Exploring the customer satisfaction in a global context: The case of elite soccer league websites.

Marvin E Gonzalez

1. ABSTRACT

This paper describes the use of Quality Function Deployment and Benchmarking technique to evaluate Sport Organizations Web sites, in the particular the case of Elite Soccer leagues. We used the 22 basic questions of WebQual 2.0 as the customer expectations; then, we evaluated the perceived quality and performance (customer satisfaction) of five professional soccer leagues websites. Using the dimensions of WebQual as the voice of the customers, we analyzed the impact of the website on the customers in order to evaluate the current online marketing strategy. Five international well known soccer teams from the most competitive and financially wealthy leagues are assessed using a survey. Data are collected from students using an on-line questionnaire and a Likert scale was used (1 to 5). Analyses of the results explain a rigorous and well planned marketing strategy in the professional leagues to keep the public informed and to increase the position of their brands. The findings and their implications for e-commerce and design of online marketing strategy are discussed and conclusions will be provided.

Field of Research: Sport Management, Electronic Commerce; Quality Improvement in service organizations

1. Introduction

There has been a consistent increase in online spending over the past 11 years, and that trend is not going to change any time soon. According to (Stokes & Jensen, 2011) “sales from electronic retailing, or e-tailing, continue to escalate in relation to other areas, including in store shopping”. Most of the literature sustains that e-commerce business is still growing and growing year by year. According to Forrester Research Institute online retail sales aren’t growing at the torrid pace they once were, but they continue to grow steadily.
This prestigious research center put out a new five-year forecast predicting that e-commerce sales in the U.S. will keep growing at a 10 percent compound annual growth rate through 2014, data is depicted in Figure 1. It forecasts that online retail sales in the U.S. will be nearly $250 billion, up from $155 billion in 2009. Last year, online retail sales were up 11 percent, compared to 2.5 percent for all retail sales. More interesting data is provided by the U.S. government: e-commerce sales will represent 8 percent of all retail sales in the U.S. by 2014, up from 6 percent in 2009. As can be seen in Figure 1, 154 million people in the U.S. bought something online during 2009. In other words, 67 percent of the online population came from the US (4 percent more than in 2008). This is in contrast with regular commerce figures in which 95% of the customers are outside the USA.

![Figure 1 Online sales forecast (Forrester, 2011)](image)

As any business to business (B2B), the explosion of internet sales depend on products, brands, popularity, market and the marketing strategy developed. Literature is rich in online examples related to retail services, books, auction houses, and even gambling websites. However, there is a lack in the literature in the area of sports management. This paper presents an empirical study, conducted on students to obtain a perspective on the quality of a set of professional sports organizations websites (international and well known soccer teams). The customer requirements are based on WebQual dimensions provided by (Barnes & Vidgen, 2002) and the technical requirements are based on online marketing strategies recommended by the research team. The Quality Function Deployment and benchmarking process were applied to identify what is the perceived quality and performance of the teams’ websites.

2. Theoretical Background

**Customer satisfaction - a review**

In prior research, customer satisfaction has been distinct as a customer's overall evaluation of performance for a current offering ((Johnson & Grayson, 2005)). Other authors like (Czepiel, Rosenberg, & Akerele, 1974)); (Tsai, Chung-Lin, & Chang, 2010); (Müller, 1991) Singh (1991); (Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995)). From these researches can be seen that the customer satisfaction is a key factor for business success in the future, also notes that customer satisfaction is a dimension of multiple items evaluated as a satisfaction measurement, which can vary from business to business. Therefore, customer satisfaction is an expression of enjoyment or displeasure resulting from a comparison between quality perception and expectation of a product or service. The
concept of customer satisfaction is a combination of feelings in a period of time (before and after use of the service or product). But it is important to mention that when we are evaluating customer satisfaction, as a general concept, a considerable amount of research came up, therefore if we are looking for a gap in this area, it is almost impossible to find one. However, our contribution is in the era of electronic commerce applied to sports management organizations. We provide a tool to evaluate customer satisfaction of online information in websites of sports organizations. There is a lack of literature that has specifically explored customer satisfaction as it pertains to sports, particularly soccer, one of the most popular sports around the world. We will use stratify our sample as soccer fans versus people not particularly interested in soccer, in order to analyze customer satisfaction of websites from two different perspectives. This study analyzes from the benchmarking perspective, what is the perceived quality and perceived performance (customer satisfaction) of the marketing strategy by using as case studies, successful sports organizations.

