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Improving management of volleyball academies through an investigation in parents' views about services offered

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Abstract

The investigation and evaluation of the services provided in the field of girls' volleyball academies management in Epirus Region, Greece, reveal an important aspect of the sports community. Through data collection and analysis (sample, n = 195 parents), the positive elements and challenges faced by both the female athletes in this sport and how parents perceive the services provided, whether they are related to the coaches or the area and the condition of the facilities, are highlighted. Emphasis is placed on the quality of the services provided, while considering how they affect the development and training of young female athletes. Based on the results of this research, the potential for improving training and education programs as well as management of volleyball academies is highlighted, in order to reinforce the dynamics of the region's sports community.

Keywords: *Service Quality, Girls' Volleyball Academies, Parents' Perceptions*

Introduction

Sport is central to the lives of individuals, families and communities worldwide, promoting, enhancing and delivering significant social, emotional, cultural and economic benefits. The role of sport goes beyond the simple physical advantages of exercise and competition, as it positively affects social cohesion, psychological well-being, cultural exchange and economic development. Overall, sport is emerging as a multidimensional and essential factor that positively impacts the lives and well-being of individuals, families and communities worldwide (Papadopoulos & Kargidis, 2022).

According to Edginton et al. (1994), participation in creative and meaningful programs of high quality can offer young people important benefits, such as: personal development, socialization, improvement of physical condition, acquisition of positive values, expression of creativity and imagination, learning and maturation and memories of experiences.

Even in ancient times, people knew the beneficial effects of the countryside and sports [e.g. Asclepia and Spartan camps etc., (Costa et al., 2004)]. This awareness has increased even more in modern society, where children are bombarded with a lot of information and ideas every day, through television, advertisements, electronic games, the internet, etc. (Dees et al., 2022). Therefore, children need a break from their routine and time to refresh by avoiding, even temporarily, the unwanted consequences of all this information.

The Region of Epirus is located in the north-western part of Greece; it consists of the prefectures of Arta, Thesprotia, Ioannina and Preveza, with a total population of 319,991 inhabitants. The most important economic activities concern the sectors of animal husbandry, agriculture, forestry, and tourism. The number of sports clubs that are active in the sport of volleyball and have academies in their ranks is 15.

Research Purpose

This research aims to make the most valuable aspects from parents of youth players in non-professional girls' volleyball academies. This information can guide us on parent expectations and can be used by academy marketing departments in any of the management processes (recruitment, retention, customer service, etc.). This study is of interest not only to the executives of volleyball academies, but also to any sports organization whose service is based for good financial well-being. The consumer segment is considered essential in the current competitive sports environment.

Literature Review

Parents play a key role as decision makers in youth sport services (Nuviala and Álvarez, 2005), so understanding their opinion on non-professional academies would be a very interesting point for marketing and commercial purposes.

Coaches and parents are considered the closest and most important stakeholders who can directly influence the development of young athletes (Bloom, 1985). Central to a coach's responsibility is this: the “*architects of the sports environment*” (Rynne & Mallett, 2017). Their roles may include sharing expertise, implementing effective methods and pedagogy, encouraging positive athlete relationships, managing long-term goals, and overseeing overall support and development (Bloom, 1985; Lara-Bercial & McKenna, 2018, 2022a, 2022b; Martindale et al., 2007). So how coaches evaluate and how they make their decisions can have important implications for young athletes (Lyle & Muir, 2020; Till et al., 2019).

Parents can also be positive elements in their child's development, in what is largely a supportive role (e.g. emotional, appreciative, informational and tangible). However, sport parenting of children is complex and challenging (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Parents can be a source of additional pressures for young athletes. Their positive input is largely determined by knowledge, experiences and their attitudes of being a sports parent (Harwood & Knight, 2015). Given the active role parents have, how they perceive the services offered by an academy will likely influence their and their child's participation (Clarke & Harwood, 2014).

Harmony between parents' and coaches' knowledge, perceptions and attitudes can lead to strong integration of young athletes and coordination of academy practices. Reproducing agreed coaching approaches, exchanging corresponding messages and strengthening relationships lead to honest communication, clarity of stakeholder roles and achievement of academy goals (Pankhurst et al., 2013).

