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Service quality aspects and sports scientific conventions: An experience from Iran

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of service quality aspects in a Sport Scientific Convention held in Mashhad, Iran in 2015. A sample of 175 conference attendees were targeted to investigate the quality of services offered, their satisfaction, and intention to return. However, the findings show that the quality of access to destination and venue affect service accessibility quality. The hotel value and hotel staff interaction affect accommodation quality, but the atmosphere of the hotel does not. The internal environment of the venue and its staff interaction affect venue quality in a direct and meaningful way, but venue value does not. In addition, convention process and product affect convention quality in a direct and meaningful way. There is also a direct and meaningful relationship between accommodation quality, venue, and convention quality, and service quality in the sports scientific convention. Access quality, however, is not a part of this relationship. On the other hand, there is a relationship between access quality and satisfaction, and satisfaction affects participants' intent to return to the convention.

Introduction

During the past decades, tourism has noticeably been developed and received an ever-increasing attention in the global business sector. In the year 2015, more than 1.2 billion international tourists traveled abroad and created approximately 1400 billion US$ in the global economy (UNWTO, 2016). In addition, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated the number of international tourists to be increased up to 1.8 billion by the year 2030. However, the convention industry plays an indisputably important role in international tourism industry and the economy of host societies (Yoo, 2005). According to the Convention Industry Council in 2013, the U.S. meetings industry directly supported 1.8 million jobs, a

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$115.6 billion contribution to gross domestic product (GDP), $280 billion in spending, $66.9 billion in revenue, $14.8 billion in federal tax revenue, and $13.3 billion in state and local tax revenue (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014). Likewise, in South Korea, Sungsoo (2002) estimated the investment in conventions to the amount $2.4 million, leading to the employment of 7,200 individuals. Sports conventions are undoubtedly of great importance and have proven to be a potential goldmine for any country (Russo & Zarick, 2011). According to the reports, 2.5% of the world trade is allocated to sports which is considerable (Goodall & Ashworth, 2013).

However, the success of sport conventions is directly related to the quality of the provided services and the service quality is viewed as a key factor for visitors' intention to return (Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005; Kim, LaVetter, & Lee, 2006). Shonk and Chelladurai (2008) discuss the importance of service quality for sports convention attendees and their satisfaction of the convention. Many destinations are competing to provide high-quality services for their special guests and provide excellent Meeting, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions (MICE) facilities to lure them to return (Hinkin & Tracey, 1998). Although many studies have investigated the importance of service quality in convention industry, still there is a need to undertake empirical research in different countries to understand the aspects of service quality in different cultural context.

Sport convention industry is a relatively new research area in Iran, and rarely has been touched in the literature. Given the context of Iran and with special focus on Persian culture, it is important to realize the perspectives of convention attendees of service quality, their satisfaction level and their intention to return. For the purpose of this study, Sports Scientific Convention can be defined as a gathering forum for participants including sports researchers, organizers, and sport students to discuss the economic aspects of sports and how to create a positive image in order to attract international attention. Keeping in mind that Iran's image has been affected by negative propaganda in international arena, and the sports industry was not an exception. The convention was conducted to recover the image. This study tries to reach the following objectives:

1. To determine the aspects of service quality in sport scientific conventions in Iran;
2. To examine the role of service quality in convention attendees' satisfaction;
3. To examine the role of satisfaction in convention attendees' intent to return.

Literature review

Service quality in sports scientific convention

Service quality is a term indicating a general judgment of the excellence of a service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Grönroos (2001) defines service quality as the level of difference between a customer's perception of the service and his or her expectation. Research indicates an interest in service quality in the sports industry during the past two decades to such an extent that, today, service quality is among

the most important issues in service management and sports marketing (Robinson, 2006). Today, service quality can help an organization to distinguish itself from its peers and achieve a stable competitive advantage. Quality is a multi-dimensional phenomenon; it is thus, impossible to ensure the quality of products or services without determining its most prominent aspects.

Service quality assessment tools mostly focus on the physical conditions (Facilities), interpersonal interaction, and the main services (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000). Gronroos (2007) mentions three aspects in service quality, namely technical output quality, service related duty quality, and the company's image. Lethinen and Lethinen assert that the three aspects include physical quality, interactive quality, and organizational quality (Harrison, 2000). Although these efforts have had a great effect on the division of service quality into process quality and output quality, they lack sufficient details. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) listed 10 aspects for service quality. In their later work, however, they found communication, competence, courtesy, reliability, security, access, and understanding, to be strongly correlated; thus, they combined the previously mentioned aspects into two new aspects: assurance and empathy. They further concluded that service quality has five aspects: the tangible factors, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. This model is known as the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Nonetheless, service quality assessment is still a controversial issue in the sport service industry (Williams, 1998). Another research conducted on services provided by five touring companies indicates that the most important aspect of tourist satisfaction is assurance; therefore, it deserves much attention from executive directors of tourism centers (O'Neill, 2001). Yoo and Chon (2008) have listed five factors, namely destination, business and social networking opportunities, sanitary and safety conditions of the site and accessibility as the most important factors affecting individuals' decision to participate in conventions.

