



ARE OUR STADIUMS READY FOR EURO 2024? EVALUATION OF SERVICE QUALITYⁱ

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Abstract:

For sports enterprisers, providing quality service to sports consumers, such as football supporters helps to achieve the kind of participation in and consumption of important sports events that these businesses want. As a result, it is important that the quality of the service offered is known by both sports marketers and service providers. The aim of the research was to compare the perceptions of service quality of spectators who watched the 2014-2015 football season in an old stadium and the perceptions of service quality of spectators who watched 2016-2017 season in the new stadium, and to determine what needs to be done in order to make the level of service at the new stadium the best possible. The population of the research included the spectators following the Eskişehirspor competitions in the 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 football seasons. A total of 888 (715 male; 173 female) spectators were selected from within the determined population by the convenience sampling method. The "Scale of Event Quality for Spectator Sports" was used as data collection tool in the research. When the data obtained from the study were examined, it was determined that the spectators in new stadium gave a higher average score than the spectators in the old stadium in terms of the dimensions in which difference occurred. As a conclusion, the improvement in the event quality was not at the expected level and the event quality required by the spectators in the new stadium was not at the highest level.

Keywords: Euro 2024, football, stadium, event quality

1. Introduction

Quite substantial investments have been made in recent years in Turkey in terms of the facilities established by the football industry. In 2015, the Turkish Ministry of Youth and

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Sports announced 26 new stadium projects, and many stadiums have already begun to provide services. In this context, one of the main questions within the scope of this research is as follows: *“Are the new stadiums contributing positively to the quality of the service provided for the event?”* Providing a high level of service in new stadiums which contribute greatly to Turkish football is very important for Turkey’s candidacy for EURO 2024 (2024 European Football Championship). For EURO 2024, UEFA is requesting that the host country have nine or ten stadiums. Two or three of these must have a capacity of at least 50,000, three must seat at least 40,000 and four of these must be able to accommodate at least 30,000 spectators. One of the stadiums that Turkey is planning to use during EURO 2024 is Eskisehirspor stadium, which opened in the 2016-2017 season with a seating capacity of 34,930. Eskisehirspor stadium is an important example of the new stadiums that will be used, because the stadium is easily accessible to spectators by various transport means, the surroundings are designed both for crowd management and entertainment, the city is able to supply the audience required by EURO 2024, and the atmosphere in the stadium and the interior design have features that can affect the spectator. The development of qualifying matches for the events held in the new Eskisehirspor stadium is crucial not only for EURO 2024 but also for Eskisehirspor's Sports Toto Super League competitions. As a club, Eskisehirspor and its stadium have the same problems as many sports organizations in the world. Sports organizations are faced with difficulties retaining customers as a result of rising prices and rising expectations about the quality of the event (Howard & Crompton, 2004). In order to reduce this resistance, sports clubs should try to provide the best possible products and services as well as to reduce their operational costs. The inadequacy of scientific research to determine whether football clubs are receiving appropriate recompense for the services offered is another reason contributing to the formation of this situation. However, all stakeholders can be satisfied, improvements in quality can be achieved and audience participation and retention can be increased by introducing permanent measures and practices on the basis of findings obtained by scientific data.

In this context, the research problems were: *“What are the differences in spectators’ perception of the quality of events in the old and new Eskisehirspor stadiums?”* and *“What should be done to make the service provided in the new stadium the best possible?”* The aim of the research was to compare spectators’ perceptions of the quality of events in the old and the new stadiums and to determine what needs to be done in order to bring the service provided in the new stadium to the highest level.

2. Literature Review

Quality of service is the consumer's impression of the relative excellence of a service (Liu et al., 2009). Service quality provides significant advantages over the competition in the sectors in which an organization provides a service (Ko et al., 2011). For this reason, factors affecting the quality of service need to be well analyzed by organizations. When the literature on service quality was examined, it was observed that it is a common view

among researchers that the concept of service quality is multidimensional and hierarchical (Yıldız, 2012). Over time, a number of unique scales have emerged that use different factors and measurement structures to measure service quality. Measurement models that assess service quality in the sports industry can be classified under the headings of “participation-based” and “audience-oriented” service quality due to the varying nature of sports services (Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008). Despite the differences and uniqueness of each of the scales that assessed audience-oriented service quality, a clear theme emerged: they were particularly focused on the service framework, which was defined as the physical environment in which service distribution occurs. Emphasis was placed on physical and tangible resources in the literature among studies focused on service quality and especially sports facilities. Research in the sports field shows how perceived service quality, perceived space quality, intentions to revisit and product and satisfaction perceptions are influenced by the service framework. It is useful to examine some of the developed scales to better understand this effect.

