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Full Length Research Paper

The relationship between team identification and service quality perceptions in professional football

Ramazan Timucin Gencer

Department of Sport Management, School of Physical Education and Sports,
Ege University, Bornova, Izmir, Turkey. E-mail: timucin.gencer@ege.edu.tr. Tel: 90.232.3425714. Fax: 90.232.3399000.

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In this study the relationship between team identification and service quality perceptions of football spectators is examined. 608 football spectators from 3 different teams who played their games at the same stadium participated in the study. Spectators completed a questionnaire packet containing a demographic form, the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) and Scale of Perceived Service Quality in Professional Sport (S_PSQPS). Examining correlation between service quality perceptions and team identification it was interesting to see that there was negatively inclined low degree of correlation between team identification and quality perceptions on physical environment. The difference determined in physical environment quality between the spectators of the 3 different teams playing their games at the same stadium is extremely striking. Core service quality perceptions presented a downward trend amongst spectators attending games for long periods of time and this stands out as a significant finding demanding the attention of professional football managers.

Key words: Service, quality, identification, sport, football, spectators.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout our lives we are offered diverse services by a great number of organisations to meet both our personal and social needs and interests. Although the diversity of these services show great variation from society to society their trend of development nonetheless exhibits coherence with the socio-economic progress of societies. Societies' demand for growing and diversifying services has triggered the emergence of an abundance of service organisations involved in identical or similar functions. The competitive environment originating from this outcome has forced organisations to not only diversify offered services but also improve their quality.

Services occupy a significant share in the strategic, tactical and operational management of organisations working within the sports industry (Svenson, 2003). Sports industry occupies a pivotal place in the entertainment and service industry (Mullin et al., 2000). Looking through a financial perspective, the success of activities carried out by sports organisations is closely associated with the quality of services offered to customers and making sure customers get highest level of satisfaction from such services (Kotler, 2000). Consequently, no different to any organisation (Kotler, 1997), it has become ever more critical for professional football clubs to persistently offer better quality services than their competitors in order to differentiate themselves from their opponents and accordingly meet and even surpass the expectations of their customers, which in this context is their spectators.

However, sports organisations, especially those offering spectator targeted services, differ from other service organisations on a number of aspects. Expenses made by customers for sports activities are entirely discretionary. More importantly, customers typically make emotional investments in such organisations (e.g. supporting sports teams, becoming club members etc.). These facts make it imperative to evaluate professional football clubs within the service sector from a different perspective (Robinson, 2006).

The extent of revenue generated by football clubs is

closely linked to the effectiveness and efficiency of their activities. One of the fundamental prerequisites of generating revenue for football clubs is undoubtedly having a wide fan base and especially active spectators. The magnitude of the fan base is critical for clubs to generate direct and indirect revenue. In addition to generating box-office revenue for clubs the fan base secures major assets for the club by attracting the attention of sponsors and media companies (Mullin et al., 2000). This is why sports managers and marketing specialists have concentrated their efforts to conduct research on ways of increasing fan base attendance to their events. Issues concerning identification with the team and service quality take up a significant share in such research activities. The purpose of this study is to assert the relationship between the level of identification amongst professional football team spectators and service quality perceptions, an issue of growing importance for professional sports clubs.

What is quality?

The concept of quality is used frequently in defining a large number of goods and services. However, individuals attribute different meanings to defined goods and services, making the concept of quality difficult to understand (Hoyer and Hoyer, 2001; Ross, 1999). Considering the points emphasized by researchers believed to be great contributor of studies on quality, including Crosby, Deming, Feigenbaum, Ishikawa, Juran, Pirsig and Shewart, the characteristics of quality that stand out and appear to have secured a certain degree of unanimity include its demand for a tangible definition, its dynamism, its linear relation with pricing, its multi-dimensionality and foremost its correspondence to customer satisfaction (Hoyer and Hoyer, 2001).

Quality is an objective that evolves according to changes occurring in a customer's aspirations and needs. This is why organisations must conceive their services in a way that makes it possible for them to be enhanced or remodelled according to the customer's current or future aspirations and needs. In this context Olsen et al. (1998) defines quality as the proper and consistent practicing of the right job.

Service quality

The pace of service quality related theory development gained momentum as researchers working within the service industry realised that efforts concerning service marketing would be impossible to implement without stepping into the domain of quality (Lagrose and Lagrosen, 2003). Research suggests that offering high quality services is closely tied with profit, cost cuts and market share growth in a great number of industries (Devlin and Dong, 1996). The extent of perceived service quality is not only critical for competing organisations; it also presents the advantage of being different (Arnould et al., 2004).

