Proceedings of the 17th International Conference
LIBEREC ECONOMIC FORUM

2025

Veronika PULPAN KRAUSE, Daniel OPELIK, Josef VORACEK, Klara KULHANKOVA

Sports Services of a Selected Academy in the Ötztal Ski Resort

MOTTO: New Horizons in Economics and Business

Veronika PULPAN KRAUSE[a], Daniel OPELIK[b], Josef VORACEK[c]*, Klara KULHANKOVA[d]

[a] Charles University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Department of Sport Management
José Martího 269/31, 162 52 - Praha 6 – Veleslavín, Czech Republic
ORCID 0000-0001-6006-1698

[b] Charles University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Department of Sport Management
José Martího 269/31, 162 52 - Praha 6 – Veleslavín, Czech Republic
ORCID0000-0002-1007-5466

[c]* Charles University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Department of Sport Management
José Martího 269/31, 162 52 - Praha 6 – Veleslavín, Czech Republic
josef.voracek@ftvs.cuni.cz, ORCID 0000-0002-6551-4729 *(corresponding author)*

[d] Charles University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Department of Sport Management
José Martího 269/31, 162 52 - Praha 6 – Veleslavín, Czech Republic

Sports Services of a Selected Academy in the Ötztal Ski Resort

Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the sports services provided by the Snowlines ski and snowboard school during the 2023/2024 winter season, focusing on the perception of service quality, customer satisfaction, and their loyalty. Additionally, the influence of the image of the Sölden ski resort on clients' relationship with the Snowlines school is examined. To achieve the results, this study uses an electronic data collection method, specifically an electronic survey in a standardized format with precisely defined questions and response options. The statistical software MiniTab is used for the analysis and interpretation of the collected data, offering a wide range of functions for statistical analyses and advanced graphical tools for data visualization.

To compare differences between selected customer segments, the Test of Equal Variances and One-way ANOVA are used. The research results showed that the services provided by the Snowlines ski and snowboard school are generally of a very high quality, although some areas received lower ratings. The critical groups identified were clients aged 18 to 29, those with a master's degree, individuals with the employment status of "self-employed," and those who had their first experience with the Snowlines school and ski or snowboard for less than 5 days per season.

Key Words: Sport Services, Destination Image, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Ski Tourism

JEL Classification: L83, Z33, Z20

Introduction

The ski and snowboard school Snowlines represents a significant entity in the field of winter sports, continuously striving to enhance the quality of its services and meet the needs and expectations of its customers. The perception of service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty are key factors influencing the school's success and its ability to maintain a competitive advantage. Studies (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee et al., 2011) indicate that service quality and customer satisfaction significantly impact customer loyalty, which directly affects the long-term success of an organization.

In building a relationship with satisfaction, it is not only the quality of the service or product that is decisive; rather, the key factor in the entire process of forming customer satisfaction is the perception and evaluation of the product by the customer. This is the result of a subjective process where the customer compares their expectations with the perceived reality (Zamazalová, 2009). Zamazalová (2009) also believes that higher product or service quality does not necessarily lead to greater customer satisfaction. Nový and Petzold (2006) address the issue of measuring satisfaction in their publication. Since it is a subjective mix of rational and emotional considerations, the authors state that it is always necessary to consider what the person is most likely comparing their satisfaction to. The research results of Jiang and Rosebloom (2005) showed that post-delivery satisfaction has a much stronger influence on overall customer satisfaction and their intention to return than satisfaction during the purchase. In this case, it is assumed that the customer is implicitly able to recall a range of experience variants obtained through product or service consumption combined with the perception of emotions (Permatasari et al., 2017).

Every tourism sector strategically focuses on positively creating the destination's image in the minds of actual and potential tourists (Fakaye & Crompton, 1991). Hájková (2010) believes that the destination image is formed slowly and gradually and can be both positive and negative. The image can arise naturally, for example, based on previous visits, or artificially, for example, through television advertising or other media reports (Hájková, 2010). The key to the destination's image is how strong these associations are, regardless of their positive or negative nature (Hájková, 2010). According to Chi and Qu (2008), positive tourist experiences with services, products, and other resources provided by tourist destinations can lead to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth among friends and/or relatives. The destination image positively influences perceived quality, satisfaction, and tourist behavior.

