

CORRELATES OF BRAND LOYALTY IN THE SERVICE SECTOR: THE CASE OF A “NEW” TEAM

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Baseball fans attending a four-game home stand of a “newer” team were surveyed. The study focused on four fundamental objectives: 1) identification of the extent of brand loyalty exhibited by fans to the team of interest; 2) determination of the extent to which more loyal team fans behave differently or express different attitudes compared to less loyal fans; 3) examination of whether more loyal team fans are demographically similar or different from less loyal fans, and 4) examination of whether more loyal fans exhibit different levels of product knowledge and/or competitiveness than less loyal fans. Results showed that a majority of fans surveyed considered themselves to be loyal or die-hard fans of the team, that differences in fan loyalty corresponded to differences in fan behaviors and attitudes, and that demographic differences existed between loyal/less loyal fans. Managerial implications and avenues for future research are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Brand Loyalty in the Sports Market

Consider the following:

The (Boston) Red Sox franchise continues to thrive where other teams struggle because it is arguably one of the best brands in America. People understand and embrace the Red Sox on rational and emotional levels ... If a brand's reputation is bland, or the reason to buy is not clear and compelling, customers will buy on price, which eats into market share and margins. For a brand they love, like the Red Sox, customers will pay a premium because they perceive that it's worth more. (Clancy and Kelly 2001).

And therein lies the importance of building brand awareness, interest, conviction and, ultimately, loyalty; customers will pay a premium for well-known and respected brands. Product marketers have long recognized the

notion of brand value and the role played by loyal customers in building value. Indeed, British advertising agency Interbrand annually publishes a list of the leading global brands and their respective dollar value. Topping the 2006 list is Coca-Cola, with an estimated value of \$67 billion. Rounding out the five brand value leaders are Microsoft (\$57 billion), IBM (\$56 billion), General Electric (\$49 billion) and Intel (\$32 billion) (Business Week 2006). Notice in this list the preponderance of high technology brands as well as the absence of brands representing service industries; all these companies are primarily known for what they manufacture.

But the services sector is learning from their manufacturer brethren. Berry (2000) suggests that branding will emerge as the cornerstone of service--providing industries as the new millennium begins to unfold. Building brand recognition, let alone brand loyalty, is especially difficult for service firms owing to the intangibility of services. It is difficult for the consumer to know, at least prior to purchasing, whether one hair salon, tax preparer or auto repair shop is better than the next. Services are essentially experiential, which is to say that quality can ordinarily only be assessed during or after a purchase has been made. In such an environment creating a brand loyal customer is indeed challenging.

All the more impressive, then, that the Boston Red Sox have succeeded in doing just that, as suggested above. Red Sox fans are loyal fans, through winning seasons and losing ones, through World Series appearances that average less than once every twenty years, through economic good times and bad times, and through baseball's occasional effort to shoot itself in the foot with an assortment of internal problems and issues. But the "Boston Red Sox" brand is not the only successful one in major league sports, a classic service industry. The Chicago Cubs and the New York Yankees enjoy similar levels of support and loyalty among fans, with respectively less and more on-field success than the Red Sox have experienced over the decades.

On the other hand, these three brand names are among the oldest, most venerable and most highly regarded teams in existence. The respective organizations, and several others, have had virtually a century to convert brand unaware residents into brand aware consumers, then into brand interested customers, then into brand loyal fans and, finally, using jargon unique to sports, into diehard fans. Not many professional sports franchises have been around that long. The Minnesota Twins and Kansas City Royals, for example, have had but half as many years to build their fan base. And, some "newer" teams -- including the Arizona Diamondbacks, the Florida Marlins, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, and the Colorado Rockies -- have had less than a decade.

Objectives of the Study

The four "newer" teams mentioned above came into existence in the last decade (the Marlins and the Rockies in 1993; the Diamondbacks and the Devil Rays in 1998) as a result of major league expansion efforts. At the time of this writing, then, these teams have had only a few seasons to build a base of loyal customers, this at a time when many consider professional sports in this country to be in the late maturity if not decline stage of the product life cycle (Burton and Howard 1999). Still, the ballparks and stadiums of these relatively newly

formed teams constitute intriguing laboratories in which to study the extent of brand loyalty for a service provider early in its existence.