Compared to the quality of goods, service quality is harder to define. Measuring service quality is complicated for a number of reasons; it is intangible and more so lacks physical dimensions normally used for comparison or measurement such as performance and functional specifications (Kotler et al., 1996). Unlike tangible goods, service quality is not suitable for objective measurement based on characteristics like time and number of defects, so the only reference point for assessment is how the organisation is perceived by customers (Parasuraman et al., 1985). This is why customers' judgement on the quality of services received from an organisation stands out as a fundamental value for the organisation to sustain a healthy existence. In terms of effective management it is of great importance to understand what the customer thinks about service quality offered by the organisation (Rust and Oliver, 1994).

Although there is a relative amount of consensus about the fact that service quality is an attitude or overall judgement on the superiority of the service there is no agreement on the nature or composition of this attitude. Whilst some researchers advocate that service quality materialises from a comparison between performance perceptions and expectations (Gronross, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1988), others endorse the idea that service quality emerges from perceptions based on comparing performance with ideal standards (Teas, 1993), or entirely on performance (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). These concepts are subjective and hence take shape in the consumers mind (Rust and Oliver, 1994). These characteristics mean that consumer perception plays an important role in assessing service quality (Winer, 2000).

Service quality in sport

Sports organisations are marketing oriented and, compared to the past, this has escalated the need to offer customers top-level service quality (Shank, 1999). Categorising sports services has relatively helped clarify potential debates on quality focusing on these services. In a broad sense Chelladurai (1992) classifies sports services into two large groups, participant services and spectator services. In this context, studies concentrating on service quality directed at participant and spectator services have gained momentum (Kim and Kim, 1995; Howat et al., 1996; Papadimitriou and Karteroliotis, 2000; Chang and Chelladurai, 2003; Lam et al., 2005; Ko and Pastore, 2005; Shilbury, 1994; Mc Donald et al., 1995; Kelly and Turley, 2001; Theodorakis et al., 2001).

A service has several significant characteristics demonstrating its quality; service is intangible, it is more of a performance than an object, its performance is

heterogeneous by nature and it is produced and consumed simultaneously (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Devlin and Dong, 1996; Foster, 2001). However, the abovementioned characteristics and the ambiguity surrounding the result of the sports event (Chadwick and Beech, 2007), that is the core service on the field, differentiates sports service related marketing efforts from those of other services. In scope of these efforts, sports managers and marketing specialists are striving to incorporate tangible clues capable of depicting the high level of quality in their intangible services (Shank, 1999; Kotler et al., 1996). However, the most basic service component sports managers and marketing specialists have control over is, without a doubt the place where the service is offered, that is the physical environment.

Studies related to quality in sports services to date have focused more on participants rather than spectators (Theodorakis and Alexandris, 2008). The universally accepted method in developing a standard measurement in terms of service quality is determining service dimensions (Kim and Kim, 1995). Some definitions of quality in services focus on determining assessable parameters. Objectives of quality assessment include core service, the physical structure in which the service is offered and the interaction amongst individuals during the performance of the service (Chelladurai and Chang, 2000).

Team identification

Trail et al. (2000) defined identification as “an orientation of the self in regard to other objects including a person or group that results in feeling or sentiments of close attachment”. The theory of social identity constitutes the basis of identification. Individuals have a formidable need for expressing who they are to others. Professional football teams are very suitable means in meeting this need (Wakefield, 2007).

The relation between team identification and spectators’ attendance to events (Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Fisher and Wakefield, 1998) is extremely important for professional sports clubs. Sports marketing specialists’ or managers’ success in strengthening the degree of fan base identification with the team is directly proportional to the support the club receives by its fan base (Wakefield, 2007). Spectator identification with the team is crucial for the team not only in the sense of players’ performance on the field but also their contribution in increasing revenue from the sale of tickets and licensed merchandise.

Team identification expresses the level of psychological connection fans feel towards their team as a consequence of perceiving his/her team as an extension of his/her identity (Trail et al., 2003). Individuals feel an emotional connection to their team; make an investment into the team and perceive the team as an extension of themselves (Wann et al., 2004). Individuals with a strong degree of identification to their team consider the success or failure of the team as their own. Such individuals support their teams persistently. Managed effectively, this condition presents professional sports teams the opportunity of acquiring desirable advantages.

METHODS

Participants

The study group features fans supporting 3 of the oldest clubs in Izmir, currently competing in the Turkey Bank Asya (2nd Division) League and 2nd Professional Football League (3rd Division): Kar ıyaka Sports Club (Established 1912) Altay Sports Club (Established 1914) and Göztepe Sports Club (Established 1925). These teams once competed in the Turkish National League founded in 1959 however; none of them currently compete in this league, known today as Turkcell Super League. Since 1959 Altay, Göztepe and Kar ıyaka respectively competed in the super league 41, 25 and 16 times. Altay and Göztepe last competed in the super league in the 2002-2003 seasons whilst Kar ıyaka last competed in the 1995 - 1996 season.

