

# Service Quality within Officially Licensed University Retail Outlets

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## Abstract

*The collegiate licensing market is large and becoming increasingly competitive, particularly for officially licensed university retail outlets. In such competitive environments, retailers should have a strong customer orientation and provide exceptional customer service to foster loyalty. Based on responses from patrons of an official university retail outlet (n=249), this study found that dimensions of service quality (technical, environmental, and functional) impact customers' satisfaction and subsequent loyalty. Further, this study found that when consumers identify with a team (i.e., team identification and identification through apparel), higher levels of service quality are perceived. Based on results, retailers can distinguish their retail outlet and enhance customer retention by providing exceptional service quality. It is also important to reinforce customers' sense of belonging to a particular team-affiliated group and market the retail outlet as the "official" outlet for team merchandise.*

## Introduction

The collegiate licensing market is large and increasingly competitive for retailers offering officially licensed university sport merchandise. The sales in this category reached a staggering \$27.63 billion in 2015 and is estimated to reach \$48.17 billion by 2024 (Transparency Market Research, 2016). These sales are largely driven by the popularity of college sports (Transparency Market Research, 2016). A greater numbers of retailers (e.g., department stores, online retailers, and local boutiques) have increased their offering of officially licensed university sport merchandise in their stores to capitalize on the lucrative opportunities and growing market (Evans, 2015). Since consumers have many options to purchase their officially licensed university sport merchandise from several different types of retailers, this has fostered a competitive environment among retailers which sell licensed sport merchandise.

In such competitive environments, researchers argue that retail stores must have strong customer orientation and focus on fostering consumer loyalty (Kotler, 1997; Sacheva & Goel, 2015; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). Today's customers are looking for a reason to visit and revisit retail outlets, and they are seeking experiences as an integral part of shopping (Danzinger, 2006; Sacheva & Goel, 2015). The retail outlet no longer exists to simply present and move merchandise. Instead, retail stores may look to incorporate service quality to lure customers back into their retail store (Sacheva & Goel, 2015) and deter customers from purchasing from a competitor (either online or from another retailer). That is, to remain competitive, retail stores should seek to enhance their level of service quality because service quality can be a tool to elevate customer satisfaction (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000), loyalty (Wong & Sohal, 2003) and enhance direct spending (Case et al., 2018).

Satisfaction and loyalty are key variables to understand as an increasing amount of department stores and specialty stores carry officially licensed university sport merchandise. Creating and

maintaining satisfaction and loyalty assists businesses in developing long term and mutually beneficial relationships with their customers and is likely to impact the economic well-being of the retailer (Pan, Sheng, Xie, 2012; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). In this way, officially licensed university retail outlets may use service quality as a mechanism to enhance their competitiveness within the marketplace, and thus enhance their market performance.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the link between service quality dimensions (functional, environmental, and technical) with satisfaction, and subsequently loyalty, as measured by re-purchase intentions, within officially licensed university retail outlets. Additionally, since consumption and display of officially licensed merchandise indicates one's support for a particular team (Heere et al. 2011; Kwon & Kwak, 2014), it is important to consider the impact of team identification and team identification through apparel. Therefore, to further understand loyalty behaviors towards officially licensed university retail outlets, this study also investigates the influences of team identification and team identification through apparel on service quality perceptions. This study specifically collected data from patrons of a retail outlet at a southeastern conference university within the United States because sales of officially licensed university sport merchandise are particularly high for this conference (Rovell, 2013). The Southeastern Conference consists of 14 universities in the United States and is one of 31 conferences that comprise Division I, the highest level of competition in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Among collegiate athletic associations, the NCAA is the largest national governing body of collegiate athletics within the United States. Royalty revenue is reported by NCAA members in combination with advertising and sponsorship revenue. The median revenue for NCAA Division I – Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Autonomy members is \$8.2 million which equates to 8.6% of generated revenue. The 14 members of the Southeastern Conference are classified as NCAA Division I – FBS Autonomy (Fulks, 2017). This research will assist to enhance the understanding of the competitive nature of officially licensed university retail outlets, which are an integral component of universities in the United States.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### ***Service Quality***