Considering the fact that convention attendees use normal tourism infrastructure, such as hotels, restaurants, transportation, cultural priorities, entertainment centers, along with other academic and scientific areas in accordance with their specialized subjects, and also benefited from the most modern multimedia technologies available in scientific seminars, workshops, laboratories (Molokáčová & Molokáč, 2011), the viewpoint of participants in evaluating the convention is of utmost importance. Executives can also use this information to organize conventions in such a way that participants become more eager to take part in current and future conventions (Hilliard, 2006). Considering this vital issue, the following hypotheses can be developed:

H1: There is a relationship between the sports scientific convention quality participants' view on access quality and their perception of tourism quality.

H2: There is a relationship between the sports scientific convention quality participants' view on hotel quality and their perception of tourism quality.

H3: There is a relationship between the sports scientific convention quality participants' view on the quality of the convention venue and their perception of tourism quality.

H4: There is a relationship between the sports scientific convention quality participants' view on the quality of the convention and their perception of tourism quality.

Event, convention, and conference tourism have been defined from both supply and demand perspectives (Getz, 2008). Sometimes they have been used interchangeably (Medlik, 2012), but they can be distinguished with regard to their purpose and goal. According to Medlik (2012, p. 44), conventions are "large meeting or assembly commonly so described in the USA, when referring to an association meeting held on an annual basis, whilst conference or congress is more often used elsewhere." Conventions can be categorized into different sub-sectors such as business and trade convention, sport convention, political, scientific, etc. (Getz, 2008; Medlik, 2012).

Access quality

Access quality includes access to destination and access to the convention venue. Accessibility is an important element in sport tourism (Bull, 2009), and it can be related to details such as parking, airports, freeways, and public transportation (Getz, 1997). Khadaroo and Seetanah (2008), studied the role of transportation as an important element in the development of tourism. They concluded that transportation is the most important factor in the development of international tourism and also reaffirmed that the way to get to the tourist attraction sites plays a key role in increasing tourists' level of satisfaction. It is worth mentioning that access to the convention venue also includes the ease of exit from the venue after the convention (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Therefore, with regard to this important aspect of sport scientific convention quality, the following hypotheses can be shaped:

H1a: The perception of the sports scientific convention participants of the access to destination affects their view on access quality.

H1b: The perception of the sports scientific convention participants of the access to convention venues affects their view on access quality.

Accommodation quality

The accommodation quality includes hotel environment quality, staff interaction, and hotel value. Most visitors require overnight stays during their visit. Hotels are the most important and well-known type of accommodation, and the great hospitality industry plays an important role in the production of added value and occupation for millions of people around the globe (Sharpley, 2005). Using hotels has economic effects on the tourism industry, to the extent that more than 60% of the tourist costs are spent on accommodations (Law, 1996).

Lewis (1983) asserts that the provided services and facilities are important factors for selecting an accommodation and Atkinson (1988) considers the safety and the hotel value as the most important elements when a tourist decides to choose a hotel. Ananth, DeMicco, Moreo, and Howey (1992) believe that the location of the hotel and its cleanliness are of main concern and importance. For those on business

travel the safety of personal things and the hotel value are more salient points of consideration. Taninecz (1990) asserts that hotel cleanliness, bed comforts, and the quality of the towels are highly important measures for business tourists. On the other hand, Mccleary, Weaver, and Hutchinson (1993) maintain that the hotel location is the most important factor for visitors and recreational tourists and pay more attention to the accommodation costs. Atilgan, Akinci, and Aksoy (2003) stated that there is a great difference between the tourist expectations and their perceptions. This point has already caused the managers of the tourism and accommodation sectors to face problems in fulfilling clients' needs and wants. Parasuraman et al. (1988) considered the quality of hotel services and hotel staff members' interaction, and interaction with the recreational guests is highly important. Some researchers have considered the environmental factors of a hotel as an important issue (Tarí, Claver-Cortés, Pereira-Moliner, & Molina-Azorín, 2010). The results of a research conducted by Akama and Kieti (2003) indicate that more that 70% of the visitors have been satisfied with the state of the quality of the accommodation services. Crosby (1993) maintained that if we could gain tourist satisfaction regarding the services provided in the accommodation sectors, they would certainly recommend visiting these places to their own friends and relatives and this is the most effective and cheapest way of marketing and advertisement. In this study, the hotel environment, staff members' interaction and the hotel value are sub-variables of accommodation quality. Therefore, the following hypotheses can be shaped:

H2a: The perception of the convention participants regarding the hotel environment affects their view on the accommodation quality.

H2b: The perception of the convention participants regarding the interaction of the hotel staff members affects their view on accommodation quality.

H2c: The perception of the convention participants regarding the hotel value affects their view on accommodation quality.