Few studies have examined effective academies from the perspective of the coach, and exploring parents' perceptions of coaches will lead to their improvement, helping to rationalize resource allocation (Sargent Megicks et al., 2022).

Costa et al. (2004) created a 10-dimension questionnaire about children's sports camp services. They found that there are 5 factors for children ("Training Program", "Satisfaction - Intention", "Safety & Convenience of Facilities", "Unrealized" and "Relationships with Coaches") and 4 factors for parents ("Accommodation Facilities", "Coaches", "Satisfaction - Intention" and "Access - Communication") that really influence them when it comes to deciding which camp to attend/send their children to. These factors should be taken into account by the sports managers / directors camps when the services are offered.

Bonal et al. (2020) designed a questionnaire for parents of non-professional football and basketball academies, adapted from the study by Costa et al. (2004). The resulting questionnaire was called the Non-PA/PPQ Parent Perspective Questionnaire (non-PA/PPQ), consisting of five dimensions: a) coaches, b) information and satisfaction, c) facilities, d) development/intention, e) location/environment. The study, addressed to parents in Spain, had findings that showed that the "position" of the academy, the "focus of the programs", aspects of social and personal development and the role of the coach, are the main parameters that determine in which academy parents will enroll their children.

Ko and Pastore (2005) developed one of the most popular models for service quality in recreational sports. The model, called the Hierarchical Model of Service Quality for the Recreational Sports Industry, has four main dimensions defined by corresponding sub-dimensions. The first is called program quality and takes into account program scope, execution time, and information. The second is the quality of interaction and is understood as customer-employee interaction and customer-to-customer interaction. Third, the quality of the result, consisting of physical change, vigor and sociability. Finally, the quality of the environment, which consists of the state of the environment, design and equipment. The authors also emphasize other key elements such as punctuality, some key aspects such as punctuality in class/training, nice programs, politeness of employees (Ko & Pastore, 2005).

The sports practices of young people are determined by several factors that influence both the performance and the type of physical activity they engage in, among which family members stand out (Chillón et al., 2002; Latorre et al., 2009). Family members, especially parents, play different roles, including creating a positive climate for sports participation, increasing opportunities for sports participation, or even as role models (Bonal et al., 2019) reasons why it is necessary to know their opinion about the services of the Youth Sports Academies. Similar research, knowledge of parents' perceptions of tennis was developed by De Francesco and Johnson (1997), where one-third of the sample stated a desire to enroll their children in an academy that helped them win games and improve skills them in tennis.

Methodology

Convenience or convenience sampling method is chosen. It is a non-random sampling method and was chosen due to the saving of time, effort and resources in general. The survey was carried out in electronic form with a structured closed-ended questionnaire designed to collect responses regarding the evaluation of the services provided by volleyball sports academies operating in the Region of Epirus and resulting from the literature review.

The geographical area to which the questionnaire was distributed is the sports associations that operate girls' volleyball academies in the Region of Epirus. The time when the answers were collected is December 2023. The population of the research was defined as the parents of the girls participating in the volleyball academies of the Epirus Region. The sample size of the research consisted of $n=195$ people.

The answers to the questionnaire were carried out electronically with a live personal interview and remotely by sending the questionnaire link to parents in a targeted manner. The live collection of responses was carried out in the presence of the researcher, where each respondent completed the answers on the researcher's device. Through Google Form, the data with the help of excel in the statistical program SPSS.

A questionnaire was designed for the parents of the non-professional football and basketball academies participants-based and adapted from the study of Costa et al. (2004).

To measure the factors, a total of 17 examined items: "Coaches" (4 questions), "Information and satisfaction" (4 questions), "Facilities" (3 questions), "Development / intention" (4 questions) and "Location / environment" (2 questions). Bonal, León-Quismondo, Burillo, Pérez-González, & Fernández-Luna (2020), "Parent Opinion Questionnaire for Non-Professional Academies" was used. The questionnaire was designed for the parents of the non-professional football and basketball academies participants-based and adapted from the study of Costa et al. (2004). Participation questions along with demographics are 8. Total questions: 25.

