



The Impact of Service Quality on Destination Image among Sports Event Participants: Evidence from the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the effects of service quality on destination image formation for the participants in the International School Games Bahrain 2024. In this regard, a descriptive survey research design was utilized, and data were collected using a valid questionnaire that was distributed to 360 randomly chosen participants who belong to different nationalities and serve various purposes in the event. Results show that all five aspects of service quality are highly satisfied by the participants, and these include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In addition, a positive destination image is perceived by them in terms of modernity, development, facilities, safety, and a friendly society. There is a significant effect of service quality on destination image ($p < .001$), where service quality predicts 83.8% of the variance in destination image. The School Games Bahrain 2024 is presented here as an international multi-sport event from which it is possible to see how organizing international events positively impacts the national image of a country and also leads to positive tourism and economic effects, provided there are good service standards during such events. The situation in Bahrain is shown here not as a unique case, but as an exemplary context. The study helps fill the gap both at a global and regional level by stressing the importance of service quality for the perception of the destination and recommending using mixed-methods research in the future.

Keywords: Sport Events, Service Quality, Destination Image, Sports Tourism, Bahrain.

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Introduction

Many nations compete in an effort to host significant sporting events, which would boost their international profile while bringing them various benefits in terms of their culture, economy, and social status. There is a considerable body of literature devoted to the effects of such events on the hosting country and region, which has been the focus of numerous studies (Thomson et al., 2019; Koenigstorfer et al., 2019; Malchrowicz-Moško & Poczta, 2018). Successful hosting of big sporting events is believed to improve the reputation of the destination in question as a result of increased tourism and business activity that contributes to enhanced international reputation (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2019). This issue may be considered both from the perspective of supply and from the perspective of demand, which is associated with the psychological aspects of participation (Kaplanidou et al., 2013).

In this regard, it is important to note that the idea of service quality during sporting events has received significant scholarly attention because the expectations of participants depend on various factors associated with political, cultural, and social background, which causes different perceptions of services offered to different participants. Service quality assessment in sporting events should be performed according to several parameters, including event organizing, venue features, safety measures, service provider performance, and communication efficacy (Zhao, 2025). Apart from the issue of service quality, another key concept of sport event research is destination image, which consists of three major elements: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Milovanović et al., 2021). These components define participants' perceptions of an event itself and its destination, which, in its turn, allows making the event a powerful platform for highlighting the characteristics and values of a country to a wide audience (Meier et al., 2021).

Recent studies have established robust connections between service quality, value, satisfaction, and intentions for behavior in the sport and recreation settings (Choi et al., 2018; Le et al., 2025). The significance of evaluating the image of sport events was emphasized by other studies by proving that people develop a cognitive and affective image of events in which they participate (Ocakoglu et al., 2025). Moreover, some studies proved that the quality of services is a vital component in forming satisfaction, loyalty, and intentions for behavior in the sport and fitness setting (Gücal & Gürbüz, 2024). In this case, sport institutions try to satisfy needs of their beneficiaries through providing high-quality services because effective leadership and organization are necessary for developing positive image of an institution (Alsandi et al., 2025). Thus, these findings prove the relevance of evaluating service quality and destination image in sport event environment.

Despite the vast amount of literature regarding sporting events in the global arena, empirical studies exploring the organizational aspects of such events in the Gulf and Arab societies are few. In the last decade, the Kingdom of Bahrain has taken advantage of being a host to regional and international sporting events to develop the sports tourism sector as well as supporting sports infrastructure through the efforts of the Ministry of Tourism, the Bahrain Olympic Committee, and the sports federations of the country (Sowaid, 2024). However, studies regarding the effects of service quality on the formation of destination image are few



in number. Sowaid et al. (2025) call for further systematic and practical research on this subject, especially due to the fast developing Bahraini sport event sector. This study attempts to fill this gap by exploring the perceptions about the level of service quality and destination image among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024).

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the perceived level of service quality among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)?
2. What is the perceived destination image among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between service quality and destination image among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)?

Study Design and Methods

Methodology of the Study

A descriptive survey research design was used in the study because this type of research is relevant for the investigation of phenomena existing in reality via the systematic measurement of the participants' perceptions.

