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Customer Delight in Futsal of Pokhara Valley: A Narrative Study From the Customer Perspective

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ABSTRACT

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Futsal is a popular sport in Nepal and futsal centers play an important role in providing opportunities for people to play and enjoy the game. This study explored the factors that contribute to customer delight in futsal centers in Pokhara. A narrative analysis of the stories of futsal participants identified three distinct themes: physical environment, social interaction and surprise and joy. The participants emphasized the importance

of a safe and comfortable physical environment, as well as the opportunity to socialize with friends and meet new people. They were also surprised by some of the positive benefits of playing futsal, such as weight loss and improved sleep quality. Finally, they experienced joy from a variety of things, such as winning games, spending time with friends, and being recognized by others. The findings of this study suggest that futsal centers should focus on providing a safe and comfortable physical environment, fostering social interaction, and surprising and delighting customers with unexpected benefits. By doing so, futsal centers can attract and retain customers, build loyalty, and generate positive word-of-mouth.

Keywords: Customer delight, futsal, social interaction, surprise and joy

INTRODUCTION

Sport is a physical activity that everyone can do, including children and the elderly (Suryadi et al., 2021). By exercising, physical and spiritual health will be maintained (Suryadi et.al, 2022). A study conducted by Hughes et al. (2020) thought to play a significant role in

one's physical, psychological, and emotional well. Exercise has several advantages, including enhancing health and lowering disease risk (Meo et al., 2021). In addition, physical fitness offers significant advantages because it is intimately linked to daily activities (Suryadi et.al, 2022b). Therefore, it is important to maintain physical fitness to carry out activities properly. Lack of physical activity causes decreased physical fitness (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Futsal, also known as five-a-side indoor soccer, is a team-sport officially authorized by FIFA and is becoming increasingly popular all over the world. It is characterized as a high-intensity intermittent sport that imposes high physical, technical, tactical, and psychological demands on players (Barbero et al., 2008). The game is played five-a-side (i.e., four on-court players and one goalkeeper), in a 40×20 m court, with a 3×2 m goal post and an unlimited number of substitutions. The maximum number of players in a squad for a match is 14 (a maximum of 9 substitutes per team). A futsal match consists of two halves of 20 min separated by a 10 min break. Given that the game-clock is stopped for some events (i.e., ball out of the court, faults, corners), a competitive match may last between 75 and 90 min. (FIFA, 2007).

Another difference between futsal and football is the size and weight of the balls, with futsal being slightly smaller (size 4) and heavier. During match-play, teams can request one timeout (1 min) in each half. Futsal is a global sport in its own right and differs to football greatly in terms of the rules of the game and tactical actions. There is however a lack of research which explores any link between them, which is surprising given that futsal is used in some countries as a football development tool, to develop young footballers' technical and tactical behaviors (Moore et al., 2014).

Historically, futsal was first devised by a professor Juan Carlos Ceriani. By learning and modifying the regulations and strategies of the trending mainstream sports like football and cricket; he was able to create a new sport called futsal in 1930. The Kumari Futsal is the first in Nepal that introduced by Nawang Nima Lama; who started futsal business at Thamel in 2011 and from 2015 it is gaining popularity in Nepal. He got this idea from his Thailand visit in 2009. "When I visited Thailand, I saw people playing the sport at home. I later came to know about this sport and introduced it here," he said (myrepublica/sports). Having seen it flourishing as a business in Thailand and Singapore; then Lama decided to introduce new composition of sport in Nepal (Kafle, 2018). Futsal is becoming an appropriate choice and alternative means of entertainment for the urban people of Nepal. Since its introduction in Nepal in 2011, the sport has taken a step forward. The craziness for Futsal has been increasing

in the country recently, with people of all ages, children, youth, and the elderly, becoming attracted to sport. (Shrestha, 2021).

