A Structural Model of the Relationships Between Sport Website Quality, E-Satisfaction, and E-Loyalty

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The Internet website has become an effective marketing vehicle for sport organizations. The purpose of this study was to examine theoretical relationships between key variables of online sport consumption behavior such as sport consumers’ perceptions of sport website quality, satisfaction, and behavioral loyalty to the websites. In addition, the mediating effect of e-satisfaction between website quality and e-loyalty was examined. The results of data analyses using structural equation model tests revealed that loyalty to a sport team’s website was more likely to occur as sport fans developed positive perceptions and satisfaction with the website. The results also suggested that consumer e-satisfaction is an important mediating variable between sport website quality and e-loyalty.

The Internet is the fastest growing communication medium and provides an important marketing vehicle for the sport industry (Delpy & Bosetti, 1998; Rainie, 2005). For instance, online sport fans—consumers who engage in a broad range of sport-related activity using the Internet—employ the Internet to visit sport websites (e.g., espn.go.com), obtain their favorite teams’ game results, purchase team apparel, enjoy interaction with other fans through discussion forums, and engage in online fantasy sport leagues with friends around the world. In fact, as of 2007, nearly 30 million people participated in fantasy sport leagues, and spent nearly $1 billion on fantasy sport products ("Fantasy sports industry," 2008).

The growth of Internet usage among online sport fans is also evidenced by traffic patterns at popular websites. For instance, the average daily page viewership of espn.go.com is more than 14 million. The overall average traffic ranking of espn.go.com within the U.S. is 17th, which is higher than cnn.com (Alexa, 2009). Given this deluge of consumers, the Internet has become a big part of the overall sport industry. In fact, popular online websites, such as espn.go.com, had an estimated worth of more than $32 million, with a daily advertising revenue of approximately $44,000 (Websiteoutlook, 2009).

The popularity and growth of online sport consumption suggests a clear opportunity for sport-related marketers to effectively use the Internet as a key component within an overall marketing strategy. To effectively leverage the opportunities that the Internet affords to an organization, it is crucial that organizations gain a clear understanding of online sport fan behavior. While most collegiate athletic programs and professional sport teams use websites to enhance effectiveness of communication with their target consumers by providing up-to-date information about their organizations and products (e.g., game results and news as well as methods of purchasing and renewing season tickets; McClung, Hardin, & Mondello, 2004), are websites designed to optimally meet the needs of their consumers (Valacich, Parboteeah, & Wells, 2007)? For example, the NFL revamped and added new elements on its nfl.com website, including redesigned Game Center pages with 3D-type depth, a sharply expanded social media and community section, and a bulked-up content subscription area providing full-length online game replays (Fisher, 2009). However, the effectiveness and success of this and other websites relies on how consumers perceive the value and quality of the interactions and services (Zhang & Prybutok, 2005).
particular, “the online experience is crucial to engaging fans” (Cordova, 2009, p. 28). In the sport website context, consumers have high hedonic values (fun and entertainment) rather than utilitarian values when compared with other business contexts (Hur, Ko, & Claussen, 2007). Although previous academic studies have highlighted the importance of understanding various aspects of online sport fan behavior (e.g., Brown, 2003; Caskey & Delpy, 1999; Delpy & Bosetti, 1998; Duncan & Campbell, 1999; Filo & Funk, 2005), a more comprehensive and systematic analysis of online sport fan perceptions and behavior is warranted. As understanding improves, better guidance for enhancing website design can be provided to organizations serving online sport consumers.

In pursuing this improved understanding, it is important to adequately conceptualize the psychological constructs that influence sport consumption decisions in the online context. Consumer variables such as service quality perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty are important elements that explain general consumption behavior. Consequently, numerous studies have been conducted to understand these constructs and their relationships in a broad range of contexts: general business (Babakus & Boller, 1992), retailing (Boulding, Staelin, Kaira, & Zeithaml, 1993; Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000), marketing (Bitner, 1990; Fornell, 1992), and sport management (Ko & Pastore, 2005). Likewise, as the Internet has evolved, these psychological constructs have also been adapted as key research variables to explain the unique characteristics of this new medium and related online consumer behavior (e.g., Flavián, Guinalíu, & Gurrea, 2006; Gounaris & Dimitriadis, 2003; Huang, 2005; Li, Tan, & Xie, 2002; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003).

In the sport management literature, studies have focused on functions of the Internet for sport businesses, website content analyses, and demographic profiles (see Table 1). More recent studies (e.g., Filo, Funk, & Hornby, 2009; Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007; Tsuji, Bennett, & Leigh, 2009) have attempted to understand sport consumer behavior in the online context. As of yet, however, few studies have examined issues related to sport consumers’ perceptions of sport website quality (a.k.a., SWQ) and the relationships between salient psychological constructs such as satisfaction and loyalty. Although scholars in the offline context have identified predictors of consumer satisfaction (e.g., Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997; Szymanski & Henard, 2001), there have been few systematic satisfaction studies in the online context (Szymanski & Hise, 2000). Researchers in the offline context have tried to confirm whether dimensions of satisfaction in traditional retailing are applicable to e-business settings (Evanschitzky, Iyer, Hesse, & Ahlert, 2004). However, as argued by Jarvenpaa and Todd (1997), online shopping differs from traditional shopping in numerous ways such as the inability to physically examine product quality before purchase, security in online financial transactions, and associated privacy concerns. Therefore, it is necessary to reconceptualize customer satisfaction in the online context.

