

Exploratory Study on Professional Baseball Fan Experience Management: Based on In-Depth Interview and Customer Journey Map

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is was to analyze customer experience attribute of professional baseball. To achieve objectives of this study, a method was used the in-depth interview and experts' consultation which understanding the attributes and structure of customer experience attribute of professional baseball. As a result, the professional baseball customer experience attributes are 'viewing plan & purchase', 'stadium movement', 'entrance stadium', 'move to seat', 'game viewing', 'amenities/services', 'events/cheering', 'move after match'. The review of the experience section and attributes derived through in-depth interviews with professional baseball fans was verified through an expert' consultation to secure content validity. Through this process, 8 experience section and 41 attributes were analyzed. The customer experience journey was analyzed for a more in-depth analysis of the viewing experience of professional baseball fans. The customer experience journey was presented based on the needs of fans and discomfort in each experience section activity.

Keywords: Professional Baseball, Customer Experience Management, In-Depth Interview, Customer Experience Journey

1. Introduction

Seattle Sounders FC is a soccer team that has more than doubled the average audience of the Major League Soccer(MLS) and in 2013 it showed a capacity of crowd mobilization with 43,124, higher than the average audience of Chelsea, a popular English premier league club. This achievement is attributed to the fact that Seattle Sounders FC provided a discriminatory experience to the spectator. The club is divided into three spaces such as 'outside the stadium', 'corridor', and the 'seat with a view of the playground', and secures more loyal fans by providing differentiated services according to the six experiences that occur in the space could [1].

Famous companies and organizations at home and abroad are actively applying customer experience management theory to provide differentiated services using customer experience [2]. CEM was first proposed

by Professor Burnt Schmidt of Columbia Business School, an activity that enhances the customer's experience at all points of contact with its products and services. To this end, it is a process that analyzes the customer's experience at all points of contact with the customer, establishes the basis for what type of experience to provide to the customer, and then strategically designs and continuously manages the customer's experience based on this experience [3].

In previous studies on the existing professional baseball fans' game viewing, the facility side and service side were mainly considered [4, 5].

This study is to mobilize the largest number of spectators in domestic professional sports and to identify the CEM process for the continuously increasing professional baseball. To this end, we intend to explore the section and elements of the experience through in-depth interviews on the viewing. Through this, it is intended to identify positive and negative emotions felt by fans, and through this, to identify customer experience journey maps to provide implications for professional baseball customer experience management research.

2. Research Method

2.1 Research Subjects

The sample in qualitative research cannot differ from a large number of samples and the typicality of the sample is more important than the increase in the possibility of generalization. Therefore, appropriate samples were selected for the study by purpose sampling. The in-depth interview was targeted to 20 professional baseball fans from 10 clubs, and the interview period was conducted for about 4 months. The specific characteristics of the interviewees are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the interviewee

ID	Age	Support Career	Club	ID	Age	Support Career	Club
Fan1	31	9	Samsung Lions	Fan11	30	23	Lotte Giants
Fan2	23	10	Samsung Lions	Fan12	27	4	LG Twins
Fan3	28	13	kt wiz	Fan13	30	23	LG Twins
Fan4	23	5	kt wiz	Fan14	41	28	LG Twins
Fan5	37	13	Kia Tigers	Fan15	28	6	NC Dinos
Fan6	41	33	Kia Tigers	Fan16	50	11	Kiwoom Heroes
Fan7	25	9	Hanwha Eagles	Fan17	29	4	Doosan Bears
Fan8	28	7	Hanwha Eagles	Fan18	31	18	Doosan Bears
Fan9	30	24	Hanwha Eagles	Fan19	27	11	Doosan Bears
Fan10	31	13	Lotte Giants	Fan20	31	4	SK Wyverns

2.2 Interview Method

In order to explore the structure and attributes of professional baseball fans' experience, one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted. The interview was conducted by referring to the interview method of Patton's study and Seo's study [6, 7]. Interview took about 20-30 minutes per individual, and interviews were conducted again for insufficient responses or additional matters.

2.3 Interview question content and analysis method

Prior to the full-scale interview, the preliminary concept of experience and the purpose of the study were explained. Examples of question types and contents at the in-depth interview stage are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Question type and content

Examples of semi-structured questions in in-depth interviews
▪What made you want to watch professional baseball?
↓
▪How did you learn about the professional baseball game schedule?
↓
▪What experiences did you experience while coming to the stadium? What are your feelings and your reactions at that time?
↓
▪What experiences did you experience while entering the stadium? What are your feelings and your reactions at that time?
↓
▪What experiences did you experience while watching professional baseball? What are your feelings and your reactions at that time?
↓
▪What kind of experiences did you experience until your return home after watching? What are your feelings and your reactions at that time?