The quality of services offered at a retail store is a well-established strategic variable that widely impacts consumers' store assessment (Finn & Lamb, 1991; Grönroos, 1984; Martinelli & Balboni, 2012; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; 1988; Siu & Cheung, 2001; Orel & Kara, 2014). Seminal research on service quality describes it as consumers' overall perception or judgement of the firms' delivered quality, that is, the firms' overall excellence (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Zeithaml, 1988). When purchasing officially licensed merchandise, clear tangible evidence (e.g., style, color, and packaging) exists for consumers to evaluate the quality of products. However, in the assessment of service quality within university retail outlets, there lacks tangible evidence. In this case, an assessment of service quality becomes complex; consumers have to rely on other cues to form evaluations (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Therefore, an assessment of service quality within officially licensed university retail outlets is warranted. While the quality of service has been measured in diverse settings, such as internet service providers (Thaichon & Quach, 2015), mobile communication (Zhang, Li, & Zhang, 2012), fitness clubs (Oh, Lee, & Kim, 212), hospitals (Babakus, & Mangold, 1992), and sports and leisure centers or events (Case et al., 2018; Chelladurai, & Chang, 2000; Kelley & Turley, 2001; Koo, Andrew, & Kim, 2008; Koo, Hardin, & Dittmore, 2015; Murray & Howat, 2002; Shapiro, 2010), it has had surprisingly limited application in the retail store context (Gaur & Agrawal, 2006), particularly within specialty stores.

It is especially important to assess service quality within particular types of retail stores because the in-store experience can be significantly different when compared to other retail experiences (Gaur & Agrawal, 2006). How consumers navigate through the store's layout and design, and how they interact with sales associates and product assortments, will impact consumers' perception of the store's service quality (Gaur & Agrawal, 2006). Establishment of service quality in-store is vital to the store's survival. That is, consumers' perception of the level of a store's service quality influences their attitudes and store behavior (Orel & Kara, 2013; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). Specifically, researchers found that a high level of service quality in a retail setting is a precursor to developing consumers' favorable attitudes towards a store, intentions to purchase products in store, satisfaction with the store and store loyalty (Caruana, 2002; Lee & Lin, 2005; Orel & Kara, 2014; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000).

In other words, if retailers lack a high level of service quality, retail outcomes become unfavorable, risking continuity of operations. This is true regardless of the shopping channel (Lee & Lin, 2005). Understanding service quality within official university retail outlets is particularly important given the large and increasing sales generated by licensed sport merchandise as part of the university's revenue stream. Taken together, due to the unique retail-related experiences of various retail settings and the importance of service quality to store operations, this study investigates the quality of service in a particular type of retail store (i.e., official university retail outlet). Thus, contributing to a holistic understanding of the impact of retail service quality on consumer behavior.

According to abundant literature on service quality, the construct can be examined based on three dimensions: (i) functional service quality (i.e., quality of interaction between service personnel and customers), (ii) environmental service quality (i.e., quality of physical facility), and (iii) technical service quality (i.e., quality of service outputs and products) (Brady & Cronin, 2011; Kang & James, 2004; Koo et al., 2008; 2015; Rust & Oliver, 1994). The functional aspects of service quality of officially licensed university retail outlets involve helpful and knowledgeable interactions with store employees on the retail floor. The quality of customers' interactions with store employees are a critical aspect of establishing retail service quality and customer satisfaction (Dabhoklar, Thorpe, & Rentz, 1996; Hurley & Estelami, 2007; Wong & Sohal, 2002; 2003). Employee-customer interactions are vital to establishing service quality and satisfaction because frontline employees are customer-facing and perform the main business activities within service organizations (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001).

An additional critical aspect of service quality are the store's environmental aspects (Bitner, 1990; 1992; Dabhoklar et al., 1996; Danziger, 2006). The officially licensed university retail store's environmental aspects include merchandise displays, as well as store layout and design aspects (e.g., lighting). These environmental aspects serve as important components when establishing consumers' store perceptions, evaluations, and level of service quality (Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994; Dabhoklar et al., 1996; Hummel & Savitt, 1988; Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, & Roggeveen, 2014), and can further impact retail store performance (Kumar & Karande, 2000). That is, customers like to feel, touch, hear, and experience the retail store atmosphere (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015) and these shopping environments can impact in-store experiences (Andreu, Bigné, Chumpitaz, & Swaen, 2006; Babin, Hardesty, & Suter, 2003; Bäckström & Johansson, 2017; Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002) and perceptions of service quality (Baker et al., 1994).

Further, the technical quality, the service outputs and delivered products, is a critical component when establishing service quality (Dabhoklar et al., 1996; Danziger, 2006; Demirci Orel & Kara,

2014; Koo et al., 2015; Rust & Oliver, 1994) and can have an impact on the level of customer satisfaction (Tom & Lucey, 1995; Van Riel, Semeijn, Ribbink, & Bomert-Peters, 2012). When an officially licensed university retail outlet is able to provide customers with ease when finding and checking out quality merchandise, it is likely to relieve consumer stress so that the shopping experience is more enjoyable. This may be true because perceived wait during the checkout process has a direct impact on consumers' responses and store evaluation (Grewal, Baker, Levy, & Voss, 2003; Van Riel et al., 2012).

