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ABSTRACT

Service quality is an essential element for managers and marketers to successfully compete in the sport and leisure industry. The present study is a first of its kind research study evaluating the service quality of the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong. In this study, extensive customer research was conducted to investigate the members' usage, expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction levels in the Recreation and Sport Department. Data were collected from 559 members. This study provides a channel to listen to the voice of the customers and assist the managers to improve the service quality by pinpointing areas that need managerial action.

INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction is a key differentiator and has become a key element of business strategy in the service marketplace of sport and leisure. Retaining existing customers while targeting non-customers along with measuring customer satisfaction and service quality have become important priorities for leisure service providers. Leisure service providers could enhance their competitive advantages through identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the service quality for improvements (Howat, et al., 2008).

Competition among government, non-private sectors, and private sectors providers has increasingly come to characterize Hong Kong's recreation and leisure services industry. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) (2006) reported that almost 55% of all participants used sport facilities provided by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The non-profit and private sectors claimed the remaining market share. Within this 45% market share, residential clubhouses with sport and recreation facilities are other major service providers. In the interest of enhancing the competitiveness of the Recreation and Sports Department (RSD) at the Chinese Young Men's Christian Association of Hong Kong (YMCA-HK), measuring and improving service quality was determined to be an important priority.

Many researchers have devoted themselves to explaining the definitions, dimensions or determinants of service quality. Saunders (1999) viewed service quality as a relative concept dependent on the perceptions of the customers. Thwaites (1999) concluded that management should

be aware of factors which affect the customer's perceptions of the service before, during, and after the service encounter.

The most widely accepted description of service quality is based on the Parasuraman et al. (1985) study. "Quality is an elusive and indistinct construct. Often mistaken for imprecise adjectives like goodness, or luxury, or shininess, or weight, quality and its requirements are not easily articulated by customers" (p. 42). Parasuraman et al. (1991) revealed "service quality, as perceived by consumers, stems from a comparison of what they feel service firms should offer (i.e. from their expectations) with their perceptions of the performance of firms providing the services" (p. 423).

Parasuraman et al. (1985) identified and invented the Gap Model of Service Quality. The Gap Model reflected the differences between customer's perceptions and expectations of service quality. This gap is the customer gap or service quality gap, which is a combination of the other four gaps. Miline and McDonald (1999) interpreted:

The Gap Model conceptualized customer service satisfaction as being a function of the following five perceptual gaps that occur between service design and delivery: Gap 1: The difference between consumer expectations and management perceptions of consumer expectations. Gap 2: The difference between management perceptions of consumer expectations and service quality specifications. Gap 3: The difference between service quality specifications and the service actually delivered. Gap 4: The difference between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to consumers. Gap 5: The difference between perceived service and expected service on the part of consumers. (p. 109)

In addition, Parasuraman and his colleagues (1991) have developed a 22-item generic instrument which focused on five dimensions (i.e. Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy) to measure service quality across a broad spectrum of services, named SERVQUAL. The SERVQUAL and the Gap Model (Parasuraman et al., 1985) provide the basis for the measurement of customer satisfaction with a service by using the gap between the consumer expectations for performance and their perceived experience of performance. This provides the measurer with a satisfaction "gap," which is objective and quantitative in nature.

However, the SERVQUAL instrument is considered to be inadequate for determining the service quality in specific industries (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Carman, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Kim and Kim, 1995; Theodorakisa and Alexandrisa, 2008). Consequently, Kim and Kim (1995) developed the Quality Excellence of Sports Centers (QUESC) instrument to measure the service quality of sport centers. The QUESC identified the kinds of services customers want in sport centers and the level of service they desire, along with specific areas requiring managerial attention. The QUESC consists of 33 items and is classified into eleven dimensions: ambiance, employee attitude, employee reliability, information availability, programs offered, personal considerations, price, privilege, ease of mind, stimulation, and convenience.