Customer requirements and design characteristics

I. Perceived Quality Dimensions

In electronic commerce, like any other industry, it is important not only to identify consumers’ perceptions but also to identify their requirements in order to satisfy (or better yet, exceed) them. In our case, customer requirements refer to the expectations of the customers from a specific website in which they are trying to find particular information or buy a product. Using the literature explored, we split the customer requirements in two parts, perceived quality and perceived performance. In the next paragraphs, we explain one by one the dimensions that measure customer requirements. According to Hair (2009), the measurement of perceived quality in a website must satisfy six strategic requirements: trust, communication, presentation, content, usability, and consumer impact (Figure 2).

According to (Chen, Hsu, & Lin, 2009) usability is the dimension that corresponds to the overall website layout and functionality. This dimension is critical in the e-commerce process, because a transaction time is part of the dimension, aspect that requires a fast and easy process ((Iwaarden, van der Wiele, Ball, & Millen, 2004)). (Green & Pearson, 2011) did an extensive study about the dimension of website usability using e-commerce simulation, they identified 9 variables related to this dimension (design credibility, content, interactivity, navigability, responsiveness, download delay, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and satisfaction with design).
Rosen 2004 defines the **presentation** of a website as something that must be enjoyable as well as inventive, providing complete information about the service or product, and identifying completely the brand. In the case under study, identification of the team provides kind of proud in the customers (if soccer fans) that are trying to buy products from his/her favorite team. When a website is maintained in the customer mind because it created a very good impression, it is almost 100% warranty that they will return ((H. Kim & Niehm, 2009; M. Kim, Kim, & Lennon, 2006; S. Kim & Stoel, 2004)). The website’s main objective is to promote communication between the company and the consumer. Therefore, a website should show a great way to display information in an aesthetic form. The information on the websites cannot be tailored to unique requirements and expectations of a single user. On the other hand, companies should have the ability to provide information for a bigger niche without losing the customer’s perception that it provides all the information he/she needs (S. Kim & Stoel, 2004).

Another important variable in website evaluation is **Communication**. (Cox & Dale, 2002) define this variable as “the way in which the consumer and business transfer information to one another”. With a good communication, users have more opportunities to be informed about the service or the product that they are looking for. According to (Maamar, 2003), communication via websites must provide a way that the customer understand and feel comfortable with the product and the service provided, visual communication represent one factor of security in most of the customers. Another empirical study conducted by (Brunelle, 2009) shows why communication represents an important factor in the use of a website for the customers. As part of the navigation process in the internet, website with an attractive appeal calls the attention of the consumers and therefore, can communicate better the information it is intended to disseminate.

**Content** represents another critical variable in the process of customer satisfaction when related to websites. (Cox & Dale, 2002), define content as the motivation of the customer for being in the website. The content is why the consumer is visiting the web site and why the business is displaying it. According to (Cox & Dale, 2002) a successful website must have a clear, concise well written and easily comprehended content. (Huafei Liao, Proctor, & Salvendy, 2009) state that content
usability of websites is central to the success of e-commerce. Content preparation represents an important stage in e-commerce website development. It is critical to present appropriate information, because it is the base of the decision making for the customer. According to several authors; the quality of information content provided by e-commerce websites is an important evaluation criterion and dimension of overall quality and usability of the sites (e.g. (P. Katerattanakul & K. Siau, 1999), (Van Duyne, D.K., J.A., & Hong, 2003),(H. Liao, Proctor, & Salvendy, 2008)).

One of the most important and critical variables in e-commerce is **Trust**, for some authors this variable is directly connected to loyalty ((Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990), (Pavlou, 2003); (Y. D. Wang & Emurian, 2005). According to (Pavlou, 2003), trust in e-commerce is defined as the conviction that allows consumers to willingly become exposed to web retailers after having taken the retailers’ characteristics into consideration. Drawing on previous literature, we define trust as a token of confidence from the market in an online service provider. Customer satisfaction is attached to trust, if the service is reliable, customers believe in the service and return when the need is present ((e.g. (Chiung-Ju & Hui-Ju, 2009);(Geyskens, Jan-Benedict, & Nirmalya, 1998);(Garbarino & Johnson, 1999);(Ganesan, 1994) ; (Johnson & Grayson, 2005)). In general, it is a common belief that trust is associated with the ability to protect personal information, it is always rated as the most important component of an e-commerce website ((Zhang & von Dran, 2002); (Zeithaml & Parasuraman, 2005); (Mei, Qingyu, & Seydel, 2005); (Flavian & Guinaliu, 2006)).