Positive image resulting from positive travel experiences leads to positive destination evaluation and a higher likelihood of returning to the same destination (Chi & Qu, 2008). Qu et al. (2011) divided the construction of the destination image into three dimensions: cognitive destination image, affective destination image, and unique destination image. In their study, Qu et al. (2011) demonstrated that the overall image of the destination is positively influenced by both cognitive and affective evaluations. Cognitive evaluation refers to beliefs and knowledge about the object, while affective evaluation concerns feelings towards the object (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). The uniqueness of the destination

image provides a compelling reason why travelers should choose a particular destination over alternatives (Qu et al., 2011).

It is expected that a customer with an overall positive image, as a general impression of cognitive, affective, and unique images of a given destination, is more likely to reuse services at that destination and recommend it to others (Qu et al., 2011). The intention to revisit a specific destination has been extensively studied in tourism research as a signal of customer loyalty (Qu et al., 2011). This model originates from the English term "revisit intention" and refers to "*the intention of customers to relive the same tourist destination or product*" (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021, p. 7). Managers of service-oriented companies consider understanding the intention to revisit a specific destination or relive a given service as a key issue, as it can lead to increased revenues and reduced operating costs (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011).

1. Methods of Research

The aim of this study is to analyse the sports services provided by the ski and snowboard school, focusing on the perception of service quality, customer satisfaction, and their loyalty. Additionally, the influence of the Sölden ski resort's image on clients' relationship with the ski school is examined. A quantitative questionnaire survey was used for the research. For this research, an electronic data collection method was chosen to ensure respondent anonymity and confidentiality, objective data collection, standardized question format, and response quantification. The target population includes all clients of the ski and snowboard school, totaling approximately 1200 throughout the season from November to April. Participation criteria included having attended at least one lesson with an instructor and being over 18 years of age.

The research sample consists of 123 clients who met these criteria. These clients were contacted via social media and direct messages containing a link to an online survey on the survio.com platform. Except for demographic questions, all questions were evaluated using a qualitative five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree," allowing respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements. The questions were posed in English. The focus of the questionnaire was divided into two main parts: respondent identification data and their visit frequency, and questions measuring service quality, destination image, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. The questions were adapted from previous studies (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee et al., 2011):

1. Service Quality: Questions adapted from the SERVQUAL method (Parasuraman et al., 1988).
2. Destination Image: Questions based on the work of Chi and Qu (2008), focusing on transportation accessibility, accommodation selection, restaurants/cuisine, entertainment offerings, the number of slopes, snow quality/grooming, infrastructure safety, and price/performance ratio.

3. Customer Satisfaction: Questions adapted from the work of Lee et al. (2011), evaluating the ordering process, the quantity and quality of offered services, availability, price/performance ratio, and overall satisfaction.
4. Customer Loyalty to the Ski School: Questions adapted from the research of Lee et al. (2011), focusing on recommending the school to others and their intention to order another service in the future.

The collected data were transferred to Microsoft Excel and subsequently analyzed using the statistical software MiniTab. To compare differences between selected customer segments, the Equality of Variances Test (Levene's test) and one-way ANOVA were used. Before conducting the tests, their assumptions were verified using normality tests. If the p-value is less than the chosen significance level α (0.05), the null hypothesis is rejected (Kozel et al., 2011).

2. Results of the Research

A total of N = 123 clients participated in the survey, meeting the criteria of having attended at least one lesson and being over 18 years of age. Of these, 58.5% were female and 41.5% were male. The age distribution revealed that the largest group of participants (34.1%) were aged 30-39, followed by the 18-29 age group (22%). The majority of participants were highly educated (40.7% held a master's degree), employed (65.0%), and could be classified as irregular tourists (47.2% skied less than 5 days per season). The complete structure of the resulting research sample is presented in Table 1.