Study Population and Sample

The study population included all the beneficiaries and stakeholders in the International School Games (Bahrain 2024), such as coaches, administrators, officials, referees, and media personnel. Based on the data provided by the official source – the Bahrain News Agency (BNA, 2024), the study population was around 5,515 people who represented 80 school federations from 71 countries. The minimum number of respondents that should be surveyed was calculated in accordance with the recommendations of Serdar et al. (2021) taking into account the population of 5,515 people, confidence level 95%, and the margin of error $\pm 5\%$; thus, the minimum number of the sample should be 359 and round up to 360. Simple random sampling was used for the selection of participants. Table 1 shows the distribution of the study sample.

Table 1. *Distribution of the primary study sample*

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Less than 30 years	93	25.8
	From 30 to 40 years	140	38.9
	More than 40 years	127	35.3
	Total	360	%100
Position	Coach	105	29.2
	Administrator	85	23.6
	Official	68	18.9
	Referee	52	14.4
	Media Personnel	50	13.9
	Total	360	%100
Identity	Bahraini	73	20.3
	Arab Resident	146	40.6
	Non-Arab Resident	141	39.2
	Total	360	%100



Study Instrument and Validity

A quantitative tool in the form of a structured questionnaire was used for collecting data from the study participants concerning service quality and its importance in influencing perceptions of beneficiaries with regards to the International School Games (Bahrain 2024). This questionnaire was designed after conducting a thorough literature review and related studies. Content validity was assessed by a panel of ten experts in sports management, who evaluated the relevance of the items, clarity of wording, and alignment with the study constructs. The experts confirmed the suitability of the instrument, recommending only minor wording modifications, and the item acceptance rates ranged from 90% to 100%, indicating a high level of content validity.

Internal Consistency

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated between each item score and its corresponding scale score to assess internal consistency. As shown in Table (2), the correlation coefficients ranged from .704 to .881 for the service quality dimensions and from .716 to .877 for the destination image dimensions. All coefficients were statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < .01$), indicating a high level of internal consistency and supporting the construct-related validity of the questionnaire.

Table 2. *Pearson correlation coefficient between the score of each statement and the axis to which it belongs*

Tangibility	Correlation Coefficient	Reliability	Correlation Coefficient	Responsiveness	Correlation Coefficient
1	.733**	6	.829**	10	.755**
2	.758**	7	.752**	11	.782**
3	.728**	8	.795**	12	.877**
4	.704**	9	.786**	13	.813**
5	.847**			14	.831**
Assurance	Correlation Coefficient	Empathy	Correlation Coefficient		
15	.853**	19	.868**		
16	.881**	20	.768**		
17	.786**	21	.847**		
18	.712**	22	.744**		
Cognitive Image	Correlation Coefficient	Affective Image	Correlation Coefficient	Social Image	Correlation Coefficient
1	.762**	6	.731**	11	.847**
2	.782**	7	.716**	12	.847**
3	.847**	8	.762**	13	.764**
4	.795**	9	.833**	14	.847**
5	.816**	10	.877**	15	.717**

Stability of the study tool



To verify the reliability of the instrument, the test-retest method was employed by administering the questionnaire to a pilot sample ($n = 27$) drawn from outside the main research sample. The same group completed the questionnaire again after a two-week interval. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the instrument, yielding a coefficient of 0.971. This indicates a high level of reliability for the study instrument.

Calculating stability using Cronbach's alpha

Table 3. Axes reliability by Cronbach's alpha coefficient

Dimension	Item Numbers	Cronbach's Alpha
Service Quality Dimensions		
Tangibility	1–5	0.936
Reliability	6–9	0.905
Responsiveness	10–14	0.962
Assurance	15–18	0.918
Empathy	19–22	0.957
Destination Image Dimensions		
Cognitive Image	23–27	0.968
Affective Image	28–32	0.972
Social Image	35–37	0.906
Overall Instrument	1–37	0.971

Statistical Interpretation Criteria

Arithmetic mean ranges were employed to interpret the levels of the measured variables.

Table 4. Statistical standard for determining the quality of services and their role in improving the mental image of beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)

Degree	Arithmetic mean
low	1.0 - 1.66
Medium	1.67 - 2.33
High	2.34 - 3

Results

This section presents the results reached by this study based on the sample members' responses to the study questions, as follows:

Results related to the answer to the first question: What is the perceived level of service quality among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)?



