relational effect between service quality and customer loyalty in sports-fitness facilities will be examined.

This research aimed to investigate the effect of service quality on customer loyalty in sport-fitness facilities. When the literature is examined, there are few studies on the effect of service quality on customer loyalty in sports-fitness facilities. For this reason, it is thought that this study will be academically useful in terms of contributing to and updating this relational model. Besides, it is also important to make suggestions for the interaction of service quality and customer loyalty for sports facility businesses in the sectoral sense.

Study Hypotheses

- H₁. Interaction quality of sports-fitness facilities have a positive effect on customer loyalty of members.
- H₂. Output quality of sports-fitness facilities have a positive effect on customer loyalty of members.
- H₃. The physical environment quality of sports-fitness facilities has a positive effect on the customer loyalty of members.
- H₄. Exercise equipment quality of sports-fitness facilities has a positive effect on customer loyalty of members.
- H₅. Program quality of sports-fitness facilities has a positive effect on customer loyalty of members.
- H₆. The quality of ambient conditions of sports-fitness facilities has a positive effect on the customer loyalty of the members.

METHOD

Research Model

In the research, quantitative surveys and relational models were used in scientific research methods.

Research Group

The population of the study consisted of 1525 individuals who were members of 6 sports-fitness centres located in Istanbul and Niğde. The sample of the research consisted of 311 individuals, 165 males and 146 females, selected by simple random method within this population. Using Roasoft (2023) sampling volume calculation engine, it was determined that 308 individuals would be sufficient for the sample group with a margin of error of 0.05 for a population of 1525 people. In our research, 311 individuals were reached.

Data Collection Tools

To collect the research data, a questionnaire consisting of 3 sections was prepared and applied to the participants. The first section included demographic items for the participants. In the second part, the "Perceived Service Quality Scale of Sports-Fitness Centres" developed by Uçan (2007) was included. The third section includes the "Customer Loyalty Scale" developed by Zeithaml et al., (1996) and adapted into Turkish by Savaş (2012) was used.

Demographic Data: In the demographic information section of the data collection tool, questions related to demographic variables such as age, gender, educational status, and marital status were included for the members of the sports-fitness centres participating in the study.

Perceived Service Quality Scale of Sport-Fitness Centres (PSQ-SFC): Uçan (2007) developed the "Perceived Service Quality Scale of Sport-Fitness Centres " which consisted of 31 items and 6 dimensions ("Interaction quality, outcome quality, physical environment quality, equipment quality, program quality and, ambient condition quality). The scale was a 5-point Likert-type scale. The scale was rated from "completely agree" to "strongly disagree" and scored from 5 to 1. For the whole scale, $\alpha=0,95$. It was also observed that the reliability coefficient values of the sub-dimensions of the scale ranged between $\alpha= 0,77$ and 0,95. This situation showed that this scale was usable.

Customer Loyalty Scale: The Customer Loyalty Scale developed by Zeithaml et al., (1996) and adapted into Turkish by Savaş (2012) consisted of 5 items and one dimension. The statements of the 5-point Likert-type scale was rated from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The reliability coefficient of the scale was determined as $a= 0,77$. This result showed that the scale was reliable and usable.

Ethical Approval

During the research, "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" and "Helsinki Declaration" has been taken into consideration. The ethical approval of the research was approved by the Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Ethics Committee with the date 01.06.2023 and the decision number 08-21.

Data Collection

During the research, the data were collected by applying face-to-face and online questionnaires to the members of 6 sports-fitness centers in Niğde and Istanbul.

Analysis of Data

SPSS 22 program was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used in the evaluation of demographic information, perceived service quality and customer loyalty scores in sports-fitness centres. To reveal the effect of service quality on customer loyalty, multiple regression analysis was used considering that the data were normally distributed (skewness and kurtosis values were within ± 1.5) and there was no multicollinearity problem (VIF value was 10 and above).

Table 1. Distribution of skewness and kurtosis values of the dependent and independent variables of the study

Variables	Skewness	s	Kurtosis	s
Interaction quality	-1,06	0,13	0,06	0,27
Output quality	-1,19	0,13	0,26	0,27
Physical environment quality	-0,57	0,13	-0,50	0,27
Equipment quality	-0,65	0,13	-0,27	0,27
Program quality	-0,79	0,13	0,60	0,27
Ambient condition quality	-0,91	0,13	0,14	0,27
Customer Loyalty	-1,22	0,13	0,49	0,27

When Table 1 is examined, it is observed that the skewness and kurtosis values of the dependent and independent variables of the study are between +1.5 and -1.5. According to these results, we can say that the data of the research show a normal distribution.