Once the role of the various constructs that influence online consumer behavior are better understood, sport marketers are better poised to develop effective business strategies for increasing customer satisfaction and retention. Accordingly, this study aims to empirically test theoretical relationships between key variables of online sport consumption such as sport consumers’ perceptions of SWQ, satisfaction, and behavioral loyalty with the website. In addition, this study examines the mediating effect of e-satisfaction on the relationship between SWQ and e-loyalty perceptions. Even though this study mainly follows the conceptual model of quality perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty provided by prior studies (e.g., Caruna, 2002), this study proposes a revised and more robust scale for examining website quality and reexamines the conceptual relationships in the sport website context that have barely been investigated in the sport management field.

Accordingly, two research questions served as a guide for this research study: (1) how do sport consumers’ perceptions of SWQ influence their level of satisfaction and loyalty with the website?; and (2) how does the level of satisfaction influence consumer loyalty? Results from this study should inform sport marketers of the interplay of website quality, satisfaction, and loyalty, providing justifications for further investments into their websites to better meet the needs of their consumers. This study also aids future research by providing a foundation for further investigation regarding online sport consumption behavior.

A Research Model and Hypotheses

Although there is a growing body of online sport consumer-related research, there is insufficient understanding of the various factors influencing consumer behavior in this context. As a step toward an improved understanding, this study examines the interrelationships between SWQ, satisfaction, and loyalty in the online sport consumer context.

The expectancy-value model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Johnson, Gustafsson, Andreasen, Lervik, & Cha, 2001) was applied as a theoretical foundation for this study. This theory implies that a person’s orientation toward a particular behavior is determined according to his/her expectations (beliefs) and evaluations (Palmgreen, 1984). A large number of research projects related to this theory testify to the causal relations of expectations, evaluations, and behaviors both in offline and online contexts (e.g., Athiyaman, 2002; Cooper, Burgoon, & Roter, 2001; Lim & Dubinsky, 2004; Smith & Vogt, 1995; Sparks, Hedderley, & Shepherd, 1991). For example, Lim and Dubinsky (2004) found that a positive affect toward an e-tailor (i.e., a commercial website on which consumers can shop) is developed according to how consumers perceive characteristics of the website (e.g., diverse information, a trustful transaction system). Applying the expectancy-value model to sport websites, it is suggested that sport consumers’ cognitive
beliefs about a sport website’s quality influences their satisfaction with the website. Increased satisfaction, in turn, influences the likelihood that a consumer returns to the website in the future (Auh & Johnson, 2005). To examine these causal relationships in the online sport business context, we adopted conceptual frameworks from previous studies (Butcher, Sparks, & O’Callaghan, 2001; Caruana, 2002; Chiou, 2004; Choi, Cho, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2004), which explain the relationships between the various consumer psychological constructs of interest (e.g., service quality, satisfaction, or loyalty; see Figure 1).

Table 1  Prior Studies on Sport Internet/Websites in Sport Management Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kahle &amp; Meeske (1999)</td>
<td>- The reasons for the growth of the Internet</td>
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<td>- Internet characteristics</td>
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<td>Caskey &amp; Delpy (1999)</td>
<td>- The revenue models of online sport websites</td>
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<td>- Profitability on the web</td>
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<td>Delpy &amp; Bosetti (1999)</td>
<td>- The importance of the World Wide Web</td>
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<td>- Demographic profiles of Internet users</td>
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<td>- Applications of the Internet for business</td>
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<td>Smith, Pent, &amp; Pitts (1999)</td>
<td>- The contents of 35 stadium websites</td>
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<td>Duncan &amp; Campbell (1999)</td>
<td>- A profile of Internet users</td>
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<td>- Primary functions of the Internet for sport businesses</td>
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<td>Turner (1999)</td>
<td>- The integration of television broadcasts with Internet technology</td>
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<td>Brown (2003)</td>
<td>- Types of user activities</td>
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<td>- Marketing objectives</td>
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<td>- Benefits of establishing a website</td>
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<td>Carlson, Rosenberger, &amp; Muthaly (2003)</td>
<td>- The content of the sites</td>
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<td>- Marketing mix</td>
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<td>Evans &amp; Smith (2004)</td>
<td>- Effective Internet marketing and strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filo &amp; Funk (2005)</td>
<td>- Marketing mix on sport websites</td>
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<td>- Sport Interest Inventory (SII)</td>
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<td>- SII on the websites</td>
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<td>Kitchin (2006)</td>
<td>- The development of sport organizations to capitalize on their online products</td>
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<td>Theysohn (2006)</td>
<td>- Sport reports on the Internet</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Product design preferences of sport fans</td>
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<td>Hur et al. (2007)</td>
<td>- Online sport motivation and concerns</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Actual Internet usage</td>
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<td>Seo, Green, Ko, Lee, &amp; Schenewark (2007)</td>
<td>- Web cohesion, web commitment, attitude toward a website, and web consumption</td>
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<td>Seo &amp; Green (2008)</td>
<td>- Sport online motivation</td>
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<td>Filo et al. (2009)</td>
<td>- Information requirements and Web site evaluation</td>
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<td>- Push motives and intention</td>
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<td>- Attitude toward the event</td>
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<td>Tsuji et al. (2009)</td>
<td>- Brand awareness levels of virtual advertising</td>
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<td>- The effects of animation repetition</td>
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<td>- Baseball involvement</td>
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<td>- Team identification</td>
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Several scholars have examined online consumers’ perceptions of services and the performance of websites (e.g., Koerning, 2003; Negash, Ryan, & Igbaria, 2003; Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002). When using a sport website (e.g., the Seattle Mariners’ website), consumers may engage in various online behaviors (e.g., buying a T-shirt, obtaining a game score, or sharing opinions about the recruitment of players). Each of these behaviors can be described in terms of perceptions of process and outcome quality (Van Riel, Liljander, & Jurriëns, 2001). In the offline market, customer service quality is defined as “a global judgment or attitude related to the superiority of a service” (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988, p. 16). Many scholars have attempted to examine customer perceptions of service quality (Babakus & Boller, 1992; Cronin et al., 2000; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

