

Badger Business: Understanding the Fan Experience Through Customer Journey Mapping

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ABSTRACT

More and more services and customer experiences have become the focus of many business models and strategies, but little information currently exists about how these affect sports teams. In this study, a customer journey map is created outlining the entire process a college-aged fan goes through when attending a Wisconsin Badger home football game in the student section of the stadium. Through personal interviews and e-mail survey data collection, critical points within that process that lead to sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are identified. This information is then used to provide recommendations and a plan for implementing these recommendations to create a better fan experience and, ultimately, increase the Wisconsin Badgers brand equity.

INTRODUCTION

For years, millions of Americans have watched, attended, and participated in college football. Parents proudly watch their sons, alumni nostalgically relive their glory days, and students cheer on their team with a sense of pride and camaraderie. Meanwhile, universities are profiting. Last year over a third of all college fans purchased logo apparel and more than 26 million fans aged thirteen and up attended a college football game. College football teams have over 25 million Facebook fans and nearly ten million Twitter followers. The University of Wisconsin is no exception. In 2011, the Wisconsin Badgers were ranked by Forbes as the fifteenth most valuable college football team and valued at \$67 million with profits of approximately \$20 million (Smith 2011). The Badgers currently have roughly a half million *likes* on Facebook and twelve million followers on Twitter (Facebook, Twitter, 2012). With these staggering dollar numbers and an overwhelming amount of fan engagement, it is hard to deny that there is big business surrounding college football.

Considering the amount of revenues and level of fan engagement college football is experiencing, it is clear that there is more to the business of college football than just selling tickets. Fans engage in an experiential process continuously throughout the season. The brand touch points these fans encounter throughout the year create a journey from preseason to postseason, before game to after game, and everything in between. Throughout this entire journey, a company or brand has an opportunity to differentiate itself at each touch point through memorable experiences (MacMillan 1997). Though often times lumped with services, experiences are really the result of goods and services working in conjunction to create a memorable moment with a brand (Pine and Gilmore 1998). These opportunities make services even more important since frequently they are the source of the consumer's overall brand experience. In recent years research and business has placed a heavier focus on creating quality services, in addition to products, and recognized that the total customer experience plays a huge role in purchasing patterns, brand loyalty, and ultimately, brand equity. More and more customer feedback has shown that poor service continues to top the list of forms of customer dissatisfaction (Shostack 1984). This feedback, coupled with the realization that brands provide experiences in addition to products, has caused many firms to come to the realization that they must develop and understand this customer journey to be able to execute a successful business strategy (Berry 2002). This journey encompasses all the touch points a customer may have with a brand throughout an event, including their expectations prior to the experience and the evaluations they may have once it is over (Berry 2002).

Although this journey is critical to the experiences a fan has when engaging with a team and attending their game, little research currently exists relating to the exact shape of the journey. The main objective of this research is to provide the industry with helpful information to shed light on the customer journey map related to attending a Wisconsin Badger home football game and close the information gap that currently exists today in this particular area.

METHOD

Using personal interviews and e-mail surveys, the following learning outcomes will be accomplished: (1) create a customer journey map for a Wisconsin Badger home football game to outline all of the touch points an attendee experiences before, during and after a football game, (2) use the Critical Incident Technique to identify, categorize, and interpret critical incidents within the customer journey map where failures and successes occur to explain sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among Wisconsin Badger home football game attendees, (3) create recommendations based on the findings of the Critical Incident Technique that can be used to improve the customer journey and overcome existing or potential failures as well as increase the occurrence of success along the journey map, (4) and create and provide an action plan or means of implementing recommendations as it relates directly to Wisconsin Badger home football games. Given these objectives, the research design for this study is situation analysis in that it is conducted to increase the understanding of a concept, industry, firm, products or services, or a target market.

Prior to gathering primary data through personal interviews and e-mail surveys, large amounts of secondary data were collected through an extensive literature review. Knowing that customer journey mapping and the Critical Incident Technique were going to be used to accomplish the learning objectives, a thorough literature review was conducted to gain a detailed and complete understanding of these methods. Nine peer-reviewed articles were read during the literature review. In addition to customer journey mapping and the Critical Incident Technique, these articles also focused on topics such as service creation, customer experience, and creating points of differentiation within a product and service offering.