Venue quality

The quality of the convention venue refers to the facilities provided at the convention venue which include the quality of interior environments of the convention, staff members' interaction and the convention value (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Provision of the services always occurs with high interaction among the customers, staff, and equipment. In such situations, the physical environment works as an indication of service quality and plays an important role as a mediator for the connection with the customers for the total evaluation (Briggs, Sutherland, & Drummond, 2007). In many previous investigations, physical environment was recognized as the first and best measure for the prediction of the customer evaluation of service quality (Akbaba, 2006). The physical environment includes decoration, sounds, smells, lighting, air conditioning, and other factors pertaining to the stimulation elements (Berkman & Gilson, 1986). Actually, the physical environment is indicative of

personality of a place and has an important role as a stimulus during the process of evaluating services (Kim, 2007). Shonk and Chelladurai (2008) also discuss of venue quality and its vital role in service quality and the sport convention. With regard to this importance, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

H3a: The perception of the sports scientific convention participants regarding the interior environment of the venue affects their view on the quality of the convention venue.

H3b: The perception of the sports scientific convention participants regarding the staff interaction affects their view on the quality of the convention venue.

H3c: The perception of the sports scientific convention participants regarding the value at the venue affects their view on the quality of the convention venue.

Convention quality

Convention quality in this study includes the quality of the process and the product of the convention. Shonk and Chelladurai (2008) point to the quality of the process, specifically in sport, to the start time of the competition, the quality of arbitration, the quality of the announcement and the scoreboard. And the quality of the product is dependent on the results of a competition, whether it is a win or a loss. Tanford, Montgomery, and Nelson (2012) found that five elements of the process, such as, networking, external activities, place, value, and programs have effect on the attendance and satisfaction level. They also found that being satisfied with a program was an important element for tourist intent to return in future. In this study, the quality of the process and the convention product refer to the cases such as the presence of people with high scientific merits (scholars and researchers), the presence of officials (e.g., the Minister of sports), the contents of the convention, the quality of audio–visual equipment, the quality of the presentation screen, appropriateness of the announcements related to the convention, and also the schedule of different ceremonies. Hence, considering these factors, the following hypotheses can be suggested:

H4a: The perception of the sports scientific convention participants regarding the quality of the process affects their view on the quality of the convention.

H4b: The perception of the sports scientific convention participants regarding the convention product affects their view on the quality of the convention.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction has been conceptualized as the realization of the interests, incentives, needs, or demands and expectations (Li, 2003). The concept of customer's satisfaction is one of the main aspects of marketing studies, and has become an inevitable element in services (Ueltschy, Laroche, Tamilia, & Yannopoulos, 2004). If companies are willing to gain the customers' satisfaction, they have to evaluate that, because if they fail to evaluate something, they would fail to manage it (Fečiková, 2004). In

tourism industry, the tourist satisfaction is of great concern for destination management organizations, and in order to be able to compete in the global markets, we need to have satisfied and loyal customers. In this regard, the fundamental problem is the definition of satisfaction which has always been considered as a complicated and multi-dimensional issue (Wong & Law, 2003).

There are two significant approaches to the level of tourist satisfaction in tourism destination. In the first approach, tourism planners often consider the total satisfaction of the destinations' attractions and generally the natural and human attractions are important elements, which means that the more charming the tourist attractions are, the higher the level of the satisfaction would be (Wang, Zhang, Gu, & Zhen, 2009). In addition to the natural and human attractions of a destination, other researchers consider the level of tourist satisfaction of infrastructure and facilities such as accessibility, hotels, cafes, restaurants, etc. This group of researchers also believes that despite the existence of tourist attraction, there should be proper services and facilities suiting the dignity of tourists in order to increase the level of tourist satisfaction. According to these researchers, satisfaction is a result of the productive services and social and economic welfare provided for tourists (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Hsu, 2003; Cooper et al., 2008; Dominici & Guzzo, 2010).

Currently, one of the ways to evaluate the applicability of the available services and facilities in a tourism destination is paying attention to clients' feedback and their evaluation of such services. In general, satisfaction has been used to evaluate past experiences, present products and services, and the perception of physical environment (Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012). Baker and Crompton (2000) concluded that satisfaction increases with a better perception of performance quality. They also showed that very satisfied tourists are incredibly loyal which increases the chance of their future visits or recommendation of the destination to others. Research indicates that satisfaction is related to destination choice, product consumption, and intent to return (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Lee et al., 2012). At the end, satisfaction results from comparing customer expectation before and after consumption. Therefore, we can hypothesize that:

> H5: Service quality of sports scientific conventions is to a great degree related to tourist satisfaction.