Today, Altay and Kar ıyaka compete to move up to the Turkcell Super League whilst Göztepe tries to move up to the Bank Asya League. All 3 teams use the same stadium to play their matches within the leagues they compete in. The study was conducted on spectators going to watch these professional football teams compete at the same stadium, on different days. A total of 608 spectators participated in the study. Out of these spectators 149 (24.5%) supported Kar ıyaka Sports Club, 215 (35.4%) supported Altay Sports Club and 244 (40.1%) supported Göztepe Sports Club. 539 of supporters were male (88.7%) and 69 were female (11.3%).

Data instruments

Spectators completed a questionnaire packet containing a demographic form, the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) and Scale of Perceived Service Quality in Professional Sport (S_PSQPS). SISS contains seven Likert-scale items assessing identification with a sport team (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). Response options of the SSIS range from 1 (low identification) to 8 (high identification). Günay and Tiryaki (2003) developed the Turkish adaptation of the scale. The scale was found suitable in terms of validity and reliability on Turkish spectators.

On the other hand, the S_PSQPS used for the study was derived from the researcher’s doctorate degree thesis (Gencer, 2005). Developed with the intention of determining professional sports team spectators’ level of perception concerning the quality of services offered at stadiums, the S_PSQPS, consists of 20 items within 3 subscales including: (a) Interaction Quality (IQ – 6 items)

(b) Physical Environment Quality (PEQ – 8 items) and (c) Core Service Quality (CSQ – 6 items). Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and each item was preceded with a prefix, ‘in (the name of the stadium) stadium

Procedure

A convenience sampling method was employed in this study by conducting a questionaire in professional football games for each Altay, Goztepe and Karsıyaka at the Alsancak Stadium. 3 trained students of sports management department and the researcher were positioned in the stadium before the games started. Spectators were informed of the purpose of the research and invited to attend in the study and provide sincere responses. A total of 900 questionaires (300 for each team) were distributed before their

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the sample.

		n	%
Gender	Female	69	11.3
	Male	539	88.7
Age	Under 26	358	58.9
	26 and over	250	41.1
Marital status	Single	463	76.2
	Married	145	23.8
Education	Primary school grad.	31	5.1
	Secondary school grad.	70	11.5
	High school students	101	16.6
	High school grad.	217	35.7
	University students	106	17.4
	University grad.	83	13.7
Team	Karsiyaka	149	24.5
	Altay	215	35.4
	Goztepe	244	40.1
Game attendance	4 and less	296	48.7
	5-9	239	39.3
	10 and more	73	12
Season attendance	4 and less	336	55.3
	5-9	132	21.7
	10 and more	140	23

their games started and collected during the half time of the games. Of them 608 succesfully completed questionaire included in the data analysis.

Data analysis

Data obtained from the study were recorded on the SPSS 15.0 package programme. The exploratory factor analysis for the S_PSQPS used for the study was conducted with this programme. On the other hand the confirmative factor analysis was performed using the Lisrel 8.51 package programme. Parameter measurements, standard errors, t-value, multidimensional correlation values amongst factors and various compatibility indicators were tested for the accumulated study data. To evaluate the goodness of model fit, chi-square goodness-of-fit (X^2), degrees of freedom (df), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized means square residual (SRMR), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), normed fit index (NFI) ve non-normed fit index (NNFI) fit indices were adopted. One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-test was employed to perform comparison.

FINDINGS

The sample group participating in the study consisted of 69 female (11.3%) and 539 (88.97%) male football spectators. Spectator ages varied between 14 and 65 (M = 25.21, sd = 8.48). For data analysis average age for the sample group was considered. The sample was grouped under 2 age groups, 25 and under and 26 and over. In respect to this grouping 358 football spectators were 25 and under (58.9%) whilst 250 were 26 and over (41.1%). Majority of football spectators were single (76.2%). Considering education level, a majority of the spectators participating in the study were high school graduates (35.7%), followed by university students (17.4%) and high school students (16.6%). The frequency of attending events amongst spectators was mainly 4 games or less (48.7). It was striking to see that the rate of spectators attending 10 games or more was low (12%). In a similar line the majority of spectators (55.3%) had been supporting their team as spectators for 4 seasons or less (Table 1).

Exploratory factor analysis of S_PSQPS

Obtaining a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin adequacy coefficient of 0.934 in the validity analysis for S_PSQPS indicates that

Table 2. Principal component factor analysis of S_PSQPS.