Two types of primary research were conducted to gather relevant information to complete the learning objectives. First, information was gathered through eight personal interviews to build the customer journey map. The individuals chosen to participate in the interview were drawn from a convenience sample of similarly aged participants with comparable backgrounds and lifestyles that all had attended a Wisconsin Badger home football game sometime in the last three years. This type of sample was chosen to ensure that all attendees had a common starting point and their responses could be compared. Although ten interviewees had been selected for interviews, only eight of them were completed. This was due to the fact that after the eighth interview a point of convergence had been reached in which all of the responses were very similar and began following a pattern. These interviews took place at the location of choice of the interviewee. These locations ranged from their place of work to Murphy Library at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. Each of the interviews consisted of the same three questions that asked them to describe the processes the participant went through before, during, and after a Wisconsin Badger home football game. While conducting the interviews, several occasions arose in which it was necessary to ask follow up questions in which the interviewees were requested to elaborate on or clarify an answer. Aside from these small deviations, each interviewee was asked the same set of questions. The interviews lasted from ten to twenty minutes and each interviewee had been briefed on the interview questions and the purpose of the research prior to sharing their responses. The interview outline and questions can be found in Appendix 1.

After all of the interview responses were gathered, the customer journey map containing each touch point a college-aged individual attending a Wisconsin Badger home football game experienced before, during, and after the event was created. This was done by creating separate journey maps for each of the interviewees and then combining the maps to create one, master customer journey map. This information allowed for the execution of the first objective, creating a customer journey map for a Wisconsin Badger home football game to outline all of the touch points an attendee experiences before, during, and after a home football game.

The second research method utilized e-mail surveys to implement the Critical Incident Technique and complete the second objective, to identify, categorize, and interpret critical incidents within the customer journey map where failures and successes occur to explain sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among Wisconsin Badger home football game attendees. The surveys were distributed to UW-L students through Qualtrics Survey Software. A random sample of 500 UW-L students was selected and provided by the University. This sample size was chosen with the expectation of a ten percent response rate resulting in a sample large enough to draw relevant and significant conclusions. The survey was constructed to uncover critical incidents along the journey map relating to a Wisconsin Badger home football game and identify failures and successes within the map. An informed consent was included in the body of the e-mail containing the link to the survey to inform participants that their responses are confidential and their willingness to participate is voluntary. This information was again provided to the participants at the beginning of the survey. The participants were asked one to eight questions depending on their initial response regarding their Wisconsin Badger home football game attendance in the last three years. The survey asked participants to recall particularly satisfying and dissatisfying experiences and describe when the incident happened, what specific circumstances led up to this situation, and what resulted that made them feel the incident was either satisfying or dissatisfying. Participants were given one week to complete the survey. After five days, a reminder e-

mail was sent thanking those who had already provided responses and urging those who had not to do so. At the end of the week, the survey was closed and deactivated. The survey and informed consent documents can be found in Appendix 2 and 3.

Of the 500 students included in the sample, 134 provided responses. These responses were downloaded to Microsoft Excel and sorted. Through the sorting and cleaning process, unusable or incomplete responses were removed. After this process, 26 responses of satisfying incidents and 12 responses of dissatisfying incidents were collected. These usable responses were then organized into major categories for consistency and ease of analysis.

After the critical incidents had been organized and categorized they were analyzed in relation to the customer journey map that was built based on the personal interview responses to identify where in the map the critical incidents were taking place and which events were leading up to these critical incidents. This analysis was completed with the intention of providing a basis for recommendation and an implementation plan to fulfill objectives three and four.