In particular, the SERVQUAL instrument, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), has been applied to various online business settings (Gounaris & Dimitriadis, 2003; Kuo, 2003; Van Iwaarden & Van der Wiele, 2003; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2002). It consists of five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibility.

However, given the differences between web-based and traditional businesses, it is necessary to reconceptualize at least some of the dimensions of service quality in the online context (Li et al., 2002). For example, the SERVQUAL instrument may not fully explain website quality perceptions because it does not include characteristics such as entertainment quality, website design quality, or responsiveness to information requests, each of which may be important characteristics for understanding online consumer behavior (Li et al., 2002). With regard to the online context, Dabholkar (1996) identified variables that influence service quality expectations, including speed of delivery, ease of use, reliability, enjoyment, and control variables. Although researchers have identified determinants of service quality in e-business, additional research is necessary to more fully understand website quality (Janda, Trocchia, & Gwinner, 2002).

To extend the SERVQUAL instrument to a sport website context, we reviewed the relevant literature from the fields of marketing, information systems, retailing, and computer science, integrating existing models to identify dimensions of SWQ (e.g., Janda et al., 2002; Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004; Liu, Arnett, & Litecky, 2000; Negash et al., 2003; Van der Heijden, 2003; Wang & Tang, 2003; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). These dimensions included the quality of: 1) information, 2) interaction, 3) design, 4) system reliability, and 5) fulfillment (Ko & Hur, 2005). An in-depth examination of each of these dimensions is beyond this study’s scope; however, each is briefly described in the paragraphs that follow.

**Information quality** refers to a sport consumer’s perception of the quality of information presented within a sport website. It consists of two subdimensions: usefulness of content and adequacy (completeness) of information (Ko & Hur, 2005; Yang, Cai, Zhou, & Zhou, 2005). **Usefulness** refers to relevance, accuracy, benefit, and timeliness of sport information provided by a sport website (Liu et al., 2000). **Completeness** is whether sport information is perceived to be comprehensive and complete (Liu et al., 2002).

**Interaction quality** refers to the dynamic interaction between sport fans and service providers (e.g., a sport website) as well as interactions among sport fans (Ko & Hur, 2005). For the interaction between sport fans and providers, we examined website provider courtesy expressed within the website and their ability to respond to sport fans’ needs (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004). Sport websites provide a “many-to-many” communication channel in which online sport fans can be information receivers as well as providers (Li et al., 2002). Sport fans often enjoy sharing their opinions regarding team performance or player recruiting, while others may prefer to chat about various topics or respond to opinion polls. Positive interactions among fans through a team

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**Figure 1** — A proposed model and hypotheses.

**Sport Website Quality (SWQ)**

Several scholars have examined online consumers’ perceptions of services and the performance of websites (e.g., Koerning, 2003; Negash, Ryan, & Igbaria, 2003; Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002). When using a sport website (e.g., the Seattle Mariners’ website), consumers may engage in various online behaviors (e.g., buying a T-shirt, obtaining a game score, or sharing opinions about the recruitment of players). Each of these behaviors can be described in terms of perceptions of process and outcome quality (Van Riel, Liljander, & Jurriëns, 2001). In the offline market, customer service quality is defined as “a global judgment or attitude related to the superiority of a service” (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988, p. 16). Many scholars have attempted to examine customer perceptions of service quality (Babakus & Boller, 1992; Cronin et al., 2000; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

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website may enhance their cohesion, which is one of the important determinants for sport fans’ use of the website (Seo, Green, Ko, Lee, & Schenewerk, 2007). Thus, a consumer’s perceptions of other fans also influences perceptions of website quality.