The perception of service quality is overall very positive, as indicated by the percentages of responses "strongly agree." A total of 95.1% of respondents encountered customer-oriented services, 91.9% noted effective communication, and 91.1% received sufficient information. However, the advisory service was rated slightly lower (79.7%). Customer satisfaction is rated somewhat lower. The ordering process received 79.7% "strongly agree," the quantity of offered services 78.9% "strongly agree." Availability (75.6%) and the price/performance ratio (73.2%) are areas for improvement.

The image of the Sölden destination is the lowest-rated category. Transportation accessibility (95.9% "strongly agree") was positive, while accommodation selection (52.8% "strongly agree") was average. The most critical area was the selection of restaurants/cuisine (31.7% "strongly agree"). The quality of snow and slope grooming (52% "strongly agree") was average. Regarding customer loyalty, respondents would recommend the ski school (94.3% "strongly agree") and 73.2% plan to use the school's services in the future. Since the initial data testing using a normal probability plot in the statistical software MiniTab indicated that the data were not normally distributed, Levene's test for equality of variances was used for data analysis. The results showed that only nine out of twenty-four tests for equality of variances had a p-value less than 0.05, which implies that in nine cases, the null hypothesis was rejected. These results (see Table 2) with p-values less than 0.05 will be further interpreted. Subsequently, one-way ANOVA was used to compare the means.

Tab. 1: Structure of respondents

VARIABLES	Responses	Frequency	
GENDER	Female	72	58.50 %
	Male	51	41.50 %
AGE	18-29	27	22.00 %
	30-39	42	34.10 %
	40-49	24	19.50 %
	50-59	23	18.70 %
	60+	7	5.70 %
EDUCATION LEVEL	Less than high school	1	0.80 %
	High school or equivalent	20	16.30 %
	Apprenticeship certificate	25	20.30 %
	Bachelor's degree	23	18.70 %
	Master's degree	50	40.70 %
	Doctoral degree	3	2.40 %
	Other	1	0.80 %
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS	Student	2	1.60 %
	Working student	6	4.90 %
	Employed	80	65.00 %
	Unemployed	1	0.80 %
	Entrepreneur/self-employed	28	22.80 %
	Retired	6	4.90 %
VISIT FREQUENCY	First visit	96	78.00 %
	Repeat visit	27	22.00 %
NUMBER OF SKI DAYS PER SEASON	Less than 5 days	58	47.20 %
	6 to 10 days	43	35.00 %
	More than 10 days	22	17.90 %

Source: authors' calculations

- Service Quality vs. Age: Both p-values are less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference. The critical group consists of clients aged 18–29, who exhibit the greatest variability (standard deviation 0.498) and the lowest average service quality rating (mean 4.847).
- Service Quality vs. Education: Both p-values are less than 0.05. The critical group consists of clients with a master's degree, who exhibit the greatest variability (standard deviation 0.437) and the lowest average rating (mean 4.866).
- Service Quality vs. Visit Frequency: Both p-values are less than 0.05. The critical group consists of clients on their first visit, who exhibit higher variability (standard deviation 0.374) and an average rating of 4.890.
- Satisfaction vs. Age: Both p-values are equal to 0.05. The critical group consists of clients aged 18–29, who exhibit the highest variability (standard deviation 0.520) and the lowest average satisfaction rating (mean 4.735).