Consequently, the present study was designed to survey baseball fans in attendance during a home stand of a "newer" team at the beginning of the 2001 season with the goal of assessing the extent of loyalty among fans of a major league franchise just a few years old, as well as to examine selected correlates of brand loyalty among those fans. The first objective of that research, of course, was to identify the extent of brand loyalty exhibited by fans to the team of interest. Investing in building brand loyalty through marketing efforts is sensible only if the loyal customer behaves or feels differently or more positively about the brand when compared to the less loyal customer. In characterizing brand loyalty as one of the determinants of brand equity, Aaker (1991) suggests that brand loyalty builds dollar value for the brand in several ways. To wit, managers who build a loyal customer base benefit from (a) reduced marketing costs, (b) enhanced leverage with channel members, (c) reassurance for potential new customers, and (d) increased time to respond to competitive threats. Thus, the second objective of the study is to determine the extent to which more loyal team fans behave differently or express different attitudes toward the team when compared to less loyal fans. In this case, the *a priori* expectation is that behaviors and attitudes that are favorable or positive with respect to the product (team) will be associated with more intense loyalty.

It is possible, even probable, that fan loyalty varies across subgroups based on demographic characteristics. If so, it may be simpler and more efficient to design promotional efforts, especially those relying on media versus direct delivery, to appeal to one or more of the differentially loyal subgroups rather than to attempt to identify and appeal directly to the highly loyal fan. Consequently, the third objective of the study is to examine whether more loyal team fans are demographically similar or different than less loyal fans.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to anticipate, *a priori*, which demographic profile(s) might be associated with more intense loyalty. Who is loyal and who is not seems to depend on the particular product for which loyalty is being examined. Consumer behaviorist John Mowen (1995), for example, says:

Research evidence also indicates that brand loyalty is a product-specific phenomenon. Very little evidence suggests that consumers have a general tendency to be loyal. Thus, consumers who are loyal in one product category may or may not be loyal in any other product category. (Mowen 1995, p. 534)

Finally, fan loyalty may also be linked to a variety of personal characteristics of fans -- in a sense, the internal, less visible parallels to demographic characteristics. Two such personal traits were tapped for inclusion in this study: product (i.e., baseball) knowledge and competitiveness. Thus, the fourth and final objective of the study is to examine whether more loyal team fans exhibit different levels of product knowledge and/or competitiveness than less loyal fans.

First, it was thought *a priori* that more loyal fans might be in possession of greater baseball knowledge or expertise than less loyal fans. It is plausible that highly loyal fans will act in a manner leading to greater product knowledge, including attending more games at the ballpark, watching games more often on television and listening to games more often on the radio, taking a personal interest in and closely following the performance of the team and individual players through both print and electronic media, and generally being more involved with the team and, hence, the game of baseball. All of these sorts of actions necessarily lead to enhanced knowledge about the game of baseball, even if unintentionally for some fans. Second, it was thought *a priori* that more loyal fans would tend to be more competitive than less loyal fans, though with a reverse anticipated direction of causality. In this case, it was thought that more competitive fans, with an enhanced generalized desire to win, would be especially drawn to a new baseball

team that had had such great early success on the playing field.

Research Methods

The data in this study were collected from fans attending games at the ball park of a relatively recent expansion team. The development of the research methodology began with meetings between the primary researchers and the Director of Promotions for the major league team. After those initial meetings, in which an outline of the research program was presented and modified, the researchers were granted permission to administer questionnaires to fans attending home games of the team early in the 2001 season. All data were collected during batting practice and pre-game warmups.

Within five to ten minutes after passing through the turnstiles and taking their seats, fans in various sections of the stadium were approached by the primary researchers, who, in an attempt to 1) identify the university with which they were affiliated, and 2) to illustrate that they were not employees or representatives of the team in question, wore hats and shirts bearing logos clearly identifying the university they represented. The researchers briefly identified themselves and their university, provided the fans with a synopsis of the purpose of the study, and asked fans to complete a short questionnaire that included previously developed measures of loyalty proneness (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer and Burton 1990), product expertise (Mishra, Umesh and Stem 1993), and desire to win/competitiveness (Corfman 1991) as well as a number of questions which were specifically developed for the purposes of this study.