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Table 5. Arithmetic means in descending order and standard deviations related to the service quality domain (N360)

number	Paragraph	Average	deviation	Rank	Degree
Paragraph		Arithmetic*	Standard		
	Tangibility	2.74	.340		High
1	Bahraini employees are good looking and elegant	2.83	.373	2	High
2	The interior design of sports facilities is characterized by modernity	2.64	.481	4	High
3	Healthy and clean sports fields are available	2.72	.449	3	High
4	The match stadiums have a distinct geographical location	2.61	.637	5	High
5	Bahrain has highly qualified volunteers	2.89	.315	1	High
	Reliability	2.57	.428		High
6	School games services are tied to a specific schedule	2.33	.708	4	Medium
7	School Games staff provide adequate and appropriate information to beneficiaries	2.44	.644	3	High
8	Employees provide a range of services that meet the desires of beneficiaries	2.67	.624	2	High
9	Ease of procedures to obtain services in the Kingdom of Bahrain	2.83	.373	1	High
	Responsiveness	2.63	.332		High
10	School Games organizers provide fast and immediate service to beneficiaries	2.61	.488	4	High
11	The School Games Administration listens to the proposals submitted by the beneficiaries	2.64	.481	3	High
12	The School Games includes a mechanism to evaluate the services provided to beneficiaries	2.39	.637	5	High
13	The School Games administration is interested in resolving problems as quickly as possible	2.75	.434	2	High
14	Volunteers are constantly present at their workplaces	2.78	.416	1	High
	Assurance	2.63	.427		High



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15	The School Games Administration works to achieve integrity and transparency in providing services to beneficiaries	2.72	.449	2	High
16	The School Games Administration provides sufficient guarantees and facilities to meet the needs of the beneficiaries of the services provided	2.56	.644	3	High
17	The stadiums have security and safety factors such as (emergency exits and fire extinguishers)	2.42	.830	4	High
18	There is a list outlining the rights and duties of School Games beneficiaries	2.83	.373	1	High
	Empathy	2.81	.341		High
19	Every beneficiary of the School Games receives adequate attention in the service provided to them	2.81	.396	3	High
20	The workers provide advice to the beneficiaries according to the services provided	2.86	.346	2	High
21	School Games staff are characterized by good manners and respect	2.89	.315	1	High
22	The organizers of the School Games are distinguished by the art of dealing with problems	2.69	.616	4	High
	The tool as a whole	2.68	.337		High

Table 5 indicates that the mean scores for service quality items ranged from 2.33 to 2.89, reflecting medium to high levels of perceived service quality among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024). Across the five dimensions, the highest-rated aspects related to the presence of highly qualified volunteers (tangibility), ease of service procedures (reliability), continuous availability of volunteers (responsiveness), clarity of beneficiaries' rights and duties (assurance), and staff courtesy and respectful treatment (empathy), collectively indicating a high overall perception of service quality.

Question 2: What is the perceived destination image among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)?

Table 6. Arithmetic means in descending order and standard deviations related to the destination image domain (N360)

number	Paragraph	Average	deviation	Rank	Degree
Paragraph		Arithmetic*	Standard		
	Cognitive Image	2.77	.310		High



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23	The Kingdom of Bahrain has modern civilizational development	2.86	.346	2	High
24	The Kingdom of Bahrain has a thriving economy, advanced technology, and strong internet speed	2.75	.434	3	High
25	The Kingdom of Bahrain is very popular among the delegations participating in the School Games	2.89	.315	1	High
26	public transportation system is excellent in the Kingdom of Bahrain	2.67	.624	5	High
27	The Kingdom of Bahrain enjoys various tourist attractions	2.69	.461	4	
	Affective Image	2.72	.321		High
28	Through my participation in the tournament, I became a fan of the Kingdom of Bahrain	2.67	.472	4	High
29	Through my participation in the tournament, I loved the Kingdom of Bahrain as a tourist destination	2.64	.481	5	High
30	Through my participation in the tournament, I see that the Kingdom of Bahrain is a country in which one can live	2.69	.461	3	High
31	I felt safe and secure in the Kingdom of Bahrain	2.83	.373	1	High
32	I enjoyed organizing the tournament and the activities that accompany the sporting event	2.78	.416	2	
	Social Image	2.74	.423		High
33	The Bahraini people are friendly and cooperative	2.89	.315	1	High
34	The Bahraini people are committed to traffic safety and adhere to general laws	2.61	.488	5	High
35	The Bahraini people are open to tourism	2.69	.461	3	High
36	The Bahraini people are proud of their country	2.64	.481	4	High