Design quality is measured by assessing ease-of-use and aesthetic qualities of sport websites (Ko & Hur, 2005). Ease-of-use represents whether a website is easy to navigate and whether it provides a user-friendly interface (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). Flavián et al. (2006) examined the effect of perceived usability (i.e., ease of use) on online users’ loyalty to websites. They argued that usability is a crucial dimension of a website’s image and a key factor of online services. The aesthetics dimension measures the physical features of a website and whether it is visually appealing to consumers (Van der Heijden, 2003). For example, aesthetics of a sport website relates to how sport information is distributed by using attractive layouts, colors, fonts and graphics.

The fourth dimension is system quality. System quality is defined as a sport fan’s perceptions of a website’s performance in information delivery (Ko & Hur, 2005; Yang et al., 2005). It consists of two subdimensions: (1) security and privacy and (2) reliability. Security and privacy is defined as a sport fan’s perceived risks of personal and financial information being abused or compromised. Several studies of online consumer behavior have found that perceived risk of security and privacy is a critical issue in online business transactions (Featherman & Pavlou, 2003; Joines, Scherer, & Scheufele, 2003; Lee, 2002; O’Neil, 2001; Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002; Swinyard & Smith, 2003). Reliability is also an important aspect in measuring website quality (Liu et al., 2000) and refers to “the system’s consistency of performance and dependable” (Negash et al., 2003, p. 760).

The last dimension is fulfillment quality. Huang (2005) emphasized the importance of the outcome variable, website performance, which refers to “users’ subjective evaluative judgment toward a particular website” (p. 842). In his work, Huang contrasted two relevant outcome variables for assessing different categories of website usage: utilitarian and hedonic fulfillment. Utilitarian outcomes refer to “website users’ assessment about the instrumental benefits derived from its functional attributes” (p. 842), while hedonic outcomes refer to the degree of playfulness and pleasure that online sport consumers experience (Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1997). Rice (1997) further supported this notion, claiming that enjoyable experiences lead online consumers to revisit the websites. It is measured as the extent to which sport fans enjoy a website, experience fun, and feel pleasure when using its features and capabilities.

E-Satisfaction

In this study, e-satisfaction is proposed as another important construct for understanding online sport fans’ intentions and ultimate behavior. Consumer satisfaction is defined by Oliver (1981, p. 27) as “the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with a consumer’s prior feelings about the consumer experience.” In other words, satisfaction is “the outcome of an evaluative process, where consumers examine the results of their prior service use and decide whether or not to continue using the service” (Bhattacharjee, 2001, p. 204). A consumer’s satisfaction level reflects how successfully and effectively a company implements its business operations (Melone, 1990; Zviran, Glezer, & Avni, 2006). Klenke (1992) emphasized the importance of understanding consumer satisfaction, since it is associated with other crucial constructs such as loyalty in the context of information systems design. Bittner and Hubbert (1994) proposed two types of consumer satisfaction: transactional and overall. In this study, we focused only on overall satisfaction to reflect all encounters and experiences provided by a sport website to a consumer. As such, overall satisfaction may reflect consumer willingness to revisit the website (Jones & Sasser, 1995).

E-satisfaction, in a similar vein, refers to “the contentment of the customer with respect to his or her prior purchasing experience” with a given website (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003, p. 125). Antecedents of e-satisfaction have been identified by researchers. For example, to capture e-satisfaction, Szymanski and Hise (2000) used consumer perceptions of convenience, merchandising, website design, and financial security. E-satisfaction is also affected by online consumers’ expectations about information quality and perceived performance (McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002). Likewise, Muylle, Moenaert, and Despontin (2004) developed the website user satisfaction (WUS) construct, which included information, connection, and layout, as factors. These various antecedents form the basis for the e-satisfaction construct.

E-Loyalty

Consumer loyalty is one of the most important outcomes of a sport-related online business. Arguably, loyalty provides a meaningful indicator of success for an organization in a competitive market environment (Srivastava, Shervani, & Fahey, 1998). Consumer loyalty is defined as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchases, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). Oliver (1999) conceptualized four levels of loyalty including cognitive, affective, conative, and action. When Oliver’s four levels are applied to a customer’s purchasing behavior on a website, an online customer has a preference (cognitive phase) to alternative websites and can develop positive attitudes (affective phase) toward the website. For the conative level, the consumer is expected to revisit the website and find the most favored product available, but not necessarily engage in purchasing behavior. Finally, the highest level of loyalty occurs at the action phase, where the customer
is ready to revisit the website and purchases the product online. Oliver argued that to create customer loyalty, a company needs to meet and exceed customer needs better than any known competitors.

Anderson and Srinivasan (2003) defined e-loyalty as “the customer’s favorable attitude toward an electronic business resulting in repeat buying behavior” (p. 125). In addition, e-loyalty refers to a consumer’s intention to buy from a website (Flavián et al., 2006) or intention to revisit a website (Cyr, Bonanni, Bowes, & Ilsever, 2005). In this study, e-loyalty to a sport website was defined as a sport consumer’s intention to revisit a sport website and contains both the conative phase and the action phase of Oliver’s (1999) conceptualization.