3. Results

3.1 Analysis of Professional Baseball Fans In-Depth Interview Results

In the process of comprehensive analysis of interview contents, Thompson’s reserch four-step analysis technique was used. In the analysis of experience, it is important to set the intervals about the flow of time or the fan contact point in space and analyze each experience factor [8]. Accordingly, the section on the professional baseball viewing experience through a preliminary interview with the professional baseball fans and through an expert meeting is shown in Figure 1.

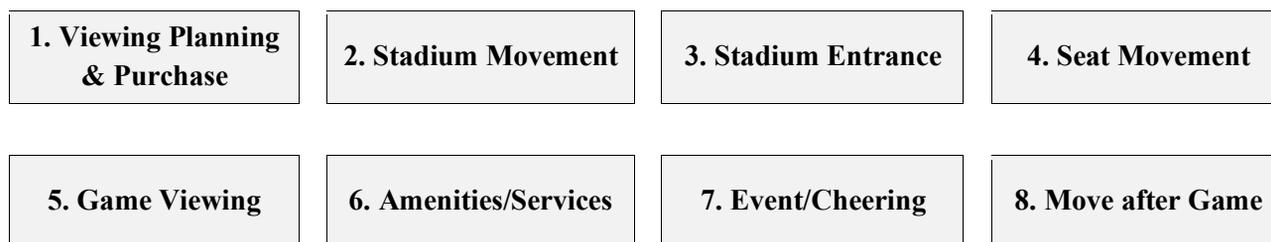


Figure 1. Professional baseball fan experience section

The results of the in-depth interview for each experience section are as follows.

3.1.1 Viewing Planning & Purchase

In the viewing plan and purchase, it shows a favorable/unfavorable response to the experience and a favorable/unfavorable response to this, as well as the experience of linking with the purchasing agent through the club's homepage, using the purchasing agent directly, using mobile applications, and purchasing on-site.

“It is convenient because tickets are linked to the official website of Samsung Lions(fan1)”

“The reservation fee varies depending on the connection method (fan6)”

“If I am online, it is convenient to pick up the ticket with the ticketing machine without having to wait for it(fan19)”

3.1.2 Viewing Stadium Movement

Regarding the movement of stadiums, public transportation and self-use fans have shown the convenience of public transportation and the experience of parking facilities and favorable/unfavorable responses to them.

“The parking lot is small and the public transportation is very in convenient(fan3)”

“The parking lot is nice because it is spacious, but the lighting is dark, so I feel scared. Considering safety, it would be nice to increase the lighting or have a safety and guide(fan 20)”

“It's good because there are so many things to eat around the stadium(fan12)”

3.1.3 Stadium Entrance

Admission to the stadium refers to the experience related to the process of arriving at the stadium and entering the building, and shows the experience of search, facilities at the entrance, guides, and supporters, and a favorable/unfavorable response to this.

“It adds to the pleasure of the crowd looking for the stadium with various mascots and characters at the entrance (fan10)”

“Mobile tickets and tributary ticket entrance gates are divided, so waiting time is shortened compared to stadiums where there is no such thing(fan11)”

“The passage is wide, so it is easy to move and the ticket confirmation process proceeds quickly, but there is a lot of time delay due to item inspection(fan14)”

3.1.4 Seat Movement

Seat movement shows the experience of the convenience and stability of moving to one's seat after entering the stadium, and a favorable/unfavorable response to this.

“Gwangju baseball stadium has the space between the front and rear seats, so when someone else goes to the bathroom or goes out to smoke, there is no need to get up and get out of the seat(fan5)”

“While it is easy to find chairs because of different colors of seats, seats that are not table seats are inconvenient to move because of the narrow distance from the front seats (fan14)”

3.1.5 Game Viewing

The game viewing shows the experience of viewing the game from the seat, the electronic board, and the sound, and a favorable/unfavorable response to it.

“There is no steep slope, so it is less dangerous than other stadiums, and the fifth-floor sky box has a high view, so the game looks down well. The signboards are large and the fonts are readable (fan1)”

“It is the first octagonal ballpark in Korea, and it seems that the convenience of visitors is considered as much as possible (fan2)”

“It is uncomfortable because it is difficult to see the game at a glance if spectator sit too in front. If spectator sit too far above or in the outfield, it is difficult to understand the game situation because the ball is difficult to see (fan12)”

3.1.6 Amenities/Services

It shows experience in the use of facilities and services related to canteens, toilets, fan shops, and MD products in the stadium, and a favorable/unfavorable response to them.