	IQ	PEQ	CSQ
Employees are polite and respectful	0.758		
Employees make an effort to help spectators	0.736		
employees are presentable	0.709		
Employees are reliable	0.671		
There is a safe environment	0.660		
Employees do a good job of their responsibilities	0.627		
Entry is easy		0.796	
Exit is easy		0.769	
Seats are comfortable		0.659	
Car park facilities are adequate		0.640	
There is enough space to move inside and outside		0.584	
Evacuation is easy in the case of any danger		0.577	
Football pitch is in perfect condition		0.509	
Colour design is very appealing		0.500	
Players are eager to do the best they can			0.806
Players on the field are always competitive			0.721
Teams generate a lot of attacks			0.676
Teams play good football that is a pleasure watch			0.632
Competing team has several star players			0.522
Competing players are respectful to their opponents			0.492
Eigenvalue	7.88	2.20	1.17
Variance explained (%)	39.41	10.11	5.84
Crombach α	0.83	0.84	0.88
Mean	2.74	2.46	3.02
S.d.	0.81	0.79	0.78

Table 3. Comparison of fit indexes between model 1 and 2.

	χ^2	d.f	χ^2/d.f.	RMSEA	SRMR	RMR	GFI	AGFI	CFI	IFI	NFI	NNFI
Model 1	614.75	167	3.62	0.067	0.056	0.067	0.91	0.88	0.91	0.91	0.89	0.90
Model 2*	468.46	162	2.89	0.056	0.048	0.057	0.93	0.91	0.94	0.94	0.92	0.93

* items disengaged: 1-10, 8-14, 7-8, 13-15, 7-9.

the sample is sufficient for factor analysis. Bartlett test returned a value of 5330.52 (p = 0.000) and this demonstrated that the factor analysis suitable in terms of applicability to variables. The principal components factor analysis performed using the Equamax rotation method returned 3 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. These factors were termed as Interaction Quality (IQ), Physical Environment Quality (PEQ) and Core Service Quality (CSQ) (with respective eigenvalues of 7.88, 2.02 and 1.17). It has been seen that these 3 factors explain 55.36% of the variance. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the factors varied between 0.83 and 0.88. On the other hand, the general Cronbach alpha coefficient for S_PSQPS consisting 20 items is 0.91. Spectators' perceptions related to Total Perceived Service Quality (TPSQ) was M = 2.74 (sd = 0.68). Table 2 presents items grouped under obtained factors, factor loads as well as the percent of variance each factor explains and Cronbach alpha values.

Confirmatory factor analysis of S_PSQPS

In light of the results obtained from exploratory factor analysis for S_PSQPS, the structure consisting of 20 items grouped under 3 factors were tried with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Examining the obtained fit indices it is seen that the model is compatible with the data [Chi-square = 614.75 (df = 167, p < 0.00), RMSEA = 0.067, SRMR = 0.056, RMR=0.067, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.88, CFI = 0.91, IFI = 0.91, NFI=0.89, NNFI = 0.90] (Table 3). As an outcome of investigating modification indices levels of correlation were considered amongst the errors in some items and certain revisions

Table 4. Factor loadings and ıtem descriptive statistics.

Item	M	S.d.	Λ	t-value	R^2	skewness	kurtosis
1	2.67	1.05	0.78	22.20	0.60	0.105	-0.356
2	2.75	1.02	0.78	22.14	0.61	0.017	-0.359
3	2.75	1.00	0.77	21.82	0.60	0.064	-0.168
4	2.75	1.04	0.72	19.85	0.52	0.055	-0.365
5	2.71	1.07	0.64	17.07	0.41	0.159	-0.396
6	2.80	1.01	0.74	20.73	0.55	0.060	-0.178
7	2.32	1.20	0.64	16.08	0.41	0.590	-0.598
8	2.28	1.14	0.63	16.05	0.40	0.567	-0.567
9	2.29	1.13	0.65	16.54	0.42	0.583	-0.439
10	2.06	1.13	0.62	16.09	0.39	0.704	-0.621
11	2.70	1.08	0.63	15.92	0.39	0.203	-0.539
12	2.54	1.19	0.63	15.90	0.39	0.374	-0.697
13	2.83	1.14	0.51	12.70	0.26	0.099	-0.720
14	2.66	1.18	0.66	17.00	0.43	0.184	-0.842
15	3.26	1.11	0.61	15.77	0.37	-0.133	-0.581
16	3.16	1.06	0.70	18.69	0.49	-0.117	-0.453
17	3.05	1.04	0.68	17.95	0.46	-0.149	-0.352
18	2.98	1.04	0.70	18.68	0.49	-0.070	-0.349
19	2.82	1.13	0.71	18.97	0.50	0.057	-0.629
20	2.87	.098	0.61	15.48	0.37	-0.047	-0.102

$p < 0.05$

were performed to facilitate some conceptual clarity. In scope of these revisions correlation between items i1-i10, i8-i14, i7-i8 and i13-i15 were disengaged. Repeated CFA returned changes in compatibility indices as follows: χ^2 = 468.46, df = 162, χ^2/df = 2.89, RMSEA = 0.056, SRMR = 0.048, GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.94, IFI = 0.94, NFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.93 (Model 2). Examining the obtained compatibility indices it is seen that the extent of compatibility had considerably improved (Table 3).