E-loyalty is considered an important construct because it positively influences long-term profitability (Ribbink, Van Riel, Liljander, & Streukens, 2004) and word-of-mouth referrals (Van Riel et al., 2001). Referrals are crucial in online business, with referred consumers often seeking advice from loyal customers (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000; Van Riel et al., 2001). Given that switching costs are very low in online contexts where alternative websites are only one ‘mouse click’ away, understanding how consumers develop loyalty is critical for all business organizations (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003).

Many scholars have investigated the antecedents to, and consequences of, e-loyalty (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Semeijn, Van Riel, Van Birgelen, & Streukens, 2005; Srinivasan, Anderson, and Ponnavaulu (2002) proposed eight factors for understanding customer loyalty: customization, contact interactivity, cultivation, care, community, choice, convenience, and character. These factors can be operationalized as various services provided by a sport website. Loyalty toward a website may therefore be cultivated and strengthened as online consumers repetitively use various quality functions and services offered by the website (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). Identifying and understanding these various predictors of e-loyalty can help a website succeed in a fierce online business environment (Chiou, 2004).

**SWQ and E-Satisfaction**

The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction has received heavy attention during the past decades, with previous studies (e.g., Caruana, 2002; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Jones & Sasser, 1995; Oliver, 1980) finding that service quality is an important predictor of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction has been found to be influenced more by quality than by price or value (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996). In the online context, Negash et al. (2003) found that the system quality of a website is positively related to website user satisfaction. Likewise, Balabanis, Reynolds, and Simintiras (2006) found that e-satisfaction is influenced not only by product quality but also by website quality, including website design, security/privacy concerns, and convenience applications. Similarly, website users’ overall satisfaction is influenced by website characteristics such as ease-of-use (Bansal, McDougall, Dikolli, & Sedateole, 2004; Zeithaml et al., 2002). As such, website quality has been a robust antecedent of e-satisfaction. Consequently, we propose (see Figure 1):

H1. SWQ positively influences sport fans’ e-satisfaction.

**SWQ and E-Loyalty**

A positive relationship between service quality and loyalty has been supported by several studies. For example, Wang, Hsiao, and Shieh (2005) examined the effect of service quality in the consulting industry on customer satisfaction and loyalty, finding that service quality significantly and positively affects customer satisfaction and loyalty. A positive effect of service quality on customer loyalty has also been demonstrated in the UK steel industry (Lee-Kelley, Davies, & Kangis, 2002). Likewise, Wong and Sohal (2003) found a positive relationship by testing the effect of SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988) on loyalty. Mittal and Lassar (1998) found that because customer satisfaction cannot fully explain loyalty to a service provider, it is also necessary to test how different components of service quality influence loyalty.

Liang and Lai (2002) found that the quality of website design positively affected website users’ purchase decisions. More recently, consumers who have positive service quality evaluations were more likely to purchase products in a given shopping environment (Laroche, Teng, Michon, & Chebat, 2005).

Van Riel et al. (2001) argued that because it is more difficult and expensive to acquire online consumers than offline consumers, quality services offered through a website are necessary to attract and retain online consumers. Therefore, it is necessary to examine whether SWQ is a predictor of loyalty within a sport-related website. Thus, we propose:

H2. SWQ positively influences sport fans’ e-loyalty.

**E-Satisfaction and E-Loyalty**

Although both the e-satisfaction and e-loyalty constructs are commonly measured outcomes of postconsumption behavior in e-business, the loyalty construct is quite different from satisfaction. In particular, loyal consumers show strong emotional attachment and behavioral commitment toward an organization and its website regardless of their satisfaction level or any other situational influences. Satisfaction is an outcome and an evaluative process, which contributes to the development of consumer loyalty.

Prior research has found a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty (e.g., Boulding et al., 1993; Fornell, 1992; Oliver & Swan, 1989). For example, in the offline context, customer satisfaction has been found to directly affect customer loyalty (Bitner, 1990; Ping, 1993). Similarly, Ribbink et al. (2004) confirmed that satisfaction positively and directly influences loyalty in the online business. More recent studies also
supported this positive relationship between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty (Balabanis et al., 2006; Semeijn et al., 2005).

According to Patterson, Johnson, and Spreng (1997), customer satisfaction is highly related to future purchase intentions. Bansal et al. (2004) also explored the relationship between (1) e-satisfaction and customers’ stated purchasing behavior and (2) actual browsing behavior. Furthermore, they found that e-satisfaction influences behavioral outcomes such as website visits, time spent on the website, and number of pages viewed.

It has been proposed that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is much stronger for online than offline consumers (Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003). It is therefore proposed:


The Mediating Effect of E-Satisfaction Between SWQ and E-Loyalty

Satisfaction as a mediator between consumer psychological variables has been well established by researchers (e.g., Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Olsen, 2002). The relationship between SWQ, e-satisfaction, and e-loyalty is consistent with the cognition-affect-behavior hierarchy within expectancy-value theory (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Johnson et al., 2001). In particular, Olsen (2002) found a significant mediating role of satisfaction between perceived quality performance and repurchase loyalty. Thus, we propose:

H4. E-satisfaction mediates the relationship between SWQ and e-loyalty.