Based on previous literature (Akbar & Parvez, 2009; Brady & Robertson, 2001; Demirci Orel & Kara, 2014; Rust & Oliver, 1994; Sureschander, Rajendran, & Anantharaman, 2002), it is likely that the level of service quality at an officially licensed university retail outlet can impact customer's level of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction), a cognitive or affective post-consumption response. However, research in the retail sector has primarily focused on overall service quality in which satisfaction is based (e.g., Dabholkar et al., 1996; Savadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000), rather than the impact of service quality dimensions. All dimensions of service quality reflect customers' experiences at the officially licensed university retail outlet, and are likely to influence their level of satisfaction. Research has established that satisfaction is based on the level of perceived quality (Dick & Basu, 1994; Demirci Orel & Kara, 2014; Rust & Oliver, 1994). That is, when consumers have favorable functional, environmental, and technical service quality levels within officially licensed university retail outlets, it is likely to impact their overall satisfaction with the store. Based on this rationale, H1 proposes:

H1a: Functional service quality will have a positive impact on store satisfaction in officially licensed university retail outlets.

H1b: Environmental service quality will have a positive impact on store satisfaction in officially licensed university retail outlets.

H1c: Technical service quality will have a positive impact on store satisfaction in officially licensed university retail outlets.

### ***Satisfaction and Loyalty***

Research (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996) has found that a customer's relationship with a particular company can be strengthened when they have a positive experience or assessment of the quality of services offered. Satisfaction consists of a summary of both cognitive and affective reactions to service incidents, or service long-term relationships. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction is formed based on the level of quality of service experiences compared to their expectations (Oliver, 1980; Rust & Oliver, 1994). As a result, satisfaction can be established based on a single service encounter or a series of service encounters (Oliver, 1994; Rust & Oliver, 1994; Srivastava & Kaul, 2014). Satisfaction is also described as consumers' level of fulfillment according to consumption goals (Oliver, 2006) or judgement that the product or service provided a pleasurable level of fulfillment related to consumption (Oliver, 1997).

Establishing satisfaction in officially licensed university retail outlets are important because according to previous literature, satisfied customers are more likely to spread positive word-of-mouth and exhibit repurchasing behaviors (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Reynolds & Arnold, 2000; Zeithaml et al., 1996). That is, satisfaction and loyalty are often recognized as strongly related (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Demirci Orel & Kara, 2014; Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Taylor & Baker, 1994) and there is often a direct relationship from satisfaction to loyalty (Stauss & Neuhaus, 1997). Researchers also emphasize the importance

of establishing service quality within particular retail outlets because it indirectly influences loyalty behaviors by helping customers determine their level of satisfaction, which directly influences their loyalty (Demirci Orel & Kara, 2014; Murray & Howat, 2002).

Previous literature has yet to investigate the link between satisfaction and loyalty within the context of officially licensed university retail outlets. This research gap is surprising given that research within the retail sector suggests there is a direct relationship between consumers' service quality attitudes and their repatronage intentions (Freymann, Jeffrey, & Cuff, 2010). Therefore, it is likely that customers that are satisfied with the functional, environmental, and technical service quality aspects of an officially licensed university retail outlet will be more likely to exhibit loyalty behaviors towards the retail store.

Understanding customer loyalty behaviors within officially licensed university retail outlets is particularly important because previous literature suggested that loyalty effectively captures success of an organization (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016; Song, 2015). Loyalty, a deeply held commitment to a product or service which results in repetitive consumption of the same products or services (Oliver, 1999), is vital for successful business practices because it positively impacts company performance (Aaker, 1996; Dick & Basu, 1994). Thus, identifying factors that impact customer loyalty is critical among marketing scholars as well as practitioners (Zeithaml, 2000). Based on this, H2 proposes:

H2: Store satisfaction will have a positive impact on store loyalty in officially licensed university retail outlets.

### **Team Identification**

It is possible that a sports team can become part of a consumer's identity (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). A consumer's self-concept is composed of a personal identity related to specific interests and abilities, and a social identity related to group memberships (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A consumer who becomes a member of a group feels a sense of "oneness with or belongingness to the organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). Consumers thus integrate their group memberships into their self-concepts (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994); this identification dictates how they view themselves, how they think and feel, and how they should behave (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Identification with a social category is a strong predictor of consumer behavior.