Those fans willing to participate received a pen, a clipboard, and a two-page (front and back) questionnaire that included completion instructions. The researchers provided clarification for those participants requesting further information and then reminded each participant to take as much time as necessary to complete the questionnaire. Finally, each participating fan was told that the researcher

would leave, let the participant enjoy their snacks and refreshments, watch batting practice, and so on and that the researcher would return and collect the completed questionnaire. Although no systematic response data were collected, a highly conservative estimate of fan response rate would be 95 percent. Indeed, it was quite rare to have a fan decline to participate in the study. The data collection process was stopped approximately 30 minutes prior to the first pitch of each ball game.

Due to the physical seating arrangement of the baseball stadium, and to the fact that fans entered the park and took their seats at different times during each one-and-a-half hour data collection period, it was not possible to obtain a truly random or probability sample of fans. In an attempt to overcome or at least compensate for the above mentioned limitations, the researchers collected data from fans seated in the upper and lower decks, bleacher areas, and along the first and third base foul lines. A concerted effort was made to survey fans regardless of gender, age (children under the age of 17 were allowed to complete a questionnaire but those observations were not included in data analyses), or ethnic background. The researchers do acknowledge that the participants in the study may have differed from the general population of fans in that the surveyed fans all arrived at the ball park well in advance of the official start of the game. Exhibit 1 presents a demographic profile of the 337 fans who participated in the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Composition of Fan Loyalty Index

The extent of loyalty fans feel toward the team was self-reported based on joint responses to two separate questions asked of those attending a game at the ball park/stadium of the team participating in the study. The first question asked, "Do you consider yourself to be a loyal (name of the team) fan?" Responses were measured as a simple yes/no dichotomy. The second question, located on the reverse side of

the two-page questionnaire, asked fans, "How would you characterize your loyalty to the (name of the team)?" Responses to this question were along a four point "scale," from "not at all loyal" to "less loyal than most (name of the team) fans" to "more loyal than most (name of the team) fans" to "diehard."

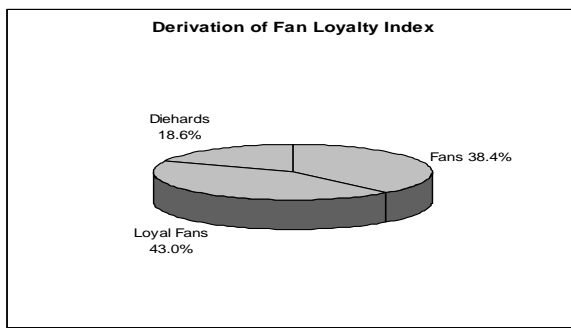
EXHIBIT 1
Demographic Profile of Participants

	Percent
Gender --	
Female	45.4%
Male	54.6%
Presence/Number of Children Living at Home --	
None	61.9%
One	12.7%
Two or More	25.4%
Age --	
18 to 35	31.7%
36 to 50	37.7%
51 and Older	30.6%
Years Lived in Team's State --	
10 or Less	28.6%
11 to 25	36.9%
26 or More	34.5%

Joint responses to these two questions appear in Exhibit 2. Fans were classified as **diehard** if they jointly answered "yes" to the first question and "diehard" to the second question. Further, fans were classified as **loyal fans** if they jointly responded "yes" to the first question and "more loyal than most (name of the team) fans" to the second question. Finally, fans were classified as simply **fans** if they responded "no" to the first question or if they responded "less loyal than most (name of the team) fans" or "not at all loyal" to the second question.