The "Coaches" dimension was measured with 4 considered items, such as "The coaches answer my questions" and "I am grateful for the general treatment by the coaches". The dimension "Information and satisfaction" was measured with 4 examined items e.g. "I have the possibility to contact one of the Academy Executives at any time" and "I have the sports information (such as that related to matches and training) in an appropriate way ». The dimension "Facilities" was measured with 3 considered items such as "The supplementary facilities (such as changing rooms) seem adequate to me" and "The sports facilities of the academy seem adequate". The dimension "Development / intention" with 4 examined items "The development and my daughter's athletic development is an important consideration at the time of my daughter's enrollment" and "My daughter's growth, development and formation as a person is an important consideration at the time of my daughter's enrollment". The dimension "Location / environment" with 2 items examined, "The location of the academy is an important factor when enrolling my child" and "One of the important aspects for me, is that my daughter will be able to play and hangs out with her friends."

There are also 2 questions regarding the duration of participation in the academies and the main reasons that have led to the academy.

The responses for the metrics of 'Coaches' (4 questions), 'Information and satisfaction' (4 questions), 'Facilities' (3 questions), 'Development / intent' (4 questions) and 'Location / environment' (2 questions) were given on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponded to "strongly disagree" and 5 corresponded to "strongly agree".

The SPSS statistical package was used for statistical processing, as well as Microsoft Excel for data transfer. Tables of frequencies and relative frequencies were used for the demographic characteristics, while the mean and standard deviation were used to present the results through a numerical Likert scale.

Also, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test correlations between variables. The examination of the statistically significant relationship (effect) of each of the demographic elements on the dependent variable Intention / Development was carried out.

In this paper, the Cronbach A coefficient is deemed satisfactory because it includes the following values: Coaches 0.805, Information / Satisfaction 0.823, Facilities 0.864, Location / Environment 0.855, and Development / Intentions 0.917.

Results

Starting the presentation of the research results with the demographic characteristics of the respondents, according to which 85.0% of them are women, while the remaining 15.0% are men.

Table 1: Age of Child

ANSWERS	n	%
Up to 7 years old	5	2.5
8-10 years old	42	21.3
11-13 years old	58	30
14-16 years old	58	30
17 years and older	32	16.2
TOTAL	195	100%

The age of the investigated parents of the girls (table 1), participating in the academies consists of 11 to 13 years and 14 to 16 years with 30% equally, followed by the age group of 8 to 10 years with 21.3% and the age group of 17 years and above with 16.2%, while under 7 years old is at 5%.

Table 2: Age of parents

ANSWERS	n	%
26-35 years old	3	1.3
36-45 years old	104	53.7
46-55 years old	78	40

56 years and older	10	5
TOTAL	195	100%

Continuing to list the results by the age of the survey participants (table 2), more than half (53.7%) are aged 36 to 45, while 4 in 10 (40%) are aged 46 to 55. The remaining age groups of the sample, 26 to 35 and 56 and over, have a very low participation with 1.3% and 5% respectively.

Table 3: Number of Family Members

ANSWERS	n	%
2 members	7	3.8
3 members	34	17.4
4 members	124	63.8
5 members or more	30	15
TOTAL	195	100%

Regarding the number of family members of the respondents (table 3), 63.80% consists of 4 members, followed by 17.40% with 3 members and 15% with more than 5 members, followed by 3.89% with 2 members.

Table 4: Annual Family Income

ANSWERS	n	%
up to €10,000	32	16.3
between €10,001 - €20,000	90	46.2
between €20,001 - €30,000	49	25
€30,001 and more	24	12.5
TOTAL	195	100%

Regarding the annual family income of the members of the sample (table 4), 46.20% ranges between 10 and 20 thousand euros, 25% has an income between 20 and 30 thousand euros a year, 16.30% has an income up to 10,000€ a year followed by those with an annual family income of over €30,000 with 12.5%.