Pokhara (28°13' N, 83°59' E, 870 m a.s.l.), the second largest city in Nepal (population circa 265 000 in 2015), lies in an intermontane basin located in the midland hills of the Lesser Himalayas and is characterized by a seasonally contrasting monsoon climate. It is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Nepal because of its natural beauty, with magnificent views of glaciated peaks, including the prominent Machhapuchhre Peak (Nepalese for “Fishtail Peak”) standing close by, only 28 km north of the city. As well as being a central node at the crossing of N–S and E–W trade routes and an important administrative center, Pokhara offers a wide variety of tourist attractions (lakes, caves, gorges, temples) related to its geomorphological evolution and occupation history (Fort et.al, 2018). Since it is indoor game and have light facilities, it can be played at any time and at any weather. The first futsal in Pokhara commercially started from 2010 and till now there are more than 30 futsals.

Customer delight was originally conceptualized as a combination of joy and surprise (Oliver et al. 1997). One of the earliest discussions in the delight literature centered on how the construct should be defined. Two major viewpoints emerged from this debate: first, customer delight as an extreme form of satisfaction.

As described by Sewell (2002) there are three purpose of Customer Delight; make customers loyal, have customers that are more profitable and have clients talk positively. Also, finding new customers costs 4 to 9 times more time and money than reselling to an existing client. It is thus commercially intelligent to retain as many clients as possible.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Customer Delight is relatively less studied in the context of Nepal. Although, there exists various studies related to Customer Satisfaction, Customer Delight lacks deep research and understanding. The lack of study in sports, especially in futsal, is one of the reason which motivated the researcher to choose this topic as the discussions on sports is only limited to the newspapers and magazines that are circulated around the country.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research aims to investigate how customers perceive and experience customer delight through the offerings of the futsal center located in Pokhara.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Delight

For academic researchers as well as marketing researchers, Customer Delight has been always a popular subject as the success of the marketers completely depends upon the satisfaction, yet to be delighted, with the offerings of their institution. Various factors like intangible assets and individual differences via perception pose as a challenge in the service industry to achieve Customer Delight and thus retain them. Apart from the retaining, it is also a strategic movement that helps in gaining the competitive advantage for the survival and growth. Similarly, for the purpose of choice of destination, the consumption of its product and services and the decision to return Customer Delight is one of the influential factor (Kozak et.al, 2000).

Several general conclusions can be made at this point: first, customer delight and customer satisfaction are two distinct and meaningful constructs; second, to date, research is clear regarding the benefits of customer delight for the firm; third, although there is wide variety of antecedents that can cause customer delight, the interaction between the employee and customer has garnered the most interest. (Barnes & Krallman, 2019)

Employee expertise, Service scape, social congruence and atmosphere are also the variety of antecedent variables, through which firms can create delight. In creating delight, neither the expectation for a win nor importance of winning significantly alter the relationships of these antecedents. (Barnes et al., 2016)

It is very necessary to evaluate the perception of customers about what made them delighted apart from the acknowledgement of the importance of Customer delight to the firm. Cognitive and Affective are the two main routes through which customer delight is created. Although, the former path is the most followed route to achieve Customer Satisfaction and Customer Delight both (Barnes et.al, 2011), the significance of affective routes to delight are one of the important aspects to consider.

Futsal

(Madrigal, 2000) has conducted a study where 400 male participants were asked to identify the factors that influence the selection criteria of football field through social media applications (Facebook, Line and Instagram). The results indicated that customer behavior and marketing techniques through 4Ps, brand and field quality were the most influential factors. Also, preference of customers to play on synthetic fields rather than natural fields, most

frequently visited time by players was at night, followed by the evening and least frequently in the morning. The study also demonstrated that brand knowledge, brand relevance and known brand are the most important factors in the selection criteria. Apart from the above mentioned factors, membership discounts, ventilation at the field, free Internet or Wifi, parking spaces, good services by employees, covered space (applicable to all weathers) are the significant factors to choose the football field in Thailand.