The skewness and kurtosis coefficients were well between ± 2.00, indicating that the data distribution did not deviate from normality for any given variable. To ensure the evidence of convergent validity, factor loadings and t-values were examined. All factor loadings were above the suggested threshold value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 1998), ranging from 0.51 - 0.78. The t-values for all indicators ranged from 12.70 - 22.20 and each of them was significant at 0.05 levels. According to observations multiple correlation square (R^2) values varied between 0.41 and 0.61 for IQ, 0.26 and 0.43 for PEQ, 0.37 and 0.50 for CSQ (Table 4). Examining correlation between factor points, a positively significant relation can be observed between the 3 factors that constitute the scale. More so, it was interesting to see that there was negatively inclined low degree of correlation between team identification and quality perception on physical environment (Table 5).

Although it is impossible to mention of a significant difference for TPSQ and its sub-dimensions in terms of gender, there nonetheless is a significant difference between males and females in terms of team identification (t = -5.329, p < 0.001). Compared to females, males present a higher degree of team identification. Approaching spectators in terms of age groups, the PEQ perceptions (t = 2.283, p < 0.05), TPSQ levels (t = 2.411, p < 0.05) and TI levels (t = 4.135, p < 0.001) of the 25 or younger spectator group was significantly higher than the 26 or older spectator group. Other age group related dimensions did not reveal significant difference. Compared to married spectators, TPSQ is significantly high amongst those who are single (t = -2.164, p < 0.05). Similarly, compared to married spectators, the level of team identification is higher for single spectators (t = -5.375, p < 0.001). It was impossible to determine a relation between spectators' level of education and perceived service quality and its sub-dimensions. However, there is a significant relation between level of education and identification. The fact that identification amongst university graduates, considered well educated, is lower than the degree of identification for spectators of other education levels calls for attention (F = 5.622, p < 0.001).

Examining spectators participating in the study by the team they support, the differences in levels of identification as well as perceived service quality and all its sub-dimensions calls for attention. At the IQ sub-dimension, perception of Kar ıyaka supporters is higher than those of Altay and Göztepe (F = 35.102, p < 0.001). PEQ perceptions of Kar ıyaka supporters are significantly higher than Altay supporters and on the same level; PEQ perceptions of Altay supporters are once again

Table 5. Correlations among quality dimensions and team ıdentification.

Factors	CSQ	IQ	TPSQ	TI
Physical environment quality	0.48**	0.62**	0.82**	-0.17**
Core service quality		0.68**	0.84**	0.02
Interaction quality			0.90**	-0.02
Total perceived service quality				-0.06

** p< 0.01.

Table 6. Means and standard deviations for the team ıdentification, quality dimensions.

		IQ	PEQ	CSQ	TPSQ	TI
		M (sd)	M (sd)	M (sd)	M (sd)	M (sd)
Gender	Female	2.68 (.65)	2.38 (.58)	3.01 (.64)	2.69 (.51)	36.63 (16.28)
	Male	2.75 (.83)	2.47 (.81)	3.02 (.79)	2.74 (.69)	47.33 (9.92)
Age	25 and below	2.79 (.83)	2.52 (.80)	3.07 (.77)	2.79 (.69)	47.71 (10.62)
	26 and over	2.66 (.77)	2.37 (.76)	2.94 (.79)	2.66 (.66)	43.83 (11.93)
Marital status	Single	2.77 (.83)	2.48 (.82)	3.05 (.77)	2.77 (.69)	47.60 (41.39)
	Married	2.64 (.73)	2.36 (.68)	2.92 (.81)	2.64 (.62)	41.39 (12.60)
Education	Primary school grad.	2.83 (.76)	2.50 (.62)	3.20 (.59)	2.85 (.48)	45.84 (10.89)
	Secondary school grad.	2.73 (.83)	2.36 (.68)	3.02 (.84)	2.71 (.65)	46.81 (9.97)
	High school students	2.79 (.94)	2.62 (.83)	3.07 (.86)	2.83 (.77)	46.59 (11.22)
	High school grad.	2.76 (.77)	2.47 (.78)	3.02 (.77)	2.75 (.66)	47.89 (9.53)
	University students	2.71 (.76)	2.40 (.81)	3.00 (.69)	2.70 (.64)	46.16 (12.56)
	University grad.	2.62 (.83)	2.36 (.84)	2.90 (.81)	2.63 (.73)	40.37 (13.67)
Team	Karsiyaka	3.20 (.76)	3.32 (.68)	3.33 (.72)	3.28 (.66)	41.69 (11.27)
	Altay	2.56 (.86)	2.31 (.66)	2.93 (.85)	2.60 (.67)	40.93 (12.36)
	Goztepe	2.61 (.68)	2.05 (.49)	2.92 (.70)	2.53 (.49)	53.39 (4.49)
Game attendance	4 games and less	2.73 (.78)	2.53 (.77)	3.03 (.73)	2.77 (.65)	41.77 (13.02)
	5-9 games	2.73 (.86)	2.45 (.86)	3.02 (.84)	2.74 (.73)	49.49 (7.97)
	10 games and more	2.78 (.77)	2.19 (.55)	2.96 (.77)	2.64 (.59)	52.70 (4.41)
Season attendance	4 seasons and less	2.86 (.77)	2.66 (.80)	3.14 (.73)	2.88 (.65)	43.41 (12.59)
	5-9 seasons	2.73 (.88)	2.33 (.78)	3.00 (.85)	2.68 (.73)	49.95 (8.00)
	10 seasons and more	2.47 (.77)	2.09 (.57)	2.76 (.77)	2.43 (.57)	48.99 (8.85)