EXHIBIT 2
Composition of Fan Loyalty Index

How Would Your Characterize Your Loyalty to the (name of team)?	Do You Consider Yourself To Be a Loyal (name of team) Fan?		
	No	Yes	Total
Not At All Loyal	11.3%	0.0%	11.3%
Less Loyal Than Most (name of team) Fans	14.7%	8.5%	23.2%
More Loyal Than Most (name of team) Fans	3.2%	43.0%	46.2%
Diehard	0.7%	18.6%	19.3%
Total	29.9%	70.1%	100.0%



As can be seen in Exhibit 2, more than six in ten (61.6 percent) fans surveyed consider themselves to be loyal or diehard fans of the team, and nearly one in five (18.6 percent) consider themselves to be, in fact, diehard fans. This is rather amazing success for a product that had been on the market for less than ten years; it seems implausible that many consumer brands, durables or nondurables, garner such a level of loyalty in such a short time frame. The team's success is doubly amazing when it is considered that the team of interest plays in an extremely competitive environment. The city in which the team is located is categorized as a medium-size sports market, and hosts teams in several of the four major professional sports leagues (MLB, NFL, NBA, and/or the NHL). In addition, a major university located in the same locale plays most major sports at the NCAA Division 1 level.

Selected Behavioral and Attitudinal Correlates of Fan Loyalty

Exhibit 3 presents contrasts between more loyal versus less loyal fans for selected behavioral and attitudinal tendencies toward the major league team of interest. Fans were first asked about their attendance behavior at the team's games. Not surprisingly, there is a positive relationship between frequency of attendance and extent of loyalty (Chi-Square = 48.6; $p < .001$). In particular, loyal fans and diehard fans, were, respectively, three (33.1 percent) and four (41.2 percent) times more likely to attend games more than once a month when compared to less loyal fans (9.5 percent). In sports, then, brand loyal customers are decidedly heavier users than other customers. Investing in building loyal customers yields significant dividends in enhanced purchase and usage rates.

Another important source of revenue and profit for the sports franchise is in the licensing of

EXHIBIT 3
Selected Behavioral and Attitudinal Correlates of Fan Loyalty

	Die-hards	Loyal Fans	Fans	Total
Average Attendance at Games (Chi-Square = 48.6; $p < .001$):				
Less Than Once a Month	25.5%	35.5%	74.3%	49.6%
Once a Month	33.3%	31.4%	16.2%	25.4%
More Than Once a Month	41.2%	33.1%	9.5%	25.0%
Purchased Products Bearing Team Logo (Chi-Square = 57.6; $p < .001$):				
Yes	98.1%	90.2%	54.6%	78.0%
No	1.9%	9.8%	45.4%	22.0%
Mean Rating of Team=s Likeability Using Scale from 1 = Very Unlikable to 6 = Very Likeable (F = 23.8; $p < .001$)	5.72	5.39	4.78	5.22
Mean Rating of Team=s Performance Over Past Four Years Using Scale from 1 = Very Poor to 6 = Very Good (F = 18.4; $p < .001$)	5.43	5.02	4.66	4.96