RESULTS

The responses from the personal interviews identified the journey and process each of the interviewees went through when attending a Wisconsin Badger home football game. The responses for each interview differed slightly but all included events that took place before, during, and after the football game. These responses were used to create a customer journey map a typical college aged student will experience when attending a Wisconsin Badger home football game. Figure 1 shows the final customer journey map in its entirety. The majority of the interview responses followed this master journey map, however, some of the points within the map were different depending on the background, personality, and place of residency of the game attendee.

The critical incidents obtained through the Qualtrics e-mail survey were first categorized into satisfying incidents and dissatisfying incidents. After cleaning the data there were 26 satisfying critical incidents that occurred within the customer journey map from the survey results. These incidents were sorted into four main categories. These categories were labeled "Interaction with Friends", "Traditions", "Good Team Performance", and "Atmosphere." Some of the incidents were related to more than one main category. These were analyzed, resorted, and placed into a category of best fit containing other incidents that were more similar to each other than they were to incidents in any other category.

Critical incidents that included hanging out with friends, being with friends, or partaking in various events with friends before, during, and after the football game were placed into the "Interaction with Friends" category. "Traditions" included critical incidents that discussed any Wisconsin Badger football game day traditions including Kegs 'N Eggs breakfast before the game, cheers during the game, Jump Around, and the 5th quarter. Critical incidents such as winning the football game or excitement experienced from a close game, upset, or conference match up created the "Good Team Performance" category. Finally, the rest of the identified critical incidents fit into the "Atmosphere" category. Several responses pointed out the atmosphere of the game and community specifically in the survey. Other responses discussed the sense of excitement around the game, cheering during the game, and the feeling of camaraderie among the other fans. These types of critical incidents were also sorted into the "Atmosphere" category.

Twenty of the twenty-six satisfying critical incidents took place during the game on the customer journey map. The remaining six critical incidents took place before the game and fell under the "Interaction with Friends" category.

From the Qualtrics e-mail survey there were twelve usable responses identifying dissatisfying critical incidents. These responses were sorted into three main categories; "Crowded", "Offensive Fans", and "Poor Team Performance." Several incidents were identified that spoke to issues of crowding. The bulk of these crowding issues centered on long waits. This included long lines to get into the stadium as well as in the restrooms and concession stands, which resulted in the participant missing part of the game. Other issues of crowding included not enough sitting room within the student section, having to stand for long periods of time, and getting spilled on and bumped into. Several critical incidents regarding rude and distasteful fans, home and visitor fans sitting too close together and fans that were too intoxicated were identified and created the "Offensive Fans" category. The last category, "Poor Team Performance," included incidents such as losing the game, key players becoming injured and unable to play, and uneventful or boring games.

Eleven of the twelve dissatisfying critical incidents took place during the game on the customer journey map. One "Crowded" critical incident took place before the game while a fan was entering the stadium and missed part of the first quarter due to long, slow moving lines.