Consumers become more attached to a particular team when they identify with it (Mitrano, 1999), leading to greater allegiance despite wins or losses (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). As a result, highly identified consumers attend more games and are willing to spend more money on tickets (Wann & Branscombe, 1990) and on officially licensed team merchandise (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; 2006). The concept of identity may also influence consumers' purchasing behaviors within officially licensed university retail outlets in that they want to purchase from the "official" retailer of their favorite team. This sense of team identification is likely to impact the perceived service quality of an officially licensed university retail outlets because patrons shop in a retail outlet in which they highly identify with the environment and the product. Thus, based on this rationale, it is likely that consumers who feel a strong sense of identification with a sports team will have a positive service quality experience. Therefore,

H3: Team identification has a positive impact on consumers' service quality perceptions in officially licensed university retail outlets.

### ***Team Identification Through Apparel***

Consumption of officially licensed university sport merchandise, particularly apparel products, is a notable aspect of establishing team identity because purchasing and displaying such products crafts their social identity (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). Drawing from research on the social psychology of dress (e.g., Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014), it is well established that one's apparel choices affect one's behavior and the behavior of others towards oneself (Johnson & Lennon, 2014). Apparel choices (e.g., team apparel choices) are related to impression formation and behavior and are used to communicate a desired aspect of one's identity (Johnson, Yoo, Kim, & Lennon, 2008; Lennon & Davis, 1989).

Additionally, apparel choices allow fans to communicate their group members (e.g., fan of a particular team) to others (Heere et al., 2001; Kwon & Kwak, 2014). In essence, purchasing and wearing officially licensed university sport apparel merchandise shows one's loyalty and allegiance towards a specific team, thus, establishing in-group membership with others who are affiliated with the team (Papadimitirou & Apostolopoulou, 2015). Hence, purchasing team-related apparel contributes greatly to one's social identity. When customers have a strong sense of identity through apparel, it is also likely to impact their perception of service quality in-store when they visit an "official" retailer that sells apparel merchandise with a team they identify with. In other words, when customers are surrounded and immersed in a retail outlet where apparel merchandise of their identified team is abundant, they are likely to experience positive service quality as part of their shopping trip. Thus,

H4: Team identification through apparel has a positive impact on consumers' service quality perceptions in officially licensed university retail outlets.

The research framework is presented in Figure 1. Overall, we posit that service quality dimensions (functional, environmental, and technical service quality) will influence store satisfaction and store loyalty of officially licensed university retail outlets. Additionally, we hypothesize that team identification and team identification through apparel will influence consumers' level of perceived service quality.

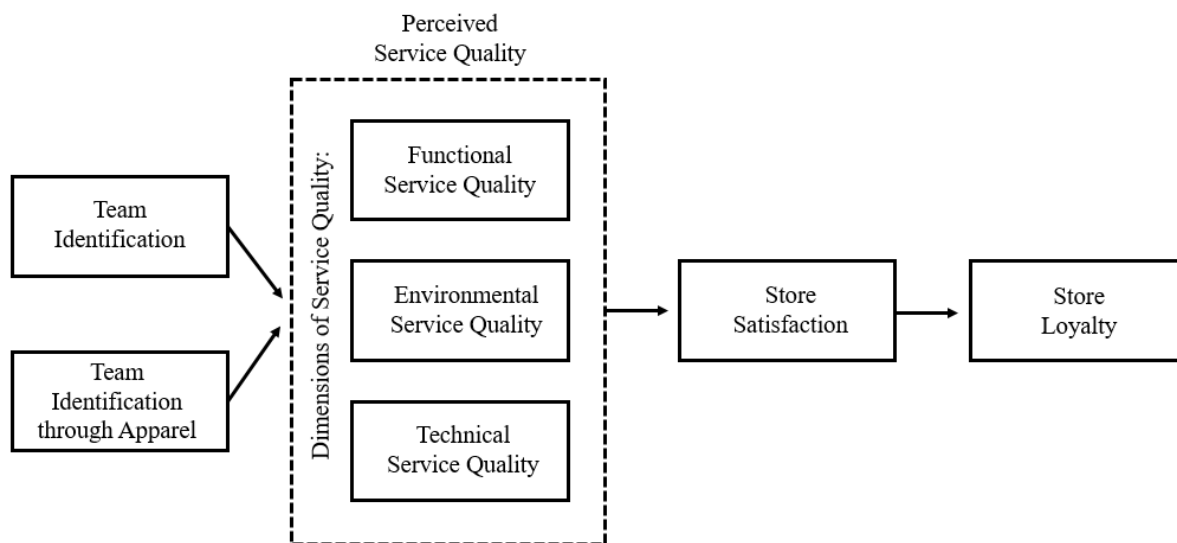


Figure 1: Research Framework

## Method

### Data Collection

Researchers worked closely with store management to ensure accuracy of data collection according to the purpose of this study. Information about the questionnaire was placed on store receipts at the four locations of the official team shop of the university in the study. The information on the receipt requested participation in the study and provided directions on where to find the questionnaire on the Web. Information regarding the study was also distributed via social media accounts (i.e., Twitter and Facebook) of the officially licensed university retail outlet under study. Data collection occurred for approximately two months. Over this period of time, 373 individuals accessed the online survey, resulting in 249 useable completed responses.

Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire based on their most recent visit to an official team shop. There are four locations of the team shop but the majority of responses (68.7%) were based on experiences at the main location of the team shop located on campus of the university under study. IP addresses of responses were analyzed to ensure there were no duplicate responses, and there were none. Respondents completing the questionnaire and providing contact information were entered into a raffle to win a giftcard for the value of \$20 USD to the official team shop. A purchase was not required to complete the questionnaire or be entered into the raffle as the study as respondents were asked to comment on their most recent visit to the official team shop.

### Instrumentation

An online questionnaire was used for data collection (see Appendix). The questionnaire consisted of the following sections/measurements: (a) service quality, (b) satisfaction and perceived service quality, (c) team identification; (d) team identification through apparel and (e) demographic questions. The dimensions of service quality were developed based on the original theoretical concept of Bitner's (1992) servicescape, and Grönroos' (1984) technical and

functional quality. The 23 items of service quality were applied to evaluate three dimensions (i.e., i. functional, ii. environmental, and iii. technical service quality). Statements used to measure the environmental attribute included statements about lighting, signage, and store layout. In addition, statements used to measure the technical quality included statement in regards to quality of clothing, value of items, and product selection. Finally, statements used to measure the functional quality focused on employee courtesy, helpfulness, and knowledge. All dimensions in service quality were measured by 7-point Likert-type scales anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). Satisfaction was measured with a 3-item scale (e.g., I am satisfied with my experience; I enjoyed my experience, and my visit was good). The statements were measured by 7-point Likert-type scales anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). This is similar to protocol employed by Oliver (1980), Love, Koo, Hardin, and Morse (2011), and Koo et al. (2015). Perceived service quality was measured by three statements using 7-point Likert-type scales anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). Participants indicated their level of agreement on statements related to the quality of service they received (Koo et al., 2015).

To measure team identification, Wann and Branscombe's (1993) team identification scale was used. This scale consisted of five measures (e.g., I consider myself to be a "real" fan of team) and was captured on 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Next, participants responded to measures of repurchase intentions to measure consumer loyalty. Repurchase intentions was measured on a 1 to 7 scale anchored by 1 = very unlikely and 7 = very likely and included statements inquiring the probability of purchasing again at the retail outlet. This scale was based on behavioral intention scales utilized in previous research examining fan attendance, volunteers, and website usage (Hardin, Koo, Ruihley, Dittmore, & McGreevey, 2012; Koo & Hardin, 2008; Love et al., 2011). This was followed by a section of the questionnaire measuring team identification associated with apparel. Measuring team identity through apparel has not been examined in prior research. Research on team identity (e.g., Kwak & Kang, 2009; Kwon & Armstrong, 2002, 2006; Wann & Branscombe, 1993) and clothing/brand identity (e.g., Johnson et al., 2014; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) was synthesized to develop modified measures for apparel identification. It was comprised of nine statements asking the respondents their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. It included statements such as I feel proud when I wear *team* apparel, I like to buy *team* colors for everyday wear, and I only buy official *team* apparel. Lastly, participants were asked a series demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, education level, household income)

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed by the SPSS statistics 24 program. First, descriptive statistics were used to establish a demographic profile of the respondents of this study. Second, this study conducted a correlation analysis to measure the association among the latent constructs. Third, multiple regression analyses were performed to examine research hypotheses related to the causal relationships among service quality, store satisfaction, service quality perception, store loyalty, team identification, and team identification through apparel.



## Results

### Demographic Profile

A total of 249 responses were collected. The mean age of the sample is 28.72, ranging from 18 to 79 years old and the majority of the sample is female (n=131, 52.6%). The majority of respondents did not attend or graduate from the university (n=114, 45.8%), while some respondents report graduating (n=63, 25.3%), while others attended the university but did not graduate (n=53, 21.3%). Respondents also report that in some cases they had children that currently attend (n=12, 4.8%) or previously attended (n=12, 4.8%) the university, while others report they had children that neither currently attend (n=218, 87.6%) or previously attended (n=214, 85.9%), or did not respond to alumni-related questions (n=31, 12.4%).

