A focussed service quality, benefits, overall satisfaction and loyalty model for public aquatic centres

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Abstract
This study supports a parsimonious range of key service quality dimensions that have a strong influence on customer loyalty at public aquatic centres using data from two major centres in Australia (n 367 and 307). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) supported a model that included three process services quality dimensions and two benefits (outcomes) dimensions. Using structural equation modelling (SEM) one of the outcomes dimensions (relaxation) and two process dimensions (staffing and facility presentation) significantly influenced overall satisfaction, which mediated significant relationships with three attitudinal loyalty variables. The data from the second centre provided a validation sample to confirm the potential to replicate the model for a different respondent profile. The parsimonious set of dimensions identified in this research could provide a common core suitable for inclusion in service quality research for a range of contexts.

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, competition for customers has been increasing due to the number of new or refurbished public and commercial aquatic and fitness centres in many Australian cities (Benton, 2003; Howat et al., 2005a; King, 2004; Whittaker, 2004). Consequently, retention of customers and measuring customer loyalty are increasingly important issues for facility managers. Indicators of customer loyalty include customer service quality as well as customer satisfaction (Bernhardt et al., 2000; Brady and Robertson, 2001; Ganesh et al., 2000; Howat and Crilley, 2007; Philip and Hazlett, 1997; Voss et al., 2004). Linking specific service quality dimensions with loyalty measures allows facility managers to identify strengths and areas for improvement in attributes of the service that they can manage to help improve their competitive advantage.

This study examines the relationships between service quality, overall satisfaction and loyalty measures, at Australian public aquatic centres (Figure 1). Satisfaction appears to be a combination of emotional and cognitive responses (Oliver, 1997; Wong, 2004; Zeithaml et al., 2006), while service quality as an antecedent to overall satisfaction appears to be mainly a customer’s cognitive assessment of a service (Cronin, 2003). Perceptions of service quality affect feelings of satisfaction, which, in turn, influence customers’ likely future support for that service (Alexandris et al., 2004; Bernhardt et al., 2000; Ganesh et al., 2000; Howat et al., 1999; Murray and Howat 2002; Voss et al., 2004).

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