Table 5: Education Level

ANSWERS	n	%
Primary school	15	7.5
Middle School / High School	32	16.3
Post-secondary school – IEK	46	23.7
TEI / University	63	32.5
Master's / Ph.D	39	20
TOTAL	195	100%

Continuing with the level of education of the respondents (table 5), 32.50% are university / TEI graduates, 23.70% vocational education and training graduates, 20% holders of master's / doctorate degrees and next are secondary and primary education graduates with 16, 30% and 7.50% respectively.

Moving on to the presentation of the results of the research and more specifically to the opinions of the parents on the services provided by the volleyball academies, regarding the evaluation of the coaches (table 6), the opinions of the respondents are considered positive overall (M=4.16, S.D.= 0.85), with a higher score given to the experience and tactical / technical knowledge of the coaches (M=4.25, S.D.=0.91).

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of the "Coaches" dimension

ANSWERS	M	SD
The coaches answer my questions	4.12	1.07
I am grateful for the general treatment by the coaches	4.05	0.92
The coaches are kind to the players/athletes	4.20	0.93
I consider the experience and tactical / technical knowledge of the coaches to be sufficient	4.25	0.91
Coaches	4.16	0.85

The respondents are satisfied with their daughter's participation and with the information provided by the academy (M=4.07 S.D.=0.82). They rate higher in this dimension the appropriate way regarding the information about the matches and trainings (M=4.32 S.D.=0.90) (table 7).

Table 7: Descriptive statistics of the "Information & Satisfaction" dimension

ANSWERS	M	SD
I am satisfied with my child's participation in this academy	3.89	1.01
I have the ability to contact one of the Academy Executives at any time	3.85	1.05
I have the sports information (such as that related to matches and training) in the right way	4.32	0.90
I have the academy information in total, in the proper way	4.22	1.18
Information & Satisfaction	4.07	0.82

The assessment of facilities has the lowest rating compared to the other dimensions (M.O.=3.25 T.A.=1.05). While the respondents answer from neutral to positive (M=3.69 S.D.=1.20), that they were worth the money they

spent on the academies, the additional facilities (locker rooms, etc.) have the lowest score of all the analyzed data (M=2.95 S.D.=1.33) (table 8).

Table 8: Descriptive statistics of the "Facilities" dimension

ANSWERS	M	SD
Additional facilities (such as changing rooms) seem adequate to me	2.95	1.33
The sports facilities of the academy seem adequate	3.10	1.21
The value for the money I pay seems adequate	3.69	1.20
Facilities	3.25	1.05

There are positive future intentions on the part of the parents for the continuation of their children's participation in the academies (M=4.47 S.D.=1.04) (table 9). In particular, the recommendation of the academy to other parents has the highest score of all the examined elements of the survey (M=4.59 S.D.=1.23). A relatively large average rating is also the element of the daughter's re-enrollment, the following season (M.O.=4.57 S.D.=1.21).

Table 9: Descriptive statistics of the "Development / Intention" dimension

ANSWERS	M	SD
My daughter's growth and athletic development is an important consideration at the time of my daughter's enrollment	4.42	1.08
My daughter's growth, development and formation as a person is an important consideration in enrolling my daughter	4.28	1.26
I plan to enroll my daughter again next season in this academy	4.57	1.21
I would recommend this academy to other parents	4.59	1.23
Development / Intention	4.47	1.04

The dimension location / environment (table 10) also gets a positive rating (M =4.30 S.D.=1.28), with a higher score for the location of the facility (M.=4.34 S.D.=1.36).

Table 10: Descriptive statistics of the "Location / Environment" dimension

ANSWERS	M	SD
The location of the academy is an important consideration when enrolling my child	4.34	1.36
One of the important aspects for me is that my daughter will be able to play and socialize with her friends.	4.26	1.31
Location / Environment	4.30	1.28

Quoting the duration of a child's participation in the volleyball academy (table 11), it is observed that 44.9% have been involved for more than 3 years, 25% have been involved for 2 years, 16.3% have just started, while for 6 months and one year they are involved 7.5% and 6.3% respectively.