- Satisfaction vs. Socioeconomic Status: Both p-values are less than 0.05. The critical group consists of entrepreneurs, who exhibit the highest variability (standard deviation 0.541) and the lowest average satisfaction rating (mean 4.732).
- Destination Image vs. Education: Both p-values are less than 0.05. The critical group consists of clients with a bachelor's degree, who exhibit the second highest variability (standard deviation 0.709) and the lowest average rating (mean 4.401).
- Destination Image vs. Gender: Levene's p-value = 0.063 (>0.05, variances do not differ). ANOVA p-value = 0.016 (<0.05, means differ). The critical group consists of males, who exhibit a lower average rating (mean 4.407) than females (mean 4.509).
- Destination Image vs. Number of Ski Days per Season: Levene's p-value = 0.184 (>0.05, variances do not differ). ANOVA p-value = 0.002 (<0.05, means differ). The critical group consists of clients skiing less than 5 days per season, who exhibit the lowest average rating (mean 4.366).
- Loyalty vs. Number of Ski Days per Season: Both p-values are less than 0.05. The critical group consists of clients skiing less than 5 days per season, who exhibit higher variability (standard deviation 0.580) and the lowest average loyalty rating (mean 4.733).

Tab. 2: Differences between selected customer segments

Variables	M	SD	Levene's p-value	ANOVA p-value
Service Quality vs. Age	4.847	0.498	0.011	0.011
Service Quality vs. Education	4.866	0.437	0.013	0.013
Service Quality vs. Visit Frequency	4.890	0.374	0.048	0.048
Satisfaction vs. Age	4.735	0.520	0.05	0.05
Satisfaction vs. Socioeconomic Status	4.732	0.541	0.012	0.012
Destination Image vs. Education	4.401	0.709	0.027	0.027
Destination Image vs. Gender	4.407	0.636	0.063	0.016
Destination Image vs. Number of Ski Days per Season	4.366	0.661	0.184	0.002
Loyalty vs. Number of Ski Days per Season	4.733	0.580	0.027	0.027

Note: $p < 0.05$; Likert scale 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree.

Source: authors' calculations

3. Discussion

This section provides a concise overview of the empirical study results, along with their evaluation based on the literature used. The study's limitations are also identified, and possible directions for future research are outlined. According to the theory (Kotler & Keller, 2007), the key factor in achieving high service quality and customer satisfaction is meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Data analysis showed that 95.1% of respondents indicated that Snowlines school services are customer-oriented, and 96.7% rated the quality of the staff as very satisfactory. However, some areas, such as advice on

selecting the most suitable service, received lower ratings (79.7%). Statistical tests revealed that critical groups include clients aged 18 to 29, those with a completed master's degree, and those who had their first experience with Snowlines school. These groups showed the greatest variability and lower average service quality ratings. Younger clients or those with higher education may have higher expectations, and new clients may have greater uncertainty. The discrepancy with the assertion that high service quality leads to complete customer satisfaction (Kotler & Keller, 2007) suggests that even high-quality service delivery can have weaknesses.

According to Zamazalová (2009) and Oliver (1997), customer satisfaction results from a subjective process where the customer compares their expectations with the perceived reality. The research results showed that customer satisfaction with Snowlines school services reached 84.6%. However, there is still room for improvement, especially in the ordering process (79.7%) and the quantity of offered services (78.9%). Statistical tests revealed that the age group 18 to 29 years shows the lowest average satisfaction, and the group of entrepreneurs showed a statistically significant difference in variability and satisfaction averages. This result supports the theory that customer satisfaction depends not only on service quality but also on other factors such as emotions and individual expectations (Carroll, 2004).

The destination image is crucial for its success and competitiveness (Morgan et al., 2011; Chi & Qu, 2008). A positive destination image should lead to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth (Chi & Qu, 2008). The research results showed that the image of the Sölden destination was rated the lowest compared to other categories, especially in the area of restaurant and cuisine options (31.7% "strongly agree") and the price/performance ratio (41.5% "strongly agree"). Statistical results revealed three critical groups: clients with a bachelor's degree, men, and respondents who spend an average of 6 to 10 days skiing or snowboarding per season. The first group consisted of individuals with a bachelor's degree, which may suggest that this segment holds higher expectations regarding the destination or that the image of Sölden does not align with their perceptions. The second group comprised male respondents, indicating that men may perceive the destination less positively than women, potentially due to an insufficient number of adrenaline-oriented attractions that meet their preferences. The third group included respondents who spend an average of 6 to 10 days per season skiing or snowboarding. Although this is not the lowest possible response category, it may reflect certain deficiencies in the destination image of the Ötztal region, which could also negatively affect clients of the Snowlines school. The discrepancy between theory and research results suggests that even though the destination may provide quality sports services, it may suffer from low ratings due to weaknesses in other areas, supporting Žáková's (2018) assertion that the destination image must align with reality.