**Consumer impact** represents another dimension to measure perceived quality (see Figure 2). The definition of this dimension is explained by (Ether, Hadaya, Talbot, & Cadieux, 2006). According to their research, consumer impact is the way in which the site reflects on the consumer. It is the begin of the website experience for the customer. Other authors refer to this dimension as perceived enjoyment ((Simon, 2010); (Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001)). According to (Hwang & Dan, 2007), consumer impact is related to the enjoyment to use the website. They also suggest that a first good reaction with the website, produces a kind of satisfaction on the side of the consumer.

**II. Perceived Performance Dimensions**

Website performance metrics are indicators of whether or not the website is doing well, according to the customer response. (Tarafdar & Jie, 2007b) explored the determinants of reach and loyalty in website performance. They developed all the dimensions to measure website performance. The construct and its dimensions are shown in Figure 3.
According to (Tarafdar & Jie, 2007a) the are two factors that need to be considered when we measure the performance of a website; reach and loyalty. As can be seen in Figure 3, seven dimensions are considered to measure website performance: information content, usability, ease-of-navigation and security are significant predictors of Reach. Ease-of-navigation, customization, security and availability are determinants of Loyalty ((Watkins & Smith, 2008); (McCarthy & Aronson, 2000); (Mei-Ling, Eileen, & Main, 2008);(Rau & Liang, 2003)).

**Information content** refers to the quality of the information provided in the website. Other authors consider that quality and usability is a criterion in the information content ((P. Katerattanakul & K. Siau, 1999)); (Van Duyne et al., 2003) ; (H. Liao et al., 2008)). Some researchers agree that information content is part of the structure and presentation of the information ((Proctor, Vu, Najjar, Vaughan, & Salvendy, 2003); (Vu & Proctor, 2006)). In general, information content is a dimension that measures quality, presentation and structure of the information, a criterion that the user or potential customer utilizes to come back again.

**Ease of use**, refers to the concept that websites that are easy to understand and easy to use are a pleasure for the consumer. Ease of use measures how users can find what they are looking for, and can accomplish their objective of going to the website (whether it is to buy a product, or just gather information). This translates, for the website owner or company, into sales, subscriptions, and everything else the website is intended to achieve. (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005) refers to ease of use as ease of navigation, they specify that the sites contain functions that help customers find what they need without difficulty, has good search functionality, and allows the customer to maneuver easily and quickly back and forth through the pages. According to (F. D. Davis, Bagozz, & Warshaw, 1989), ease of use is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort. Other authors, (Bandura, 1982) and (Hill, Smith, & Mann, 1987) introduce a concept about ease of use, combining self-efficiency and outcome produce an adequate customer satisfaction. Most of the researchers believe that ease of use is related to the final satisfaction of the users and concur in ranking this variable as a critical factor in website design ((Benbunan-Fich, 2001); (F.D. . Davis, 1989); (Elliot & Speck, 1998); (Moore & Benbasat, 1991).
There is on-going research in identifying approaches to improve ease of use of websites (Levi & Conrad, 1996). This paper will contribute to the literature in the area of sports management.

**Usability:** Some researchers use the term usefulness as a synonym of usability and the common definition is: “usability is how useful it is for visitors or users to browse a particular website” (Baroudi & Orlikowski, 1988; DeLone, McLean, & . 1992) to find what they want/need (P. Katerattanakul & K. Siau, 1999). Some websites are just plain hard to figure out. That's what website usability addresses. The essence of website usability is to assist people to help themselves to do what you want them to do (R. Y. Wang & Strong, 1996). A Website high usability should generate a desirable perception of its use and an intention to use the site. Usability includes consistency and the ease of getting the Website to do what the user intends it to do, clarity of interaction, ease of reading, arrangement of information, speed and layout. Appropriate design of user interfaces includes organization, presentation, and interactivity (Shneiderman 1998).

**Download Speed** refers to the speed at which a website loads. It has always played an important part in the success of a website which translates into the customer satisfaction with the site. Some authors call this variable as download delay (Palmer, 2002) or (Rose, Khoo, & Straub, 1999) also the variable can be known as response time (Turban & Gehrke, 2000). With the widespread use of the Web, the definitions and names of the terms varies from country to country and some time from designer to designer. For this study, we will be consistent with (Rose et al., 1999). We will use the term "download speed" since it has been adopted throughout most part of the literature.