significantly higher than those of Göztepe ($F = 213.632$, $p < 0.001$). Kar ıyaka supporters' CSQ related perceptions are significantly higher than Altay and Göztepe supporters ($F = 15.886$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, TPSQ levels amongst Kar ıyaka supporters are again significantly higher than those of Altay and Göztepe ($F = 81.075$, $p < 0.001$). On the other hand, seeing significantly higher degrees of identification amongst Göztepe supporters in comparison to those of Kar ıyaka and Altay ($F = 115.835$, $p < 0.001$) come across as a striking result.

Significant differences were determined between spectator attendance to games and perceptions of physical environment quality ($F = 5.590$, $p = 0.004$) as well as degree of identification ($F = 52.209$, $p < 0.001$). PEQ perceptions amongst spectators with game attendance frequency of 4 or less and game attendance frequency between 5 and 9 are higher compared to spectators with game attendance frequency of 10 or more. It was determined that TI degree amongst spectators with game attendance frequency of 4 or less was lower compared to those with game attendance frequency between 5 - 9.

Statistically significant results were determined between the number of season's spectators coming to watch matches at Alsancak Stadium and perceived service quality together with all its sub-dimensions as well as level of identification. In the IQ sub-dimension it was

seen that perception amongst spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 4 seasons or less and those coming for 5 - 9 seasons is higher than spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 10 seasons or more ($F = 11.619$, $p < 0.001$). In terms of PEQ, it was seen that perception amongst spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 4 seasons or less is higher than those coming for 5-9 seasons; similarly, it was also seen that perception amongst spectators coming for 5-9 seasons is higher than those coming for 10 seasons or more ($F = 31.892$, $p < 0.001$). Compared to spectators coming for 9 seasons or more, CSQ perception has been determined to be higher amongst spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 4 seasons or less ($F = 12,459$, $p < 0.001$).

In terms of PEQ, we see that perception amongst spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 4 seasons or less is higher than those coming for 5-9 seasons; similarly, we also see that perception amongst spectators coming for 5-9 seasons is higher than those coming for 10 seasons or more ($F = 31.892$, $p < 0.001$). We determined that, compared to spectators coming for 9 seasons or more, CSQ perception is higher amongst spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 4 seasons or less ($F = 12,459$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, compared to spectators coming for 5-9 seasons, TPSQ level is higher amongst spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 4 seasons or less. Compared to spectators coming for 10 seasons or more, TPSQ level is once more higher amongst spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 5 - 9 seasons. Compared to spectators coming for 5 - 9 seasons and those coming for 10 seasons or more, it was seen that TI is lower amongst spectators coming to Alsancak Stadium for 4 seasons or less ($F = 23.207$, $p < 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted with the intention of determining the sub-dimensions constituting service quality perceptions of professional football spectators as well as investigating the relation between service quality perceptions (including the sub-dimensions shaping these perceptions) and level of team identification. However at the same time, the study exposes a profile of professional football spectators in Turkey. Initially, professional football spectators are determined to be predominantly young, single males.

In terms of education they are mostly students or high school graduates. It was seen that these spectators have mainly been attending games during 4 most recent seasons and have attended 4 games or less throughout a season.Findings accumulated from the study sample reveals that professional football is an activity largely followed by the younger generation.

The process of exchange may explain the fact that professional football spectators spend less time at such events in their later years, compared their youth. This process of exchange comes into existence with the interaction of spectators, who are customers, and the football club offering them professional sports services. The anticipated dynamism as an outcome of this interaction is closely tied to the positive results individuals expect to derive from the experience of participating professional football as a spectator (Funk, 2008). The depictive statistics obtained from the study suggest that the organisation of professional football events in Turkey still fall behind the desired level of service presentation. It was considered worrying in terms of professional football management to see extremely low female attendance at professional football events. It is equally worrying to see male domination in football event attendance and a lack of continuity in attendance.