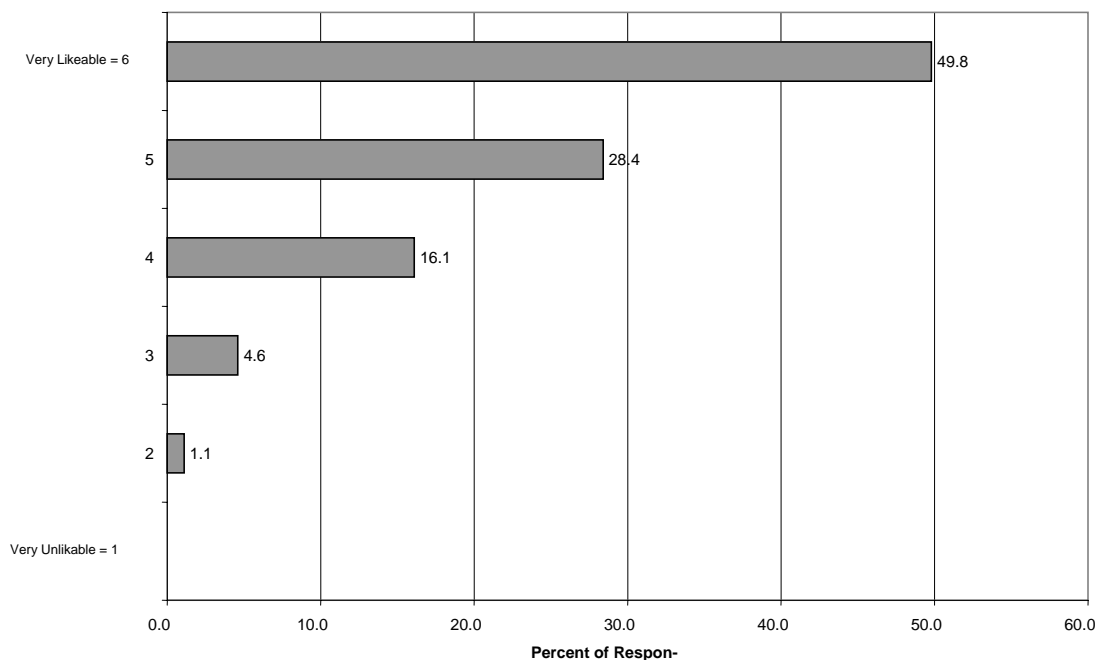
merchandise bearing the team’s logo. Fans were also asked if they had ever purchased products bearing the team/organizational logo. As with attendance, this behavior was strongly related to extent of loyalty. Nearly all diehard fans (98.1 percent) and nine in ten loyal fans (90.2 percent) had purchased such products, compared to just over one-half (54.6 percent) of those classified as just fans. This is an arithmetically and managerially huge difference likely to be extremely profitable for franchise owners. More loyal fans, then, generate far more revenue than less loyal fans, in terms of both gate receipts and in the purchase of team paraphernalia.

Nearly as important as purchase-related behaviors are the sorts of attitudes expressed about the product by customers. Fans were asked two straightforward attitudinal questions, each one a single-item measure scored on a six point scale. Mean responses to both statements were significantly related to extent of fan loyalty. The first question asked fans, “How likeable is the (name of the team) baseball team

compared to other teams?” Responses were scored from 1 = very unlikable to 6 = very likable. Overall, fans rated the team of interest as extremely likable, based on the results in Exhibit 4. Indeed, nearly all surveyed fans rated the team as likable (94.3 percent) rather than unlikable (5.7 percent), and almost half of all fans (49.8 percent) responded with the maximum value of 6. More important still, the mean response to this question (overall mean = 5.22) was significantly related to fan loyalty ($F = 23.8; p < .001$). Diehard fans were most likely to consider the team likable (mean = 5.72), followed by loyal fans (mean = 5.39) and, finally, fans (mean = 4.78).

Even more intriguing were responses to the question, “How would you rate the performance of the (name of the team) over the past four years,” scored from 1 = very poor to 6 = very good. Fan responses are shown in Exhibit 5. Overall, fans were very positive about the team’s performance on the field. And well they should have been because the team’s performance over their seasons was impressive,

EXHIBIT 4
How Likeable is (name of team) Compared to Other Teams?



especially for a new franchise. The team had won more games than it had lost and was not only competitive but considered a contender in the league. Few surveyed fans rated the team's cumulative performance as poor (3.2 percent) rather than good (96.8 percent) and more than one-fourth (27.4 percent) rated their performance with a maximum response of 6.

Now, consider that the team's performance is an historical fact; the won-loss record is fixed, along with divisional finishes, league standings, etc., over the life-span of the product. Still, fan perception of that performance varied significantly by extent of brand loyalty. The mean performance rating for the team was 4.66 among fans, 5.02 among loyal fans, and 5.43 among diehards ($F = 18.4$; $p < .001$). Surveyed fans are clearly viewing their team's objective, fixed performance through glasses colored by the extent of their loyalty, though it is unclear which is cause and which effect. It may be that highly brand loyal customers attribute or perceive a higher level of quality to the product or service under consideration. It is also