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

As shown in Table 1, mean and standard deviations were calculated for the three dimensions of service quality (Technical: m=6.00, SD=1.03; Environmental: m=5.50, SD=1.17; Functional: m=5.89, SD=1.19), store satisfaction (m=5.92, SD=1.19), service quality perception (m=5.88, SD=1.20), store loyalty (m=6.20, SD=1.10), team identification (m=5.07, SD=1.25), and team identification through apparel (m=6.10, SD=1.38) respectively. Also, the correlation coefficient values indicated all positive with magnitudes ranging from .181 to .852, all of which have significance values below the standard criterion of .05 that is showing a significant relationship statistically (Field, 2013). Also, there are no substantial correlations (i.e.,  $r > .9$ ) indicating no multicollinearity among the latent constructs (Field, 2013).

**Table 1: Correlations of Factors and Descriptive Statistics**

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N	M	SD
Technical service								216	6.00	1.03
Environmental service	.757							216	5.50	1.17
Functional service	.638	.576						216	5.89	1.19
Store satisfaction	.820	.703	.731					216	5.92	1.19
SQ Perception	.694	.593	.852	.834				216	5.88	1.20
Store loyalty	.494	.364	.394	.535	.450			216	6.20	1.10
Team identification	.249	.181	.189	.215	.287	.388		216	5.07	1.25
Team identification (A)	.322	.302	.221	.312	.330	.558	.522	216	6.10	1.38

Note: SQ Perception = Service quality perception; Team identification (A) = Team identification through apparel); all factors have statistical significant correlations at the 0.05 level.

### Preliminary Analysis

Before analyzing the causal relationships among the latent constructs, preliminary analyses were conducted to securitize any violations of (1) additivity and linearity, (2) independent errors, (3) homoscedasticity, and (4) normally distributed errors. Findings from the preliminary analyses indicated that there were no violations of the assumptions associated with multiple regression analyses. For instance, first, regarding additivity and linearity, the outcome variables analyzed in this study were related to the predictors linearly indicating that the model is valid (Cohen, 1968). Second, all the values of Durbin-Watson statistics were close to 2, indicating that independent

errors were tenable (Durbin & Watson, 1951). Third, an examination of the plot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted value did not reveal heteroscedasticity and non-linearity, which means the assumptions of homoscedasticity and linearity have been met (Field, 2013). Lastly, all the residuals were normally distributed meeting the assumption of the normality of residuals (Field, 2013).

### **Effects of Three Service Quality Dimensions on Store Satisfaction**

Multiple regression was calculated to examine which service quality dimensions predicted participants' store satisfaction (see Table 2). The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the three service quality dimensions explained 75% of the variance,  $R^2 = .75$ , and that was statistically significant at the .05 level, reflecting the overall strength of association between the three service quality dimensions and store satisfaction:  $F(3, 211) = 212.58, p < .000$ . As shown in Table 2, an examination of the beta coefficients showed that the effects of technical service quality ( $\beta = .52, SE = .07, t = 9.12, p < .001$ ), functional service quality ( $\beta = .33, SE = .05, t = 7.32, p < .001$ ), and environmental service quality ( $\beta = .12, SE = .05, t = 2.25, p = .026$ ) on store satisfaction were significant at the .05 level. These findings suggested that all service quality dimensions had a positive impact on store satisfaction. In detail, technical service quality has the biggest impact on store satisfaction, followed by functional service quality and environmental service quality.

**Table 2: Multiple regression of effects of service quality dimensions on store satisfaction**

Variables	$R^2$	B	SE	$\beta$	$t$
Technical service		.60	.07	.52	9.12***
Environmental service	.75	.12	.05	.12	2.25**
Functional service		.33	.05	.33	7.32***

Notes. The overall strength of the relationship is significant (Mean square=77.0,  $F[3,211] = 212.58, p < .000$ ); \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .000$

### **Effects of Store Satisfaction on Store Loyalty**

The results of the second regression analysis showed that the model  $R^2$  of .29, reflecting the overall strength of association between store satisfaction and store loyalty, was statistically significant at the .05 level:  $F(1, 213) = 83.03, p < .000$ . As shown in Table 3, an examination of the Beta coefficient indicated that the effects of store satisfaction ( $\beta = .54, SE = .05, t = 9.28, p < .000$ ) on store loyalty were significant at the .05 level (see Table 3). These findings suggested that store satisfaction had a positive impact on store loyalty.