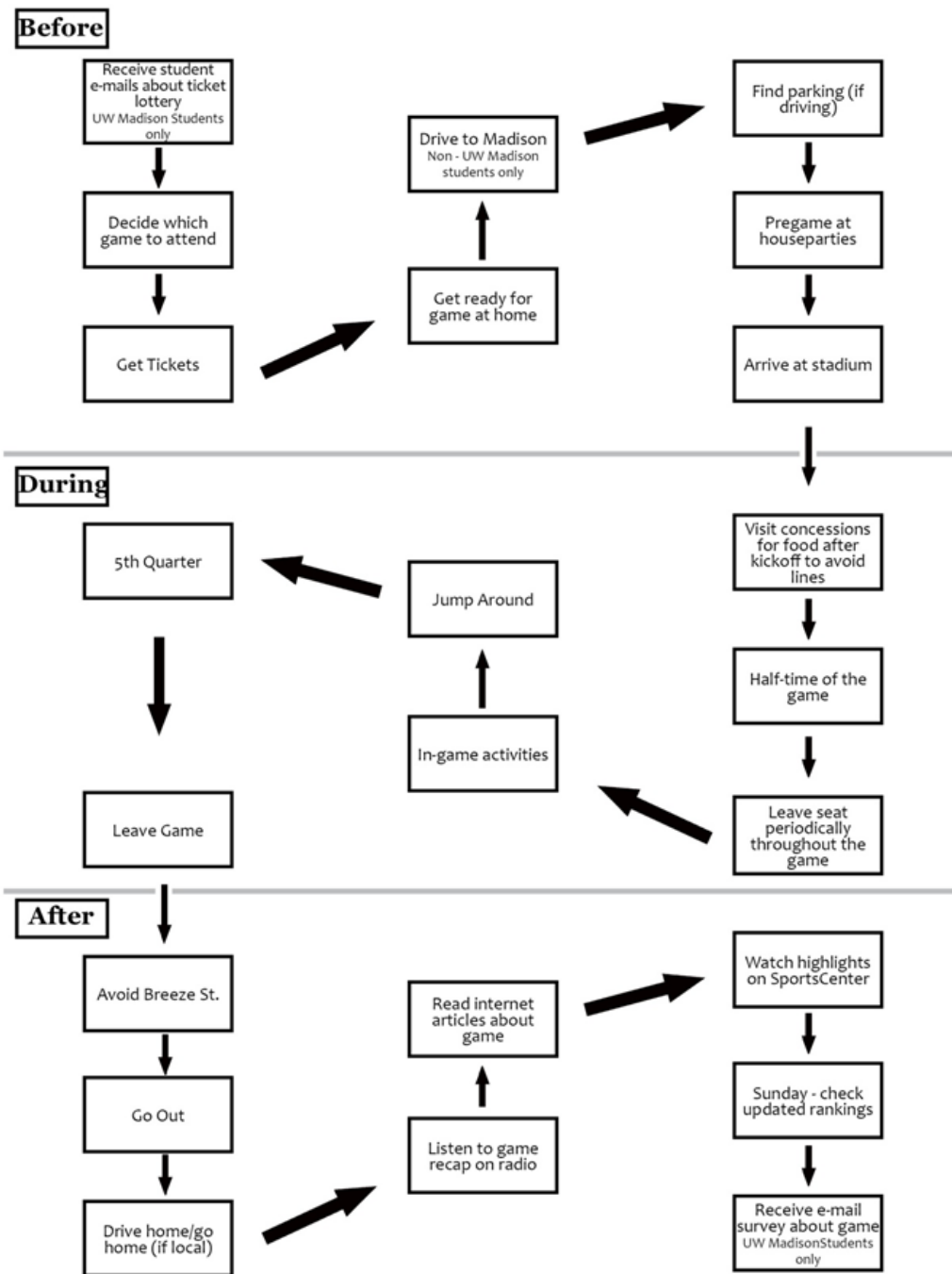


Figure 1. Master customer journey map for a Wisconsin Badger home football game.

DISCUSSION

As briefly mentioned in the results section, the majority of the fans interviewed followed the general customer journey map depicted in Figure 1. There were some discrepancies along the way however depending on the fan’s individual personality, likes, dislikes, and background as well as the college or university they attended and where they lived.

Before the Game

Several steps a fan goes through prior to attending a Wisconsin Badger home football game were identified through the surveys. The first identified step was receiving e-mails through the UW-Madison student e-mail account notifying the student that the home football game ticket lottery would be taking place and provided more information about that process. Only one interviewee identified participating in this step in the map as she was the only UW-Madison student that was interviewed for this study. The remainder of the interviewees were not UW-Madison students, therefore they did not receive these e-mails and did not experience this step in the customer journey map.

All of the interviewees indicated experiencing the next two steps on the customer journey map; deciding which game to attend and getting tickets for that game. These two steps were interchangeable and varied in order. In some cases they even occurred simultaneously. Several factors influenced which game the interviewee decided to attend. Which games their friends were going to, the opposing team, what tickets were available, and personal schedules all influenced this decision. There were several variations of the third step as well. The interviewees identified several ways they obtained tickets for games. Some of the methods were obtaining them through a friend or family member, winning them through the UW-Madison ticket lottery, or purchasing them through Craig's List, Facebook Marketplace, or from a scalper prior to the game.