Return tendency

Providing desirable service increases customer satisfaction and, hence, their loyalty. It also increases their tendency to recommend the destination to their friends and relatives, reduces complaints and increases customer retention percentage (Karakostas, Kardaras, & Papathanassiou, 2005). Customer relationship management expanding the relationship with the customer in the best way in order to win his or her loyalty, and that loyal customers are more profitable than disloyal one (Dowling, 2002). Research findings by Reichheld (1996) show that a 5% decline in customers' satisfaction results in the loss of 85% of the profits and that a 5% increase in customer retention causes an increase of 25% to 125% in the profits.

Retaining old customers has other advantages including: costing less than attracting new customers, identifying excellent services through assessing the reasons for customers to leave the organization, and identifying hazard-level customers, i.e., customers who may be inclined to leave the organization, with greater capacity Reichheld (1996). Due to the previously mentioned advantages, customer retention methods become more popular each day (Hunt, 2002). For most tourism operators, customer future behavior tendency is a key to the profitability of the organization and the future interaction of tourists is affected by tourism experience and in the current literature, their intent to return, recommending the site to others, and an inclination to speak positively about the destination are reflections of their future interaction and their satisfaction with and loyalty to an organization (Bowen & Schouten, 2008; Eusébio & Vieira, 2013; Lee & Hsu, 2013). A tourist's positive experience with services, products and other sources presented in the destination causes his or her intent to return and tendency to recommend the destination to friends and acquaintances (Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2010). Okamura and Fukushige (2010) studied the differences between tourist intention in their first and second experience visiting a destination. According to them, the aim of tourists is to see sights in their first visit, but in their second visit, they tend to stay in the hotel and participate in cultural conventions. In another research, Som and Badarneh (2011) investigated customer satisfaction and their return. Results indicate that there is a new relationship between the experience of visit and satisfaction and intent to return to the destination. Hence, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

> H6: There is a relationship between tourist satisfaction and the intent to return to sports scientific convention quality.

Methodology

For the purpose of this research, a quantitative research method was used. The statistical society of this research included convention attendees from different sectors such as sport tourism operators, sports convention managers, sports political figures, sport researchers, national and international sports athletes, and sports students. The convention was conducted at Ferdowsi University in Mashhad with the purpose of creating and improving Iranian sports brand. This 2-days convention was a venue for all sports industry players to discuss the current challenges and how to develop Iran's sports brand in international arena. Therefore, after making necessary arrangements with executive directors, permits were acquired in order to conduct the research and distribute questionnaires in the first sport brand convention held at the Ferdowsi University in Mashhad. Then, an ample number of questionnaires were copied, disseminated, and collected at the convention venue with the presence of the researchers in order to answer probable questions and misunderstandings regarding the content of questionnaires. There were 175 individuals that participated in this survey based on the availability sampling method. Availability sampling works by publicly soliciting volunteers to participate in the study (Sim, Clarke, & Holt, 1998).

After deleting incomplete and damaged questionnaires, 171 of them were collected and analyzed as the statistical sample. In order to collect the data, a questionnaire containing specific characteristics of sport scientific conventions was made based on previous research (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996; Petrick & Backman, 2002; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008; Jae Ko, Zhang, Cattani, & Pastore, 2011; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). In order to ascertain the questionnaire works well, a pre-test was conducted prior to undertaking the research. Pretesting an instrument is necessary because, as (Backstrom and Hursh (1963); Hunt, Sparkman, & Wilcox, 1982) have pointed out, "No amount of intellectual exercise can substitute for testing an instrument designed to communicate with ordinary people." For the purpose of this study, a small sample of 30 individuals have participated in the pre-test. The pre-test sample was selected from the convention attendees prior to inauguration of the convention at the Ferdowsi University. However, the pretest confirmed the content validity of the questionnaire. The questionnaire included various variables such as access quality, destination access quality, venue access quality, venue quality, venue staff interaction quality, convention internal environment quality, venue value quality, convention quality, convention result and output quality, accommodation quality, hotel atmosphere quality, hotel staff interaction quality, hotel value quality, sports scientific convention services quality, tourist satisfaction, and intent to return. All items were measured using the Likert scale of 5. The raw data obtained from the questionnaire were tested using descriptive statistical methods such as frequency, frequency percentage, and mean and standard deviation.

The major statistical technique used for this study is partial least squares (PLS)-structural equation modeling (SEM), and as recommend by Brown (2006) and (Chin (2010)) , a sample size of 100–200 is appropriate for this research. Moreover, Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, and Kuppelwieser (2014) believe that PLS is a good choice when the sample size is small, and as a rule of thumb, it should be equal to the larger of 10 times the largest number of formative indicators used to measure a single construct which in this study would be minimum 120 samples. This software was the optimal choice for this research because of the small scale of the sample, as well as its other advantages including the ease of output utilization, and its appropriate graphic charts and use of the least square couple method instead of covariance.

Findings

The demographic profile of respondents was 46.2% men and 53.8% women and the majority of respondents were in the range of 20- to 40-years-old (81.2%). As for their level of education, 2.6% of the participants had diploma degrees, 6.8% had associate degrees, 22.2% were Bachelors, 53.0% were Masters, and 15.4% were PhD holders. Among these participants, 56.4% of them were attending the scientific convention in Mashhad for the first time.