One of the first scales developed to assess service quality in sports for spectators was TEAMQUAL (McDonald et al, 1995). Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and physical environment are dimensions of service quality in this model. SPORTSCAPE developed by Wakefield et al. (1996), evaluates service quality with dimensions such as parking lot, aesthetics, scoreboard, comfort, space layout, functionality, markings and desire to stay. After the first scales developed, the development of measurement tools to evaluate service quality with different dimensions was continued. In the SPORTSERV model developed by Theodorakis and Kambitsis (2001) service quality was evaluated in terms of accessibility, reliability, enthusiasm, concrete and safety factors and Kelley and Turley (2001) pointed out that the quality of service in the sports industry for audiences can be examined with the dimensions of employees, prices, access to facility, concessions, comfort of fans, game experience, demonstrations, suitability and smoking. Greenwell et al. (2002) examined the quality of service for spectators with the physical environment (access, aesthetics, scoreboard, comfort, layout), core product and service personnel dimensions. Westerbeek and Shilbury (2003) indicated that service quality can be evaluated with core product and common service production dimensions with SPORTSCAPE features. According to Kuenzel and Yassim (2007), social interaction, game quality and ambience, and according to Gencer (2011), interaction quality, physical environment quality and core service quality are the dimensions that affect the quality of service for spectators. Tsuji et al. (2007) stated with SGG model that service quality can be evaluated in terms of core services and environmental services. Koo et al. (2009) noted that service quality is measured by technical, functional and environmental dimensions. Considering recently developed measurement models, Yoshida and James (2010) argued that service quality could be examined through stadium staff, access to facility, facility area, quality of opponent, performance of players and game atmosphere. In another study, the researchers evaluated the perceptions of service quality of baseball players using the dimensions of functional quality (personnel, access to facility, seating area), technical

quality (player performance, opponent quality) and aesthetic quality (crowd experience, game atmosphere). The latest model that has evaluated the quality of service in sports for spectators is the MEQSS model developed by Ko et al. (2011). In this model, service quality was measured by quality of game (skill performance, operation time, knowledge), augmented service quality (entertainment, concessions), interaction quality (employee interaction, fan interaction), outcome quality (sociability, value) and physical environment (ambience, design, scoreboard). When the scales and measurement models developed to measure service quality are evaluated, it is thought that two factors are the most important in evaluating service quality. The first is the physical property of the room where the service is offered. It was observed that this dimension was included in many measurement models. The second is game quality or core product dimension. The spectator comes to places offering services for the core product in particular. The performance of the players and the quality of the opponent can affect the perception of quality of the core product. In this study, the model developed by Ko et al.(2011) was used since it uses the two dimensions to evaluate perception of service quality and is one of the most recently developed models.

Event quality is used by researchers for both marketing (Dale et al., 2005; Kelley & Turley, 2001; Shilbury, 1994; Wakefield et al., 1996) and operational aspects. The general impressions about the experience provided determine perceptions about the quality of the event. Providing sustained high-quality services is a goal that sports organizations are aiming to achieve (Tsitskari et al., 2006), and providing quality experiences to consumers supports participation in future sporting events and consumption of these events (Tsuji et al., 2007).

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Participants

The population of the research involves spectators following the Eskisehirspor competitions in the 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 football seasons. For the 2014-2015 season 488 (male 444, female 44) and for the 2016-2017 season 400 (male 271, female 129) were selected from the population with the convenience sampling method, making a total of 888 spectators.

3.2 Data Collection Tool and Technique

The data were collected using the face-to-face interview technique via "Scale of Event Quality in Spectator Sports" (SEQSS) (Ko et al., 2011) and a survey with demographic questions.