Table 11: Duration of participation in the academies

ANSWERS	n	%
just started	32	16.3
6 months	15	7.5
1 year	12	6.3
2 years	49	25
3 years and above	87	44.9
TOTAL	195	100%

The main reason for participating in the volleyball academy concerns the presence of friends (42.5%), followed by the parents' preference for volleyball (28.8%). Next, the parent meeting a coach (16.3%), being informed by an advertising brochure (8.8%) and encouraging the girls themselves to enroll in the academy (3.8%) (table 12).

Table 12: Reasons for joining the academy

ANSWERS	n	%
I / we (parents) like volleyball	32	16.3
Some of her friends attend this academy	15	7.5
I know one of the Academy coaches/administrators	12	6.3
I found out about the academy from some brochure / internet	49	25
My daughter urged me / us	87	44.9
TOTAL	195	100%

Correlations were tested by Pearson (table 13), the dependent variable "Development / Intention" and the independent variables "Coaches" (r=0.458, p<0.001), "Information / Satisfaction" (r=0.665, p<0.001), "Facilities" (r=0.394, p<0.001) and "Location / Environment" (r=0.558, p<0.001). As it appears during the correlation test, there is a statistically significant, linear and positive relationship between the independent and the dependent variable.

Table 13: Correlation of Development / Intention and all independent variables

		CI Coaches	IS Information Satisfaction	F Facilities	LE Location Environment
DI	r	0.458	0.665	0.394	0.558
Development Intention	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Regarding the analysis of variance, it appears that no statistically significant differences (table 14) arise in the mean scores of the "Development / Intention" dimension based on gender ($p=0.112$), age ($p=0.482$), age of the child ($p=0.475$), the number of family members ($p=0.499$), the annual income ($p=0.322$), and the level of education ($p=0.076$).

Table 14: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the variable Development / Intention based on the variables Gender, Age of Parents, Age of the Child, Number of Family Members, Family Income & Level of Education

		DI Development / Intention				
		M	S.D	T	df	p
Gender	Man	4.38	0.785	4.2	195	0.112
	Woman	4.53	0.652			
		M	S.D	F	df	p
Age of Parents	26-35 years old	4.40	1.012	0.958	195	0.482
	36-45 years old	4.49	0.925			
	46-55 years old	4.44	0.675			
	56 years and older	4.51	0.688			
		M	S.D	F	df	p
Age of the Child	Up to 7 years old	4.48	0.898	1.516	195	0.475
	8-10 years old	4.50	0.986			
	11-13 years old	4.39	1.051			
	14-16 years old	4.40	0.733			
	17 years and older	4.45	0.946			
		M	S.D	F	df	P
Family Income	up to €10,000	4.33	0.977	1.350	195	0.322
	between €10,001 - €20,000	4.52	1.034			
	between €20,001 - €30,000	4.53	0.747			
	€30,001 and more	4.45	1.049			
		M	S.D	F	df	P
Education	Primary school	4.42	0.693	3.230	195	0.076
	Middle School / High School	4.28	1.511			
	Post-secondary school – IEK	4.59	0.696			
	TEI / University	4.56	0.839			
	Master's / Ph.D	4.51	0.799			
		M	S.D	F	df	p
Number of Family Members	2 members	4.52	0.895	1.516	195	0.499
	3 members	4.55	0.977			
	4 members	4.42	1.036			
	5 members or more	4.45	0.683			

Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of the study was to investigate the opinions and perceptions of the parents of the girls' volleyball academies, about the services provided by the volleyball sports academies of the Epirus Region, Greece.

It was found that the "Intention / Development" dimension is influenced by the way coaches operate, by the degree of information to parents provided by an academy, by satisfaction, by the adequacy of training facilities, by the perceived value of parents, by location of the academy and from the girls' social environment.

According to the demographics of the sample, the vast majority of respondents were mothers (85%), while the remainders were fathers. This shows that more mothers undertake to accompany their daughters in sports activities. As mentioned, the sample consists of only one parent of each girl, regardless of whether siblings participate in the academy. The 30% of the respondents have a girl who participates in the academy are aged 11 to 13 years and 14 to 16 years with 30% equally, followed by the age group of 8 to 10 years with 21.3%. 53.7% of respondents belong to the 36 to 45 age group followed by the 46-5 age group with 40%. More than 6 out of 10 participants (63.8%) in the survey are members of a family of four. Their annual family income is up to €10,000 for 16.3%, ranges from €10,000 to €20,000 for 46.2%, from €20,000 to €30,000 for 25%, and above €30,000 for

12, 5% of those surveyed. In terms of education level, 32.5% of those surveyed are University or TEI graduates, followed by 23.7% vocational education graduates and next by masters or doctorate degree holders with 20%.