According to the two-step approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), the model was confirmed and assessed by conducting an evaluation model, which has some operational loads for convention factors (including: access quality, access to the
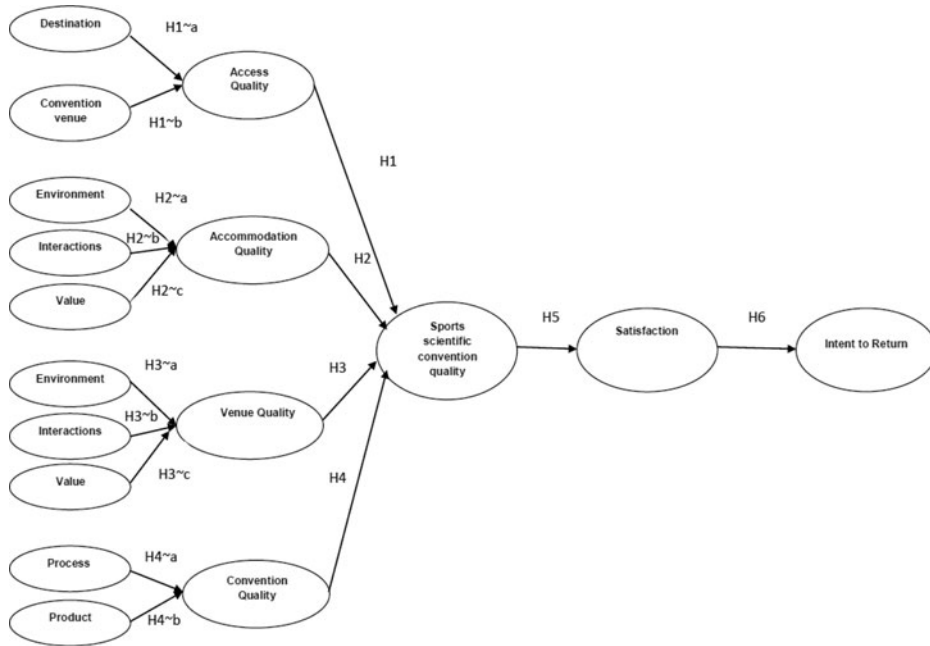
Figure 1. Research model.

destination, access to the convention venue, the quality of the convention venue, staff interaction, interior environment of the convention hall, convention value, convention quality, convention process, convention results and product, quality of accommodation, hotel environment, hotel staff interaction, hotel value, sports scientific convention quality, satisfaction, and intent to return). Figure 1 illustrate the research model which shows the relationship between these variables.

The satisfactory convergent validity in this study results from all items that had high standard operational loads for the structures beneath themselves. The operator loads were equal to or bigger that .730, with 5% of significant error (see Table 1). Table 2 illustrates the results of convergent and discriminant validity. All the extracted variance averages (AVE) for the model of structures were more than the least required amount of .50 and varied between .587 and .839 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Also, AVE of each of the structures was bigger than the square of their relationship between a pair of structures. This shows the results of convergent and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, the results indicate the reliability of measurements, because all the compound reliability results show .70 of suggested values, with a changing range between .788 and .929. Therefore, the measurement model proves the accuracy of evaluation model, which, in turn, verifies the presumed evaluation model and allows the testing of the construction relationship between the structures.

The suggested structural model perfectly fits the bases of this research. The index values of the structural model fitness are illustrated in (Table 3). The value of the explained variance (R^2) for the endogenous variables of the model varied between .363 to .740. The redundancy index was positive for all endogenous variables.

Table 1 Convergent validity of structures and questionnaire items.