The next step for each of the individuals interviewed was to get ready for the game. The interviewees all pointed out that they got ready for the game at their own home, or their friends house if they were visiting from out of town, and that this event was not unique or special in regards to the other events they went through prior to attending the game. Some of the interviewees that were from out of town and not staying with friends discussed getting ready for the game at home and then driving to Madison for the game, step five in the customer journey map. For those individuals that did drive to Madison the day of the game, the next step was to find an available parking space near the stadium. This step in the map was described as being a hassle and usually took a significant amount of time. Once parking was found, it was often not free and required a fee be paid upon exit of the parking space. Often times the time spent on this event in the map cut into the pregame activities that took place before the game or did not allow for any participation in pre-gaming as there would not be enough time before kickoff.

Participating in pregame activities was an event that each of the individuals identified in the interview. While the details of these activities varied from interviewee to interviewee, a common theme among all of them was that it took place with other friends, family members, or fans. Across the board, this event was social in nature and usually was intended to get the fans pumped up and excited about the game. Most of the interviewees described the pregame activities as drinking alcohol and attending a house party located near the stadium. Two of the interviewees who did not enjoy attending parties spent their time before the game partaking in other activities such as barbecuing or enjoying a meal with their friends and family. These pregame social activities were the basis of all of the satisfying critical incidents identified through the e-mail surveys. Several responses indicated interacting with their friends and family before the game and participating in pregame events as sources of instances they felt particularly satisfying.

From these pregame activities, all of the interviewees went to the stadium to find their seats for the game. This step in the map also had quite a variation among the responses. Some attendees preferred to arrive to the stadium at least one hour in advance of kick off while others waited until just after kickoff to find their seats, and everything in between. The motivations behind the time of arrival at the stadium were influenced by the personality of the interviewee. Those that indicated that they would rather be in their seats well before kickoff generally were very involved in the football game itself and did not want to miss any part of it. Others who did not mind being late to the game indicated that this was driven by social factors such as how much they were enjoying the house party they were pre-gaming at and when their friends were ready to leave for the stadium. This step in the customer journey map was the only before game event that provided dissatisfying critical incidents. This critical incident fell into the "Crowded" category and involved an attendee having to wait in long lines to enter the stadium causing them to miss part of the first quarter of the game.

During the Game

Many similarities were observed during the game among all interviewees. Each of the interviewees discussed leaving their seats one or more times throughout the game to use the restroom or visit the concession stands for food or drinks. Many of the interviewees also mentioned the necessity of getting out of their seats to purchase refreshments as food and drink vendors do not walk through the student sections during the game. When the attendees chose to leave their seats for these reasons differed among responses. Some indicated getting up immediately after kick off to avoid long lines that form just before the game start. While other respondents did not provide specific instances such as these, they all indicated that they tried to choose a time during the game to leave their seats when they anticipated short lines. Half-time was spent differently for each interviewee as well. Some

enjoyed utilizing this time as an opportunity to get up and stretch their legs, while others remained in their seats to watch the half time show or avoid large crowds of other fans that got up to walk around as well.

All of the interviewees discussed participating in in-game activities that took place throughout the game. Some of these activities included singing along to "Sweet Caroline," chanting Badger cheers, participating in the Student Section Races and listening to the Ask the Badgers segment among many other Wisconsin Badger traditions. All of the interviewees pointed out Jump Around and many discussed the 5th Quarter event that took place during the game. Each of the individuals interviewed indicated that they would always at least stay for Jump Around and that it was one of the highlights of the game. A survey respondent even went as far to say that it is something that every Badger fan should experience. The 5th Quarter received similar positive survey responses and was deemed a "must-see" by many participants.

During the game, several critical incidents, both satisfying and dissatisfying, were identified in the e-mail survey responses. All three of the dissatisfying critical incident categories occurred during the football game. The most frequent of these categories was the issue of crowding. Respondents identified several instances of crowding from not having enough sitting room and having to stand too long, to being bumped into and getting spilled on. The issue of offensive fans was common as well. Respondents discussed the dissatisfying experiences associated with fans that had become overly intoxicated and obnoxious, distasteful and rude fans, and the negative effects that stem from Badger fans being seated too close to the opposing team's fans. The last category of dissatisfying critical incidents that occurred during the game was "Poor Performance." Respondents described games that the Badgers played poorly in, lost, or were generally unentertaining as particularly dissatisfying.

