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An Importance-Performance Analysis of Personal Training Studios and Gyms Service Quality

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Abstract – The multitude of provided products and services in the mature market that Personal Training Studios and Gyms belong to, impose the necessity to seek methods for both retaining existing and attracting new customers. Customers' service quality perceptions are of upmost importance the industry of sport services provision. There is a difference between customer's desires, expectations and their perceptions of service quality. Customers are satisfied when the performance matches their expectations. In this research Important Performance Analysis - IPA was used for assessing consumers' attitudes towards personal training studios and gyms. The 43-item QUESC instrument was used, because it was specifically developed to measure service quality in sport centers. These qualities were combined with the research's goal, which was to examine customers' perceptions towards *importance and performance of* Personal Training Studios and Gyms service quality.

Keywords – Sport management; IPA analysis; service quality; QUESC instrument

I. INTRODUCTION

Sporting business are part of the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy and could be subdivided into the following groups: investment goods producers (sport clothing and equipment production, sport facilities construction), consumer goods producers (sports equipment industry) and, in the service sector, businesses in the profit sector (fitness studios and recreation agencies, multifunctional sports facilities, sports equipment stores, sport sponsoring agencies, sport insurances) and in the non-profit sector (sports associations, sport clubs) (Tsitskari et al., 2006).

In a highly evolving and competitive business environment understanding customers' needs, and being aware on their perspectives of service quality have become essential for Personal Training Studios and Gyms. The multitude of provided products and services in the mature market that Personal Training Studios and Gyms belong to, impose the necessity to seek methods for both retaining existing and attracting new customers. Customers Service Quality perceptions are the fundamental factor of identifying what customers actually perceive as quality.

According to Zeithaml et al. (1990), the difference between customer's desires, expectations and their perceptions of service quality is known as a service gap. The four main service quality gaps identified by these researchers are: not knowing what customers are expecting from a service; using the incorrect service quality standards; service performance (gap); and promises regarding the service which do not match delivery.

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The conceptualization and measurement of service quality is still a controversial topic in the services marketing literature (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Buttle, 1995). Quality could be defined by the customer's impression (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

II. Sports Management

Sports businesses are defined as the institutions that gives different sport activities and services to shape people's social lives (Ramazanoğlu & Öcalan, 2005) and to meet different sportive needs and wishes (Ekenci & İmamoğlu, 2002). Its aim is to be able to supply productions peculiar to some branches and to serve them to the people who want to use (Ramazanoğlu & Öcalan, 2005).

A sport product is a material that is produced to meet the needs of the sport customers or a service that is not physical (Argan & Katırcı, 2008). The concrete materials used to fulfill people's needs are the tangible products. Some tangible sport products are balls, rackets, sport clothes and fitness instruments. As to the services as some abstract actions that also meets people's needs but are not concrete, they are defined as the products that are intangible. Working out in a fitness center or swimming in a pool are the examples of those.

III. Service Quality

During the past three decades, service quality concept has grasped the attention of management and marketing researchers and practitioners. Numerous models for assessing service quality were created. Selecting the appropriate model depends on the type of service, the industry that belongs to, the research's scope and many other factors.

The two conceptualisations in the service quality literature is the Nordic perspective (Brady & Cronin, 2001), which was developed by Grönroos (1984) and the American perspective (Sayed, 2013) developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988).

Grönroos (1984) identified two dimensions that affect the total quality of a service, which are technical quality and functional quality. Technical quality focuses on the outcome from the respective service through the interactions with the service provider in satisfying the customers' basic needs (Grönroos, 1984, 1998). Functional quality relates to the process dimension, which evaluates the manner of delivery of the respective service from the service provider (Grönroos, 1984, 1998). After some years, the service quality model was enriched with a third dimension, image (Akhtar, 2011; Rahman, Khan & Haque, 2012). Image was the filter of quality perception on the service company to show favourable, unfavourable or neutral (Grönroos, 1984, 1998). The factors of technical quality are employees' knowledge, technical solutions, employees' technical ability, computerized systems and machine quality. The factors of functional quality are seven internal relationship, customer contact, appearance, accessibility, attitude, behaviour and service mindedness (Rahman, Khan & Haque, 2012; Akhtar, 2011; Grönroos, 1998, 2001; Woodall, 2001). Image has a direct relationship on the service provider (Akhtar, 2011). Rust and Oliver (1994) offer three quality dimensions: the service product (which is technical quality), service delivery (which is functional quality), and service environment.