Structures and Items	*Standardized operational load
Quality of Access	
The access rate for luxury services during the visit was high.	0.780
Traveling around the city was easy.	0.779
I had no problem with going to different parts of the city.	0.740
Access to destination	
I had no problem in reaching the city in which the convention was held.	0.892
Finding the ways and routes in order to reach the city in which the convention is held was easy.	0.808
Access to convention venue	
Access to the convention hall was easy for me.	0.883
The convention hall was in a proper and easy to access place.	0.779
Getting to the convention venue and entering it was a comfortable and easy process.	0.782
Venue quality	
Convention hall staff were ideal and desirable hosts.	0.726
Holding the convention at this place was the wisest choice.	0.897
Staff interaction	
It was easy to pay the participation fee for the convention.	0.756
My interaction with the convention staff was quiet pleasant.	0.855
Quality of interior environment of the convention hall	
The convention hall design was pretty suitable for this convention.	0.718
Convention hall had some special features.	0.857
Convention hall is a charming place.	0.766
venue value	
Convention participation fee was logical.	0.931
Food value at the convention venue was suitable.	0.888
Convention quality	
This convention was one of the best ones I have ever seen.	0.816
This convention was really great.	0.921
This convention is of a high scientific rank.	0.752
Convention process	
Convention public announcement and noticing was very fast and good.	0.783
The convention screen provided ease of access to the presented information.	0.813
Different events and ceremonies were scheduled for this convention.	0.730
Convention product	
Lecturers were among the best.	0.910
Presenters were evaluated on their performance.	0.757
Accommodation quality	
I have enjoyed my stay in this place.	0.900
The hotel was one the best places I have ever been to.	0.780
My hotel was in a proper place.	0.783
Hotel/Motel Environment	
It was easy for me to park my car in the hotel parking.	0.899
My accommodation was comfortable and perfect.	0.912
My accommodation plan was great.	0.898
Interaction of hotel staff members	
My interaction with the staff and internal administration was pleasant.	0.887
Food servants and staff in my hotel were great.	0.862
I enjoyed socializing with hotel receptionists.	0.916
Hotel Value	
The accommodation value of the accommodation was appropriate.	0.934
Accommodation costs were affordable for me.	0.871
Sports scientific convention quality	
This visit was the best one among sport trips I have ever had.	0.743
This visit provided me with the most tourism experience	0.828
Presented articles were important to see and hear.	0.813
Satisfaction	
Generally, I'm satisfied with my decision and participation in this convention.	0.768
I believe I have gained some insight by attending this convention	0.747
I'm quite satisfied with describing my feelings about the city of the convention.	0.907
I'm glad that I have come to this city.	0.754
Intent to return	
I'm going to participate in other sport conventions in this city.	0.921
I will undoubtedly visit this city again in future.	0.911

*All the operational loads are significant ($t > 1.96$).

Table 2. Convergent validity and discriminant validity results.

	Access to the destination	Access to the convention venue	Access quality	Convention quality	Staff manner	Interaction of hotel staff members	Intent to return	Quality of the convention interior hall	Accommodation quality	Venue quality	Value at venue	Hotel Value	Convention process	Convention product	Satisfaction	Hotel/Motel Environment	Sports scientific convention quality
Access to the destination	0.724																
Access to the convention venue	0.290	0.666															
Access quality	0.481	0.387	0.587														
Convention quality	0.026	0.060	0.044	0.692													
Staff manner	0.049	0.126	0.171	0.159	0.651												
Interaction of hotel staff members	0.122	0.142	0.221	0.103	0.168	0.789											
Intent to return	0.071	0.075	0.049	0.326	0.116	0.150	0.839										
Quality of the convention interior hall	0.073	0.277	0.117	0.157	0.084	0.126	0.023	0.612									
Accommodation quality	0.139	0.104	0.168	0.454	0.183	0.167	0.259	0.071	0.666								

Venue quality	0.192	0.131	0.416	0.099	0.123	0.278	0.177	0.019	0.190	0.726						
Value at venue	0.173	0.375	0.213	0.262	0.205	0.202	0.259	0.273	0.324	0.255	0.828					
Hotel Value	0.236	0.169	0.302	0.033	0.256	0.440	0.098	0.102	0.144	0.231	0.267	0.815				
Convention process	0.085	0.228	0.118	0.495	0.330	0.160	0.219	0.143	0.323	0.051	0.376	0.067	0.602			
Convention product	0.002	0.080	0.026	0.495	0.348	0.256	0.296	0.137	0.126	0.082	0.233	0.077	0.450	0.700		
Satisfaction	0.113	0.181	0.075	0.366	0.262	0.279	0.740	0.087	0.381	0.190	0.335	0.183	0.337	0.347	0.634	
Hotel/Motel Environment	0.228	0.164	0.393	0.407	0.072	0.212	0.080	0.073	0.184	0.689	0.205	0.185	0.083	0.114	0.087	0.815

The AVE values are mentioned on diagonal matrix.

Table 3. Index fitness values of the structural model.

	Access quality	Convention quality	Accommodation quality	Venue quality	Sports scientific convention quality	Tourists satisfaction	Intent to return
R^2	0.586	0.527	0.363	0.718	0.633	0.384	0.740
Redundancy	0.240	0.321	0.092	0.094	0.044	0.239	0.620

Consequently, the proposed structural model has an appropriate validity. Table 4, briefly illustrates the path ratio for all the hypothesized paths in this model. All the path ratios except H1, H2a, and H3c, were positive and significant. Although accommodation quality, venue quality, and conventions quality had a direct and significant effect on sports scientific convention quality, but access quality did not. This study, thus confirms and supports H2, H3, and H4. Even though this study supports H1a and H1b, the access quality has no significant impact on service quality at the sports and scientific convention. Moreover, the collected data support the hypothesized paths of H2b and H2c but did not support H2a. These results propose that hotel value (.502) and hotel staff interaction (.218) had a significant and direct impact on accommodation quality, but the hotel environment did not. Furthermore, the results illustrate that the interior environment of the convention venue (.734) and staff interaction (.142) had a direct and significant effect on

Table 4. Path coefficient for the hypothetical paths in the model.

