

Developmental processes of fan loyalty for the professional baseball team "The Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters"

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ABOUT THE FIGHTERS

FIGHTERS IS ...
 The Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters is a professional baseball team in Japan's Pacific League. It takes its name from the major shareholding company, "Nippon Ham," which is the corporate name of Nippon Meat Packers, Inc.

FIGHTERS HAS BEEN IN SAPPORO FOR 5 YEARS
 In 2004 the Fighters moved from Tokyo to Sapporo, the largest city on the island of Hokkaido. Its population is 1,850,000.

FIGHTERS USES THE SAPPORO DOME
 The team uses the Sapporo Dome, which is primarily used for football and baseball. Sapporo Dome opened in 2001 and has 42,126 seats, hosted three games during the 2002 FIFA World Cup.

DRAMATIC INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF FANS REGISTERED WITH THE OFFICIAL FAN CLUB
 38,776 (2004), 41,817 (2005), 41,193 (2006), 60,216 (2007), and 74,974 (2008) – almost doubled in 5 years

AWARDED BY EXCELLENT FAN SERVICES IN 2007
 The Fighters received "Japan's High-service 300" award from the Service Productivity & Innovation for Growth (SPRING), which was founded in June 2007

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

NOBODY KNOWS WHY
 Nobody knows accurately why the Fighters have achieved such a great success. This is a long-standing problem in the service industry that blocks the increase of its productivity.

PART OF JAPAN'S NATIONAL PROJECT TO SUPPORT SERVICE INDUSTRIES
 As such, the Japanese government, the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), has decided to fund research and development projects that help service providers implement services more efficiently by understanding the successful practices based on scientific and technological underpinnings.

THE FIGHTERS PROJECT IS ...
 For the Fighters, scientific underpinning includes the understanding of why the fans repeatedly come to the Sapporo dome to watch the Fighters' games and how they enjoy them – evolution of fan loyalty, and correlating such understanding with the events that the Fighters provided.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This paper reports a cognitive chrono-ethnography study that was conducted to understand the structure of the developmental process, i.e., how a person evolves from the pre-fan stage to the fan stage, and ultimately to the loyal fan stage.

OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

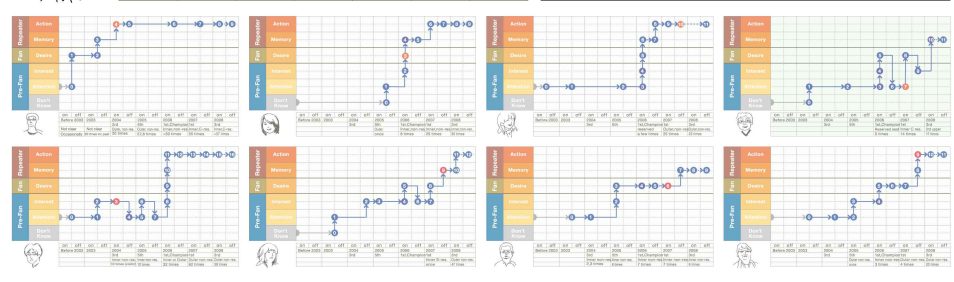
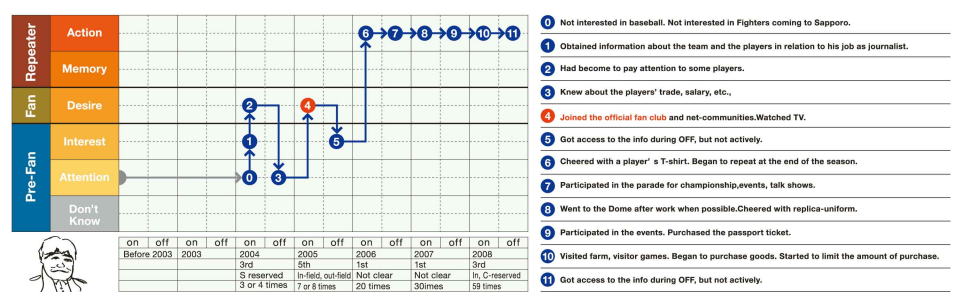
- 1 Recruiting nine fans with high loyalty who represent different fan styles by a Web survey followed by a group interview
- 2 Observing their behavior in the stadium, 3 games in July, August, and September
- 3 Conducting depth interview for understanding how they have come to show their current behavior
- 4 Creating fan-loyalty evolution diagram for each participant, or fan-history
- 5 Integrate the nine fan histories to understand common paths to evolve fan loyalty

STEP 1 RECRUITING STEP 2 OBSERVATION STEP 3 DEPTH INTERVIEW

- Recruiting nine fans who represent different fan styles by a Web survey followed by a group interview
 - Recruit nine highly loyal fans from the members of the Fighters' fan club who have different attitudes towards professional baseball, cheering, and merchandizing, and having visited the Sapporo dome more than a few times since the Fighters moved to Sapporo by conducting a Web survey.
 - There were 73,286 Fighters fan club members as of 20 June 2008, of whom approximately 30,000 can access the Internet by PC. The study focused on this population of fans. The nine selected fans were supposed to represent different "fan styles" and have different histories in reaching the current fan status, i.e., loyalty status.
- Have the selected participants visit the Sapporo dome three times to watch designated Fighters-hosted games.
 - DVD camera recorder located three rows in front of the participants' seat to capture their game-viewing behavior,
 - Small ear-mounted CCD camera to record the scene they are viewing,
 - Pin-microphone to record their vocalizations
 - Electrocardiograph and accelerometer to capture their physiological responses to the events of the game
- Conduct structured interviews after each visit to the Sapporo dome
 - Replaying the behavior records, the viewing-scene records, and the broadcasted TV video of the game for the characteristic events
 - Including scoring scenes, field events between innings, and events for which the participants exhibited remarkable changes in physiological data
- Each participant was interviewed three times with different purposes
 - First interview for understanding how the participant currently enjoys the game (July)
 - Second interview for understanding how the participant developed his/her loyalty from the pre-fan stage several years ago, to the fan stage a few years ago, and then to the current repeating stage (August)
 - Third interview for understanding what triggers the state changes and what factors help them retain each fan stage (September)



STEP 4 DIAGRAM



STEP 5 FAN LOYALTY EVOLUTION MODEL