Service quality is an essential element for managers and marketers to successfully compete in the sport and leisure industry. It is useful for the RSD at the Chinese YMCA-HK to understand the consumer expectations and perceptions in order to provide high quality services to them. The QUESC instrument and the Gap Model concept (i.e. Gap 5: the difference between perceived service and expected service on the part of consumers) (Miline and McDonald, 1999) would assist recreation and leisure managers determine which dimensions of service quality need improvement. In return, the gap should be narrowed so customers can enjoy high-quality services. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the consumer expectations and perceptions of the RSD's service quality at the Chinese YMCA-HK.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A total of 559 participants (194 males and 342 females) within the age range of 11 to 60 who were members of the RSD at the Chinese YMCA-HK participated in this study.

Instrument Development

A modified version of the SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al. 1985) and QUESC (Kim and Kim, 1995) was used to measure the RSD consumer expectations and perceptions of service quality. Development of the questionnaire involved (a) a study of related literature, (b) review by an expert panel, and (c) a pilot test. The questionnaire was originally written in English and then translated into Chinese. This questionnaire was reviewed for content validity by a panel of experts, consisting of administrators and professors in the sport and leisure field, a linguistic expert and a survey development specialist. Minor changes were made to the wording of several questions.

The questionnaire contained four parts. Part I consisted of six questions related to the demographic information. Part II consisted of eleven dimensions with 33 questions related to the expectations for service quality of sport centers in general. Part III consisted of eleven dimensions with 33 questions related to the perceptions of the service quality of the RSD. The participants were asked to rate service quality using a 6-point Likert-type scale and the Likert-response scale was as follows: “1” – strongly disagree; “2” – disagree; “3” – slightly disagree; “4” – slightly agree; “5” – agree; “6” – strongly agree; and “9” not applicable or don’t know. A conscious decision was made not to provide a “neutral” choice so as to elicit the respondents’ attitudes. The final part consisted of ten questions related to exercise patterns and other related information.

Procedures

Pilot test

After confirming the content validity, the questionnaire was pilot-tested using 35 members to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. They were asked to complete the questionnaire twice, with one Chinese version and one English version. Subsequently, these individuals were not included in the final study. Based on the results of the pilot study, further modifications of the questionnaire were made in order to clarify some ambiguous wording in the Chinese version.

Main study

Upon completion of the pilot study, 1,000 questionnaires were distributed at the RSD of the Chinese YMCA-HK. The convenience sampling method was used for questionnaire distribution. The participants were invited by the frontline staff and part-time instructors to fill out the questionnaires. The distribution locations included all the reception counters within the RSD. All program participants were also invited to complete the questionnaires. Members returned the questionnaires to the frontline staff and received a promotional gift. The entire procedure yielded a total of 559 (55.9%) valid and usable questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using three statistical techniques. Frequency distribution was used to describe the demographic information of the participants. Paired T-tests were used to measure the service quality gap between the consumer expectations and the consumer perceptions. Two (2 X 3)

Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were performed to identify the differences between genders by age group and by income level with regard to service quality expectations, service quality perceptions respectively and the gap score. All statistical testing was performed with the alpha level set at .05.

RESULTS

Participants Profiles

The participants' profiles provided much valuable information to the RSD for planning, implementing, and evaluating their marketing strategy. As Table 1 reveals, females (n = 342) comprised the majority of participants compared to males (n = 194) in this study. Age group 1 (11-20) and age group 2 (31-40) each comprised 40.3% of the participants. The majority of the participants had a monthly income between HK\$15,001- HK\$30,000 (57.8%), held a general membership (73.3%), and remained members of the RSD between one to three years (50.5%). The utilization rates and visitation patterns of the participants were varied. Thirty-eight percent of the participants visited the RSD once per week, and 30.5% visited during weekends and/or on public holidays. They spent between one to two hours per visit (63.1%).

