

Chapter 49

Brand Perception and Its Relation to Perceived Performance of a Public Sports Service

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ABSTRACT

In sport context, many contributions are involved in the perception of quality and satisfaction in sport services, but in regards to brand perception, such studies are much less common. Virtually no work is aimed at brand awareness of sports services. In the book chapter the authors expose a case study that analyze the users perception of the image of the service and is related to some performance indicators such as quality of service, satisfaction and future intentions. Data analysis is performed using structural equations and measurement scales adapted to sports facilities. The results of this study show that quality is explained by congruence with a high percentage of variance (76.6%), the latter concept being the aspect with the greatest predictive weight. Furthermore, future intentions are explained by attitudes towards the brand and quality, the latter being the element with greater predictive power.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, brands and offers of products and services have increased considerably. Never before have consumers who intend to acquire a new product or service had the range of possible choices that exist today. This large increase in supply causes companies to make a greater effort in trying to differentiate themselves from numerous competitors to achieve the goal of attracting future customers.

In this context, a large supply aimed at satisfying the same demand has become almost essential for companies to gamble on their brand image, i.e., to create meanings for which the product or service will be known and through which people will describe, remember and relate to the product (Dowling, 1986). Specialists will use associations to differentiate, position and create positive attitudes and sentiments towards brands (Low & Lamb, 2000), facilitating the process of consumer decisions (Romaniuk & Gaillard, 2007).

In recent years, there has been a paradigm change in the context of brands because not long ago the majority of work focused on the importance of the product; however, the situation has changed, and today this product is often relegated to a secondary role and the real product, the brand, has increased in importance (Klein, 2001, p. 48). According to one author, “successful corporations must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products” (Klein, 2001, p. 31), thus exemplifying the power held by brands.

Therefore, if a company can convince consumers to perceive its brand as a good or a high-quality brand, it will be more successful than a similar company that does not convince consumers to make this association, and therefore is not perceived in such a way, even if its product is objectively better. Moreover, is necessary to add many cases in which consumers do not have the necessary expertise to determine if a product is better than another, and the influence of our thinking about the brand will be a key factor.

These types of situations apparently also occur in the field of sports services, and, upon reaching a point at which companies in our competitive environment offer a service very similar to that of our company, the brand becomes a key element for the necessary process of differentiation. A few years ago, it seemed that working on the brand and creating marketing plans were activities reserved for large companies with huge product and client flows. Increasingly, however, small and medium companies are becoming aware of the importance of their brand and the benefits that they can derive from its proper handling because they can generate determined perceptions in consumers that will differentiate them from the competition (Aaker, 1996). Thus, brand image, which has long been neglected, is becoming a vital and powerful tool for companies, which are becoming aware of brand image and dedicate an increasing amount of effort and resources to improve it (Sharp, 1995).

When focusing on brand image used in services, it is possible to find that service brands, as opposed to product brands, suffer from the intangibility problem (McDougall & Snetsinger, 1990). A physical product can be touched, smelled and tasted, its packaging can be manipulated, it can be purchased repeatedly several times with no observable changes—it is even possible to purchase and use it at different times. Meanwhile a service is inseparable: it is produced and consumed at the same time, and it can be varied. Together with intangibility, the inseparability of service causes consumers to often value the tangible element of a service, e.g., equipment or staff (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Furthermore, services focus on their brand, simplifying information transmission to consumers and attempting to become more tangible by using merchandising, among other techniques.

Considering these problems, it would be interesting to study the concept of brand image in services and discover the elements that influence brand image, finding the most potent influencers. This would allow us to better understand the process.

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