As futsal is an indoor version of football, after its introduction to Nepal, it is popular among students, employees and other enthusiasts. Not only for the entertainment purposes, there are various tournaments frequently held in Kathmandu among corporate houses, school/colleges, banks and similar institutions. Futsal prices vary according to time, location and amenities. The rates on weekends is priced relatively high than on weekdays. Even individuals who are not considered athletes have the opportunity to participate in tournaments like the Ncell Corporate Beach Cricket and Red Bull Futsal League. These events showcase the success of organizing sports competitions for a wider audience. (Kafle, 2018b)

Futsal, known as “mini-football,” is a variation of association football played on a smaller, hard court indoors. It involves high-intensity gameplay with quick sprints, direction changes, and short periods of rest over an extended duration. Futsal is played with five players on each team, including a goalkeeper, on an artificial turf. The game takes place on a 40 x 20 m indoor court, with substitutions allowed without limitations. Unlike some other indoor football variations, Futsal is played on a hard court surface with lines, rather than walls or boards. Each game consists of two halves lasting 20 minutes each, with a 20-minute break in between, and the clock stops when the ball is out of play (Shrestha, 2021b).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is conducted on epistemology position where interpretation depends on the perception of respondents as it results in multiple perspectives of an incident that contributes to the understanding of facts and providing explanations. The narrative investigation has the flexibility to involve either one participant, like in a biographical study or autoethnography, or multiple individuals who have shared experiences (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

The study was conducted within Pokhara Valley where purposive sampling was chosen. Three different customer on the basis of their playing preference i.e. one regular customer (playing 6 days a week), one occasional customer (playing 3 days a week) and one random customer (playing 1 day a week) were chosen from same futsal centre which helps to define

that they have enough information about the place they play. This set of participants were chosen because of their shared experience of being in the futsal related activities.

Data were collected by visiting the respondents face to face, also observing their behaviors in the Futsal centre. The in-depth interview was conducted where answers of the respondents were recorded and, many of the times, maintained in the note. When interview was conducted there was 1 hours' time duration which was taken in average for all the interviewee.

The data from the observation were analyzed qualitatively by maintaining code and on the basis of coding it was categorized and themes were developed. The analysis showed that physical environment, social interactions and surprise and joy are the major factors for customer delight in the context of futsal activities of Nepal.

Data was taken in prior agreement and consent from the respondent was maintained. The purpose of employing this approach was to ensure consistency and confirm the findings across various sources of data which strengthens the overall reliability of the study. The researcher has always tried to maintain the ethical consideration related with the participants by ensuring their wellbeing, respecting their confidentiality and protecting their identity via taking consent, nurturing trust and using pseudonyms respectively.

RESULTS

By performing narrative analysis, which involves observing patterns, highlighting key elements, creating themes from these elements, coding thematic ideas, and conducting a case-by-case comparison, the following three distinct themes were identified in the stories of all participants:

Physical Environment

Beauty always attracts. As long as the futsal venue looks attractive, people would love to visit and play. It refers to physical surrounding, brand image, attractiveness of the whole place, etc.

HAREY says:

"[...]I am actually delighted with the physical environment of the futsal centre. Every aspects like parking, space of the ground, use of the materials on and off the ground are of good quality. Talking about the field I am actually satisfied [laughs...] yes, delighted with the thickness of the carpet used in the field. Since, I love playing as a goalkeeper I need to slide

and dive frequently and luckily, I have not got any scratches yet [pulls up his sleeve and shows by pointing and laughs]”

KRISHNA says:

“[...]I feel very safe about the physical environment here. Apart from the amenities like restrooms, lockers, changing room and parking, the best part of this futsal is the carpet and the roofing. Talking about the carpet, they have not only used the qualitative one but also between the carpet and cemented surface it has been filled with muds, sands and rubber particles which helps in safe landing of the player even in an intimate pace. About the roofing, the materials of the roof, in my view, might be of good quality as the temperature of the futsal feels moderate. You might laugh, as there are some futsals where we sweat more from the temperature than from playing [laughs, both laugh]”.