Concerning the American perspective, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988, 1991), created the SERVQUAL model, in order to evaluate service quality. They used 10 criteria divided into five groups: reliability- the ability to provide the service as promised; responsiveness- the willingness of the staff to provide assistance to the clients and to deliver the service precisely; empathy- refers to the approach of availability and easy communication, to the communication as giving information to the consumer in plain language and listening to the consumer, to consumer understanding as making efforts to know your customers and their needs; assurance - relates to competence seen as the possession of skills and knowledge required for the service, respectfulness which is politeness, esteem, consideration and friendliness dealing with the staff, confidence as personnel reliability, credibility and honesty, safety as the absence of hazards, risks and uncertainties; and tangibles - the appearance of sports center facilities and equipment, staff and communication tools, tidiness and cleanliness. SERVQUAL model suggests that service quality is designated by the difference between the customers' expectations and the actual service provided (Šimkus, Pilelienė, 2010; Mc Alexander et al., 1994). Besides, these two general conceptualizations, there are other instruments developed to assess the quality of service. For example, Cronin and Taylor (1994) developed SERVPERF, a "performance-based" service quality instrument that builds on SERVQUAL but only measures customer perceptions.

3.1 Service Quality in Sports

There are many service quality assessment models in literature but the attributes of services may differ among industries. In sports industry, service quality has proved to be a key factor for customer attraction and retention. This industry's service provision singularity may demand a more progressively manifested model that will concretize solely on the specific dimensions of service quality in this field.

Therefore, models like SERVQUAL or SERVPERF may not be appropriate to either measure or evaluate service quality in this industry.

Lam, Zhang and Jensen (2005) developed Service Quality Assessment Scale- SQAS, to assess the quality of fitness centers service. It is used to examine service quality factors such as staff, program, locker rooms, training equipment and outsourced entertainment. They created a scale of assessment of service quality containing 31 items and 6 dimensions: personnel, program, locker rooms, workout facility, physical facility, and child care).

According to SQAS, fitness center personnel have a direct effect on customers and everything about them from how they dress to how they communicate influence customers' perception of service quality. Also, the variety of offered programs (individual, group, workouts etc.) even if they are not all used by customers create the grounds for personal development in the fitness area. Lastly, quality of physical facilities is proved to be of great importance for customers (Lam et al., 2005). Furnitures, convenience, work-out gear and so on influence the overall perception of service quality.

Chang and Chelladurai (2003) developed Scale of Quality in Fitness Services (SQFS). In SQFS nine dimensions of service quality were proposed: three in the input stage (Service Climate, Management Commitment to Service Quality, and Programmes); five in the throughput stage (Task Interactions with Employees, Interpersonal Interactions with Employees, Contact with Physical Environment, Contact with Other Clients, and Service Failures and Recovery); and one in the output stage (Service Quality). One of the weaknesses of the SQFC is that fitness specialists and managers were used for the identification of service quality attributes as opposed to fitness club members (Yildiz, 2011).

Kim and Kim (1995) developed Quality Excellence of Sport Center (QUESC) scale, which consisted of an item survey to evaluate service quality of fitness centers. It is a model that aims to identify the kind of service that customer wishes to receive, what level of services they require and what attention the administration should pay to in order to meet customer's expectations (Milne and McDonald, 1999). According to Tsitskari et al., 2006, the use of QUESC scale is a standard practice for assessing fitness centers' service quality, because it is totally sport-center oriented. QUESC scale shows the relationship between customers' needs and attributes of the service, such as intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, client involvement, and perishability. The service quality items defined by Kim, Kim (1995) are grouped into eleven dimensions: 1) ambiance; 2) employee attitude; 3) employee reliability; 4) available information; 5) offered programs; 6) personal considerations; 7) price; 8) privileges (offered discounts); 9) ease of mind; 10) stimulation; 11) convenience.

