ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study was to examine the effect of electronic service quality on fan satisfaction and fan loyalty in the online environment. Selection of three hundred and fifty-six fans of a famous sports club was through random sampling using the club’s website. AMOS used structural equation modeling for data analysis. Results provided strong support on the effect of electronic service quality (E-S-QUAL) on fan satisfaction and fan loyalty toward the website of their favorable football teams. Business enterprises have well researched e-service quality and loyalty. However, limited research exists in the sports context. This paper provides valuable insight into the measurement of e-service quality and fan loyalty in the sport and offers a foundation for future marketing research.
1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the growing development of the internet in Iran has provided an opportunity for online purchases. Therefore, e-services and their unique characteristics have become a new area of interest. A number of organizations use internet as a profitable channel to distribute goods and to deliver services (Akinci et al., 2012; Barrutia and Gilsanz, 2013). They are trying to satisfy their customers and create great relationships with them. Recent marketing studies have assessed the importance of perceived quality variables on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, with all leading to evaluate marketing success and efficiency. This is even more critical in service companies (Finn, 2011).

Today, services are widely expanded, and no business can survive without service. Club managers have to retain customers and provide better service, paying the most attention to the needs, opinions, and complaints that customers make in relation to service. Reviewing the problems and addressing the comments and the level of satisfaction with regard to the quality and speed enhancement of service can be a huge help to preserve them.

Service quality has a close relationship with customer satisfaction in the sports service industry; nowadays, sports organizations understand that providing service quality to customers is essential for success and is a key to survival in today’s competitive environment. Customer retention and creating a basis for the return of their vital task requires special tools and tricks. The most important tools for sports clubs are constant communication with people, providing appropriate services, and being aware of the competitive market. Loyalty maintains and strengthens customers for organizations concerned to maintain and develop their competitive position in the market, and seen as a strategic challenge.

To create a loyal fans base, sports clubs must be in direct contact with their fans and create a mental picture where the fans feel informed about the activities of the club, that the club hears the voice of fans, and they are given importance; the club then goes on to meet their needs and day-to-day quality of service improved. In this case, making satisfactory changes in activity can turn them into loyal fans and one of the methods is by means of communication, use of the website.

The rapid growth of the internet as a low-cost facilitator tool for businesses and consumers has made customer satisfaction a critical component in marketing. To attract online customers, websites should be well designed and deliver proper services. To gain competitive advantages, it is important to understand factors influencing electronic service quality and customer satisfaction (Craig-Lees et al., 2013; Allameh et al., 2012).

Sports clubs should design their websites to provide information in a user-friendly manner, to satisfy their fans and customers. The better the website, the more customers are attracted. Satisfaction and loyalty are strong mediators for facilitating customers’ purchasing behaviors.

Weathers and Makienko (2006) believe that online service quality provides organizations with remarkable success through online satisfaction and online loyalty. Because of its critical impact on customers’ behavioral intentions, customer satisfaction has attracted remarkable attention in marketing literature (Theodorakis et al., 2013).

Previous studies have discussed the importance of understanding the various attributes of service quality and purchasing, often in the area of e-services delivery (Rezaei Dolatabadi and Khazaei Pool, 2013).

There have been a large number of studies conducted regarding the role and importance of service quality during the past twenty years (Rezaei Dolatabadi et al., 2012; Shaemi et al., 2012). In 2005, Para-
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