PRABHUG adds:

“[...]Talking about the physical environment, the best part of this futsal is that it is really spacious. I have a bad experience of being injured at futsal often, but this futsal has proved to be the best in this aspect, at least for me. Also, the next good part of this futsal is that it has been open from three direction which allows light and air to pass freely. I think the owner has a good sense of VAASTU (science of architecture) due to which this futsal is successful too.”
The impact of physical environment is deeply shared by the participants and one of the best factor regarding the choice of futsal. They believe that it is the prime factor through which the venue of futsal is choose by the players.

Social Interaction

Since, futsal is a team game enjoyed between 10 and above individuals there exists social interaction between the team members, owners and societal members. The more the interaction is, the better will be the team.

HAREY adds:

“[...]Although, futsal is only the motive, it is actually the interaction between-close friends and some of the times new friends-us which we really want. The 1 hour that we spend on the field and another 15-20 minutes off the field is also one of the main reason behind my delight. Some clever moves inside the field, some easy misses, some teasing while some praising are those factors under social interaction which I, personally, feel very attached to and feel motivated to arrive on time at the futsal field.”

KRISHNA adds:

“[...]Yes, I do have many friends because of futsal. Not only we meet to play here, we

also watch professional football game together. Some of the times, we play matches and the team which loses the game has to sponsor the winner team for dinner and drinks. So, because of futsal our interaction has increased not only physically but also virtually. Sometimes, there are tournament organized in the same futsal field, where I get to see many of my personal as well as professional friends, with whom we were contactless for decades or so. I am delighted as I get to meet and interact with the friends and even play.”

PRABHUG adds:

“[...]Since futsal requires around 12 players both the side, 10 inside the field and 1 each for the substitution, the atmosphere while playing is indescribable. People call by their nicknames, some of them boo [tease] while some of them woo [praise] while playing which makes the game even more interesting. Also, some of the times, we get to meet our older friends at futsal too. As of my experience, I met my kindergarten friend at futsal as they were about to play after our booked time and at the meantime we shared conversation after a very long period of time. So, there is a high level of social interaction found in futsal fields which I am very much delighted of.”

The participants of the study highlighted the importance of social interaction as well as the factors associated with it towards the achievement of customer delight.

Surprise and Joy

Surprise occurs when customers encounter something unexpected (Kim & Matilla, 2013). Similarly, if surprise exceeds the expectation of customers, it automatically creates a joyful environment, which helps to create delight among customers.

HAREY tells:

“[...]Actually, I have encountered both surprise and joy. Talking about surprising factor, my sleep cycle has been increased along with the increase in deep sleep time. I want to give credit to the futsal by which my sleep cycle has been positively changed. And talking about joy, apart from game and friends, we feel overjoyed when the management allows us some more spare time apart from our regular 1 hour period. Although the added time is hardly more than 3-5 minutes, the joy within us cannot be measured in the meantime.[laughs]”

KRISHNA adds:

“[...]Surprisingly, my weight has been reduced after playing futsal here. Although we play twice or thrice a week, my weight has been reduced by 5 kilos within a month. My physical posture have also been maintained and obviously my diet has also been reduced. That created joy inside me. And, the joyous factor behind the futsal is that people tend to recognize

me from futsal when we meet outside in the professional world. It is because of the social interaction also since, there is a tendency to accept invitation from other teams to play if their team members are absent or about to come.”

PRABHUG adds:

“[...]Obviously there are some surprising factors which makes us delighted. As, I am a desk officer and rarely an athletic guy. However, when arriving on futsal my sweat, agility and running have subsequently been improved. I am surprised that futsal is somehow similar to swimming where many of the organs are in movement at the same time. One of the joyous moment for me and our team was at that time when the futsal management offered us a specific football to mark our 1st anniversary at the futsal field. Similarly, discounts, time adding and complementary mineral water bottle do provides me joyful factor too.”