The results obtained from exploratory and confirmative factor analysis of S_PSQPS, invented to determine professional football match related service quality perceptions of spectators participating in the study reveal that the developed measurement tool is valid and reliable ($\chi^2 = 468.46$, $df = 162$, $\chi^2/df = 2.89$, $RMSEA = 0.056$, $SRMR = 0.048$, $GFI = 0.93$, $AGFI = 0.91$, $CFI = 0.94$, $IFI = 0.94$, $NFI = 0.92$, $NNFI = 0.93$). Chau (1997) states that the ratio of Chi-square to degree of independence must be 3 or smaller where as GFI, NFI, NNFI, CFI values must be 0.90 or greater for the model to have a good degree of compatibility to data. Kelloway (1998) states that absolute compatibility demands SRMR value to be smaller than 0.05 and adds that RMSEA values lower than 0.05 (for high degree of compatibility) together with AGFI and GFI values greater than 0.90 indicate a good degree of compatibility. On the other hand, Hu and Bentler (1999) stress the need for SRMR value and RMSEA value to be respectively close or smaller than 0.08 and 0.06, and CFI value to be 0.95 or greater for the model to ensure a good degree of compatibility with the data.

Spectators having a higher degree of perception for core service quality, a sub-dimension of perceived service quality, compared to other sub-dimensions stems from the fact that spectators have somewhat more up-to-date knowledge and more realistic expectations concerning the performance of the team they go to watch. As Greenwall et al. (2002) indicates spectators generally have knowledge and certain ideas about core service quality before coming to the stadium for the match. Actually this condition reveals the importance of core service in ensuring and increasing spectator attendance because realistic expectations regarding meeting requirements have the most critical role in the final decision to participate. This is none other than the component of core services, a domain where spectators are relatively more informed.

Park (2001) states that the presence of a single important factor is enough for many recreational sports consumers to participate in an event and that other factors are generally disregarded. Individuals' intent to participate an event is closely tied to the satisfaction they get from the team's performance and the degree of

identification with their team (Matsuoka et al., 2003). After all, the satisfaction experienced from the team's performance increases individuals' degree of identification to the team in due course. Professional football spectators essentially come to the stadium to watch the team they support (Gencer and Aycan, 2008; Gencer et al., 2009) and this provokes managers to give more emphasis on the core service component. Hence, in order to enhance team performance, it is paramount that team managers concentrate efforts on incorporating good players and coaching staff in to the team framework (Mullin et al., 2000) and continue their attempts in improving core service quality. As a matter of fact, according to Berri et al. (2004) there is a positive and statistically significant relation between a team having star players and ticket revenue.

However, in terms of effective management, it is tremendously risky for professional football clubs to concentrate solely on core services. As findings from the study indicate, CSQ perceptions present a downward trend amongst spectators watching games for long periods of time and this stands out as a significant conclusion demanding the attention of professional football managers. Undoubtedly the most critical reason behind this trend is performance comparison with past results. It might be imagined that winning professional football teams attract more spectators to the stadium however, expanding benefits offered to spectators in other dimensions is equally important in terms of continued attendance.

This is because it certainly is not easy to form continually winning teams and secure sustainability in today's circumstances. A core service like professional football is inconsistent and challenging for sports managers to establish full control. Compared to factors like interaction and physical environment the extent of control professional football team managers have over core services can be considerably weaker (McDonald et al., 1995; Gladden and Milne, 1999).

Lack of control over the core service has led most sports managers, especially in developed countries, to focus their attention on the development of interaction and physical environment factors, in the struggle to meet the needs and demands of spectators (Theodorakis et al., 2001). Compared to efforts focusing on developing core service quality, it is evident that such attempts are much simpler, consistent and permanent. Performance problems experienced throughout the season have an extremely negative impact on spectators' decision to participate. For such reasons, managers should not only concentrate efforts on improving physical environment and interaction factors in stadiums to attract a greater number of spectators, but also strive to create an atmosphere capable of minimising losses and maintain revenue generation during times of performance related fluctuations.

According to Funk et al. (2002) core service is fundamental for the spectator and that there is a need to generate a positive image about the footballers and the league they compete in to increase core service quality perceptions. However, notwithstanding, there still is a need to focus on the physical environment as well as factors with an entertainment value for the spectator not only during the game but also at half time. Wakefield and Sloan (1995), on the other hand, state that game attendance is not only a function of team performance or team loyalty; it simultaneously is the function of the sum of experiences of spectators at the stadium. Actually, according to Greenwell et al. (2002) the contribution of service personnel and physical environment perceptions on spectator satisfaction is greater than core service quality perceptions.