The advantages of QUESC model are (Kim, Kim, 1995):

1. The model contains specific items designed to assess the quality of services of fitness centers;

2. A very comprehensive scale of the assessment of service quality;

3. The model does not require many respondents;

4. Great attention is paid to the analysis and study of human resource capital.

The major disadvantage of the model is failure to show the difference of the customer's perceived and expected quality of service. QUESC model cannot be applied to any service organization. Kim, Kim (1995) stated the following major disadvantages of the model:

1.Big number of items;

2.Not all items are clear;

3.More interest is given to constant items, while new items are not studied.

IV. Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) Concept

Importance-performance analysis (IPA) is a widely accepted method for measuring service quality that is well known of its simplicity. The concept of IPA was introduced in 1977 by Martilla and James (1977). Essentially, the idea of IPA comes from the theory of customer satisfaction as a function of the expectation on important attribute and the judgment of attribute performance (Martilla and James, 1977). The underlying assumption in IPA is the relationship between importance attribute and attribute performance toward customer satisfaction is linear and symmetric (Martilla and James, 1977). Thus, IPA investigates the gap between customer expectation on the importance and assessment of the performance of services. The objective is to identify which attributes or its combination gives more impact toward customer satisfaction and leads to the repetitive customer purchase behavior (Matzler et al. 2004).

The IPA consists of a pair of coordinate axis where the 'importance' (y-axis) and the 'performance' (x-axis) of the different elements involved in the service are compared (Figure 1). Each of the quadrants combines the importance and the performance assigned by the customers/user given

element of the service and possesses a different value in terms of management and the respective mean of self-stated raw importance and attribute performance data is the original point of this IPA matrix (Martilla and James, 1977; Guadagnolo, 1985; Bacon, 2003; Matzler et al. 2004; Matzler et al., 2003; Zhang and Chow, 2004; Silva and Fernandes, 2010). Each quadrant suggests a different marketing strategy.

The acceptance of IPA as the measurement of service quality is corroborated by extensive application of IPA, largely in the tourism sector (Kitcharoen, 2004), followed by banking sector, education sector (Daud et al., 2011; O'Neill and Palmer, 2004), automotive sector (Martilla and James, 1977), and many other. It provides indication that the customer is either satisfied or dissatisfied on the attributes of service consumed (Martilla and James, 1977).

The four quadrants in importance-performance analysis are characterized as (Martilla and James, 1977): "- A. Concentrate here - high importance, low performance: requires immediate attention for improvement and are major weaknesses; - B. Keep up with the good work - high importance, high performance: indicate opportunities for achieving or maintaining competitive advantage and are major strengths; - C. Low priority - low importance, low performance: are minor weaknesses and do not require additional effort; - D. Possible overkill - low importance, high performance: indicate that business resources committed to these attributes would be overkill and should be deployed elsewhere".

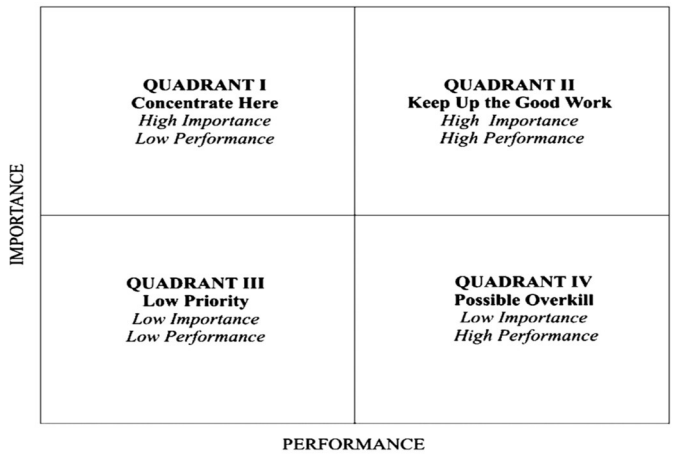

Figure 1. Quadrants of importance-performance analysis (IPA)
Adapted from "Importance-Performance Analysis," by J. A. Martilla and James, 1977