3.3 Analysis of Data: The differences in gender, age, education level, occupation and household income level of the sample group were determined by t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in order to identify consumer opinions about the quality of service provided by Eskisehirspor in the old and the new stadium. The variance

homogeneity of the t-test and ANOVA for the averages that have difference was assessed by Levene's test.

4. Results

The comparison was made by taking into consideration the groups having the highest average from the tables based on the demographic characteristics. In addition, groups that did not show a difference in the tables were not included.

Table 1: Differentiation Status of Sample Group by Gender in 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 Seasons in terms of Dimensions of Scale of Event Quality for Spectator Sports

Old Stadium Dimensions	Gender	n	X	Sd.	t	p
Interaction Quality	Male	444	2.4014	.7880	3.590	.001*
	Female	44	2.8455	.7254		
Outcome	Male	444	3.8886	.7079	3.502	.001*
	Female	44	3.4136	.7696		
New Stadium Dimensions	Gender	n	X	Sd.	t	p
Service Augmentation	Male	271	3.1815	.5511	.971	.034*
	Female	129	3.3023	.4874		
Interaction Quality	Male	271	3.5073	.7818	4.711	.021*
	Female	129	3.7116	.6642		
Outcome	Male	271	3.9919	.8235	2.681	.050*
	Female	129	4.1442	.5482		

Table 1 shows that women had a higher average than men in the interaction dimension of event quality in the old stadium. In the outcome dimension, men had a higher average than women. In the service augmentation, interaction and outcome dimensions of the activity quality in the new stadium, women had a higher average than men.

When Table 2 is examined, it can be seen that the individuals in the age range 23-29 reported a more favorable opinion than the other groups in the outcome dimension of perception of quality perception for the old stadium. In each of the three dimensions of the event quality of the new stadium, different age groups had a higher average. These dimensions were game (44 years and over), interaction (23-29-year olds) and outcome (37-43-year olds).

Table 2: Differentiation Status of Sample Group by Age in 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 Seasons in terms of Dimensions of Scale of Event Quality for Spectator Sports

Old Stadium Dimensions	Age	n	X	Sd.	F	p
Outcome	Between 16-22	144	3.7903	.7636	3.661	.006**
	Between 23-29	171	3.9088	.6209		
	Between 30-36	84	3.6119	.7893		
	Between 37-43	58	3.6862	.5805		
	44 years and over	31	3.5419	.9383		
New Stadium Dimensions	Age	n	X	Sd.	F	P
Game	Between 16-22	120	4.1426	.3153	2.929	.021*
	Between 23-29	102	4.2424	.2626		
	Between 30-36	88	4.1869	.2920		
	Between 37-43	44	4.0985	.3190		
	44 years and over	46	4.2754	.2487		
Interaction Quality	Between 16-22	120	3.5317	.8147	3.578	.007**
	Between 23-29	102	3.7804	.7167		
	Between 30-36	88	3.4386	.7245		
	Between 37-43	44	3.7545	.5191		
	44 years and over	46	3.4826	.7917		
Outcome	Between 16-22	120	3.9650	.8364	2.758	.028*
	Between 23-29	102	4.0745	.5943		
	Between 30-36	88	3.9295	.8954		
	Between 37-43	44	4.3455	.3694		
	44 years and over	46	4.0870	.7151		

Table 3: Differentiation Status of Sample Group by Education Level in 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 Seasons in terms of Dimensions of Scale of Event Quality for Spectator Sports

Old Stadium Dimensions	Education Level	n	X	Sd.	F	p
Interaction Quality	Primary and Secondary Education	214	2.2813	.6922	9.352	.001**
	Associate / Bachelor's	233	2.5983	.8269		
	Master's Degree	44	2.3854	.69158		
Outcome	Primary and Secondary Education	214	3.8589	.6939	4.555	.001**
	Associate/Bachelor	233	3.6712	.7345		
	Master	44	3.9024	.7295		

According to Table 3, Associate/Bachelor's group in the dimension of interaction quality and the Master's group in the dimension of outcome reported more favorable opinions there was no difference in the level of event quality according to the education level of the sample group in the new stadium.