Method

Participants

To validate the conceptual model, a convenience sampling method was employed. Specifically, we directly administered instruments to sport participants within the Department of Recreational Sports and students enrolled in various sport management classes at two large universities located in the Northwest and Southeast regions in the U.S., one from the Pacific 10 Conference and the other from the Southeastern Conference. We asked whether participants visited the official website of their athletic department, and included only the users who previously used said websites in the current study (see Table 2).

Four hundred and twenty four respondents participated in the survey, with an effective sample size of 371. Of the 371 respondents, 62.8% (n = 233) were male; 37.2% (n = 138) were female. A majority of the respondents were university students between the ages of 18–25 (90.3%). More than 89.2% of participants (n = 331) have been using the Internet for 5 years or more. The average time used for the official website of the athletic department was less than 1 hr per week. All of the items were measured with a nine-point Likert type scale format, which is suggested by Preston and Colman (2000), ranging from (1) “Strongly Disagree” to (9) “Strongly Agree.” The mean scores of participant loyalty to their athletic teams for these two samples were 6.99 and 7.54, respectively. When comparing these means with the 9-Likert scale, the participants appear to be loyal fans to their respective teams.

Measurement Scales

SWQ. Ko and Hur (2005) developed a sport website quality scale (SWQS) to measure an online sport consumer’s perception of quality of a sport-related website. The scale items were developed and modified from the items of existing scales (e.g., Janda et al., 2002; Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004; Liu et al., 2000; Negash et al., 2003; Van der Heijden, 2003; Wang & Tang, 2003; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). A total of 21 items were included in the original scale, which reflect 5 factors of SWQ (i.e., quality of information, interaction, design, system, and fulfillment). Ko and Hur reported in their previous study that the scale was both reliable and valid. Here, however, 15 of the 21 items (i.e., 3 items for each construct) that had the highest scores in the reliability and validity tests were used to produce psychometrically sound and parsimonious structural models. Cronbach’s alpha of the five factors ranged from .74 to .87 and item loadings ranged from .70 to .88 (see Table 3).

E-satisfaction. E-satisfaction was measured with 3 items derived from Janda et al.’s (2002) online consumer satisfaction measurement scale. Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

E-loyalty. E-loyalty was measured by 3 items adapted from Oliver’s (1997) loyalty scale. Cronbach’s alpha of e-loyalty was .88.

Data Analysis Procedures

The efficacy of the proposed model and psychometric properties of the overall scale were tested using SPSS 16.0 and AMOS 5.0 (Arbuckle, 2003). Data analysis
Table 3  Cronbach’s α, Means, Factor Loadings (β), Critical Ratio (C.R.), Standard Error (S.E.), Construct Reliability (C.Rel), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor (Cronbach’s α)</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>C.R.</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>C.Rel.</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Quality (α = .87)</td>
<td>INF 1.—website is a very useful source of information.</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INF 2. Information contained on—website is rich in detail.</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INF 3. Information contained on—website provides wide ranges of information.</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Quality (α = .79)</td>
<td>ITR 1. I can learn something valuable by interacting with other fans in—website.</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ITR 2. I can count on—web managers to be friendly.</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ITR 3.—web managers recognize and deal with my special needs promptly.</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Quality (α = .85)</td>
<td>DES 1. It is easy to navigate around and find what I want at—website.</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DES 2. The layout of the team’s website is attractive.</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DES 3.—website is visually appealing.</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Quality (α = .74)</td>
<td>SYS 1.—website is error-free.</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYS 2. I feel like my privacy is protected at—website.</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYS 3. I trust—website will not misuse my personal information.</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfillment Quality (α = .78)</td>
<td>FUL 1. I would evaluate the outcome of using—website favorably.</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EUL 2.—website helped improve my knowledge of the sport and team.</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EUL 3. It is fun to visit—website.</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Satisfaction (α = .88)</td>
<td>SAT 1. I am satisfied with my decision to use—website.</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAT 2. Based on all of my experience with—website, I feel very satisfied.</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>19.14</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAT 3. I think I did the right thing when I decided to use—website.</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Loyalty (α = .88)</td>
<td>LOY 1. I have repeatedly found—website is better than others.</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LOY 2. I always continue to favor the offering of—website before others.</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LOY 3. I always choose to use—website in preference to others.</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

was executed with 3 steps. First, we conducted a full measurement model test including all constructs (i.e., information, interaction, design, system, and fulfillment quality, e-satisfaction, and e-loyalty). The psychometric properties of all constructs (the five service quality dimensions along with e-satisfaction and e-loyalty) and indicators were then assessed with respect to convergent and discriminant validity. Second, structural regression models were tested to determine the hypothesized relationships among the research constructs. Finally, the mediating effect of e-satisfaction between SWQ and e-loyalty was tested with structural equation model tests.
Results

Descriptive Statistics

The mean score of each item is provided in Table 3. The summated means of SWQ factors were 6.48 (information), 5.58 (interaction), 6.41 (design), 6.09 (system), and 6.38 (fulfillment), and the standard errors ranged from .04 to .11. The summated means of e-satisfaction and e-loyalty were 6.50 and 5.87, respectively.