V. Research Methodology

IPA was used for assessing consumers' attitudes towards personal training studios and gyms. The 43-item QUESC instrument developed by Kim and Kim (1995) was used in this research, because it was specifically developed to measure service quality in sport centers. The qualities used are shown in Table 1. These qualities were combined with the research's goal, which is to examine customers' perceptions towards *importance and performance of* Personal Training Studios and Gyms service quality

Table 1. QUESC qualities used

1	Pleasant interior	22	Instructions on how to use the facility
2	Modern facility	23	Easy access to drinks
3	Cleanliness	24	Snack bar
4	Brightness	25	Convenient schedule
5	Comfortable temperature in locker rooms	26	Family program

6	Adequate space	27	Children programs
7	Comfortable temperature in the gym	28	Customized programs
8	Willingness to help	29	Variety of sports
9	Courteous employees	30	Play, goal differentiation
10	Responsive to complaints	31	Easy to obtain membership
11	Professional knowledge	32	Provision of membership packages
12	Responsibility	33	Moderate fee
13	Customer record-keeping	34	No loss or damage to goods
14	Skills recognition	35	Privacy
15	Interested in customer progress	36	Ability to bring guests
16	Clear instructions	37	Opportunity to meet people
17	Consistency	38	Stimulation
18	Emergency procedures	39	Grooming facilities provided
19	Safety measures	40	Programs renewed
20	Comprehensive brochure	41	Interaction among members
21	Convenient transportation to fitness center	42	community activities

Two bilingual experts used collaborative "back-translation" techniques to translate the instrument into Greek (Brislin, 1970; Evangellopoulos, 1993). Next, QUESC's Greek version was validated by other two physical-education professionals who were expert in sport centers. The item "Location near a shopping area" was excluded as not applicable.

The survey was conducted during January and February of 2020 in Greece. A total of 276 valid questionnaires were received, using a non-probability convenience sample. No incentive was offered to encourage participations. Respondents were instructed to identify the levels of importance they associated with 42 items of QUESC instrument and their overall satisfaction from Personal Training Studios and Gyms service quality. The response set for each item was a 5-point Likert-type scale, with possible response options ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*). Respondents also were instructed to identify the levels of performance they associated with the same set of items. The response set for each item was a 5-point Likert-type scale, with possible response options ranging from 1 (*not at all performed*) to 5 (*extremely performed*).

VI. Results

59% were woman and 41% were men. The age of the respondents was expected to be rather young, since the distribution was done in social media. 35% are 18-24 years old, 48% are 25-34 years old, 14% are 35-44 years old, 3% are 45-54 years old.

Concerning marital status, 28% are "Single", 16% are "In a relationship", 37% are "Married", 19% are "Divorced" and 0% are "Widowed". 12% own a High-School Degree, 63% own a Bachelor's Degree, 23% own a Master's Degree and 2% own a PhD. 2% of the participants are "Currently Unemployed", 24% work "Part-time", 57% work "Full Time" and 17% are "Self Employed". The vast majority of the participants, 92%, visit Personal Training Studios and Gyms on a weekly basis, while 8% on a monthly basis.

Importance Performance Analysis

In order to approach the importance that customers assign to QUESC qualities and their overall satisfaction from Personal Training Studios and Gyms, as well as know the value of performance, means and standard deviations for the aggregated data were calculated. The overall importance means ranged from 2.89 to 4.91 and the overall performance

means ranged from 2.18 to 4.96 (Table 2). The overall grand means for importance and satisfaction were 3.97 and 3.81, respectively. The position of the grid is determined by these two overall mean values for attribute importance and attribute importance (Figure. 2).

According to Table 2, the QUESC qualities that customers mentioned as the most important were: 1,5,11,12,13,14,20,21,22,26,27,28,32,33,35,36,37,38,39,41. On the other hand, QUESC qualities that customers mentioned as less important were 2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,15,16,17,18,19,23,24,25,,29,30,31,34,40,42.

In evaluating the performance QUESC qualities and their overall satisfaction from Personal Training Studios and Gyms, the first seven were 27 with the highest (4.96), followed by 20 (4.83), 24 (4.71), 14 (4.69), 23 (4.62), 3 (4.45) and 11 (4.41). 17 (2.18) was the lowest-rated performance quality.