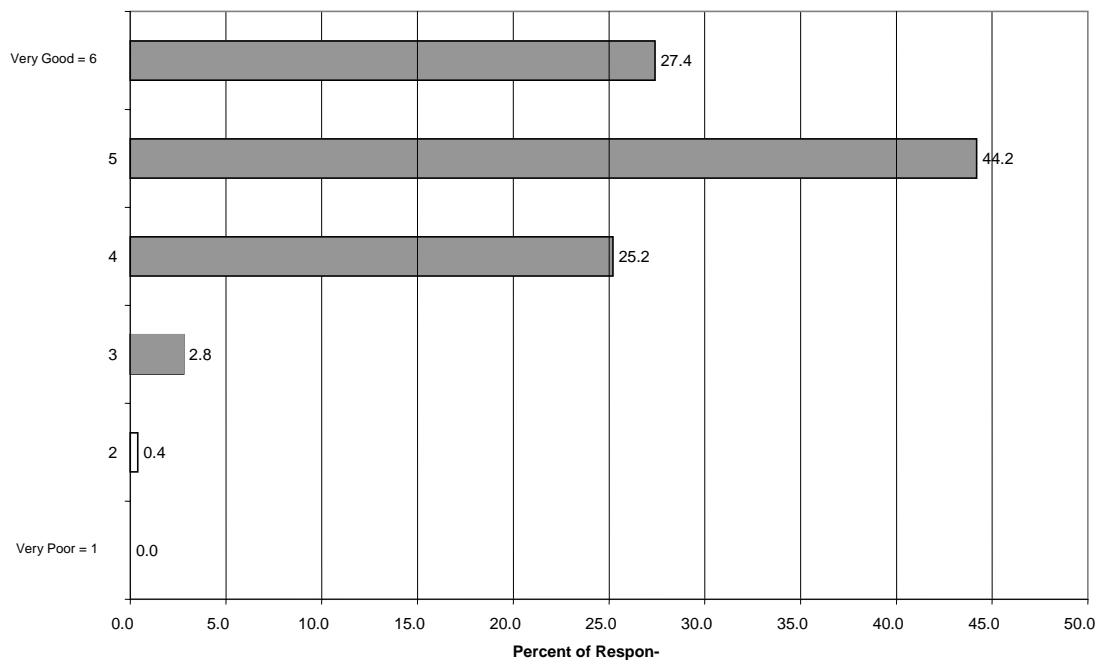
plausible that some fans exhibit greater loyalty because of their perception that the team delivers quality performance.

Demographic Determinants of Fan Loyalty

The composition of fans, loyal fans and diehards by selected demographic variables is presented in Exhibit 6. Given limits set by the interview process, only certain demographic variables were measured, including gender, presence and number of children living at home, age and years lived in the state in which the team of interest was located.

Fan loyalty was significantly related to three of these four variables, including gender. In particular, while only about four in ten fans (38.3 percent) and loyal fans (44.3 percent) were female, half again as many diehard fans (62.3 percent) were female. Second, fan loyalty was significantly and positively related to age. For example, nearly one in two (49.1 percent) diehard fans were over the age of 50, compared with only about one in four fans (23.9 percent)

EXHIBIT 5
How Would You Rate the Performance of (name of team) Over the Past Four Years?



and loyal fans (28.7 percent). Finally, fan loyalty was positively related to the number of years lived in the team’s state, albeit reaching a level of statistical significance only for the parametric ANOVA test on mean years lived in the state. In summary, then, loyalty to the team of interest tended to increase with increasing age and years resided in the state and is higher among women than men.

Interestingly, loyalty did not vary significantly by whether there were “no,” “one” or “two or more” child(ren) in the household (Chi-Square = 1.9; p = n.s.). These results were similarly not significant when testing for differences based on the presence or absence of any children. That is, just under four in ten (38.1 percent) of all surveyed fans have at least one dependent child living at home, and this did not vary by extent of brand loyalty (Chi-Square = .037, p = n.s.). Nor did the results change when testing for differences based on “one” versus “two or more” child(ren) among only households with at least one child present. That is, more loyal fans were not significantly more likely to have two or more children compared to less loyal fans (Chi-Square = 1.84, p = n.s.).

