Abstract
This study discusses current issues of service quality and proposes a conceptual model that is focused on consumers' perceptions of service quality toward organizations and services in the participant sport industry. The proposed model is based on the current conceptualization of service quality, which suggests that service quality is a multidimensional and hierarchical construct. In the proposed model, service quality consists of four primary dimensions which are defined by several corresponding subdimensions: (a) program quality - range of program, operating time, and information, (b) interaction quality - client-employee interaction and inter-client interaction, (c) outcome quality - physical change, valence, and sociability, and (d) environment quality - ambient condition, design, and equipment. The hierarchical approach in the model allows researchers to integrate specific procedures and/or attributes of service delivery into primary dimensions of service quality. This study is designed to resolve the conceptual differences in service quality research and provide a comprehensive conceptual framework for sport management scholars and practitioners.

“Leading scholars have become confident in their argument that providing quality service is not only the most important factor for customer satisfaction, but it is the principal criterion that measures the competitiveness of a service organization.”

Current Issues and Conceptualizations of Service Quality in the Recreation Sport Industry
As a society advances economically, matures culturally, and increases its knowledge base, the societal demands for quality service increase (Lakhe & Mohanty, 1995). Accordingly, the interest in ‘service quality’ has increased exponentially during the 1980s (Gronroos, 1990). Today, service quality is recognized as one of the most important topics in the field of service management and marketing, and the word quality has become a part of the everyday vocabulary of management (Gronroos, 1990).

The increased interest in service quality has motivated many scholars to research the topic. As a result, leading scholars have become confident in their argument that providing quality service is not only the most important factor for customer satisfaction (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994; Berry, Parasuraman, & Zeithaml, 1994; Gronroos, 1990; Schneider & Bowen, 1995), but it is the principal criterion that measures the competitiveness of a service organization (Lengnick-Hall, 1996). Brady (1997) summarized the key outcomes of heightened levels of service quality as: (a) a higher than normal share of the market (Buzzell & Gale, 1987), (b) improved profitability relative to the competition (Anderson, et al., 1994; Gronroos, 1990), (c) consumer loyalty (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996), (d) the realization of a competitive price premium (Zeithaml et al., 1996), and (e) an increased probability of purchase (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Thus, marketers and managers now focus
on the process of service production and consumption as it governs consumer behavior in the service industry where services are produced and consumed simultaneously (Gronroos, 1992).

Sport organizations face a new era of global competition. Within the saturated market of sport industries, the success of a sport organization may depend on the degree to which the organization can satisfy their customers with quality service. Within the sport industry, however, service quality was not recognized as a major area of research until the late 1980s (Crompton & Mackay, 1989; MacKay & Crompton, 1988).

"The meaning of quality is a relative concept and can vary under different circumstances. Therefore, it is necessary to reanalyze the meaning of service quality in relation to the recreational sport industry."

To date, the studies of service quality have focused on identifying dimensions of quality in fitness services, leisure and recreation services, and spectating sport services (see table 1).

Although researchers have suggested several different factor structures, there is no general agreement as to the content of the dimensions. For example, although researchers emphasized the importance of facility and other elements of physical surrounding (e.g., equipment) in service delivery of recreational sport, the factors were included in different dimensions with different focus areas. Howat, Absher, Crilley, and Milne (1996) included facility and equipment as core services (program quality in this paper), while Papadimitriou and Karteroliotis (2000), and Chelladurai and Chang (2000) included them as separate dimensions with different terms, facility attraction/operation and context (facility, location, and equipment) respectively. In addition, it is apparent that there is a gap between the current conceptualizations of service quality in recreational sport/fitness programs and those from the general service marketing literature. For example, none of the literature in recreational sport discusses the actual outcome of service consumption, though it is included as an important area to be investigated in general marketing literature (Brady & Cronin Jr., 2001; Rust & Oliver, 1994). Therefore, the dimensions of service quality in the recreational sport industry need to be reexamined. In addition to the issue of factor structure, current service quality researchers suggest that service quality evaluation is a highly complex process that operates at several levels of abstraction. As such, the missing link of service quality research in our industry is a unifying conceptualization that reflects the multidimensional and hierarchical nature of service quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Carman, 1990; Dabhokar, Thorpe, & Rentz, 1996).