The values obtained for the standard deviation (SD) are considered low, indicating that the variations of the responses are low. This measure reflects the variation of dispersion of a set of data around the mean, i.e., the greater or less variability of results.

Table 2. QUESC qualities, overall satisfaction and value of performance

Corresponding Number	Importance		Performance		Gap	Quadrant
	Mean	SD	Mean.	SD		
1	4,45	0,42	4,28	0,59	0,17	2
2	3,39	0,61	3,31	0,61	0,08	3
3	3,42	0,51	4,45	0,97	-1,03	4
4	3,25	1,28	4,23	1,19	-0,98	4
5	4,31	1,14	3,31	0,75	1	1
6	3,25	1,01	2,57	0,71	0,68	3
7	3,18	0,51	3,26	0,51	-0,08	3
8	3,58	1,12	3,12	0,58	0,46	3
9	3,41	0,41	2,84	0,95	0,57	3
10	3,73	0,82	3,41	1,16	0,32	3
11	4,24	1,05	4,41	0,61	-0,17	2
12	4,69	0,94	4,14	0,63	0,55	2
13	4,37	0,31	3,99	0,41	0,38	2
14	4,73	0,61	4,69	1,2	0,04	2
15	3,61	1,01	3,69	0,59	-0,08	3
16	3,51	0,69	3,91	0,47	-0,4	4
17	3,82	0,91	2,18	0,41	1,64	3
18	3,62	0,79	3,61	1,13	0,01	3
19	2,89	0,71	3,41	0,69	-0,52	3
20	4,81	0,72	4,83	0,39	-0,02	2
21	4,12	0,47	4,26	1,07	-0,14	2
22	4,23	0,31	4,01	0,51	0,22	2
23	3,71	0,34	4,62	1,14	-0,91	4
24	3,81	0,27	4,71	1,03	-0,9	4
25	3,81	0,81	4,12	1,12	-0,31	4
26	4,78	0,18	3,95	0,52	0,83	2
27	4,91	0,15	4,96	0,22	-0,05	2
28	4,82	0,48	4,21	0,91	0,61	2
29	2,91	1,13	3,83	0,82	-0,92	4
30	3,94	0,69	3,62	0,62	0,32	3
31	2,89	1,05	2,27	0,81	0,62	3
32	4,05	1,03	3,51	0,37	0,54	1
33	4,58	1,12	4,14	0,91	0,44	2
34	3,84	1,23	3,69	0,38	0,15	3
35	4,18	0,97	3,82	0,82	0,36	2
36	4,91	0,28	3,62	0,37	1,29	1
37	4,86	0,38	4,28	0,59	0,58	2
38	4,28	0,72	4,09	0,61	0,19	2
39	4,59	0,6	4,39	0,81	0,2	2
40	3,44	0,62	2,61	0,81	0,83	3
41	4,17	0,62	4,09	0,51	0,08	2
42	3,59	0,99	3,48	0,81	0,11	3
	3,97		3,81			

Importance-Performance matrix is represented in Figure 2. The results are spread over 4 quadrants. In Quadrant A there were 3 QUESC qualities: Comfortable temperature in locker rooms, Provision of membership packages and Ability to bring guests. Quadrant B shows Personal Training Studios and Gyms's weaknesses. Customers valued these attributes

but showed low satisfaction with the performance. Managers should focus on them immediately, in order to improve customers' satisfaction. In Quadrant B were Pleasant interior, Professional knowledge, Responsibility, Customer record-keeping, Skills recognition, Comprehensive brochure, Convenient transportation to fitness center, Instructions on how to use the facility, Family program, Children programs, Customized programs, Moderate fee, Privacy, Opportunity to meet people, Stimulation, Grooming facilities provided and Interaction among members. These QUESC qualities are of the highest importance for guests and of high satisfaction, judging from the good performance evaluations. E-marketplaces should keep up the good work here and continue to meet the needs of their customers.