**Table 3: Linear regression of effects of store satisfaction store loyalty**

Variables	$R^2$	B	SE	$\beta$	$t$
Store satisfaction	.29	.49	.05	.54	9.275***

Notes. The overall strength of the relationship is significant (Mean square=75.16,  $F[1,213] = 86.03, p < .000$ ); \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .000$

### **Effects of Team Identification on Service Quality Perception**

Third regression was calculated to examine whether team identification and team identification through apparel predict participants' service quality perception. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model  $R^2$  of .29, reflecting the overall strength of association between two types of team identification and service quality perception, was statistically significant at the .05 level:  $F(2, 212) = 15.49, p < .000$ . Examination of the Beta coefficient showed that the effects of team identification through apparel ( $\beta = .25, SE = .07, t = 3.30, p < .001$ ) and team identification ( $\beta = .16, SE = .07, t = 2.10, p = .037$ ) on service quality perception at the .05 level, as shown in Table 4. These findings suggested that team identification had a positive impact on service quality perception. In detail, team identification through apparel has a bigger impact on service quality perception than team identification.

**Table 4: Multiple regression of effects of team identification on service quality perception**

Variables	$R^2$	B	SE	$\beta$	$t$
Team identification (A)	.29	.24	.07	.29	3.30**
Team identification		.14	.07	.16	2.10*

Notes. Team identification = Team identification through apparel; The overall strength of the relationship is significant (Mean square=19.93,  $F[2,212] = 15.49, p < .000$ ); \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .000$

### **Discussion and Implications**

The market for collegiate licensing is vast and growing. Many retailers have started to compete for market share in this business due to the potential profitability of selling collegiate licensing products. A greater number of retailers (e.g., department stores, online retailers, and local boutiques) are selling collegiate licensing products which have increased the competition among sellers. For this reason, it is important for retail outlets (i.e., officially licensed university retail outlets) to distinguish their store by incorporating exceptional levels of service quality (Sacheva & Goel, 2015; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Wong & Sohal, 2003) to increase customer satisfaction and subsequent loyalty (Akbar & Parvez, 2009; Demirci Orel & Kara, 2014; Sureschander, et al., 2002; Zeithaml et al., 1996). This may be particularly true when consumers feel a strong sense of team identification and team identification through apparel (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; 2006; Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2015). To further understand consumers' loyalty behaviors towards officially licensed university retail outlets, this study investigated the influence of service quality dimensions (functional, environmental, and technical) on satisfaction and subsequently loyalty, and the influence of team identification and team identification through apparel on service quality perceptions of officially licensed university retail outlets.

The results demonstrate that functional (H1a), environmental (H1b) and technical service quality (H1c) have a positive impact on store satisfaction in officially licensed university retail outlets. Previous literature has identified that service quality levels, the firms' overall excellence (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Zeithaml, 1988), becomes important when assessing different types of retail stores (e.g., official university retail outlet). In this case, it was clear that consumers utilize both tangible and intangible observations of service quality. That is, customers not only evaluate their customer service experiences based on the quality of their interaction with

employees, but also observe the quality of offered products and the physical facility to make judgements.

This study established the importance of functional service quality within officially licensed university retail outlets. While not previously tested, this result is in line with preceding research on general service quality (Hurley & Estelami, 2007; Wong & Sohal, 2002; 2003). While customers have an abundance of options to purchase officially licensed university sport merchandise, providing exceptional in-store functional service (i.e., quality of interaction between service personnel and customers) may entice customers to return to shop in-store at an official university retail outlet (versus competitors). Customers require motivation to visit specific retail outlets when merchandise can be interchangeable or similar between retail establishments. In this case, our research alludes the importance of effectively training store personnel to ensure a high level of functional service quality. Particularly, store personnel may consider approaching customers with greetings (e.g., Can I help you find something?) but should also be well versed on product knowledge (e.g., material of products; knowing what clothing the coaches wear) and athletic specific knowledge (e.g., game schedules). While further tests are needed to confirm, functional service quality is likely to be particularly important in the context of officially licensed university retail outlets because store personnel can more effectively service customers by outfitting with appropriate game-day gear.

Our findings also point to the notion that it may be critical for managers of officially licensed university retail outlets to ensure that environmental aspects of the store (e.g., lighting, visual displays) complement the store. This may be true because environmental service quality can influence store performance (Baker et al., 1994; Dabhoklar et al., 1996; Kumar & Karande, 2000; Spence, 2014). Managers should acknowledge the importance of the visual appeal of displays because demonstration of this kind are convenient to shop and visually stimulating. One way to achieve environmental service quality is to group related products on in-store displays. In line with findings of the importance of developing environmental service quality in store, we encourage the following suggestions based on industry recommendations (Eldor, 2017; Phibbs, 2010). It is recommended that retailers group products that are worn or used together (e.g., apparel, handbags, shoes) to encourage cross shopping and to contribute to customer convenience. It is important to keep displays looking new and fresh, alternative products should be added frequently for original looks for loyal or frequent shoppers. New or most valuable (e.g., game specific) merchandise should be displayed near the entrance of the store. Adding direct light to entrance displays makes goods become eye-catching and may encourage revisit intentions.