The purpose of this paper is to present an integrated conceptual framework of service quality for the participant sport industry. This framework can provide a foundation for the development of instruments to measure and evaluate service quality of sport organizations. The intent of the proposed model is also to advance the knowledge base of service quality within the fields of sport management and marketing.

Issues in Service Quality Research

To date, the study of service quality has been conducted in various segments of the sport industry such as professional sport (McDonald, Sutton, & Milne, 1995; Milne & McDonald, 1999), fitness programs (Kim & Kim, 1995; Papadimitriou & Karteroliotis, 2000), and recreation and leisure (Crompton & Mackay, 1989; Crompton, Mackay, & Fesenmaier, 1991; Howat et al., 1996; MacKay & Crompton, 1988; Taylor, Sharland, Cronin, Jr., & Bullard, 1993; Wright, Duray, & Goodale, 1992). In general, the management of service quality is concerned with three distinct aspects: (1) designing the service product, (2) designing the service environment, and (3) delivering the service (Rust & Oliver, 1994). However, for the best conceptualization of service quality, researchers need to focus on (a) how the service quality construct is conceptualized (i.e., the meaning), (b) which factors determine the consumer's perception of service quality (i.e., determinant), and (c) how to measure the constructs (i.e., measurement means) (Brady, 1997; Chelladurai & Chang, 2000). The aforementioned areas warrant further investigation in order to improve the service quality research. Prior to presenting the proposed model of service quality, we first focus our discussion on the concept of service quality. This is then followed by a discussion of factors that have been identified in the literature to comprise service quality.

Concept of Service Quality

The basic concept of service quality needs clarification in order to develop a conceptual framework of service quality. Service quality has been defined in several ways. Bitner and Hubbert (1994) defined service quality as "the consumer's overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of the organization and its services" (p. 77). On the other hand, a more traditional definition of service quality is the comparison of consumer expectations with actual service performance (Berry, Parasuraman, & Zeithaml, 1988; Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The purpose of this paper is to present an integrated conceptual framework of service quality for the participant sport industry. This framework can provide a foundation for the development of instruments to measure and evaluate service quality of sport organizations. The intent of the proposed model is also to advance the knowledge base of service quality within the fields of sport management and marketing.
### Table 1
Comparison of Service Quality Factors

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<tr>
<td>Recreational Sport</td>
<td>Fitness</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>Fitness</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Fast food, Photography</td>
<td>Amusement park Dry cleaning</td>
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| Instrument | SSQRS | QUESC | CERM-CSQ | - | QUESC | - | - |
| Analysis    | CFA | EFA | EFA | EFA | EFA | CFA |

| Dimensions | 4 (11) | 11 | 15 | 3 (5) | 4 | 3 | 3 (9) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Quality</th>
<th>(a) Range of program</th>
<th>(b) Operating-time</th>
<th>(c) Information</th>
<th>Core Service</th>
<th>Core Service</th>
<th>(a) Program availability</th>
<th>(b) Other Services</th>
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<tr>
<th>Interaction Quality</th>
<th>Interaction between:</th>
<th>(a) Attitude</th>
<th>(b) Reliability</th>
<th>(c) Personal-consideration</th>
<th>Staff Quality</th>
<th>(a) Responsiveness</th>
<th>(b) Staff Knowledge</th>
<th>(c) Officials</th>
<th>Instructor quality</th>
<th>Interaction between:</th>
<th>(a) Client-employee</th>
<th>(b) Inter-client</th>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome Quality</td>
<td>(a) Physical-change</td>
<td>(b) Valance</td>
<td>(c) Sociability</td>
<td>Outcome quality</td>
<td>(a) Waiting-time</td>
<td>(b) Valence</td>
<td>(c) Tangibles</td>
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<td>Physical Environment Quality</td>
<td>(a) Ambience</td>
<td>(b) Design</td>
<td>(c) Equipment</td>
<td>Ambiance</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>(a) Facility</td>
<td>(b) Equipment</td>
<td>(c) Equipment</td>
<td>Facility-attraction/operation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>(a) Privileges</td>
<td>(b) Price</td>
<td>(c) Ease of Mind</td>
<td>Client Participation</td>
<td>Service Environment</td>
<td>(a) Ambience</td>
<td>(b) Design</td>
<td>(c) Social-factor</td>
<td></td>
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For example, Zeithaml et al. (1990), based on the disconfirmation paradigm, defined service quality as "the extent of discrepancy between customers' expectations or desire and their perceptions" (p. 19).