Table 4: Differentiation Status of Sample Group by Occupation in 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 Seasons in terms of Dimensions of Scale of Event Quality

Old Stadium Dimensions	Occupation	N	X	Sd.	F	p
Interaction Quality	Worker	88	2.1569	.5928	4.751	.001**
	Civil Servant	27	2.1630	.6703		
	Retired	28	2.5786	.8207		
	Student	270	2.5252	.8353		
	Self-employment	75	2.5120	.7872		
New Stadium Dimensions	Occupation	N	X	Sd.	F	p
Environment	Worker	74	4.1011	.3569	2.606	.035*
	Civil Servant	40	4.0778	.4799		
	Retired	53	4.2036	.4233		
	Student	139	4.1956	.4881		
	Self-employment	94	4.0053	.5341		

According to Table 4, in terms of event quality, retired individuals in both the old and new stadiums had more favorable opinions than other groups about the interaction quality and environment dimensions.

Table 5: Differentiation Status of Sample Group by Income Level in 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 Seasons in terms of Dimensions of Scale of Event Quality

Old Stadium Dimensions	Household Income Level	n	X	Sd.	F	p
Game	500 TL or less	129	3.8659	.4613	3.010	.011*
	5001-1,000 TL	137	3.5458	.5229		
	1,001-1,500 TL	139	3.6179	.5801		
	1,501-2,000 TL	99	3.7441	.6128		
	2,001-2,500 TL	34	3.7386	.3709		
	2,501 TL and more	50	3.5400	.6139		
Interaction Quality	500 TL or less	29	3.0207	.8406	9.397	.001**
	501-1,000 TL	137	2.3562	.7622		
	1,001-1,500 TL	139	2.3065	.7503		
	1,501-2,000 TL	99	2.2768	.7118		
	2,001-2,500 TL	34	2.7000	.8168		
	2,501 TL and more	50	2.8640	.7860		
Outcome	500 TL or less	29	3.5103	.7001	2.594	.025*
	501-1,000 TL	137	3.8628	.7061		
	1,001-1,500 TL	139	3.7842	.7003		
	1,501-2,000 TL	99	3.8384	.7060		
	2,001-2,500 TL	34	3.7647	.6813		
	2,501 TL and more	50	3.5240	.8289		
Environment	500 TL or less	29	3.4000	.6819	3.003	.011*
	501-1,000 TL	137	3.2664	.6662		
	1,001-1,500 TL	139	3.1043	.6209		
	1,501-2,000 TL	99	3.0101	.6552	3.003	.011*
	2,001-2,500 TL	34	3.1647	.6582		

		2,501 TL and more	50	3.0140	.8516		
New Stadium Dimensions	Household Income Level	n	X	Sd.	F	P	
Game	500 TL or less	55	4.0667	.3682	3.632	.003**	
	5001-1,000 TL	140	4.1508	.2827			
	1,001-1,500 TL	107	4.2285	.2720			
	1,501-2,000 TL	43	4.1938	.2818			
	2,001-2,500 TL	27	4.2840	.2692			
	2,501 TL and more	28	4.0100	.2235			
	500 TL or less	55	3.7673	1.0123			
Outcome	501-1,000 TL	140	4.0771	.6354	2.409	.036*	
	1,001-1,500 TL	107	4.0280	.7409			
	1,501-2,000 TL	43	4.1860	.5974			
	2,001-2,500 TL	27	4.2667	.4367			
	2,501 TL and more	28	3.8871	1.0073			
	500 TL or less	55	4.2119	.5762			
	501-1,000 TL	140	4.4579	.3664			
Environment	1,001-1,500 TL	107	4.3075	.4848	5.399	.001**	
	1,501-2,000 TL	43	4.4093	.4363			
	2,001-2,500 TL	27	4.4296	.2743			
	2,501 TL and more	28	3.7900	.6702			
	500 TL or less	55	4.2119	.5762			

When Table 5 is examined, according to the household income level of the sample group in the old stadium, the perception of event quality had a difference in game, interaction quality, outcome and environment dimensions. In the other dimensions except the interaction quality, individuals with an income of 500 TL or less showed difference. The differences in the perception of event quality according to the household income level of the sampling group in the new stadium were shown in the game, outcome and environment dimensions. Those with an income of 2001-2500 TL showed a difference in the game and outcome dimensions and those with an income level of 501-1000 TL showed a difference in the environment dimension. The following brief summary may be informative in order to better understand the differences in the perceptions of event quality of the Eskisehirspor competitions of the sample group in the old and new stadiums in terms of the demographic characteristics.