Assumed path	Path coefficient	t-value	Results
Hypothesis no. 1: Access quality→ Sports scientific convention quality	0.388	1.075	Not Confirmed
Hypothesis no. 2: Accommodation quality →Sports scientific convention quality	0.190	2.245	Confirmed
Hypothesis no. 3: Venue quality→ Sports scientific convention quality	0.077	4.907	Confirmed
Hypothesis no. 4: Convention quality→ Sports scientific convention quality	0.383	4.639	Confirmed
Hypothesis 1~a: Access to destination→ Access quality	0.505	7.675	Confirmed
Hypothesis 1~b: Access to convention venues→ Access quality	0.350	4.236	Confirmed
Hypothesis 2~a: Hotel environment → Accommodation quality	− 0.059	0.614	Not Confirmed
Hypothesis 2~b: Interaction of hotel staff members → Accommodation quality	0.218	2.919	Confirmed
Hypothesis 2~c: Hotel value→ Accommodation quality	0.502	4.786	Confirmed
Hypothesis 3~a: Interior environment of the convention venue→Venue quality	0.734	9.186	Confirmed
Hypothesis 3~b: Staff interaction→Venue quality	0.142	1.997	Confirmed
Hypothesis 3~c: Venue value→Venue quality	0.071	0.983	Not Confirmed
Hypothesis 4~a: Convention process→ Convention quality	0.541	7.043	Confirmed
Hypothesis 4~b: Convention product →Convention quality	0.242	3.219	Confirmed
Hypothesis no. 5: Sports scientific convention quality→ Tourists satisfaction	0.620	14.334	Confirmed
Hypothesis no. 6: Tourist satisfaction → Intent to return	0.861	28.671	Confirmed

the quality of the convention venue but the value at the venue did not. Consequently, this study supports H3a and H3b but not H3c. The results also support the hypothesized paths of H4a and H4b, indicating that convention process (.541) and convention results (.242) have a positive and significant effect on convention quality.

As hypothesized, sports scientific convention quality has a positive and significant impact on the level of tourist satisfaction (.620), and the level of tourist satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on their intent to return (.861). As a result, this study supports H5 and H6.

Discussion and conclusion

As the results of this study revealed sports scientific convention participants' perception of access to destination and convention venue affects the comprehension of access quality, that is consistent with the results found by Yoo and Chon (2008). This issue also indicates that the way participants are going to reach the destination and the paths and routes are important to access quality. This result is specifically important within the context of Iran because Iranians prefer luxury services with the easiest way of reaching to the event venue. In addition, the accessibility of the convention hall and the path to the convention are important factors for access quality. This result can also be supported by this argument that Mashhad is a metropolitan city (the second most populous city in Iran after Tehran), which despite its important position and popularity, it still does not have appropriate and efficient public transportation systems compared to its western counterparts (Mashhad News, 2017). Thus, it was important to participants of this study to have an easy access to the event. However, there is no relationship between Sports scientific convention participants' point-of-view about access quality and their perception of service quality as for the first hypothesis. This is consistent with results obtained by Kim, Lee, and Kim (2012) but not consistent with those of Bull (2009) and Yoo and Chon (2008). Yoo and Chon (2008) maintained that the quality of access to the location plays an important role in people's decision to participate in the convention.

Kim et al. (2012) maintain that social interaction and training are two important factors causing participants' intent to return to the convention. Due to the fact that the city wherein the convention was held is a mega city, and that it is easily accessible (this is different from the previous discussion which considers the accessibility within Mashhad city), participants did not deem access quality to be an important factor of tourism quality. The findings of the quality variables of accommodation and the second hypothesis indicate that the convention participants' perception of the hotel environment does not affect quality of accommodation, which is not consistent with results obtained by Mccleary et al. (1993). They asserted that the location of the hotel is the most important factor for business visitors. It seems that accommodation design, access roads, parking, and ease of the accommodation are not that important to the convention participants' perception. According to the findings of the present research, affordable and suitable accommodation values and their

compatibility with the participants' expenditures in the convention as well as staff interaction during the reception, meal time, and cleaning were positive and effective factors in the participants' perception of accommodation quality.

Atkinson (1988) states that hotel value is paramount. Parasuraman et al. (1988) assert that staff interaction with the visitors is a really important issue. There is a relationship between convention participants' view regarding hotel quality and their perception of tourism quality which is consistent with the results obtained by Lewis (1983). Therefore, it can be concluded that uniqueness and enjoyableness of accommodation, as well as the suitability of hotel location to the convention are in direct relationship with total quality. The findings of the quality variables of the convention venue and the third hypothesis indicate that the perception of the sports scientific convention participants about the interior environment of the venue and the staff interaction affects their comprehension of the convention venue quality. This result implies that Iranians pay attention to fine arts and enjoy a lot in a place which is being decorated with arts and crafts, and they like to have a high level of interaction with service providers. In addition, Iranians are among those nations that have high number of internet users and use social media to get in touch with their friends and relatives. These findings are consistent with the results obtained by (Akbaba, 2006; Kim, 2007) Because the interior design of the convention hall and its facilities, e.g., rest rooms, high speed internet access, and attractiveness of the convention hall added more values to accommodation quality. In addition, staffs are among the first people who come into contact with participants, so their interaction is also important and effective in the perception of the people regarding the quality of the convention venue. It is suggested that convention organizers and executives use expert staff capable of delivering high quality service. Staff members must possess the essential skills to interact with guests in the best possible fashion, therefore, it is recommended that they undergo training courses on interactive skills.