The above definitions of service quality indicate that quality itself has many meanings. It can be an attribute of the product or service, the work itself, the processes and systems surrounding the work (Spencer, 1994), or the performance itself (Deighton, 1992). In addition, the criteria or standard which determines the level of quality varies: (a) quality as excellence, (b) quality as value, (c) quality as conformance to specifications, and (d) quality as meeting or exceeding customer's expectations (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000; Reeves & Bednar, 1994). Lastly, the meaning of quality can vary depending on who would judge quality (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000). This notion implies that the meaning of the quality is a relative concept and can vary under different circumstances (Reeves & Bednar, 1994; Spencer, 1994). Therefore, it is necessary to reanalyze the meaning of service quality in relation to the recreational sport industry.

First, an analysis of the unique characteristics of sport service may help identify an appropriate meaning of service quality in the recreational sport industry. According to Gronroos (1990), a service is "an activity or series of activities of more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily, take place in interactions between the customer and service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems" (p. 27). Similarly, using a systems approach, Lakhe and Mohanty (1995) defined service as "a production system where various inputs are processed, transformed and value added to produce some outputs which have utility to the service seekers, not merely in an economic sense but from supporting the life of the human system in general, even maybe for the sake of pleasure" (p. 140). In the definitions, there are several features of service that should be highlighted since this may help explain the unique characteristics of sport services. First, the main focus of service is on the human performance that occurs between the interaction of customers and service providers (Deighton, 1992; Gronroos, 1990; Sasser, Olsen, & Wyckoff, 1978; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). This feature represents the traditional characteristics of the service product (i.e., simultaneous production and consumption, heterogeneity, intangibility, perishability) (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). In the service delivery process, it is suggested that an employee's behavior, attitude, and expertise affect the service transaction and the service outcome for which customers actively participate (Czepiel, Solomon, & Surprenant, 1985; Lengnick-Hall, 1996). The services provided within the recreational sport industry can be explained by these main characteristics of the service. In this process, customers not only attend, but also actively participate in the service production and consumption. In addition, sport services in recreational sport require a close relationship and a high level of involvement between the service provider and customers. In these relationships, the service offered is unstandardized, and both the customer and service provider must make conscious efforts to interact to ensure that the appropriate service is delivered (Chelladurai, 1998; Milne & McDonald, 1999). All in all, human performance is the core product and customer experience is a major output. In the recreational sport industry, however, the level of interaction among sport consumers is relatively high and customers affect each other. For example, fitness program managers should expect high levels of interaction among members in instructional programs, and prevent possible causes of problems.

"The differences in the conceptualization of service quality suggest that a comprehensive conceptual model needs to be developed for better understanding of this construct and effective application of service quality to sport organizations."