**Customization** refers to a strategy to produce customized goods and services with high efficiency and cost (Toffer, 1970). According to (Tarafdar, 2009), customization is a critical variable that have a strong influence on the performance of the website. Customization is also considered to be a good predictor for customer loyalty (Cho & Fiorito, 2009; Feng, Zheng, Tan, & Wei, 2009; Kennedy, 2002; Poria & Gvili, 2006; Sia et al., 2009).

**Security,** according to (Szymanski & Hise, 2000), security is one of the dominant factors in consumer assessments of websites. The security of online business continues to control deliberations on electronic commerce and with all the identity theft concerns related to internet, security obviously still one of the most important concerns in the customer satisfaction. Some empirical studies reports that security improves trust (C. Kim, Tao, Shin, & Kim, 2010); (Becker & Berkemeyer, 2004). For (Chang & Chen, 2009) customer satisfaction and security are positively related. Others believes that security is critical in the successful trading (Backhouse, 1998); (Pauline, 1998); (Thompson, 2004); (Dallas, 1998).

Finally the dimension **availability,** is a technical dimension that measures website performance (Palmer, 2002). It is important to measure this dimension, because it provides a kind of trust and final loyalty in the users.

### 3. Research Methodology

Some academic researchers have developed scales to evaluate websites (Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue, 2007). One of the most popular instrument is Webqual, a scale for rating websites on 12 dimensions: informational fit to task, interaction, trust, response...
time, design, intuitiveness, visual appeal, innovativeness, flow-emotional, integrated communication, business process and substitutability. In this study, we will use the WebQual questions as our customer needs, and using a 5-point Likert scale to measure each of the constructs in the model, we will request a stratified sample to complete a survey on two sports organizations: soccer-fans versus no-soccer-fans. We identified two tasks in the two main goals of a sports organization website: dissemination of information and electronic commerce (searching for a product to buy). The questionnaire was constructed for this study based on previous research and it was modified for the sports management context. The questionnaire will be tested in order to analyze the reliability and validity using statistical analysis.

The research model for this study is presented in Figure 3. As can be seen, two variables will be measured using 12 dimensions; perceived quality and perceived performance. Five soccer teams were selected (using as criteria the popularity and the brand of the team. The teams are: Manchester United (Premier League); Barcelona FC and Real Madrid (Spain League), Milan FC (Italian League), LA Galaxy (MLS).

![Research Model](image)

The methodology used for this study is based on the Quality Function Deployment (QFD) developed by Akao (1970). This approach considers the “Voice of the Customers” (VOC) as the material to design new products or services (González, Quesada, Gourdin, & Hartley, 2008), using the information compiled in every design stage of the product/service. By means of the relationship between what the customers wants (WHATS) and how to incorporate these needs or expectations in the product/service, a number of product specifications or requirement will be generated (HOWS). Based upon a distinction of “WHATS” and “HOWS”, a series of matrices is used to deploy customer-demanded requirements. As can be seen in Figure 5, the process used in this paper is composed of three phases. Phase 1 includes the procedure that the research group will use to gather and analyze the initial information on customer expectations. In this stage, we hope to collect a minimum of 100 surveys regarding customer expectations on sports organizations website, specifically in the teams mentioned above. The gathering of customer expectations will be using the 22 basic questions of WebQual 2.0 instrument. WebQual instrument includes electronic commerce evaluation, where website service quality is proposed as a key issue.
WebQual dimension has been validated in several papers as a valuable instrument that considers the most basic step in website evaluation. The research group decided to use these 22 dimensions as the “Voice of the Customers, VOC” because; all the questions evaluate 6 important characteristics that a high quality website must have: consumer impact, usability, presentation, content, communication, trust, and consumer impact. Phase 2 includes the building the House of Quality (HOQ) matrix. In this phase the research group will develop the planning matrix of QFD that will be used as a base for the formulation of the online marketing strategy. Phase 3 is the analysis of benchmarking, comparing the performance metrics among the five teams involved in the study. Using a “best practices analysis”, we will identify sales points and based on the customer’s evaluations, we will identify what team developed the best website (best practice).

4. Results and Analysis

Data collection will be done before the submission of the final papers, and it will be included if accepted.
References