The Relationship Between Fan Loyalty and Product Knowledge

Product knowledge was assessed by administering an adapted version of the product expertise scale (Mishra *et al.* 1993). Adjusted to relate to the game of baseball, this scale consists of the following four items:

- *I am very knowledgeable about the game of baseball.*
- *I am a very experienced baseball fan.*
- *I am an expert when it comes to understanding the game of baseball.*
- *I am a very informed baseball fan.*

Each item was measured on a six point scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. Consequently, the four item scale measuring self-assessed knowledge of baseball ranges in value from a minimum possible score of 4*1 = 4 to a maximum possible score of 4*6

= 24, with a scale midpoint of 14. (Psychometric properties of the scale were as follows. An internal reliability analysis of the scale resulted in an alpha of .90, and a common factor analysis led to the extraction of a single factor with eigenvalue of 3.11.)

The results of the study yielded a median baseball knowledge score across all fans of 17, and a mean score of 17.3. More importantly, mean baseball knowledge scores differed significantly by fan loyalty index. In particular, diehard fans exhibited the largest mean score of

**EXHIBIT 6
Selected Demographic
Characteristics by Loyalty Index**

	Diehards	Loyal Fans	Fans	Total
Gender (Chi-Square = 8.3; p = .016) --				
Female	62.3%	44.3%	38.3%	45.4%
Male	37.7%	55.7%	61.7%	54.6%
Presence/Number of Children Living at Home (Chi-Square = 1.9; p = n.s.) --				
None	60.8%	61.6%	62.9%	61.9%
One	9.8%	11.7%	15.2%	12.7%
Two or More	29.4%	26.7%	21.9%	25.4%
Age (Chi-Square = 17.0; p = .002) --				
18 to 35	13.2%	31.1%	41.2%	31.7%
36 to 50	37.7%	40.2%	34.9%	37.7%
51 and Older	49.1%	28.7%	23.9%	30.6%
Mean Age (F = 9.5; p < .001) --	50.0	43.2	40.5	43.4
Years Lived in Team=s State (Chi-Square = 7.1; p = .132) --				
10 or Less	20.8%	26.1%	36.8%	28.6%
11 to 25	34.0%	38.2%	36.8%	36.9%
26 or More	45.2%	35.7%	26.4%	34.5%
Mean Years Lived in Team=s State (F = 5.4; p = .005)	25.8	22.5	17.8	21.6

18.8, followed by a mean score of 17.9 for loyal fans and of 16.2 for fans ($F = 8.44$; $p < .001$). Clearly, baseball knowledge is significantly and positively related to fan loyalty.

The Relationship Between Fan Loyalty and Competitiveness

Competitiveness was assessed by administering the desire to win scale (Corfman 1991). This scale consists of the following three items:

- *I want to win at whatever I do.*
- *I am a competitive person.*
- *I dislike losing.*

Each item was again measured on a six point scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. Consequently, the three item desire to win scale ranges in value from a minimum possible score of $3 \times 1 = 3$ to a maximum possible score of $3 \times 6 = 18$, with a scale midpoint of 10.5. (Psychometric properties of the scale were as follows. An internal reliability analysis of the scale resulted in an alpha of .79, and a common factor analysis led to the extraction of a single factor with eigenvalue of 2.11).

The results of the study yielded a median competitiveness score of 15 for all fans included in the study, and a mean score of 14. The mean competitiveness scores did differ significantly by fan loyalty index. In this case, diehard fans exhibited a mean score of 14.6, statistically identical to the mean score of 14.8 for loyal fans, both of which were significantly larger than the mean score of 13.6 for fans ($F = 4.49$; $p = .012$). Greater competitiveness is associated with greater loyalty, though the relationship seemed to plateau with loyal fans (i.e., no further increase in competitiveness was noted between diehard fans versus loyal fans).