“The food store is not just in one place, but it is located around the stadium, so you can easily go and buy it anywhere. When you go to buy food, you can see the game in any corridor because you have a clear view, not a structure that you can not watch the game(fan1)”

“The food is best organized among baseball fields in Korea. It is also famous among other teams. Also since the stadium has been renovated, the amenities are clean. There is a pub in the outfield and I am very satisfied. Smokers seem to feel a little uncomfortable because there are no smoking booths in the stadium(fan3)”

“The ladies’ room is clean and has a small mirror in the bathroom compartment, making it convenient to modify makeup. The toilet paper is good because it has enough amount, but it is uncomfortable because the compartment is a little cramped(fan 12) ””

3.1.7 Event/Cheering

It shows the experiences of the events held inside and outside the stadium and the cheering culture in the stadium, and a favorable/unfavorable response to them.

“The atmosphere of cheering together is better than any other baseball team. During cleaning time, the club's unique event raises the audience's interest. The leadership and fighting of the captain of a cheerleading squad are overflowing (fan10)”

“For visitors who are interested in watching the game, the cheering sound is so loud that it interferes with the viewing. Also, there are times when you feel uncomfortable because the cheerleader's choreography and clothes are sensational(fan14)”

“It is satisfactory to have an experience event for the fans at the event booth outside the stadium. However, it is too complicated to see if the booth is located right in front of the subway entrance (fan12)”

3.1.8 Move after Game

It shows the experience in the process of leaving the stadium and the experience in the process of using transportation after the game , and a favorable/unfavorable response to them.

“After the game is over, it is easy to go by bus if the time is right, but if the game time is delayed, there are cases where people will have to come out during the game due to the time of the last bus(fan4)”

“There is a good exit guide for each area where you want to go. However, as many people move at the same time, children and the elderly are dangerous. In addition, it would be good to shorten the bus dispatch interval at the end of the game(fan10)”

“There are many people who want to catch a taxi, but they are not well caught, and the taxi stand is not

well enough, so it is chaotic. In addition, there are traffic police on the street side of the stadium, but it is difficult to handle the crowded vehicles or crowds because there are only a few(fan5)”

3.2 Expert Investigation

The review of the experience section and attributes derived through in-depth interviews with professional baseball fans was verified through an expert’ consultation to secure content validity. This is because the content validity can be maximized by being reviewed by a group of experts who have knowledge of the related concepts [9]. The expert group consisted of professors in sports management, worker in professional baseball teams, and five experts in qualitative research. The final conclusion was asked to examine whether the structure of the experience section and the attribute was well reflected and whether additional experience section and attribute composition are necessary. Through this process, the 8 experience section and 41 attributes of professional baseball fans are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Experience section and attributes of professional baseball fans

section	attributes
Viewing plan & purchase	①Diversity of reservation methods ②Convenience of use by reservation method ③Convenient cancellation and refund ④Easy to exchange advance tickets ⑤Possibility to purchase the desired seat
Before Viewing	Stadium movement ①Convenient use of public transportation ②Transportation in the stadium ③Adequate parking space ④Safe parking space ⑤Link parking facilities with other buildings ⑥Purchase nearby food
	Entrance stadium ①Easy entrance to the stadium ②Efforts to reduce waiting time ③Response to inspection of belongings ④Ticket office information ⑤Display club property items at the entrance
Move to seat	①Information sign ②Free passage and seating space ③Different colors for each seat ④Safety between seat movements
Viewing	Game viewing ①Securing game visibility ②High-tech electronic display ③Providing fan-oriented electronic display information ④Benefits by differentiated seat class
	Amenities/Services ①Cleanliness of facilities ②Diversity of food ③ Appropriate price for goods ④Convenience of using MD shop ⑤Continuous efforts to provide game information ⑥Sanitary products ⑦Appropriate number of stores
	Event/Cheering ①Differentiated support ②Consideration for visitors with little experience ③Healthy support culture ④Sincere events for fans ⑤Diversify events
After Viewing	Move after match ①Safe movement outside the stadium ②Rapid movement outside the stadium ③Smooth traffic control for parked vehicles ④Consider public transportation ⑤SNS upload

3.3 Customer Experience Journey

The customer experience journey was analyzed for a more in-depth analysis of the viewing experience of professional baseball fans. The customer journey map is a way to break down the overall experience step by step and analyze it in more depth, and to compare multiple experiences in the same visual language. Through

this method, it is possible to understand the factors that affect the experience from the user's point of view, and to be more immersed in the service user experience, and focus on user perception. More information can be shown [10, 11].