Webqual qualities included in Quadrant C, are of low priority and need no additional action. Customers neither evaluated them as important nor rated them as being of high performance. Fourteen qualities were included here. In Quadrant D, seven qualities appeared were they are between the low expected lines and high performance lines.

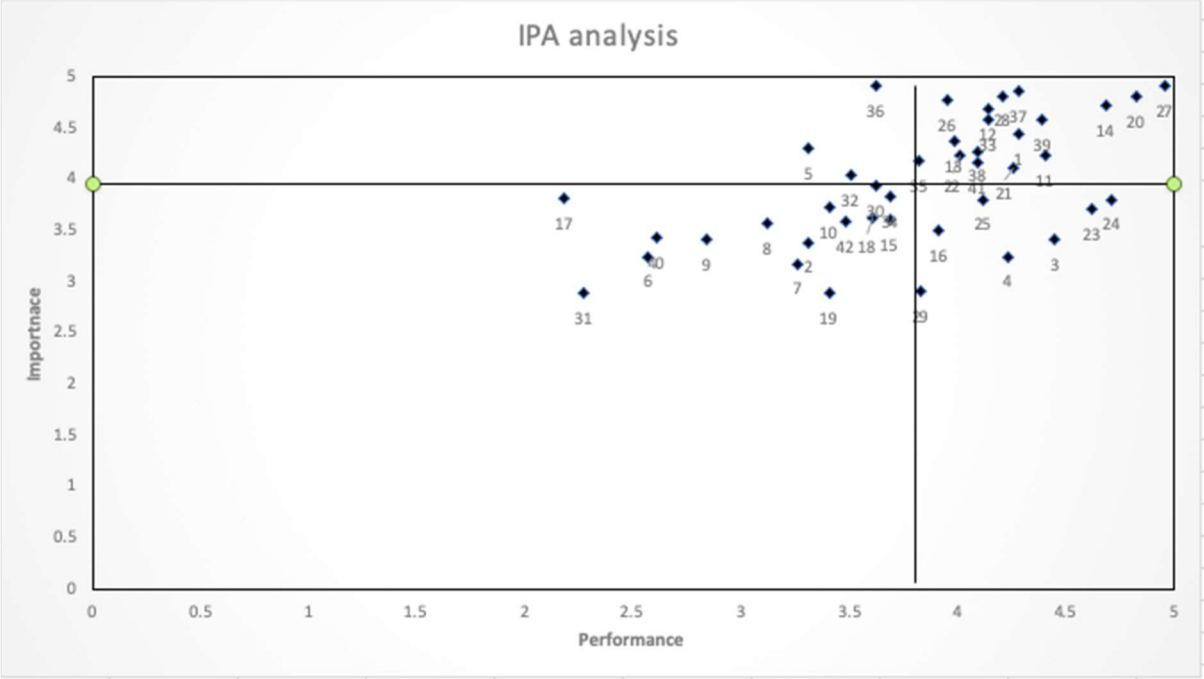

Figure 2. Importance-Performance matrix

VII. Conclusions

Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) is a simple and useful technique that can help managers identify which attributes should be improved to increase overall customer satisfaction and offers a number of advantages when it comes to assessing customers' acceptance of Personal Training Studios and Gyms attributes. It is an easily applied technique and can be used to identify and Personal Training Studios and Gyms's strengths and weaknesses. This research supports the adoption of the IPA as a framework for evaluating customers' satisfaction. Such framework can be used in further research on customer's satisfaction.

Personal Training Studios and Gyms must deliver high customer satisfaction if they are to maintain a competitive advantage and it is up to managers to identify the critical performance attributes that generate this customer satisfaction. Customers are satisfied when the performance matches their expectations. However, many studies have evaluated either customers' expectations or actual Personal Training Studios and Gyms attributes performance only, rather than both. The lack of systematic study into customers' expectations and performance is making it more difficult for professionals to develop a sound marketing strategy.

The generalization of these results should not, however, be overstated. It would be interesting to look at the decisive factors that influence customer's loyalty and how this technique can help managers allocate their resources with more confidence. We propose managers to use IPA findings

to prioritize their resources, manage costs related to qualities in Quadrant 3 and 4 and reassess their resources.

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