Second, according to Gronroos's (1990) definition, service is produced and consumed in physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider. This notion supports that all other physical sources and goods or service delivery systems are important mediums for the service production and consumption (American Marketing Association, 1960; Gronroos, 1990). In most of the service delivery process, especially in sport and fitness services, a customer's presence is required. Thus, the tangible physical surroundings and other tangible cues are important variables that determine the customer's level of quality perception in the intangible service delivery system (Bitner, 1992). For example, up-to-date equipment and state of art facility design in fitness programs could positively affect a consumer's service quality evaluation. In practice, service is interpreted as activities, systems, or business transactions in which the tangible and intangible attributes are carefully combined for the maximization of customer satisfaction and efficiency of an operational system (Gronroos, 1990; Lakhe & Mohanty, 1995). Therefore, the traditional argument which emphasizes characteristics of the service/goods dichotomy (e.g., intangibility & heterogeneity) may limit our ability to develop comprehensive...
marketing strategies. For example, when customers are seeking certain utilities from a fitness program service, they might not care whether the core product is tangible or intangible. Rather, they develop perceptions regarding quality by using their overall experience of service, equipment, facility, and the service provider. In this situation, the argument that service is intangible is not meaningful from a practical viewpoint (Wright, 1995).

Third, consumers buy a service to solve their problems (Gronroos, 1990). In other words, the focus of the purchase is on the after-use benefits and outcomes, not the service itself. In the sport industry, a customer's experience is a major outcome. Sport consumers often have a certain level of expectation about the outcome of sport participation. However, as the needs of sport consumers are often varied and difficult to predict, the sport product is more elusive than most realized. For example, physical fitness, risk-taking, stress reduction, affiliation, social facilitation, self-esteem, achievement, skill mastery, aesthetics, and self-actualization are all potential motivation factors for the sport participant (Milne & McDonald, 1999). It is important to identify participative motivation and customers' problems because this determines not only the level of service quality, but also the level of customer satisfaction.

"Customers evaluate programs and services using tangible physical surrounding such as facility's design, ambience, and equipment. They, in turn, determine the customers' level of quality perception in the intangible service delivery system."

In sum, the concept of service quality is defined based upon the characteristics of services and its delivery process as viewed by sport consumers. In this case, it is suggested that the concept of service needs to be understood from a broad perspective. Unique characteristics of service and consumer's participative motives in the recreational sport industry suggest several research implications. Customers evaluate the service performance and determine the level of service quality based upon their goal attainment, unique experiences, and service outcome. This notion suggests that it is appropriate to choose customers as 'arbiters' of service quality evaluation, and the 'standard of quality' should be the customer's perception of service excellence or meeting or exceeding customer's expectations. Gronroos (1990) supported the argument by saying "what counts is quality as it is perceived by the customers" (p. 37). Therefore, in the recreational sport industry, service quality should be defined by the customer's overall impression about the service performance, service delivery systems, and overall consumption experiences. This, in return, provides an important background in identifying the major determinants of service quality, which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Factors of Service Quality

In the sport and leisure literature, service quality has been conceptualized in different ways. Thus, differences exist relative to how perceptions of service quality are measured. For example, since its introduction, SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) has been utilized by many scholars. Researchers have either directly applied the SERVQUAL instrument (e.g., Howat et al., 1996; Wright et al., 1992), or have modified it to tailor it more specifically to the services of the fitness and recreational sport industry (e.g., Crompton et al., 1991; McDonald et al., 1995; Wright et al., 1992). Additionally, several researchers have attempted to develop sound factor structures of service quality for different segments of the sport industry (Howat et al., 1996; Kim & Kim, 1995). However, empirical examinations of the sport, fitness, and leisure literature offer little to support commonly agreed upon dimensions of service quality to date.

The differences in the conceptualization of service quality suggest that a comprehensive conceptual model needs to be developed for better understanding of this construct and effective application of service quality by sport organizations. Current literature emphasizing the multi-dimensional and hierarchical nature of service quality may assist in resolving the conceptual differences in service quality research. The development of such a conceptual model can explain how specific attributes (or factors) can be combined into generic dimensions of service quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Dabholkar et al., 1996). The conceptual framework developed using this pattern may help us to better understand the meaning of quality in the process of production and consumption of sport services and the mechanism of how sport consumers develop their intangible service quality perception. This, in return, captures the unique features of sport service, its delivery system, and customers' participative motives.