**TABLE 1
 PARTICIPANTS PROFILES**

Participants Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	194	36.2
Female	342	63.8
Age Group		
Group 1: 11-20	225	40.3
Group 2: 21-40	225	40.3
Group 3: 41-60	109	19.5
Income Level		
Level 1: \$15,000 or lower	170	33.7
Level 2: \$15,001-\$30,000	191	57.8
Level 3: \$30,001 or over	144	28.5
Membership Types		
General	403	73.3
Family	78	14.2
Other	69	12.5
Duration for joining YMCA		
Less than 1 year	169	30.6
1-3 years	279	50.5
4 years or over	104	18.9
Utilization Rate		
Less than once per week	154	31.5
Once per week	186	38.0
Twice per week	67	13.7
Three times per week or more	82	16.8
Visitation Pattern		
Weekday Morning	117	23.0
Weekday Afternoon	105	20.7
Weekday Evening	131	25.8
Weekends and/or Holidays	155	30.5
Duration		

Less than 1 hour	134	24.5
1-2 hours	345	63.1
3 hours or over	68	12.4

Aquatic programs and strength and conditioning were the most popular activities among the participants. The main reasons to exercise were to keep healthy (63.7%), reduce stress (41.5%), have fun (26.3%), and control weight (21.0%). Concerning the total number of members per household, it was found that most of the respondents had 3 to 5 members (4 members = 45.7%; 3 members = 22.4%; 5 members = 18.0%) in their families. The website of the organization was tailored to provide information for its members. However, 77.5% of the respondents had never visited the website. On the other hand, a total of 12.6% respondents visited the website once a month. Only 9.9% of the respondents visited the website equal to or more than twice a month. In addition, encouragement from friends (38.4%) and family members (19.6%) were the main reason for the respondents to use the sport facilities for the first time. Only 9.1% of them said the promotional strategies attracted them to use the sport facilities for the first time.

Service Quality

The service quality depends on the consumer expectations and perceptions of the service. This section would include the results of the expectations and perceptions mean scores of respondents' of the organization, the mean differences of the overall satisfaction level (the differences between the expectations and perceptions), and eleven dimensions of service quality.

Expectations

The participants were asked to rate service quality using a 6-point Likert-type scale. The mean score of participants' expectations shown in Table 2, ranged from 4.40 to 4.96, that corresponded roughly to "4" (slightly agree) and "5" (agree). The top five ranked items were courtesy ($M = 4.96, SD = .93$), emergency procedures ($M = 4.93, SD = .97$), privacy ($M = 4.92, SD = .99$), safety measures ($M = 4.90, SD = .97$), and cleanliness ($M = 4.88, SD = .96$). The last seven ranked items were non-member guests may be invited ($M = 4.40, SD = 1.06$), community activities ($M = 4.50, SD = .93$), modern facilities ($M = 4.55, SD = 1.01$), grooming necessities ($M = 4.56, SD = .97$), adapted physical activities ($M = 4.58, SD = .95$), family program ($M = 4.56, SD = .96$), and music provided ($M = 4.58, SD = .97$).

TABLE 2
RANK ORDER ON MEAN SCORES OF MEMBERS' EXPECTATIONS

Rank	Item	Label	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	n
1	Q7	Courteous	4.96	.93	538
2	Q13	Emergency procedures	4.93	.97	537
3	Q31	Privacy	4.92	.99	538
4	Q14	Safety Measures	4.90	.97	537
5	Q2	Cleanliness	4.88	.96	550
6	Q16	Instructions for accessing or using facilities	4.87	.94	525
7	Q4	Locker room with a warm atmosphere	4.86	.96	532