On average, parents rate positively the dimensions examined in the present research with scores ranging around grade 4 (five-point Likert scale), except for the "Facilities" dimension ($M = 3.06$ S.D. $= 1.05$). Coaches ($M = 4.16$ P.A. $= 0.85$), Information and Satisfaction ($M = 4.07$ P.A. $= 0.82$), Intention / Development ($M = 4.47$ T.A. $= 1.04$), the Location / Environment ($M = 4.30$ T.A. $= 1.28$). As presented, the average ratings of the services offered at the volleyball academies lead to the search for suggestions for improving the services provided, more specifically in the "Facilities" dimension, which the parents evaluate relatively neutrally.

Also through the application of Pearson correlations, the dependent variable "Intention / Development" and the independent variables "Coaches", "Information and Satisfaction", "total service quality", and "Location / Environment" it follows that pairwise linear relationships are generally positive and statistically significant.

On the other hand, no statistically significant differences emerge between the demographic data and the dependent behavioral variable "Intention / Development", because in all possible relationships the values are above 0.05.

Important findings are presented by the responses of the respondents in relation to the duration of the girls' participation in the sports academy. More than 4 in 10 (44.9%) have answered that they send their children to the academy for more than 3 years. Regarding the main reasons for participation, the majority of parents (42.5%) consider the socializing and company that the girls will have with their other friends as the most important reason, while a significant percentage (28.8%) consider it an important reason parents' love and preference for volleyball.

In general, parents rate the services provided positively and consider that the services were quite good; while they are quite satisfied and consider that they received some value for the money they paid. The administrators of the sports academies should focus their attention on the parents-consumers and the young athletes in order to take important steps to attract more athletes, improving the services provided, and by extension the development of top-level female athletes.

Starting from the examined items where there are lower evaluations, solutions should be sought so that the interventions that will be made will significantly improve these items. In Greece, most indoor gyms were built several decades ago and with old specifications, with obviously limited possibilities for interventions to improve the facilities. The construction of new sports facilities, in accordance with all modern specifications, in order for sports organizations to be able to cope with the new global trends in sports, is an ideal proposal, having as a guide the available resources for such type of constructions. Indeed, new facilities can create new opportunities and sources of income for a sports organization and especially create a positive environment for the development of a sports academy. The continuous education and training of coaches in collaboration with other professionals, such as trainers, sports psychologists and physical therapists can support the development of young athletes. Coaches are at the core of the service provided and greatly influence satisfaction and future behavioral intentions. The review of some aspects of the content of sports programs in order to increase the satisfaction of young athletes and sports consumers in general.

Continuous improvement is needed in areas such as staff training, renovated facilities with renewed equipment, so that volleyball academies offer services that meet participants' expectations and positively influence their future behavioral intentions. The increase in the behavioral intentions of sports consumers can be strengthened even more, through the improvement concerning the role of coaches, the appropriate information / information to parents, modern facilities and an appropriate social environment for young female athletes. In summary, managers of sports academies should focus on improving service quality that will positively affect the satisfaction of sports consumers and improve the overall sports product.

Convenience sampling was performed due to time constraints. Therefore, the generalization of the results should be done with special care. The research area is the associations that are based and are active with the organization of girls' volleyball academies only in the region of Epirus. The sample could be expanded to the entire Greek territory where volleyball academies are active. Similar research could be done in other sports that have academies such as football, basketball, handball, individual sports, etc. The nature of each sport would be of interest for the perception of the services provided.

It is suggested that future studies should be performed in larger samples, with random sampling method, involving more respondents so that the results can be generalized with wider confidence. Further statistical processing of the data is also suggested, which was not applied in the present study. Other concepts such as loyalty, perceived value and how they affect repurchase intentions could also be examined.

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