37	The Bahraini people are cultured people, and I did not encounter any linguistic or cultural barriers with the	2.87	.372	2
The tool as a whole		2.74	.351	High

Table 6 shows that the mean scores for destination image items ranged from 2.61 to 2.89, indicating a high overall perception of destination image among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024). The highest-rated aspects were related to Bahrain's popularity among participating delegations (cognitive image), positive experiences with event organization and accompanying activities (affective image), and perceptions of the host community as friendly and cooperative (social image).

Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between service quality and destination image among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)

Table 7. Multiple Linear Analysis to service quality and destination image among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R	R Square	F Value	Sig.
Regression	26.794	5	5.359	.915	.838	366.586	.000
Residual	5.175	354	.015				
Total	31.969	359					

Table (7) presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis examining the effect of service quality on destination image among beneficiaries of the International School Games (Bahrain 2024). The results indicate a statistically significant effect at the 0.01 level ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient (R) is .915, indicating a very strong relationship between service quality and destination image. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is .838, suggesting that approximately 83.8% of the variance in destination image is explained by the quality of services. These findings confirm the presence of a strong and statistically significant relationship between service quality and destination image.

Discussion

Service quality is one of the key elements that influence the competitiveness of the sport event industry since it influences the perception of satisfaction, experience, and behavioral intentions of the visitors. As per the results of this research, all the indicators of service quality, including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, have been evaluated by the participants very positively which means that the International School Games (Bahrain 2024) managed to organize a highly satisfactory experience. These results prove the high level of investment that is made by the country into the development of the human and tangible resources.

The above results confirm earlier studies showing that the dimensions of service quality are significant determinants of satisfaction in the sports and fitness sectors, implying that good service quality has a broad-based effect irrespective of whether the sport is large or small or



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whether it is conducted in different cultures (Huang & Kim, 2023). Similarly, Berber and Mollaoğulları (2020) indicated that the respondents had high appraisals of service quality concerning the quality of the employees and the quality of the programs, stressing the need for qualified human resource management within an efficient organization structure, as one of the critical aspects for offering quality services in sports events. The results of this study are also in line with those reported by Theodorakis et al. (2015) on the importance of the relationship between participants and service providers in determining service quality. In this case, the high level of responsiveness and empathy indicates that respect for professionalism is essential in service provision.

Alongside other aspects mentioned, material resources, infrastructure development, and institutional factors play an important role in perception of service quality. The high level of satisfaction reported by participants regarding venue quality, accessibility, and transportation system confirms previous findings on the significance of investment in infrastructure as one of the main determinants for making a place attractive and ensuring successful event organization (Boroujerdi et al., 2023; Caraka et al., 2023; Heebkhoksung et al., 2023; Karinda et al., 2024). While improving infrastructure makes operations more efficient, such actions are able to increase the symbolic and emotional aspect of destination. Moreover, in line with existing studies, it was found out that government is one of the major players when organizing events internationally due to the provision of legal framework, funding, security, logistics, and promotion (Temnyk, 2017; Weed, 2020). Overall, the discussed data demonstrates how Bahrain's integrated institutional strategy contributes to improved event performance and participant experience.

In relation to destination image, the results of this analysis show strong, positive cognitive, affective, and social images of Bahrain, where participants view Bahrain as a developed, dynamic, technologically advanced, safe, and friendly destination. The results correspond with the findings of previous researches proving that sports events and their host destinations' perceptions positively correlate with people's satisfaction and further willingness to come back to visit the location again (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Hautbois et al., 2020). It is notable that the social image of Bahrain, which is defined by hospitality, cooperativeness, openness, and pride of people for their native place, corresponds to the literature on the subject, emphasizing the significance of the interaction between locals and visitors for achieving good outcomes at events (Polcsik & Perényi, 2022; Yao & Schwarz, 2018). This statement was echoed by Vial and Barget (2023) who stated that cultural expression and social integration play important roles in leaving a social legacy from sports events. Finally, the obtained findings are also consistent with Rozhda and Sheresheva (2021) who stated that properly arranged international sports events can increase the visibility of locations and make tourists attracted to visiting the location.