The convention participants' perception of the venue value does not affect their intuition regarding the quality of the convention venue. There is a relationship between sports scientific convention participants' viewpoint of the quality of the convention venue and their perception of tourism quality as a whole, which is quite consistent with results observed by Shonk and Chelladurai (2008). Selection of a proper place for conducting a convention and implementing the proper standards for the reconstruction of the place, improves and guarantees higher attendance of the participants in the upcoming conventions of the convention industry (Palmer, 2011). This shows that, because the participants of the convention spend most of their time there, the quality of the convention venue plays a very important role in customer satisfaction. In the case of Persian culture, it is also true that people usually combine their business trip with leisure and bring their family as well. Hence, the quality of convention venue is important in their satisfaction. A good way of improving sport scientific convention is to organize conventions in proper and fully facilitated places. The findings resulted from the convention quality variables and the fourth hypothesis indicate that the sports scientific convention participants' perception of the quality of the process and the convention product has a direct effect

on the intuition of the quality of the convention, which is consistent with the results obtained by Severt, Wang, Chen, and Breiter (2007); Chen, Lee, Chen, and Huang (2011), and Tanford et al. (2012).

The quality of the process, which includes the presence of officials and highly educated guests, means of dispersing information and the type of screen show, affects the perception of the convention quality. This result also implies that Iranians highly regard events in which officials or highly scientific scholars deliver keynote speaks; therefore, the present of these figures increases the convention's quality and attendee's satisfaction. Convention product such as the presented papers, the analysis of the presentations, were also important to the process of assessment on the part of the participants. There is a relationship between sports scientific convention participants' perception of convention quality and their perception of tourism quality. This issue also indicates that the contents of the convention are in direct relationship with the participants' perception of tourism quality. These findings are consistent with competition quality as mentioned by Shonk and Chelladurai (2008). There is a relationship between the Sports scientific convention service quality and the level of satisfaction of the convention attendees, which are consistent with the results obtained by many predecessors (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Bigné et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2012). Having the best experience among sport trips, having an interesting experience of tourism in the city or town wherein the convention is held, valuable papers presented at the convention and seeing and hearing them are all quite important and cause the increase in the level of convention participant satisfaction, thus these findings are consistent with results obtained by other researchers (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Bigné et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2012). Generally, being satisfied with the experience, finding the convention interesting, and finding pleasure in visiting the city in which the convention is held increase the level of satisfaction and as a result intent to return of the participants of the scientific convention. It is safe to assume that the convention organizers should focus on the quality of the services and different aspects of it, they can encourage participants to return to the destination. Moreover, convention attendees' satisfaction causes them to talk to others about their own positive and pleasant experiences. That is why tourists must be provided with the best services and make them happy with their decision. Due to the fact that most convention organizers have limited budgets at their disposal, they cannot allocate an equal amount of money to all aspects. They must, therefore, evaluate the aspects and focus their attention and monetary sources on the most important ones (Kim et al., 2012). Finally, as this study suggests, sports scientific convention attendees in Iran are specifically concerned about convention's process quality such the scientific level of key speakers and the quality of presented knowledge which is the key factor of satisfaction, and encourages the intention to return. Therefore, convention organizers must pay attention to this issue in their planning, and organize scientific conventions which are cost-effective and ensure their scientific quality.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The first limitation worth mentioning is that the information was collected from participants in a national convention, for example, the results are demonstrative and not generalizable. Future research and investigations should be conducted on bigger samples including tourists attending international conventions or a combination of several conventions to achieve more reliable and generalizable results. In addition, cultural elements were ignored in this study and the discrepancies among cultures might affect consumers' experience with services. It is, therefore, highly recommended to include different cultural dimensions and perspectives in future service quality models.

Similarities and differences of service quality among tourists in different scientific fields is an issue that has to be analyzed and scrutinized in future investigations; achieving this aim requires the use of service quality models for tourists from different scientific fields, hence evaluating service quality can be demonstrated in a specific framework related to the essence of that scientific field of study and tourist expectations. The three structures used in this model are, as mentioned before, conductors' service quality, and participants' level of satisfaction, and intent to return. Other factors that affect service quality and are not taken into account in the present study include participants' satisfaction and intent to return. It is recommended to further investigate issues such as the image convention makes and its value as perceived by the participants in future studies.

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