2014-2015 Season: Old Stadium

- Differences were found in terms of gender, interaction quality (female) and outcome (male)
- In terms of age, outcome (23-29)
- In terms of education, interaction quality (associate / Bachelor's) and outcome (master)
- In terms of occupation, interaction quality (retired)
- In terms of income level, game (500 TL and below), interaction (500 TL and below), outcome (501-1000 TL) and environment (500 TL and below).

2016-2017 Season: New Stadium

- Differences were found in terms of gender, service augmentation (female), interaction quality (female) and outcome (female)
- In terms of age, game (44 and above), interaction (23-29) and outcome (37-43)
- There was no difference in terms of education level.
- In terms of occupation, environment (retired)
- In terms of income level, game (2001-2500 TL), outcome (2001-2500 TL) and the environment (501-1000 TL) according to income.

3. Discussion

It has been determined that in terms of the findings obtained within the scope of the research, there is a positive improvement in the event quality of the old and the new stadiums in general terms. However, improvement in the event quality was not at the expected level. The question to be asked at this point is: "What are can be done in order to raise the level of event quality in the new stadium to a higher level?" In the discussion section of the study, the findings obtained based on these problems were interpreted and recommendations were made to increase the event quality of Eskisehirspor stadium, which is one of the stadiums in Turkey that is currently a candidate for EURO 2024.

When the findings related to the old stadium are examined, the most striking result is that the dimension of interaction quality showed differences in terms of gender, education level, occupation and income level. The low averages of interaction quality indicate that the staff in the stadium did not communicate well with the audience, and that activities designed to increase inter-personal interaction and reduce needs were inadequate. In the new stadium, differences in interaction quality in terms of education, occupation and income were not found, and it can be said that the services provided had been improved, but not at a high level. The most striking finding in the new stadium was that women had a higher average than men in the service augmentation, interaction quality and outcome dimensions. These findings show that women enjoy the new stadium more, have concessions are more satisfied with the fan and employee interaction and the social environment. Mikulic and Prebezac (2011) found that the facility and quality of equipment is much more important for male participants than for female participants. Unlike Mikulic and Prebezac (2011), Theodorakis et al. (2004) found that the expectations of women are higher than those of men. In terms of gender, expectations regarding service quality and differences in satisfaction levels are notable. In this context, differences in the quality of service in terms of gender in spectator sports should be examined in depth. In the old stadium, women had a higher average than men solely in terms of interaction quality. However, the level of the average ($X = 2.8450$) was low. Similarly, the averages of women in service augmentation and outcome were very low. These findings show why women were more satisfied than men in terms of the augmented service and outcome dimensions in the new stadium. The quality of the event obtained with the new

stadium can be said to have overcome the dissatisfaction of women with the old stadium.

It can be said that those who were in 23-29 age group were more satisfied with the quality of event in the old stadium than the other age groups, because this group had a higher average than other related age groups. Mankongvanichkul (2010) stated that young customers have less experience in service and that it is difficult for them to compare services with their past experiences. As a result, they are more satisfied with the service than adults. This may be the reason why young customers have a higher average than adults in the outcome dimension of event services, according to findings from the research. In the new stadium, the number of dimensions and age groups showing a difference increased. Considering the averages, this indicates that the new stadium was able to provide an adequate service quality to different age groups. When the total number of samples was taken into consideration, it was seen that a very large part of the audience was less than 36 years old. Therefore, more emphasis should be given to the diversity of activities, facility and equipment quality and the courtesy shown by the personnel as stated by Mikulic and Prebezac (2011), so that the needs of these consumers in the young age group can be met at a high level. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the competition, atmosphere created by the facility, other consumers and other concessions sold during the event also affects quality of service (Kelley & Turley, 2001).