RESULTS

Table 2. Demographic Information distribution of the participants in the study

Demographic Information		f	%
Gender	Male	165	53,1
	Female	146	46,9
	Total	311	100,0
Age	18 and below	41	13,2
	19-24	88	28,3
	25-35	92	29,6
	36-50	74	23,8
	51 and older	16	5,1
	Total	311	100,0
Marital Status	Married	150	48,2
	Single	161	51,8
	Total	311	100,0
Educational Status	Primary education	11	3,5
	Secondary education	96	30,9
	Bachelor's degree	154	49,5
	Master's degree	50	16,1
	Total	311	100,0

When Table 2 was analysed, it was seen that 53% (n=165) of the individuals participating in the study were male and 46,9% (n=146) were female. Regarding the age variable, it was observed that 13,2% (n=41) of the participants were 18 years old or below, 28,3% (n=88) were between 19-24 years old, 29,6% (n=92) were between 25-35 years old, 23,8% (n=74) were between 36-50 years old, and 5,1% (n=16) were 51 years old and above. In terms of the marital status variable, 48,2% (150) of the participants were married and 51,8% (n=161) were single. According to the educational status variable, 3,5% (n=11) of the participants were primary education graduates,

30,9% (n=96) were secondary education graduates, 49,5% (n=154) had bachelor's degrees, 16,1% (n=50) had master's degree.

Table 3. Analysis of the arithmetic mean of the scores obtained from the perceived service quality scale and customer loyalty scales of sports-fitness centres

	n	Min.	Max.	\bar{x}	s
Interaction quality	311	2,40	5,00	4,11	0,76
Output quality	311	2,40	5,00	4,35	0,69
Physical environment quality	311	2,00	5,00	4,03	0,79
Equipment quality	311	1,67	5,00	3,93	0,83
Program quality	311	1,00	5,00	4,02	0,82
Ambient condition quality	311	1,67	5,00	3,98	0,89
Customer Loyalty	311	1,00	5,00	4,11	0,95

In Table 3, when the mean arithmetic means of the scores of the participants from the Perceived Service Quality of Sports-Fitness Centres scale were examined, it was seen that the mean scores of the service quality sub-dimensions [Interaction quality (M=4,11, SD=0,76), output quality (M=4,35, SD=0,69), physical environment quality (M=4,03, SD=0,79), exercise equipment quality (M=3,93, SD=0,83), program quality (M=4,02, SD=0,82), environmental conditions quality M=3,98, SD=0,89)] received scores above 3 and 4. These results showed that service quality evaluations were considered as good and excellent. When the arithmetic mean of the participants' scores from the Customer Loyalty scale was analysed, it was observed that they received scores above 4 (M=4,11, SD=0,95). This result showed that customer loyalty was high in the facilities.

Table 4. Analysis of the relationship between service quality and its sub-dimensions in sports-fitness centres and customer loyalty

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1-Interaction quality	1						
2- Output quality	0,579**	1					
3- Physical environment quality	0,663**	0,681**	1				
4- Equipment quality	0,684**	0,683**	0,860**	1			
5- Program quality	0,585**	0,572**	0,728**	0,775**	1		
6- Ambient conditions quality	0,627**	0,599**	0,710**	0,796**	0,565**	1	
7- Customer loyalty	0,707**	0,767**	0,724**	0,777**	0,752**	0,665**	1

**p<0,01

When Table 4 was examined, high-level positive relationships were observed between service quality sub-dimensions (interaction quality 0,707, output quality 0,767, physical environment quality 0,724, exercise equipment quality 0,777, program quality 0,752, ambient conditions quality 0,665) and customer loyalty in sport-fitness centres.

Table 5. Analysis of the effect of sport-fitness centre service quality sub-dimensions on customer loyalty

	B	S.H	β	t	p
Interaction quality	0,27	0,04	0,21	5,55	0,00
Output quality	0,51	0,05	0,37	9,70	0,00
Physical environment quality	-0,08	0,06	-0,06	-1,21	0,22
Equipment quality	0,13	0,08	0,12	1,72	0,08
Program quality	0,37	0,05	0,32	7,31	0,00
Ambient conditions quality	0,07	0,05	0,07	1,56	0,12