Studies conducted by a large number of researchers emphasize that physical environment quality at stadiums is just as significant as the core service itself (Shilbury, 1994; Leonard, 1997; Pan and Gabert, 1997; Wakefield and Sloan, 1995; Westerbeek and Shilbury, 1999; Westerbeek, 2000). Today it is evident that even a winning team cannot guarantee a sold-out stadium. As a matter of fact, according to Brown et al. (1993), poor service can raise questions on the decision to attend future events, even amongst spectators with a high degree of identification. This is why contemporary management and marketing strategies have shifted from being top quality sports focused core service oriented to being quality entertainment experience focused core service oriented (Hill and Green, 2000). In this sense, besides core service, physical environment and interaction quality factors are also gaining tremendous importance in terms of professional football management.

Another reason why physical environment quality is so important for professional football clubs is the fact that quality of interaction is affected by physical environment quality (Bitner, 1992; Westerbeek and Shilbury, 1999). More so, physical environment is where the core service is created and presented. Hence, it is very possible that physical environment also has significant effects on core service quality. Spectator interaction can take place at high levels within a good physical environment. Furthermore, spectator attention that is normally largely focused on the core service can be directed to a wider domain and thus create an environment for enhanced in-stadium entertainment which in return can increase attendance and revenue.

It would be wrong to say that there is a significant relation between team identification and service quality perceptions. The negatively inclined weak relation between team identification and physical environment quality originates from Göztepe spectators having a higher degree of identification with their team, compared to the spectators of the two other teams, and a low degree of service quality perceptions. Actually this supports Theodorakis and Alexandris (2008) and Kim and Trail (2009) who found service quality having an

extremely small impact on event attendance. The fundamental reason behind Göztepe spectators participating events is the high degree of identification with their team. However this should not be interpreted as disregarding the fact that teams are loosing a large number of potential and current spectators as an outcome of poor service quality perceptions.

Service quality perceptions do not reveal significant difference according to gender. However females returning a lower degree of identification, compared to males, are considered as a factor explaining why female attendance to professional football events is poor. In other words it would be correct to say that the reason behind male dominance in event attendance is due to their high levels of identification. Besides gender, a high degree of identification noticed amongst relatively young, single and comparatively less educated individuals is extremely coherent with the spectator profile obtained from the study. Team identification has a distinctive impact on the decision to participate football games as spectators.

The facts that sports spectatorship perception amongst males is differ than females (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000); that, compared to females, males are more interested in the technical aspects of the game and that females are motivated more by the social and familial elements rather than the game itself (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Trail et al., 2002) demonstrates, beyond the core service, the demand for improving physical environment and interaction quality for desired degree of female spectator attendance. Actually investments made to increase female spectator attendance will certainly return significant returns for professional football clubs. Compared to males, female spectators have a greater inclination to purchase official team merchandise (Fink et al., 2002); they also have a higher degree of perception concerning the core service quality of a team with poor performance (Greenwell et al., 2002). This presents considerable advantages for professional team managers.

Determining a significantly high degree of physical environment quality perception amongst young spectators with low attendance frequency gives rise to the thought that these individuals are predominantly core service oriented and probably come to watch football games to enjoy a different experience in their daily lives. However, continuity of attendance as a spectator subsides as a consequence of being unable to adequately meet the individual's expectations from other service quality components, especially with the impact of core service related faults. At this point the behaviour of choosing games surfaces which is actually extremely critical for the club. This tendency is also observable amongst season ticket holders.

Team identification presents extremely significant advantages for professional football clubs (Wakefield, 1995; Sutton et al., 1997; Dietz-Uhler and Murrell, 1999). This characteristic makes sports spectatorship considerably different than other recreational activities. The important point here for football clubs is the presence of a positive correlation between the degrees of spectator identification and attempts to affect the game result (Wann et al., 1994). Spectators who frequently and continuously participate in events present a significantly high degree of identification compared to other groups. This demonstrates the significance of identification for professional football teams.

However, teams equally suffer from weakened degree of identification during a spell of prolonged and continued poor performance where spectators gradually give up on event attendance. Beyond the contrast in interaction quality and core service quality perceptions in the study, the difference noticed in physical environment quality between the spectators of the 3 teams playing their games at the same stadium is extremely striking. At this stage, looking at the degree of team identification, seeing a higher degree of team identification amongst spectators coming to watch 2nd division team Göztepe compared to the spectators of the other two 1st division teams makes the study even more interesting in terms of results. Such an outcome demonstrates the loss of a large number of spectators due to poor performance and that spectator persistently coming to watch their team have an extraordinary degree of identification.

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