Customer loyalty is essential for the long-term success of a company and is influenced by positive experiences and the quality of provided services (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). A potential mediating relationship arises from the observation made by Chi and Qu (2008), who noted that positive tourist experiences with services, products, and other resources offered by destinations can lead to repeat visitation. Subsequently, the intention to revisit a specific destination has been widely examined in tourism research as an indicator of customer loyalty (Qu et al., 2011). The research showed that 73.2% of respondents plan

to use Snowlines school services again in the future. Statistical tests revealed that the group with less than five days spent on snow shows lower loyalty. This indicates the need to create an environment that clients will want to return to. Customer loyalty is also influenced by other factors, such as the length of stay, and is not automatically guaranteed by high service quality alone.

Study Limitations and Future Research

One of the main limitations of this study is the relatively small and non-representative sample of respondents (only 123). This limited number reduces the possibility of generalizing the results to a broader population. The research was also conducted in a specific time period which may also constrain the ability to capture long-term trends and shifts in customer behavior across different phases of the season. Perceptions of service quality and destination image can vary significantly throughout the season, influenced by factors such as snow conditions, occupancy levels relative to resort capacity, and psychological determinants shaping consumer behavior. The absence of data on nationality may have influenced the perceived quality of services and the destination image, particularly in terms of comparing expectations with the services and overall product offerings across different countries. This is especially relevant in the context of ski and snowboard schools, as well as the technical, natural, and tourism-related conditions that shape the feasibility and attractiveness of engaging in these activities. Despite using standardized tools such as the Likert scale and the statistical software MiniTab, there are methodological limitations. Another limitation may be cultural differences among respondents, as their nationality was not specified, which could have influenced the perception of service quality and satisfaction.

For future research, it would be appropriate to focus on specific aspects of service quality, for example, using the SERVQUAL method. It could be beneficial to use various methodological approaches, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews with school employees. In the area of customer satisfaction research, it would be possible to identify specific factors and compare them among different demographic and cultural groups over a longer period. The use of digital technologies, such as social media and mobile applications, could provide better insights into the impact of these tools on customer loyalty. Furthermore, it would be possible to conduct more detailed research on factors influencing the destination image and collaborate with resort managers.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze the sports services provided by the Snowlines ski and snowboard school during the 2023/2024 winter season, focusing on the perception of service quality, customer satisfaction, and their loyalty. Additionally, the influence of the image of the Sölden ski resort on clients' relationship with the Snowlines school was examined. The research revealed that despite the high quality of service delivery and positive client evaluations, there are areas that require regular monitoring and improvement. The study results indicate that service quality received high ratings in areas such as customer orientation, communication with staff, information provision, problem-

solving, instructor quality, and overall trust. These results were achieved thanks to the highly professional services provided by the school's employees.

The findings highlighted the crucial role of satisfaction in the relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty, as well as the intention to revisit the school. According to the expectation-disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1993), it was confirmed that met expectations lead to positive disconfirmation, resulting in high levels of satisfaction and an increased likelihood of repeat visits. This underscores the significant role of satisfaction in influencing customers' intentions to share positive experiences and recommendations (Qu et al., 2011), as well as their likelihood of returning to use the sports services of the Snowlines school. The final part of the study examined how the image of the Sölden ski resort affects clients' perceptions and their loyalty to the Snowlines ski and snowboard school. Empirical results revealed that the resort suffers from certain deficiencies, such as the price/performance ratio and the quality of snow grooming on the slopes, which reduce the likelihood of customers returning to the resort and, consequently, to the Snowlines school.