Managerial Implications, Limitations and Future Research

The research presented in this study was designed to provide insights into four fundamental questions focusing on the impact of fan loyalty to a specific team and

subsequent fan behaviors and related attitudes. Results of the work showed that 1) some sixty-two percent of the team's fans surveyed considered themselves to be loyal to the team; 2) there was a direct positive relationship between fan loyalty and the number of games attended and team paraphernalia purchased; 3) a positive correlation existed between fans' loyalty to the team and fans' perceptions of the team's likeability and performance; and 4) fans' age, gender, and the number of years lived in area were related to fans' loyalty to the team.

While the findings reported in this manuscript are interesting, the results hold important implications for marketing managers in professional sports organizations. For example, despite a relatively short brand history as compared to proverbial market leaders (e.g., the New York Yankees, the Boston Red Sox, the Chicago Cubs) with long and storied histories and traditions, respondents in the study demonstrated strong brand loyalty to the team (product) of interest. Such a finding suggests that newer professional sports franchises can, with effective marketing strategies and environmental analyses, develop a strongly loyal fan base in a relatively short time.

Importantly, as indicated by the results of this study, along with that fan base and fan loyalty come significant fan behaviors and attitudes. The team in this study can use a variety of demographic variables to effectively segment the sports fan market in the team's locale. This is especially important to the organization in question due to intensive competition in the specific metropolitan area for the fans' professional sports entertainment dollar. For example, the results of this study showed that female respondents tended to exhibit more brand loyalty to the team than did their male counterparts. In addition, it was found that fans over 50 years of age were more likely to be self-proclaimed die-hard fans of the team than were younger fans. In order to successfully compete in this highly competitive market, marketing and communications directors for the team might use such information to develop effective promotional campaigns and

positioning strategies. For example, this information could be used in the tailoring of advertising messages, making media choices, selecting product or service spokespersons or in the development of appeal strategies to target these specific segments of the market. The organization might consider the development of promotional nights/days and even team paraphernalia designed to appeal specifically to consumers sharing these demographic characteristics.

While the primary researchers and officials with the organization of interest considered the findings of this study useful and promising, important limitations do exist. Perhaps the most obvious (and important) limitation of the work is that the results represent the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of fans of a single (MLB) team. Accordingly, the research findings and resultant implications lack direct generalizability to other MLB teams/organizations. The researchers encourage others to extend this stream of research to other MLB teams and to other professional sports venues, including football, basketball (men's and women's), hockey, soccer, and so on.

Another previously acknowledged limitation of this work involves the sample of fans included in the study. Despite the best efforts of the research team, it is unlikely that a truly representative sample of the team's fans was obtained. By surveying fans who 1) traveled to the ball park to attend a MLB game and 2) entered the ball park soon after the gates were opened, it is likely that at least a modicum of sampling bias was introduced into the study. While this bias might be overcome by using a mail or electronic survey of fans included in the organization's mailing list or by surveying a random sample of citizens living in the greater metropolitan area where the team in question is located, the results of this research remain meaningful and useful.

Perhaps, especially from the perspective of a professional sports organization, it is important to understand that fans who attend games may

differ significantly in terms of attitudes and/or behaviors from those fans who watch or listen to games on television or radio. If so, each type of fan may constitute a different segment of the market for the product, a segment with distinct needs, wants and desires. Such postulation presents future researchers with an intriguing avenue for further work.

Another interesting implication of these results involves a bit of role reversal. Manufacturers of physical goods might take away a lesson in building brand loyalty from this fledgling (at least by MLB standards) brand. While loyalty to a professional sports team no doubt derives from a plethora of sources, certainly on-field performance was instrumental here in building such an extensive fan base in so few years. There is so much discussion about "perceived quality" these days that it is tempting to forget the old adage that perceived quality is generated quickest with actual quality. That is, if an organization wants potential customers to think of their brand as being high quality, it is well-advised to build real, apparent quality into the product itself. Companies with a high level of actual, demonstrable product quality need spend less time touting superficial surrogates; customers will make the link soon enough on their own. In this case, fans quickly came to hold the team in high regard through their expressions of loyalty to the brand, in part at least because of the on-field performance of the team during its first several years. Manufacturers of consumer goods from automobiles to zippers should pay heed to this experience.

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