Measurement Model Test

To test the factor structure rigorously, we conducted a full measurement model test with a confirmatory factor analysis. The result of the measurement model was found to have a reasonable model fit. The value of $\chi^2/df$ ratio ($2.81 = 472.10/168$) was lower than the suggested threshold (i.e., less than 3.0; Bollen, 1989; Kline, 2005, p. 137). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was .070, and this value indicates reasonable errors of approximation (i.e., less than .08; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999). The comparative fit index (CFI; .94), the normed fit index (NFI; .91), the incremental fit index (IFI; .94), and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI; .93) were above the suggested minimum threshold of .90 (see Table 4).

The item loadings of the final scale ranged from .61 to .88 for SWQ factors; .82 to .86 for e-satisfaction; and .79 to .89 for e-loyalty. Table 3 presents the results of the measurement model, including the standardized factor loadings, critical ratio, standard errors, construct reliabilities, and average variance extracted for each construct. All loadings of the indicators for each construct were significant at the .05 significance level, and greater than the suggested value of .60 (Kline, 2005), with the exception of one item (i.e., SYS1). Construct reliabilities and average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent variable exceeded the recommended standard of .70 and .50, respectively (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006).

To test for discriminant validity, we used a correlation analysis among all constructs (see Table 5). The estimated correlations between the factors are not excessively high (e.g., < .85; Kline, 2005). Among the total of 21 correlations, however, one correlation value was greater than the suggested threshold. Based upon the results of the data analyses, it is concluded that the validity and reliability of the E-SQ constructs are satisfactory.

### Table 4  Goodness-of-Fit Indexes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\chi^2/df$</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>NFI</th>
<th>IFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2$ ($\Delta df$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measurement Model</td>
<td>472.10</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>(.063 ~ .077)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct-Effect Model</td>
<td>349.19</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>(.059 ~ .077)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Model (Partially-Mediated Model)</td>
<td>518.72</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>(.064 ~ .078)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully-Mediated Model</td>
<td>519.03</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.031 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5  Correlations between Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>System</th>
<th>Fulfillment</th>
<th>E-Satisfaction</th>
<th>E-Loyalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfillment</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Satisfaction</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>-.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Loyalty</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reliability of the overall scale were established with the exception of several high factor correlations.

**Structural Model Testing and Hypothesis Tests**

To examine the hypothesized relationships of SWQ, e-satisfaction, and e-loyalty, we conducted structural model analyses. The results of the proposed structural model (see Figure 2) test showed a good model fit, with $\chi^2/df$ of $2.87$, RMSEA of $0.071$ and CFI of $0.93$.

The first hypothesis examines the causal relationship between SWQ and e-satisfaction and was supported with the standardized path coefficient of $0.93$ (critical ratio of $16.18$ at $p < 0.05$; see Figure 2). The second hypothesis, stating that website quality influences e-loyalty, was rejected. The third hypothesis, that e-satisfaction influences e-loyalty, was supported with the standardized path coefficients of $0.62$ ($3.05$ critical ratio).

**Mediating Effects of E-Satisfaction on the Relationship Between SWQ and E-Loyalty**

According to Holmbeck (1997), three steps must be taken to examine mediator effects in structural equation modeling. These steps followed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) approach for testing mediated effects. First, the direct-effect model (see Figure 3) tests the effect of the predictor (SWQ) on the criterion variable (e-loyalty) in the absence of the mediator (e-satisfaction). For the mediation to exist, the path coefficients from SWQ to e-loyalty should be significant for the next analysis. As shown in Figure 3, a path coefficient was significant (i.e., $0.70$ at $p < 0.05$). The second step is to test a fully-mediated structural model that links SWQ to e-satisfaction and e-satisfaction to e-loyalty (see Figure 4). The final step is to test a partially-mediated structured model in which a direct path from SWQ to e-loyalty was added (see Figure 2). Then, a $\chi^2$ difference test is computed between the $\chi^2$
value of the fully-mediated model and the $\chi^2$ value of the partially-mediated model. The chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2 = 0.31$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$) was not significant. This result indicates that e-satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between SWQ and e-loyalty. As shown in Figure 4, SWQ is significantly associated with e-satisfaction (path coefficient = .94) and e-satisfaction is significantly associated with e-loyalty (path coefficient = .74). Thus, hypothesis 4 is supported.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study empirically examined the theoretical relationships between SWQ, e-satisfaction, and e-loyalty. Although the psychological constructs examined in this study are central to the understanding of sport consumers’ behavior in e-business, few studies have examined causal relationships in the context of online sport consumption behavior.

The results of measurement model tests suggested that measurement scale items were both reliable and valid. The results of a structural equation modeling analysis suggested that the proposed model is psychometrically sound. In addition, three of four hypotheses were confirmed (see Figure 2). Specifically, the series of data analyses revealed that sport fans’ e-loyalty to a sport website has a clear sequential process. A high-quality sport website increases fan satisfaction; likewise, heightened levels of satisfaction improve consumer loyalty to the website.