Based on the analysis of statistical data and the limitations of the current research, it is clear that there is room for further improvement in all monitored areas. Considering the specific requirements of clients aged 18 to 29 or those with higher education levels regarding service quality, the school should consider introducing more personalized services that better meet their expectations. Simplifying the ordering process and expanding the range of services would represent significant improvements for these clients. In conclusion, it can be stated that the Snowlines ski and snowboard school has a solid foundation in its current strategy and a well-chosen customer-oriented approach.

Acknowledgment

References

BALOGLU, S., and D. BRINBERG. (1997). Affective Images of Tourism Destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 1997, **35**(4): 11-15.

CARROLL, B. A. (2004). An Empirical Test of Contingency Theory. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissastisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, 2004, **17**: 171-181.

FAKAYE, P. C., and J. L. CROMPTON. (1991). Image differences between prospective, first-time and repeat visitors to the lower Rio Grande Valley. *Journal of Travel Research*, 1991, **30**(2): 10-16.

HÁJKOVÁ, R. (2010). *Model formování image destinace*. Diplomová práce. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, Ekonomicko-správní fakulta, 2010.

CHI, C., and H. QU. (2008). Examining The Structural Relationship of Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty: An Integrated Approach. *Tourism Management*, 2008, **29**(4): 624–636.

JIANG, P., and B. ROSENBLOOM. (2005). Customer intention to return online: price perception, attribute-level performance, and satisfaction unfolding over time. *European Journal of Marketing*, 2005, **39**(1/2): 150-174.

KOTLER, P., and K. L. KELLER. (2007). *Marketing management – 12. vydání*. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2007.

KOZEL, R., MYNÁŘOVÁ, L., and H. SVOBODOVÁ. (2011). *Moderní metody a techniky marketingového výzkumu*. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2011.

LEE, S., JEON, S., and D. KIM. (2011). The Impact of Tour Quality and Tourist Satisfaction on Tourist Loyalty: The Case of Chinese Tourists in Korea. *Tourism Management*, 2011, **32**(5): 1115-1124.

LOVELOCK, CH., and J. WIRTZ. (2011). *Services Marketing: People, Technology, Strategy. (7th edition)*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2011.

MORGAN, N., PRITCHARD, A., and R. PRIDE. (2011). *Destination Brands (3rd edition)*. London: Routledge, Elsevier Ltd., 2011.

NOVÝ, I., and J. PETZOLD. (2006). *(NE)spokojený zákazník – náš cíl?! Jak získat zákazníka špičkovými službami. (1. vydání)*. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2006.

OLIVER, R.L. (1993). Cognitive, Affective, and Attribute Bases of the Satisfaction Response. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 1993, **20**(3): 418-430.

OLIVER, R. L. (1997). Satisfaction: A Behavioral Perspective on the Consumer. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 1997, **14**(3): 1-40.

PARASURAMAN, A., ZEITHAML, V., and L. BERRY. (1988). SERVQUAL: a multiple item scale for measuring consumer perception of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 1988, **64**(1): 12-40.

PERMATASARI, Y. Y., MURWANI, F. D., and S. M. SUHARTO. (2017). Examining the Structural Relationships of Service Quality, Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty: An Integrated Approach. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2017, **7**(6): 367-378.

QU, H., KIM, L. H., and H. H. IM. (2011). A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image. *Tourism management*, 2011, **32**(3): 465-476.

RASOOLIMANESH, S. M., SEYFI, S., RATHER, A., and C. HALL. (2021). Investigating the mediating role of visitor satisfaction in the relationship between memorable tourism experiences and behavioral intentions in heritage tourism context. *Tourism Review*, 2021, **77**(2): 687-709.

ZAMAZALOVÁ, M. (2009). *Marketing obchodní firmy. (1. vydání)*. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2009.

ŽÁKOVÁ, H. (2018). *Image destinace a její vliv na podniky služeb*. Bakalářská práce. Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, Fakulta ekonomická, 2018.