From the results of this research, it can be stated that there is a strong relationship between service quality and destination image which has very high explanatory power ($R^2 = .838$, $p < .001$). This means that when there is perceived high service quality, the evaluation of the host destination will be positive. Such a conclusion has been made based on other researches which emphasize the impact of quality of services and events on perception regarding destinations. For instance, Milovanović et al. (2021) noted that the quality of sport



event plays an important role not only for destination image but also affects the behavioral intention of visitors as their evaluation of the organizational and service aspects exceeds the evaluation of the event. In addition, the research carried out by Kusumah and Wahyudin (2024) found that the higher quality of events had a positive effect on tourists' destination image and increased their satisfaction with their visit as well as loyalty to the given destination. In addition, according to the findings obtained by Setyaningtyas et al. (2021), destination image can be linked to such aspects as the quality of events, sports participation, and motivations for travel. Likewise, Sowaid and Al-Salawi (2026) found that the hosting of a major sporting event in Bahrain created positive cognitive, social, and cultural perceptions of it among the participants.

In a similar vein, however, some other studies have taken into consideration the mediating influences in establishing the relationship between service quality and destination image. According to a study conducted by Rahayu et al. (2024), sports events help in improving revisit intentions and ensuring sustainability in tourism by indirectly impacting destination performance through satisfaction and value perceptions, an outcome similar to the one achieved here. Nevertheless, these studies also highlight how the relationship in question may have more dimensions than just service quality and destination image, since other factors might come into play. On the contrary, the current study found that service quality in itself accounts for a considerable amount of the variance in destination image, a result that might be attributed to the nature of newly-formed sports tourism destinations that depend more on their services in creating an image.

Conclusion

The current study has found out that service quality is an essential factor in the formation of perceptions regarding sports events as well as the overall destination image. High service quality in all aspects at the International School Games Bahrain 2024 indicates the effectiveness of the sports event model, which helps in creating positive associations and attitudes towards the sporting event. Strong correlation between service quality and destination image serves as a theoretical contribution to the fields of sport tourism and event management in the Gulf countries, where there are very few empirically-based studies available.

Furthermore, the results of the research have practical implications for sport event managers, tourism officials, and policymakers. It becomes obvious that high levels of service quality can make significant contributions to the overall destination image. Therefore, consistent investments should be made into staff training, volunteer education, and participant-oriented services. In addition, the use of service quality protocol, performance measurement systems, and digital tools is also necessary.

Moreover, the findings indicate the significance of the quality of infrastructure, venue accessibility, safety and transportation services for the participant experience. Consequently, proper planning and coordination between sport associations, local governments and tourism authorities become critical in order to ensure that sports events are incorporated into larger destination development programs. In this regard, international sport events can be considered as tools for positioning destinations and marketing their tourism potential. The coordination of sports events management and tourism/economic policies of the country will be beneficial for destination reputation building.



Recommendations and Future Research

Several recommendations can be made based on the results of the study. In terms of practice, it is suggested that the organizers of sport events and other involved parties implement service quality management programs that involve continuous training of employees, implementation of standardized processes, and collection of participants' feedbacks. These steps will improve the quality of services and contribute to increasing their effectiveness, thereby ensuring better experiences of visitors and building a positive image of the destination. It is necessary to give much consideration to the development of volunteers' skills, improvement of communication processes, and using digital technologies in the process of delivering services during large-scale sport events.

In regard to research, there is a need to use longitudinal designs in future studies aimed at analyzing the impact of sport events on the destination image, tourist behavior, and local community. The use of mixed methods can allow researchers to conduct more in-depth analysis and understand the phenomenon better. Comparative studies conducted among different destinations should also be used, especially in the GCC countries. Future research should consider mediating and moderating factors, such as perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.

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