A Proposed Model of Service Quality

The previous review of the service quality literature suggests that an industry specific (i.e., recreational sport services) and comprehensive model of service quality needs to be developed based on the customer's quality perception about services and their delivery system. For the purpose of this paper, a multidimen-
sional and hierarchical model of service quality was developed to identify the factors which determine sport consumers’ perceptions of service quality. It is anticipated that the proposed model will contribute to service quality research and quality improvement of sport organizations.

The proposed model in this study is based on Brady and Cronin’s (2001) and Dabholkar et al.’s (1996) multi-level approaches. It should be noted that Brady and Cronin’s (2001) work is the first attempt to combine the traditional approach of service quality (i.e., Tri-component model of service quality) with the recent multi-level conceptualization of service quality (e.g., Dabholka, et al., 1996). Brady and Cronin’s (2001) model includes two unique approaches. First, the primary dimensions in Brady and Cronin’s (2001) model of service quality are derived from Rust and Oliver’s (1994) ‘Tri-Component Model of Service Quality,’ and McDougall and Levesque’s (1994) ‘Three Factor Model of Service Quality.’ Rust and Oliver’s (1994) conceptual framework includes three distinct elements: (a) service product, (b) service delivery, and (c) service environment. However, McDougall and Levesque’s (1994) three factors model includes (a) service outcome, (b) service process, and (c) physical environment. The second unique aspect of Brady and Cronin’s (2001) model is the hierarchical and multi-level conceptualization of perceived service quality, which is adopted from Dabholkar et al.’s multi-level conceptualization of service quality.

In the proposed model for this study, four dimensions, that is, program quality, interaction quality, outcome quality, and physical environment are included as the primary dimensions. Each of these dimensions is defined by several corresponding subdimensions: (a) program quality – range of programs, operating time, and information, (b) interaction quality – client-employee interaction, and inter-client interaction, (c) outcome quality – physical change, valence, and sociability, and (d) physical environment quality – ambience, design, and equipment. The proposed model (see Table 1) integrates multidimensional aspects of service quality by using a hierarchical approach (i.e., construct of service quality, its dimensions and subdimensions). A discussion of the model and its subdimensions are provided next.

Program Quality

Activity classes (e.g., fitness instruction) and other various programs (e.g., childcare service) offered to participants are considered as main service products in recreational sport. Thus, program quality is included as the first dimension in the proposed model. Program quality refers to the customer’s relative perception about the excellence of the program through which customers experience sport services. The dimension of program quality is defined by the following three specific attributes in the proposed model: (a) range of programs (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000; Howat et al., 1996; Kim & Kim, 1995; Papadimitriou & Karteroliotis, 2000; Wright et al., 1992), (b) operating time (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Howat et al., 1996; Wright et al., 1992), and (c) information (Howat et al., 1996). These attributes are subdimensions of a primary dimension of program quality. The range of activity programs refers to the variety and attractiveness of classes/programs offered to participants. In this case, other secondary services (e.g., childcare) are included. Operating time refers to whether classes start and finish on time, and whether the operating hours are convenient to the customers. Lastly, information quality refers to the ease of getting a variety of up-to-date information about programs and other services. At a local fitness program or health center, for example, various attractive programs or activities should be available for customers in a convenient time slot. In addition, up-to-date information about programs and other services should be available for customers.

In the previous investigations (e.g., Brady & Cronin, 2001; McDougall & Levesque, 1994), the dimension of service product was not included in their service quality models. Instead, they included outcome quality as the first dimension. These conceptualizations are based on Gronroos’ (1984) service quality model that includes Technical Quality (i.e., outcome quality) and Functional Quality (i.e., quality of service delivery process). For example, in their service quality model, Brady and Cronin (2001) interpreted service product and outcome quality as the same concept, and thus included only outcome quality to determine what the consumer receives from the service provider as opposed to how it is received.