The results also highlight that technical aspects of service quality (e.g., quality of products) within officially licensed university retail outlets are critical to establish service quality and has an impact on customer satisfaction. In line with previous research from other sectors (Tom & Lucey, 1995; Van Riel et al., 2012), this research established the importance for officially licensed university retail outlets to build technical service quality because unlike other product categories that follow fashion trends, team-affiliated products can continue to be worn or used for several athletic seasons. In this case, it is recommended that officially licensed university retail outlets provide high-quality product options to their customers. This can be beneficial since loyal fans may be more willing to pay more (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; 2006) and these findings indicate that it may impact customers' level of satisfaction.

This study also found that consumers' satisfaction has a positive impact on store loyalty within officially licensed university retail outlets (H2). Consistent with previous studies in other sectors

(Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Demirci Orel & Kara, 2014; Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Stauss & Neuhaus, 1997; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Taylor & Baker, 1994), this research supports the link between consumers' satisfaction levels and loyalty behaviors. Thus, this study offers strong implications for retailers competing for business within officially licensed university sport merchandise. Within this competitive retail sector, managers that are able to satisfy customers by optimizing service quality levels may be better equipped to foster customer loyalty. This is particularly important because loyal customers tend to spend an estimated 67% more than new customers (Zwilling, 2013). Thus, maintaining customer patronage should be a top priority for officially licensed university retail outlets. Retailers can achieve re-patronage by ensuring customer satisfaction.

Lastly, this study found that team identification (H3) and team identification through apparel (H4) had a positive impact on consumers' service quality perceptions of officially licensed university retail outlets. While researchers have established the importance of consumers' team identification on positively influencing loyalty-related behaviors (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; 2006; Mitrano, 1999; Wann & Branscombe, 1990), this research is one of the first to establish measures for team identification through apparel. Since apparel products are the largest category within sport team merchandise (Heitner, 2014), this has important implications for officially licensed university retail outlets. Particularly, results point to the notion that when consumers develop a strong sense of team identity (through apparel or otherwise), they are likely to perceive higher levels of service quality of officially licensed university retail outlets. In this case, developing consumers' team identification becomes important. To foster consumers' sense of identification, retail managers may consider offering exclusive VIP deals for loyal customers or have contests for avid fans that test their athletic-team knowledge. For apparel manufactures, it is important to utilize the official team color, slogan, and logo in their product development. By offering these strategies, it will assist in reinforcing customers' sense of belonging to a particular team-affiliated group. It is also important to market and emphasize the retail outlet as the "official" outlet for team merchandise. This may create a higher sense of authenticity of the clothing items and perhaps makes them more desirable for consumers with high team identify.

### ***Limitations and Future Studies***

It is important to note that officially licensed university retail outlets are oftentimes or nearly exclusively located within the city/town of the university. If fans are unable to patronize the brick-and-mortar location(s) of officially licensed university retail outlets, they may choose to purchase online and still consider their product acquisition to be from an official university outlet. Since this research only investigated purchase behavior from brick-and-mortar locations, further studies should be conducted on online consumers to fully understand consumer behavior within this context. It would also be beneficial to increase the number of respondents from each of the four locations of the official team shop so comparisons across locations can be conducted. The majority of respondents (68.7%) in the current study made their most recent purchase at the main location of the official team shop, so comparisons across locations were not viable.

Additionally, to confirm and enhance the findings of this study, future research should consider collecting data from consumers that purchase from other retail outlets, such as department stores or local boutiques. It is possible that consumers' perception of service quality may vary by retail outlet. Further, it is possible that differences in the results may exist for individuals with various demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity, income). Future researchers should compare

individuals by these variables to confirm findings. Also, this research established that consumers develop team identification through apparel. However, while researchers used previous literature to develop items for measurements (e.g., Johnson et al., 2014; Kwak & Kang, 2009; Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; 2006), future research should test measurement items for team identification through apparel using other sports-related contexts to verify results. Lastly, since this study only investigated patronage behavior from one university within the Southeastern Conference in the NCAA, caution should remain when generalizing results to other universities. It is recommended that researchers examine officially licensed university retail outlets from several conferences, such as the Power 5 (i.e., Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, and Southeastern Conferences).

## Conclusions

The collegiate licensing market is large and is competitive for retailers that offer officially licensed university sport merchandise. To understand how retailers can compete in this marketplace, this study verified factors (service quality, satisfaction) that lead to loyalty towards officially licensed university retail outlets. Additionally, this study demonstrated that consumers' team identification and identification through apparel lead to greater perceived levels of service quality. Further research should be conducted to continue to understand loyalty behaviors towards officially licensed university retail outlets to help retail outlets compete in the marketplace.

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