7	Q8	Responsive to complaints	4.86	.95	531
9	Q12	Provides consistent services	4.84	.94	536
10	Q10	Responsible	4.83	.98	546
11	Q5	Adequate space	4.82	.96	537
12	Q15	Kinds of programs offered	4.81	.95	540
13	Q30	Damage to or loss of personal goods prevented	4.80	1.05	535
13	Q11	Maintains good customer records	4.80	.97	540
13	Q3	Brightness	4.80	.96	541
16	Q6	Willing to help	4.78	.97	544
17	Q18	Easy access to facility	4.77	.89	529
18	Q20	Convenient schedule	4.76	.91	527
19	Q28	Moderate usage fee	4.73	1.07	538
20	Q19	Easy access to drinks	4.70	.97	521
21	Q9	Possesses adequate knowledge and skills	4.69	1.02	542
21	Q26	Membership easy to purchase	4.69	.94	526
23	Q24	Variety of sports	4.68	.95	534
23	Q17	Easy access to transportation	4.68	.94	522
23	Q27	Consultations on how to use the facilities	4.68	.93	530
26	Q25	Play or goal-differentiated programs	4.59	.96	520
27	Q33	Music provided	4.58	.97	514
27	Q21	Family programs	4.58	.96	523
27	Q22	Adapted physical activities	4.58	.95	529
30	Q29	Grooming necessities provided	4.56	.97	519
31	Q1	Modern facilities	4.55	1.01	546
32	Q23	Community activities	4.50	.93	503
33	Q32	Non-member guests may be invited	4.40	1.06	512

Perceptions

Table 3 showed the rank order and mean score of respondents' perceptions. The mean scores ranged from 4.23 to 4.64. The top ranked items were easy access to transportation ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .94$), responsible ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .98$), courtesy ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.00$), emergency procedures ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .95$) and safety measures ($M = 4.55$, $SD = .98$). The lowest ranked factors were non-member

guests may be invited ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.02$), modern facilities ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.01$), damage or loss of personal goods prevented ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.11$), community activities ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.98$), grooming necessities ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.01$), and music provided ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.02$).

TABLE 3
RANK ORDER ON MEAN SCORES OF MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS

Rank	Item	Label	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	n
1	RS17	Easy access to transportation	4.64	.94	523
2	RS10	Responsible	4.60	.98	525
3	RS7	Courteous	4.57	1.00	533
3	RS13	Emergency procedures	4.57	.95	491
5	RS14	Safety Measures	4.55	.98	514
6	RS11	Maintains good customer records	4.54	.97	510
6	RS12	Provides consistent services	4.54	.95	525
6	RS27	Consultations on how to use the facilities	4.54	.93	519
6	RS16	Instructions for accessing or using facilities	4.54	.91	524
10	RS15	Kinds of programs offered	4.53	.92	530
11	RS9	Possesses adequate knowledge and skills	4.51	.94	516
11	RS31	Privacy	4.51	.93	507
13	RS3	Brightness	4.50	.96	543
13	RS6	Willing to help	4.50	.95	528
15	RS2	Cleanliness	4.49	.93	537
16	RS18	Easy access to facility	4.48	.93	512
17	RS26	Membership easy to purchase	4.45	.90	500
18	RS25	Play or goal-differentiated programs	4.44	.88	497
18	RS5	Adequate space	4.44	.103	528
18	RS4	Locker room with a warm atmosphere	4.44	.102	531
21	RS24	Variety of sports	4.43	.88	517
22	RS8	Responsive to complaints	4.41	1.01	491
22	RS19	Easy access to drinks	4.41	.98	516
22	RS22	Adapted physical activities	4.41	.89	503
25	RS20	Convenient schedule	4.39	.89	511

26	RS21	Family programs	4.35	.93	508
27	RS28	Moderate usage fee	4.33	1.06	526
28	RS33	Music provided	4.31	1.02	489
28	RS29	Grooming necessities provided	4.31	1.01	496
30	RS23	Community activities	4.28	.98	465
31	RS30	Damage to or loss of personal goods prevented	4.25	1.11	509
31	RS1	Modern facilities	4.25	1.02	532
33	RS32	Non-member guests may be invited	4.23	1.02	484

Service Quality Gap

Paired t-tests were used to find out the satisfaction level of the respondents. Table 4 shows the mean differences of members' overall satisfaction rating. The t-values of 32 out of 33 items were significantly different; only the item of 'easy access to transportation' was not significant. The six items with the highest dissatisfaction levels were damage or loss of personal goods prevented ($MD = .54$), responsive to complaints ($MD = .42$), moderate usage fee ($MD = .41$), locker room with a warm atmosphere ($MD = .40$), adequate space ($MD = .40$), and courtesy ($MD = .40$).

