

# Socialization into Football Fans: Role of Children as a Socialization Agent

Munehiko Harada, Waseda University, Japan, haradamunehiko@waseda.jp

Mina Tezuka, Japanese Association of Sport Management, Japan

---

Keywords: socialization, football fans, cause-and-effect model, soccer school

## Abstract

### Introduction

Just after the J League started in 1993, attendance rose sharply and dropped significantly after the 1996 season because of Japan's economic downturn.

Nevertheless, the crowds returned in the lead-up to the FIFA World Cup of 2002 and leveled off in the 2006 season. With the start of the 2007 season, all 31 teams of the J League joined in a common midterm target, known as the "Eleven Million Project", in which the league is aiming for an overall annual attendance of 11 million by 2010.

Attendance of the Yokohama F. Marinos, which is the subject of this study, paralleled attendance of the J League.

Therefore, in the 2007 season, the club set a target of one million fans for home games by 2010 and announced plans to strengthen the top team and encourage attendance through promotional activities of the organization, soccer schools, etc.

Miyazaki and Furuya (2006) suggested the possibility of soccer schools as a new base organization by pointing out that the kindergarten and elementary school-age children for whom J League clubs open schools are future supporters and the key to expanding the support base was the parents. For that reason, this study focused on children of J League club soccer schools and their parents as the means for increasing attendance.

On the subject of consumer behavior, Heskett et al (1994) and Jones and Sasser (1996) pointed out a strong tendency of customers who are fully satisfied with a specific service to be very loyal and to repeatedly buy the same product or service. Matsuoka (2004), who claimed that, in regards to the behavior of sports fans, "the cumulative satisfaction in a service of sports fans leads to a sense of belonging and attachment to the said service or the club and team that provides that service, spurring the intention to repurchase that service," have similarly suggested that soccer school children and their parents may develop a sense of belonging and attachment to the said club and team. Given that, this study sets the hypothetical model (Fig. 1) for the parents of soccer school children.

### Objectives and Methods

The objectives of this study were to (1) identify factors that influenced the overall level of satisfaction in the Marinos Football Academy of parents of attending children, and (2) the influence that the overall level of satisfaction in the school has upon loyalty

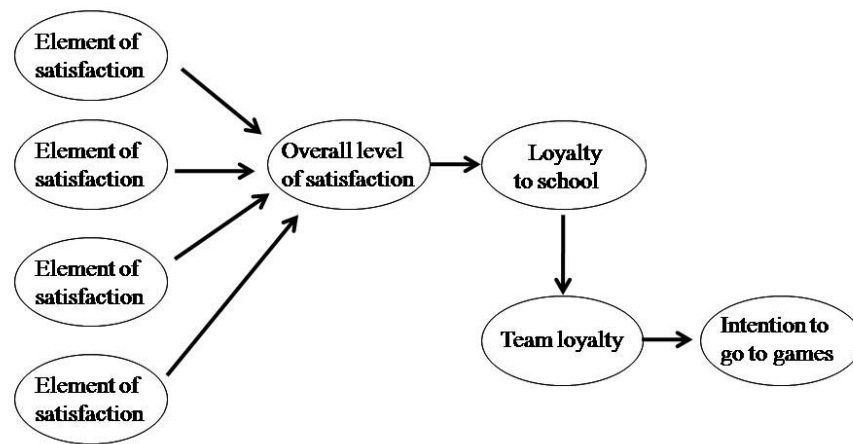


to the school, the influence that this loyalty in the school has on the loyalty to the Yokohama F. Marinos, and the influence that this team loyalty has upon the intention to go to games.

Based on previous and preliminary studies, 47 questions were set to measure elements of satisfaction. Additionally, there were 3 questions on the overall level of satisfaction, 2 on the loyalty to the school, 3 on the loyalty to the team, 1 on the intention to go to games, 3 on demographics, 8 on behavioral patterns, and 2 on psychological variables.

The research period was from November 12 to 30, 2007.

Subjects were randomly selected from a target class of kindergarten-age to sixth grade-age children of five soccer schools operated by the Marinos Football Club. Questionnaires were brought home by the children, filled out by the parents and collected the following week by coaches. Of the 868 questionnaires, 349 were collected (40.2%).



**Fig. 1 Hypothetical model of this study**

## Results

In order to identify the elements of satisfaction that influence the overall level of satisfaction, five factors were extracted by cause-and-effect analysis. These were, "coaching and organization", "child's improvement", "facilities", "privileges associated with the school" and "reception". After that, covariance structure analysis was done using the extracted factors to test the hypothetical model.

As a result, the "coaching and organization" factor and the "child's improvement" factor showed a significant influence upon overall level of satisfaction, the overall level of satisfaction affected the loyalty to the school, the loyalty to the school affected the loyalty to the team and the loyalty to the team affected the intention to go to games.

The model can be deemed applicable because of  $\chi^2/df(=2.481;\chi^2=1265.352,df=510)$ , RMSEA(=.065), GFI(=.822), AGFI(=.792) and CFI(=.899). These results suggest that improving the level of satisfaction of children attending a soccer school and their parents may broaden future fan bases. By this claim, children serve as socializing agents that lead parents to new discovery through their socialization as "spectators".