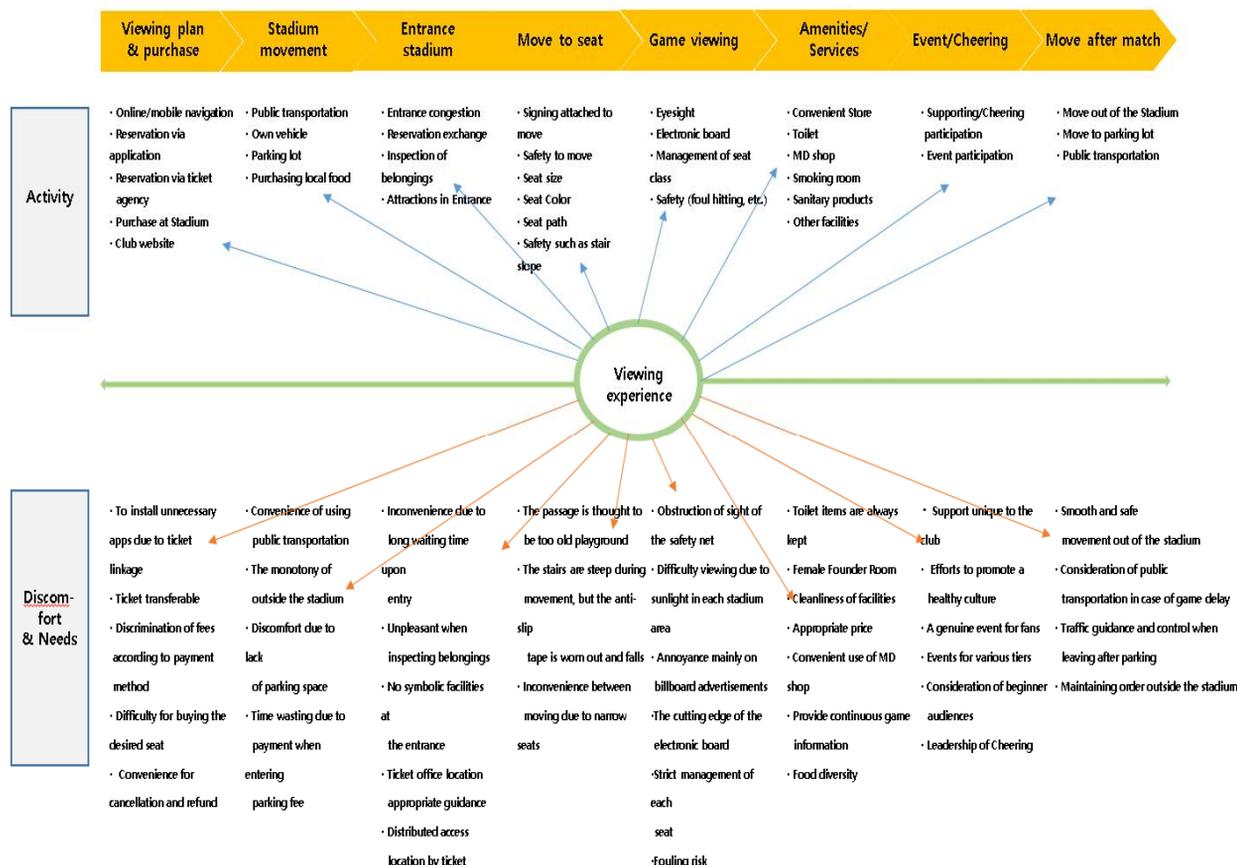


Figure 2. Professional fan experience journey

4. Conclusion

Although research in the aspect of facilities and services for professional baseball spectators has been mainly conducted, However, in this study, in order to understand the detailed fan experience process, through in-depth interviews and expert meetings, the section of the experience and the attributes of each section were identified. In addition, a customer journey map was presented to visually represent more detailed information. Through this, it was possible to analyze the fans' experience activities, needs, and discomfort before and after viewing, which are not covered in the previous studies. In the follow-up study, we hope that the development of scales and empirical studies for empirical research on fan experience management will be conducted. For this reason, we expect to accumulate research on fan experience management in the sports field.

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