TABLE 4
RANK ORDER ON MEAN DIFFERENCES OF MEMBERS' OVERALL SATISFACTION

Rank	Item	Label	MD	SD	df	t
1	G30	Damage to or loss of personal goods prevented	.54	1.33	491	8.93*
2	G8	Responsive to complaints	.42	1.12	472	8.10*
3	G28	Moderate usage fee	.41	1.30	511	7.07*
4	G5	Adequate space	.40	1.19	512	7.65*
4	G7	Courteous	.40	1.15	517	7.82*
4	G4	Locker room with a warm atmosphere	.40	1.11	511	8.05*
7	G31	Privacy	.39	1.12	493	7.67*
7	G2	Cleanliness	.39	1.05	533	8.50*
7	G20	Convenient schedule	.39	1.01	490	8.51*
10	G14	Safety Measures	.36	1.07	497	7.61*
11	G13	Emergency procedures	.35	1.05	477	7.16*
12	G16	Instructions for accessing or using facilities	.33	1.05	498	7.00*
13	G6	Willing to help	.31	1.06	514	6.63*
14	G3	Brightness	.30	1.08	528	6.38*
14	G1	Modern facilities	.30	1.07	523	6.43*

14	G12	Provides consistent services	.30	1.02	509	6.65*
17	G33	Music provided	.29	1.23	466	5.10*
17	G26	Membership easy to purchase	.29	1.10	479	5.79*
17	G18	Easy access to facility	.29	1.08	492	5.99*
20	G29	Grooming necessities provided	.28	1.12	481	5.40*
21	G15	Kinds of programs offered	.28	1.00	518	6.26*
21	G19	Easy access to drinks	.27	1.12	495	5.44*
21	G21	Family programs	.27	1.11	484	5.46*
24	G11	Maintains good customer records	.26	1.13	498	5.12*
24	G24	Variety of sports	.26	1.07	502	5.50*
26	G10	Responsible	.25	1.02	520	5.68*
27	G23	Community activities	.24	1.07	440	4.68*
28	G9	Possesses adequate knowledge and skills	.17	1.05	507	3.58*
28	G25	Play or goal-differentiated programs	.17	1.00	471	3.86*
30	G27	Consultations on how to use the facilities	.16	1.05	501	3.42*
30	G22	Adapted physical activities	.16	1.00	488	3.56*
32	G32	Non-member guests may be invited	.15	1.14	460	2.89*
33	G17	Easy access to transportation	.07	1.00	499	1.57

Note. *p < .05, 2-tailed

Among the dimensions of QUESC service quality, respondents were also dissatisfied with all dimensions (Table 5). The items lagging behind expected service quality were ranked as follows: ease of mind ($MD = .44$), price ($MD = .41$), employee attitude ($MD = .37$), ambiance ($MD = .35$), information availability ($MD = .32$), stimulation ($MD = .29$), convenience ($MD = .26$), employee reliability ($MD = .25$), program offered ($MD = .25$), personal consideration ($MD = .24$), and privilege ($MD = .15$).

TABLE 5
RANK ORDER ON MEMBERS' MEAN DIFFERENCES FOR SERVICE QUALITY

Rank	Dimensions	<i>MD</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>
1	Ease of mind	.44	1.07	466	8.95*
2	Price	.41	1.3	511	7.07*
3	Employee attitude	.37	.92	446	8.51*
4	Ambiance	.35	.85	469	8.95*
5	Information availability	.32	.77	427	8.54*
6	Stimulation	.29	1.23	466	5.10*
7	Convenience	.26	.76	427	7.16*
8	Employee reliability	.25	.78	447	6.73*
8	Program offered	.25	.75	378	6.39*
9	Personal consideration	.24	.81	424	6.05*
11	Privilege	.15	1.14	460	2.89*

Note. * $p < .05$, 2-tailed

Demographic Effect on Service Quality

The organization serves members of different genders, age groups, and social economic statuses. This part presents the service quality interaction effects between genders by age group and by income level.