Although presented at last, there is a higher impact of surprise and joy towards customer delight as they are found to be the most prominent factor towards exceeding expectation of the customer.

DISCUSSION

The narrative analysis of the stories of futsal participants identified three distinct themes: physical environment, social interaction and surprise and joy.

Physical environment: The participants emphasized the importance of a safe and comfortable physical environment. They appreciated the quality of the turf, the lighting and ventilation, and the overall cleanliness of the futsal center. The participants expressed high satisfaction with the physical environment of the futsal center. They mentioned the quality of amenities such as parking, restrooms, lockers, and changing rooms. The thickness of the carpet used on the field was particularly appreciated by the participants, especially for goalkeepers who frequently need to slide and dive. The spaciousness of the futsal center and the open design that allows for ample light and air circulation were also mentioned as positive aspects. Overall, the physical environment was considered a prime factor in choosing a futsal venue.

Social interaction: The participants highlighted the importance of social interaction in their enjoyment of futsal. They enjoyed the companionship with their teammates and the opportunity to meet new people. Some of the participants had even made close friends through futsal. They mentioned how playing futsal with friends, both old and new, created a sense of attachment and motivation. The interaction extended beyond the field, with activities such as watching professional football games together and organizing friendly matches with dinner

and drinks as rewards for the winning team. The participants also noted how futsal provided opportunities to reconnect with old friends and meet new people. The high level of social interaction in futsal fields was seen as a significant factor in their delight.

Surprise and Joy: The participants were surprised by some of the positive benefits of playing futsal. For example, some of them had lost weight or improved their sleep quality. Others were surprised at how much they enjoyed the game, even though they were not particularly athletic. The participants experienced joy from a variety of things, such as winning games, spending time with friends, and being recognized by others. They also appreciated the small gestures from the futsal management, such as offering discounts or complimentary drinks. These surprising factors exceeded their expectations and created a joyful environment. Additionally, the participants found joy in the extra spare time allotted by the management, even if it was just a few minutes. The recognition they received outside the futsal field due to their involvement in the sport also brought them joy. Overall, the combination of surprise and joy contributed to their overall delight in playing futsal.

CONCLUSIONS

The narrative analysis provides valuable insights into the factors that contribute to customer delight in futsal centers. The three themes identified in the study suggest that futsal centers should focus on providing a safe and comfortable physical environment, fostering social interaction, and surprising and delighting customers with unexpected benefits.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on customer delight. Previous studies have shown that customers are more likely to be delighted when they experience something unexpected, when they feel valued and appreciated, and when they have a positive social experience. Futsal centers can implement a variety of strategies to create a customer-delighting experience. For example, they can: invest in high-quality facilities and equipment, offer a variety of programs and activities to meet the needs of different customer segments, create a welcoming and inclusive environment, train staff to be friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable, Offer surprise and delight moments, such as discounts, freebies, or special events.

Understanding these key themes can help futsal centers and similar recreational facilities enhance the overall satisfaction of their customers and foster a sense of community among players. By focusing on the factors that contribute to customer delight, futsal centers can attract and retain customers, build loyalty, and generate positive word-of-mouth.

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RECOMMENDATION

As, there were various limitations of the study that it was concentrated on one futsal venue only, the participants of the study were chosen conveniently, the researcher tried to find out the delight factors only, the number of participants were one on each category (regular, occasional and random) and the narrative research lasted for the average of 30 minutes for each participant which generated relatively little amount of information. Therefore, the future researchers might increase the scope of research by incorporating additional futsal centres, participants, increasing relative amount of time for narration and adding the category of choosing participants. By doing so, other negative factors that might harm the customer delight could be explored as well.

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