However, in many service quality studies concerning fitness and recreational sport (i.e., recreational sport industry), program quality has been identified as an important factor of service quality. Several empirical and conceptual analyses that support the notion are available in the sport and recreation literature (Howat et al., 1996; Kim & Kim, 1995; Papadimitriou & Karteroliotis, 2000). It should be noted that the evaluation of the service product itself (e.g., fitness programs within a university recreational sport) and of the outcome of service consumption (e.g., physical change) are two different aspects in the consumption process of sport services. Thus, it is necessary to separate program quality from outcome quality as one of consumers’ evaluation criteria of service. Howat et al. (1996) supported the importance of program factor...
and each of its subdimensions. Factor analysis in their study yielded four dimensions of service quality: core service, secondary service, staff quality, and general facility. Core service included program information, start/finish on time, activity range, quality equipment, organization, and value for money. Secondary service included food and drink, and child minding. Kim and Kim's (1995) focus group interview and exploratory factor analysis further supported the importance of program quality in the recreational sport model.

Interaction Quality

In the proposed model, interaction quality is included as the second primary dimension. The main focus of this dimension is on how the service is delivered (Gronroos, 1984). The interaction in service delivery occurs at two levels. First, the service is delivered through an interaction between the service provider and customer (Zeithaml et al., 1985). As human variables are important factors in the nature of service production and consumption, service personnel's attitude, expertise, and actual behavior directly influence customer evaluation of the services (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Brady & Cronin, 2001). Within the recreational sport (Howat et al., 1996; Kim & Kim, 1995; Wright et al., 1992), many scholars reconfirmed the importance of the interaction quality in service delivery. In this model, the quality of interaction between employee and client refers to the customer's subjective perception of how the service is delivered during the service encounter in which the attitude, behavior, and expertise of service personnel are highlighted.

Second, a member's quality perception toward a service can be influenced by other clients' attitudes and behaviors (Baker, 1986; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Lengnick-Hall, 1996; Lovelock, 1991; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Sport participation is a social process in which customers interact and influence each other. Since sport consumers actively participate in service production and consumption, a high level of contact among customers exists during service delivery. This is true, especially in high contact sport services (e.g., soccer clubs and martial arts classes in recreational sport facilities). In the proposed model, the quality of inter-client interaction refers to the customer's subjective perception of how the service is delivered during the service encounter in which the attitude and behavior of other clients are highlighted.

Outcome Quality

Outcome quality refers to the outcome of the service act and represents what the consumer gains from the service (Rust & Oliver, 1994; McDougall & Levesque, 1994). Gronroos (1984) termed outcome quality as 'Technical Quality,' and defined the construct as "what the consumer receives as a result of this interaction with a service firm" (p. 38). In the proposed model, the outcome quality also is defined by several subdimensions; (a) physical change, (b) sociability, and (c) valence.

Sport participants, as noted earlier, have unique motivation and expectation of the benefits they receive from sport participation. What sport consumers gain from their involvement is an important element in developing their quality perceptions (Chelladurai, 1998). In general, recreational sport users consume sport services to seek improved physical fitness, enjoyment (Chelladurai, 1998), thrill (Deighton, 1992), and social interaction (Milne & McDonald, 1999). Consumers usually experience physical change (e.g., an increased fitness level and/or performance and skill level) following the consumption of the activity. In other words, they experience the tangible benefits after consumption (Brady & Cronin, 2001).

Sociability refers to positive social experiences, which resulted from the social gratification of being with others who enjoy the same activity (Milne & McDonald, 1999). The social experience is associated with the after-consumption outcome as opposed to the inter-client interaction, which occurs during the service delivery. Inter-client interaction does not necessarily explain a customer's overall participative motives whether a sport participant made a friend or had a good time with his/her family members. At the recreational sport level, social factors such as family members, friends, and other people are important for participants. Therefore, the social experience is one of the important outcomes of sport participation.

Lastly, valence refers to consumers' post consumption evaluation whether the service outcome was good or bad, regardless of their evaluation of any other aspect of the service experience (Brady & Cronin, 2001). For example, the customer may have a positive perception of service quality, yet the negative valence of the outcome ultimately leads to an unfavorable service experience (Brady & Cronin, 2001). In a recreational sport setting, a sport consumer's post consumption of intangible evidence (e.g., various psychological benefits such as confidence, self-esteem, and stress reduction) can be summed and measured by using this construct.

