

INFLUENCING FACTORS ON GAMEDAY EXPERIENCE: MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

Understanding influencing factors on fan satisfaction provides critical information for sport organizations. The task of making their current customers happy and satisfied is important, since it directly relates to customer retention. This means that satisfied customers are likely to continue their patronage. Similarly, Trail, Anderson, and Fink (2005) mentioned that satisfaction was a key determinant of future behavioral intentions. Satisfaction can be derived from a consumer's perception of the overall value received in relationships with an organization (Blanchard & Galloway, 1994)

Based on this, this study aims to examine influencing factors and their relative importance on Season Ticket Holders' (STH) gameday experience of a Major League Baseball (MLB) team. Based on the framework of Rust and Oliver (1994), three factors relevant to gameday experience were selected: game performance (three items), customer service (two items), and quality of stadium (two items). The items were measured by a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). In addition, various descriptive questions were asked including season ticket usage, reasons of not renewing season tickets, most important benefits for STH and socio-demographic questions. The target MLB team is located in the northeastern region of the United States. The questions used in this study were a part of the annual season ticket holders' survey conducted by the team.

The survey was conducted at the beginning of 2013 season via online. An invitation email was sent to the season ticket holders. As an incentive, a signed jersey was given to randomly selected participants. All respondents hold some types of season tickets ranging from full season to ten games per season (total eight different types). The total number of respondents was 1,380. The majority of the respondents were male (n=926, 67.1%), married (n=816, 59.1%) and Caucasian (n=1,176, 85.2%). In terms of age, all age groups were represented:

18-21(n=16), 22-25 (n=45), 26-35 (n=218), 36-45 (n=238), 46-55 (n=327), 56-65 (n=312) and 66 and older (n=85). In terms of respondent's education, the biggest two groups have bachelors' degree (n= 404) and graduate/professional degree (n=373).

To test reliability of the construct, Cronbach's tests were conducted for three constructs (game performance $\alpha=.81$; customer service $\alpha=.74$; quality of stadium $\alpha=.84$), and all alpha values were above the recommended level of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The mean scores were as the followed: performance (M=3.98, SD =0.82), customer service (M=4.16, SD =0.96), quality of stadium (M=4.9, SD =0.34), and gameday experience (M=4.18, SD =0.93). Multiple regression analysis was used to see how much the three factors (i.e., game performance, customer service, and quality of stadium) explain gameday experience. The result of the regression analysis showed that all three factors were significant predictors in explaining gameday experience ($F(3, 1241)=185.17, p<.001, R^2=.31$). Among the three predictors, 'performance' ($\beta=.035$) was the biggest predictor for season ticket holders' gameday experience followed by 'customer service' ($\beta=.021$), and 'quality of stadium' ($\beta=.017$). This result means that team's performance is the most important in deciding the gameday experience. Relatively little contribution of 'quality of stadium' might be due to very little variance among respondents (M=4.9 out of 5). To put this into the context, the target team has a relatively new ballpark which opened in early 2000.

In terms of the most important benefits given to season ticket holders, 'discounted ticket package'(n=551) followed by 'ticket exchange program for unused tickets' (n=369) were top two benefits among eight benefits. Other benefits include 'online ticket manager' (n=161), 'dedicated service representative' (n=120), early access to the ballpark on the gameday' (n=46), 'discounts on additional tickets' (n=41), 'dedicated STH website'(n=8), and 'ticket donation (n=1). The reasons for not renewing their season tickets varied including 'STH benefits' (n=27), 'customer service' (n=26), 'cost of tickets' (n=19), 'overall cost' (n=16), 'team performance' (n=16) and others.

In terms of the season ticket usage, the majority of tickets were used for personal purposes while some for multiple purposes: 1. Personal [family (n=644), spouse-date (n=634), friend (n=415), myself (n=120)]. 2. Business [client-entertainment (n=119), colleague-entertainment (n=60)].

The results of this survey need to be interpreted with caution. More specifically, the respondents of this survey are season ticket holders who are likely have higher identification with the team than regular spectators. It is possible that the importance of factors vary with different population. In addition, the subject team's performance level (below average) could have been a factor for the results. More discussion and implications of the results will be presented.

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