It has been noted that educational level has an influence on the perception of service quality and that people with a higher level of education have an expectation of a higher service quality (Chow et al. 2007; Kumari & Rani 2011). Individuals with a Bachelor's and Master's degree had the highest average in interaction and outcome quality in the old stadium. This result is consistent with the statements of Chow et al. (2007) and Kumari and Rani (2011). However, as stated earlier, the averages are not at a high level. In the new stadium, there was no difference with regard to the level of education. This result suggests that the expectations of the individuals with high levels of education as regards the new stadium were not fully met. This is because, considering the average scores regarding the new stadium, it seems that the level of perception of event quality should be higher. Ko and Pastore (2005) stated that the most important dimension in terms of increasing service quality is the physical environment. They recommend large and small innovations to improve the atmosphere and design of a facility. Environmental quality can affect customers' cognitive and emotional situations and purchasing behavior (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Wakefield et al., 1996), because most of the services experienced by consumers in a physical facility are produced and consumed at the same time (Bitner, 1992). During sports services, the sports facility is at the center of customers' service experiences (Westerbeek, 2000).

When the research findings obtained in terms of the occupation of the sampling group were examined, a group of retired individuals constituted the difference in the old and new stadiums. The most striking result in terms of income levels was the positive improvement in the event quality between the old and the new stadiums. Every individual has different judgments about quality (Aslan & Koçak, 2011).

Understanding the differences between individuals helps organizations to develop better strategies and design service quality for professional groups (Landrum et al., 2010).

The average annual household income in Turkey was 19,139 TL in 2017 (TUIK, 2018). Hence, the income levels of the groups that showed differences between the old and new stadium were low. Scott and Shieff (1993) stated that customers with different income levels have different perceptions of service quality. Lim et al. (2008) stated that individuals with high income levels also have higher education levels. In relation to this situation, individuals with high levels of income tend to ask more questions during the process of acquiring information before making a decision. Therefore, spectators with a high level of income may perceive the quality of the activity differently than those with low income levels and may not be satisfied with the quality of the service provided. The event quality in the old and the new stadium may have satisfied individuals with low income levels. However, it should be noted that all income groups should be highly satisfied with the service provided. Holton (2004) stated that individuals with high income levels want to be served by service providers who are expert, proactive and satisfy their needs, and also indicated that those with high incomes are looking for quality in service interaction. These statements are similar to findings of this study, because the findings show that the higher the income level, the lower the average. Ko and Pastore (2005) found that the attitudes, behaviors and experiences of employees in their activities had an influence on the consumer's service quality evaluations. The consumer's perception of the quality of a service is also influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of other consumers. This social process is often found in sports services where consumers have high degree of interaction (Ko & Pastore, 2005). This means that the new stadium employees should be more effective in interacting with the audience and meeting the needs of the audience.

6. Conclusion

When the findings of the research are examined in general terms, in all dimensions where the differentiation occurs, the averages were at "I partially agree" and at a lower level in the old stadium, whereas in the new stadium, averages were at "I partially agree" and "I agree" level. These results can be interpreted as a sign that the quality of the events in the old stadium where Eskisehirspor played in the 2014-2015 season did not meet the high quality required by the audience. The result that the new stadium increased average scores for the perception of the event quality was expected

The perception of event quality in Eskisehirspor stadium was higher for women. Considering age groups, the younger audiences in the old stadium have a higher average, while adults have a higher average in the new stadium. Those who have Bachelor's and Master's degree education levels had a positive opinion on the quality of service provided in the old stadium, but the average was low. In the new stadium, no difference was found in terms of the educational level. In terms of occupation, the highest average for perception of event quality Eskisehirspor stadium belonged to

retired individuals. The group with a higher average, in terms of a difference in the perceived event quality in terms of the household income level, consisted mostly of those with a low income level.

6.1 Recommendations

The findings of this study have produced significant results for sports managers. Thanks to the scale used in the research, managers can provide analytical information on the spectators' perception of the event quality. More specifically, the five dimensions of the scale (game quality, augmented service quality, interaction quality, physical environment quality and outcome quality) can be used to identify potential problem areas in event operations and thus become a reliable source of information for future improvement of services. The study is very important for managers who want to increase the satisfaction and loyalty of the audience through understanding the operational strengths and weaknesses of events and who want to provide the products and services both within and outside of the field. Managers have to constantly gather information if they want to adapt to an intensely competitive marketplace and their expectations and wishes change rapidly with developing technology. Therefore, it is suggested that information should be gathered from consumers with different demographic characteristics and the quality of services provided at events be monitored.

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