The major findings support a large body of previous research in both offline and online business contexts. Theoretical and practical implications follow.
The positive relationship between SWQ and e-satisfaction was consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted both in the offline setting (Caruna, 2002: banking customers) and online context (Negash et al., 2003: web-based customer support systems). This result implies that the better quality websites induce greater consumer satisfaction during website consumption experiences. More specifically, consumer satisfaction with the website improves when a sport website offers useful and relevant information and entertainment for sport consumers through attractive and easy-to-navigate website design. A similar result was found in Filo et al.’s (2009) study which emphasized the importance of information delivery in the context of the “Indy 300” website. Filo et al. found that the website users’ satisfaction and attitudes toward the website increased when the users perceived quality information delivery.

Second, e-satisfaction positively influenced e-loyalty. These results also supported the findings of previous studies: (1) Bansal et al.’s (2004) study on the relationships between e-satisfaction and behavioral outcomes in the online context and (2) Anderson and Srinivasan’s (2003) study on the impact of e-satisfaction on e-loyalty. The relationship between SWQ and e-loyalty was also confirmed in the direct-effect model (Figure 3). This result was also consistent with the findings of previous studies on a cross-cultural assessment of the effects of satisfaction on consumers’ behavioral intentions (Brady, Robertson, & Cronin, 2001) and the impact of service quality dimensions on customer loyalty to a large chain department store (Wong & Sohal, 2003).

The results stemming from the undertaken statistical procedures to test a mediating effect clearly indicated that the mediating role of e-satisfaction on the relationship between SWQ and e-loyalty was significant. This implies that e-satisfaction is a full mediating variable when explaining the relationship between SWQ and e-loyalty. This step is critical in predicting online sport consumer e-loyalty. In addition, this indicates that cognitive evaluations (SWQ perceptions) precede emotional responses (e-satisfaction and e-loyalty; Bagozzi, 1992). This finding has an important implication in that few prior studies regarding sport websites examined the mediating role of e-satisfaction (although several studies for nonsport websites examined the role). For example, Dabholkar, Shepherd, and Thorpe (2000) identified customer satisfaction as a mediating variable between service quality and future behavioral intention to use the service provided by a national photographic company in the offline context. When a fan develops high quality perceptions toward a sport website, it is more likely that the fan develops loyalty. However, their overall positive consumption experiences and satisfaction are of utmost importance in predicting fan loyalty in e-business. For example, it is assumed that the content of sufficiently high-quality information is of particular interest to the user. Even the most beautiful and well-designed website may not be satisfying to users if it does not contain information in which they are interested. This result also supports the previous findings reported in Caruana’s (2002) study, in that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and loyalty.

Marketing Implications

The results of this study provide sport marketers with a better understanding of online consumer behavior. It is important for sport marketers and scholars to realize the growth of Internet usage and understand sport fan behavior in the online context. By effectively attending to these issues, marketers can better meet the needs of the sport fan and in turn attract and retain additional fans. Attracting and retaining additional sport fans ultimately leads to financial benefits for the organization. As the current study found, the relationships of SWQ, e-satisfaction, and e-loyalty to a sport website have a clear sequential link. Developing the right mix of website content and services, as well as a high-quality website design is paramount. When sport fans make a choice to use a certain sport website, they are likely to compare other alternative sport websites in terms of website quality. Ensuring the amount and quality of information delivered makes this comparison easier for consumers and they are more likely to remain satisfied and loyal to one particular sport website.

Therefore, sport marketers need to provide not only great services such as accurate and timely information, they must also provide a high-quality user friendly interface and secure transactions. The result of this study indicates that even though sport fans may perceive the high quality of sport websites, they may not revisit the websites unless they are satisfied with their consumption experiences with these websites. Sport marketers must realize that their websites are not only media sources for sport information, but are also reciprocal communication tools that can satisfy fans to retain and attract more people. In sum, to maximize consumer loyalty, it is necessary to pay close attention to not only the product mix, but also the website environment.

Limitations and Future Study

This study has a limitation. The conceptual model was examined with the sample of university recreational sport users and students enrolled in various sport management classes who have visited the official websites of the athletic departments at two large universities. The participants in this study were highly loyal fans to each university team. Therefore, the tested model here may not be generalized to other groups. Even though the model fits to the data well, further studies are necessary to confirm reliability and validity of the scale and the model by using a broader sample.

For future studies, our findings suggest that further research is warranted and scholars should examine different types of websites such as a sport web portal (e.g., espn.go.com) or a sport e-tailer (e.g., tennishouseware.com). Because we focused and developed the model on official athletic department websites, examining other...
types of websites may be necessary, since online sport consumers may show different perceptions of website quality, level of satisfaction, and loyalty in other contexts. For example, people who use a sport e-tailor may be more concerned with system quality rather than design quality. In addition, scholars may be interested in the effect of level of satisfaction with a product purchased in a sport e-tailor on loyalty to the website. In a professional team’s website, it may be interesting to investigate how team loyalty influences satisfaction and loyalty to the website.

References