Gender

Significant differences were found in five out of eleven dimensions of respondents' expectations. Females had higher expectations than males regarding information availability ($F = 4.146$, $p < .04$), convenience ($F = 6.141$, $p < .01$), program offered ($F = 7.507$, $p < .01$), and personal consideration ($F = 5.067$, $p < .03$). Furthermore, an interaction effect existed for stimulation dimension ($F = 4.665$, $p < .01$). However, no significant differences were found between males' and females' overall expectations.

No significant differences were found in ten out of eleven dimensions of respondents' perceptions and the overall perceptions. However, there was an interaction effect on the personal consideration dimension of respondents' perceptions ($F = 3.057$, $p < .04$).

No significant differences were found in nine out of eleven dimensions of respondents' gap and the overall gap. However, a significant difference was found for stimulation dimension ($F = 8.643$, $p < .00$), and females ($MD = .43$) had higher gap than males ($MD = .07$). Moreover, there was an interaction effect for respondents' gap toward privilege dimension ($F = 3.741$, $p < .02$).

Age group

Significant differences were found in seven out of eleven dimensions of respondents' expectations. Respondents aged from 21 to 40 and 41 to 60 had higher expectations than respondents aged from 11 to 20 for ambiance ($F = 9.837, p < .00$), employee attitude ($F = 7.194, p < .00$), employee reliability ($F = 7.372, p < .00$), and information availability ($F = 6.115, p < .00$). Furthermore, respondents aged from 21 to 40 had higher expectations for ease of mind ($F = 3.815, p < .02$) than respondents aged from 11 to 20. Respondents aged from 41 to 60 had higher expectations for price ($F = 4.698, p < .01$) than respondents aged from 11 to 20. Additionally, there was an interaction effect on stimulation dimension ($F = 4.665, p < .01$). However, no significant difference was found in overall expectations.

Significant differences were found on eight out of eleven dimensions of respondents' perceptions. Respondents aged from 41 to 60 had higher perceptions than respondents aged from 11 to 20 of ambiance ($F = 5.208, p < .01$), employee attitude ($F = 5.613, p < .00$), employee reliability ($F = 7.017, p < .00$), information availability ($F = 4.178, p < .02$), and convenience ($F = 4.349, p < .01$). Furthermore, respondents aged from 21 to 40 had higher perceptions of price ($F = 4.610, p < .01$) and privilege ($F = 3.014, p < .02$) than respondents aged from 11 to 20. Moreover, an interaction effect existed with regard to personal consideration ($F = 3.057, p < .04$). However, no significant difference was found in overall perceptions.

Similarly, no significant differences were found in ten out of eleven dimensions of respondents' gap and the overall gap. However, there was an interaction effect that existed on the respondents' gap toward privilege dimension ($F = 3.741, p < .02$).

Income level

Significant differences were found in ten out of eleven dimensions of respondents' expectations and overall expectations. Respondents with income level 3 (over HK\$30,001) had higher expectations than respondents with income level 1 (HK\$15,000 or less) and income level 2 (HK\$15,001 to HK\$30,000) regarding ambiance ($F = 17.375, p < .00$), employee attitude ($F = 20.183, p < .00$), employee reliability ($F = 18.997, p < .00$), information availability ($F = 17.432, p < .00$), convenience ($F = 8.127, p < .00$), program offered ($F = 11.081, p < .00$), ease of mind ($F = 10.622, p < .00$) and overall expectations ($F = 10.620, p < .00$). Furthermore, respondents with income level 3 had higher expectations for personal consideration ($F = 5.494, p < .00$) than respondents with income level 1. Furthermore, respondents with income level 3 and income level 2 had higher expectations for price ($F = 12.134, p < .00$) than respondents with income level 1. Respondents with income level 3 had higher expectations for stimulation ($F = 6.220, p < .00$) than respondents with income level 2.

Regarding the respondents' perceptions, respondents with income level 3 had higher perceptions of ambiance ($F = 4.229, p < .02$), employee reliability ($F = 6.866, p < .00$), convenience ($F = 3.346, p < .04$), and program offered ($F = 4.065, p < .02$) than respondents with income level 1. In addition,, respondents with income level 3 had higher perceptions of price ($F = 6.617, p < .00$) than respondents with income level 2 and income level 1.