Physical Environment Quality

Physical environment quality refers to the built environment in which service delivery occurs as opposed to the natural or social environment (Bitner, 1992). Physical environment has been determined to be one of the most important aspects in service quality evalu-
which service is defined as a carefully developed concept in the intangible service delivery system. They, in turn, determine the customer's level of quality such as facility's design, ambience, and equipment. Ambient condition refers to nonvisual aspects of service environment such as temperature, lighting, noise, scent, and music (Baker, 1986; Bitner, 1992; Brady & Cronin, 2001). Facility design refers to the service facility's layout or architecture including functional (i.e., practical) and aesthetic (i.e., visually pleasing) nature (Bitner, 1992; Brady & Cronin, 2001). While, ambient conditions may exist below the customer's awareness level, design exists at the forefront of the customer's awareness (Baker, 1986; Bitner, 1992). Equipment refers to the devices utilized for the maximization of sport consumption.

In sum, the importance of physical environment cannot be overemphasized in service delivery, because in most of the sport service, the customer should be present and participate in the service production and consumption (Bitner, 1992). Customers evaluate programs and services using tangible physical surroundings such as facility's design, ambience, and equipment. They, in turn, determine the customer's level of quality perception in the intangible service delivery system. This notion is supported by the aforementioned concept of service (i.e., Consumer Benefit Package) in which service is defined as a carefully developed combination of tangible and intangible attributes for the maximization of customer satisfaction. Therefore, the researchers included physical environment quality as a fourth dimension, which is defined by ambience, design, and equipment of the recreational sport program.

**Conclusion and Implications**

The purpose of this paper was to discuss current issues of service quality and present a comprehensive conceptual framework of service quality for the recreational sport industry. The conceptual model was developed based upon the argument that service quality is a multidimensional and multi-level construct. The proposed model consists of four primary dimensions (i.e., program quality, interaction quality, outcome quality, and physical environment), which capture the general contents of a service delivery system for the recreational sport industry. Several specific aspects (i.e., subdimensions) in each of the generic dimensions reflect the industry specific characteristics that determine the level of service quality in sport organizations. This study may contribute to the field of sport management by proposing an integrated model of service quality that may fill the conceptual gaps that exist in service quality research in the sport and leisure industry. In addition, the framework provides a conceptual background for further analysis of service quality in various industry segments of recreational sport.

Once empirically tested, the proposed hierarchical model might suggest several implications for practitioners in managerial positions. First, the proposed conceptual model was developed for various organizations within the fitness and recreational sport industry. In addition, the hierarchical concept of the service quality enables industry practitioners to use two different levels of application. More specifically, the four generic dimensions of service quality in the conceptual model are common facets of service delivery systems in sport organizations. Therefore, practitioners can use the basic concepts (i.e., dimension level) of service quality in formulating their management strategies. For example, managers in a university recreational sport can evaluate overall processes and outcomes of their recreational sport services by analyzing the general aspects of management operations to meet the needs of their customers. In addition, specific aspects included in the subdimensions can be used for evaluating the specific aspects of management operation and framing daily management tactics. For example, managers can modify their daily operation to improve the service delivery process by using the specific subdimensions of the model as evaluation criteria. The results of the service performance evaluation from a customer's perspective can be used as a foundation for allocating the annual budget and other management resources (e.g., human resources) for the future improvement of service quality. Overall, the proposed model of service quality may provide strategic concepts to management professionals for the evaluation of organizational performance and assist in preparing effective marketing and management strategies for the improvement of the daily operation of sport organizations. In addition, the model may assist in understanding the decision-making process of sport and leisure participants.

In this study, the researchers integrated different conceptualizations of service quality and empirical analyses in order to develop a conceptual model of service quality for the recreational sport industry. However, further empirical investigations of service quality within different marketplaces are needed to validate the proposed model.
References


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