R= 0,88, R²= 0,77, Adjusted R²= 0,77, F_(6,304)=178,54, p=0,00

When Table 5 was examined, it was observed that a significant regression model [$F_{(6,304)}=178,54$, $p=0,00<0,05$] and 77% of the variance in the dependent variable (Adjusted R²= 0,77) could be explained by the independent variables in the investigation of the effect of sport-fitness centre service quality sub-dimensions on customer loyalty. Interaction quality ($\beta=0,27$, $p<0,05$), output quality ($\beta=0,51$, $p<0,05$) and program quality ($\beta=0,37$, $p<0,05$) dimensions had a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty ($\beta=0,27$, $p<0,05$). Other service quality sub-dimensions (physical environment quality, exercise equipment quality and ambient conditions quality) did not have a significant effect on customer loyalty ($p>0,05$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When the descriptive analyses of the research were examined, it was observed that the arithmetic means of the scores obtained from the service quality and customer loyalty scales of the participants who were members of sports-fitness facilities were above 3 and 4. According to these results, it can be said that individuals who were members of these facilities were satisfied with the service quality of the facilities and their customer loyalty levels were high. Yıldız et al. (2016) found in their study that the perceived service quality and sub-dimension (interaction quality, outcome quality, programme quality, exercise tools and equipments, environmental conditions quality) ratings in fitness centers were good. In their study, Korkmaz and Utlu (2021) determined that the scores of the 4 sports facilities members in Bursa municipality were above 3 and 4 and stated that the members perceive the service quality as good and excellent. In the thesis study conducted by Mansur (2021), considering the mean scores of the participants from the service quality sub-dimensions of the participants in recreational sports enterprises, it was observed that scores above 3 and 4 were obtained. Yıldız et al., (2018) in their studies on sports centers, they observed that the service quality in these facilities was good, as the service quality and sub-dimension (interaction quality, outcome quality, programme quality, exercise tools and equipments, environmental conditions quality) averages were above 3. They also stated that if the service quality level in sports centers increases, their service quality expectations also increase. These results showed similar qualities to the results of our study. Akgül et al., (2009) stated in their study on recreational sports facilities that the service quality of the facilities could not meet the

expectations of the members. This result differed from our results. It was thought that the difference was due to the sample group to which the study was applied. In the thesis study conducted by Receptoğlu (2022), it was determined that the level of service quality and customer loyalty in businesses that provide recreational activities was at medium levels. Katırcı and Oyman (2013) examined the loyalty status of members in sports centres and revealed that the level of loyalty was high. The results of this study also showed similarities with our study in terms of customer loyalty in sports facilities.

In the relational analysis part of the research, it was determined that interaction, output and program qualities, which were among the sub-dimensions of service quality, had a significant positive effect on customer loyalty. According to these results, it can be said that increasing interaction, output and program quality in sports-fitness facilities will increase customer loyalty. Eskiler and Şafak (2022) In their studies on fitness services, they observed that customer-staff interaction quality, customer-customer interaction quality and service output quality positively affect customer loyalty. Yıldız and Duyan (2019) In their study where they examined the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the sports and physical activity sector, they observed that service quality significantly and positive affects customer loyalty in a direct and indirect way through customer satisfaction. Akbulut and Yıldız (2021), in their study on water sports businesses, found that service quality sub-dimensions such as personnel, physical characteristics and program in water sports facilities had a strong effect on customer loyalty. Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014) in their study on sports and fitness centers, they observed that service quality for new members is an important factor for customer loyalty. Gürbüz and Gücal (2020) observed a highly positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in their study conducted in health and fitness clubs. Savaş (2012) revealed in his master's thesis that there was an positive interaction between the service quality sub-dimensions such as personnel, physical features and program of the members in the fitness centre with their customer loyalty. In order to improve customer loyalty, it was mentioned that the necessity of giving importance to service quality. In a research, Lee (2017) stated that service quality in sports centres had a positive effect on customer loyalty. Septarini et al., (2023) observed that service quality positively affected customer loyalty in fitness centres for female customers in Bandung City. Bandyopadhyay (2018) In his study, he found that sub-dimensions of service quality in fitness services such as reliability, customer orientation, comfort and ambiance have a positive effect on customer loyalty. Huang and Kim (2023) In their study on how service quality in sports-fitness centers will affect customer loyalty, they observed that service quality sub-dimensions such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy positively affect customer loyalty through the satisfaction, trust and commitment variables. The results obtained from these studies were in parallel with the results obtained from our research.

As a result, it has been observed that interaction, output and program quality dimensions have a positive effect on customer loyalty in sports-fitness facilities. Based on this, it is understood that in order to create loyal customers in the sports-fitness facilities sector, it is necessary to attach importance to service quality, especially interaction, output and program quality. This study also

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contributed to the literature by revealing the effects of different service quality dimensions on customer loyalty. According to the results of the research, it is suggested to increase the interaction, output and program quality in these facilities to improve customer loyalty, which will create an important competitive advantage in sports-fitness facilities.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest between the authors of the article.

Researchers' Statement of Contribution Rate: Research Design-OY, Data Collection-OY, statistical analysis-OY; Preparation of the article, OY-AS.

Ethical Approval

Name of Board: Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Ethics Committee

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