Relating to the respondents' gap, respondents with income level 3 had higher perceptions of ambiance ($F = 5.540, p < .00$), and program offered ($F = 4.315, p < .01$) than respondents with income level 2. Moreover, respondents with income level 3 had higher perceptions of employee attitude ($F = 5.797, p < .00$), information availability ($F = 5.274, p < .01$), and ease of mind ($F = 3.646, p < .03$) than respondents with income level 2 and income level 1.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING PRACTITIONERS

Service quality can assist an organization in performance excellence regarding service delivery and overall management (Alexandris, 2008; Dagger and Sweeney, 2006; Milakovich 1995; Stone 1997). As the leisure markets are getting more competitive and the leisure consumers become more demanding (Alexandris, 2008), organizations should determine the expectations and preferences of the customers so as to provide the quality service they prefer. Meanwhile, the organizations, employees, community, and customers will benefit from improved service quality (Bauer et al., 2002). In this study, extensive customer research was conducted to investigate the members' usage, expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction levels in the RSD at the Chinese YMCA-HK. The results would assist the organization in retaining existing members and recruiting new members. Most of all, it was important for the organization to assess target markets and deliver service quality in the future.

The participants' profiles provided a great deal of valuable information to the RSD. The information is useful for identifying target markets and implementing marketing strategy. O'Sullivan (1991) pointed out that the "process of target marketing enables the leisure organization to design services and construct programs specifically to meet the needs of these subgroups, its target markets" (p. 20). By establishing different market segmentation and marketing strategies, the needs of different customers can be more fully satisfied (Yu et al., 2006). Most respondents believed health and fitness is the ultimate goal to achieve by being active; however, they joined the programs or used the facilities only once per week. In order to fulfill the needs of the consumers (i.e. being active), the RSD could organize regular programs and classes for them to join every week. Various recreation interests are usually revealed through participation in the specific activities, thus special events can be planned to promote health information and exercises to the members. Meanwhile, the promotion can have a brand effect with the result that, whenever members want to be active, they will participate in the activities organized by the RSD. In turn, members may try to increase their participations from once per week to two or three times per week.

Results showed that there were almost twice as many female respondents as males. Additionally, the aquatic programs as well as the strength and conditioning training programs were the most popular activities among the respondents. This finding was similar to Hata and Umezawa (1995) calculated patterns of use of Facilities, Equipment, and Programs (FEP). It seemed that females like to participate in programs and facilities related to hygiene and recreation, e.g. swimming, sauna, and steam bath. In this study, some of the respondents wrote, "The sauna facility is excellent in terms of its cleanliness and uncrowded environment." However, the expectations of females were higher than males for several dimensions such as personal consideration, convenience, program offered, and information availability. Results showed that females were more demanding of service quality than males. The management should focus on enhancing the delivery of programs and information. The focus should also be responsive and sensitive to the personal needs of the consumers.

Programs and facilities provided by the RSD attract members from all ages. Respondents were classified into three age groups. Interestingly, the older the respondents, the higher the expectations for ambiance, employee attitude, employee reliability and information availability. With regard to expectations related to age group, participants aged from 21 to 60 had higher expectations than participants aged from 11 to 20 for ambiance, employee attitude, employee reliability, and information availability. Participants aged from 41 to 60 had higher expectations for price than younger participants (11-20). Participants aged from 21 to 40 had higher expectations for ease of mind than younger participants (11-20). Participant aged from 41 to 60 had higher perceptions than younger participants (11-20) regarding ambiance, employee attitude, employee reliability, information availability and convenience. Participants aged from 21 to 40 had higher expectations for privilege than younger participants (11-20).

Respondents were also classified into three income level groups. The highest income level group (i.e. HK\$30,001 or above) had the highest expectations among all three groups for almost every dimensions except for privilege. It could be reflected by the YMCA brand image. The YMCA brand is a well-known and popular brand, but, is never, considered a prestigious event when someone joins the YMCA. Participants with the highest income had higher perceptions of ambiance, employee reliability, convenience, program offered, and price. Participants with the highest income also had a higher gap in employee attitude, information availability, and ease of mind than the other two income levels. In addition, participants with the highest income had a higher gap in ambiance and program offered than participants with income level 2 (HK\$15,001 to HK\$30,000).

Research findings showed that the most popular program in the organization was the aquatic program. It was consistent with the results of the 2001 Sports Participation Survey (Hong Kong Sports Development Board, 2002), which found that "Swimming, which ranked first in both 1999 and 2000, was again the most popular sport in 2001" (p. 14). Generally, respondents who participated in swimming were made up of two groups: swimming pool users and swimming class participants. They participated in swimming programs from once a week to more than three times a week. This segment highly praised the skills and care of the qualified swimming instructors, the customers' records keeping and program designed. Thus, the management should organize different levels of swimming classes to attract members' participation.

Obviously, the YMCA Children Swimming Badges Award Scheme can enrich the development of swimming classes and enhance the development of the coaching system. Participants can also enjoy swimming from a very young age in their childhood and continue through their adulthood. This young and regular user segment is invaluable to the development of the RSD as their families are willing to spend more time and money on swimming programs. Moreover, they may extend their interests to join other YMCA programs. Cordes and Ibrahim (1999) also stated that "the family plays a key role in introducing children to recreation and leisure pursuits (p. 121)." In order to satisfy their needs, more resources should be put into ambiance, e.g. increase the changing room areas and swimming pool space, and provide a convenient class schedule and enrollment system.

Apart from the aquatic users, the strength and conditioning users often come to the RSD for exercising. Modern people are under stress in their daily life, and stress reduction was one of the main reasons for respondents to exercise. Edginton, et al. (1998) indicated that "physical activities and exercise are important to maintaining good health as individuals begin to realize their mortality during this time (p.154)." The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003 aroused people's awareness of the importance of being healthy and fit. Therefore, the RSD should increase the resources to provide private and spacious areas to this segment. If resources are available, more modern equipment should be purchased to upgrade the facilities. Also, employees should be courteous and keep the environment clean as well as maintaining a harmonious atmosphere. Finally, the majority of the respondents joined the YMCA-HK one to three years ago. The RSD must match their expectations to keep their loyalty. Promoting health seminar and body check to the members to maintain personal records for them could do this.

Courtesy and safety are the key priorities to the participants. Courtesy, emergency procedures, and safety measures were the top ranked items in both expectations and perceptions. On the other hand, modern facilities, grooming necessities, music provided, and community activities were ranked last in both expectations and perceptions. Consumers would not be able to enjoy sport participation unless they feel safe. Therefore, the RSD should develop a safety control system to create a safety manual, provide regular staff training on safety issues, and inspect the facility and equipment regularly to provide a safe environment for the members. Moreover, the RSD staff should also be responsible for educating the members about safety issues such as not running inside the swimming facility areas and properly using the weight training machines. Courtesy is one of the most

important aspects in the service industry. A rude employee will drive away consumers. Managers should assume that the standardization of rules and regulations of the services would take care of this issue. However, managers should not overlook the working atmosphere of the organization. A pleasant working environment leads to happy employees, and happy employees lead to happy consumers.

In order to facilitate a better understanding between the leisure providers and service recipients, Guest and Taylor (1999) and Alexandris (2008) claimed that the user surveys could help in identifying the market, planning, and decision-making. Hata and Umezawa (1995) pointed out that analysis and evaluation of the responses from users are important procedures for the success of the club. The club management could use the analysis to assess the members' information, recruit new members, and improve its services in the future. Koski (1995) believed the services evaluation of the fitness clubs could provide clear values underlying their activities. The present study is a first of its kind research study evaluating the service quality of the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong. This study provides a channel to listen to the voice of the customers and assist the managers to improve the service quality by pinpointing areas that need managerial action.

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