All four of the satisfying critical incidents occurred during the game as well. Carrying through from before the game, the idea of being with friends and fan interaction brought several survey respondents sources of satisfaction while attending a Wisconsin Badger home football game. Famous Badger cheers and chants, Jump Around, and the 5th Quarter, in addition to other staple events of a Badger home game, were all identified in the surveys as sources of satisfaction and categorized in the "Traditions" group. Games in which the Badgers were playing well, the score was close, or they won, all examples of the category "Good Team Performance," were identified by respondents as also being satisfactory critical incidents. The last satisfactory category, "Atmosphere," also had several instances that occurred during the game, as identified by the results of the e-mail survey.

The last step in the customer journey map that occurred during the football game was leaving the actual stadium. A variety of responses were provided through the interviews relating to this step in the map. One interviewee mentioned that he always stayed for the whole game as a sign of respect for the team. On the other end of the spectrum, another interviewee indicated that they always left early to avoid long lines and traffic. The remaining interview responses fell somewhere in between these two extremes. Many of the interviewees mentioned that when the time they left the game was dependent on the game itself. If it was a close game the attendee was more inclined to stay until it was over. At the same time, if one team had a large lead over the other or the game was not very exciting, the attendee would be more likely to leave early.

After the Game

When describing the events that took place after a game in the interviews, the responses differed from each of the interviewees. The common denominator in each of the responses was the first step that took place after the game, avoid Breeze St. This major road near the stadium was described as packed, crowded, chaotic, and definitely something that should be avoided. Many of the interviewees discussed planning their exit around Breeze St. to avoid the crowds. From there, the interviewees took several different paths. Many went out to parties or bars to interact with friends and other fans as an extension of the social aspect surrounding the game. Other fans that drove from out of town to the game would drive back home immediately following the end of the game. Finally, interviewees that did not enjoy partying or drinking would simply go home when the game was finished.

UW-Madison students that attended the games indicated that they would sometimes receive follow up e-mails from the school asking them to participate in a survey about their experiences at the recent game. This was the only follow-up interaction from the brand that was identified through the interviews. Only one interviewee described additional events that took place after the game. This interviewee discussed events such as reading articles on the internet about the game, watching highlights on SportsCenter, and checking the updated rankings on Sunday.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the feedback provided in the e-mail surveys, there are several aspects of a Wisconsin Badger home football game that can be changed, or capitalized on to improve the experience for a college aged student attending a game. Unfortunately, several of the dissatisfying critical incidents were due to factors outside of the control of the Wisconsin Badgers organization and almost impossible to regulate or improve. While these recommendations are

not all inclusive and do not replace the need for a formal marketing plan, they do provide a basis for beginning to improve this experience.

It was clear due to the overwhelming number of responses concerning the issue of crowding in the e-mail survey that steps need to be taken to alleviate this issue in order to improve the overall experience of a Wisconsin Badger home football game. One of the major implications of crowding was the issue of long lines. These lines occurred before, during and after the game and provided several sources of dissatisfaction for the fans. One recommendation for improving this issue is by streamlining the entrance process to allow the lines to move faster. This could be accomplished by having more security guards and stadium personnel on staff before the start of the game. Having more workers available to collect tickets and check in attendees would allow more people to enter the stadium at one time, thus moving the lines along faster. This same idea could be applied to concession stands to avoid long lines for food and beverages. With more vendors working at once to assist more fans at once, there would be a decreased opportunity for lines to form and create congestion within the stadium. At the same time, having more concession stands constructed around the stadium may improve this issue as well. More concession stand locations would give fans more choices in where to go to purchase refreshments, breaking up the long lines and crowds into more, shorter lines. Lastly, vendors walking through the student sections as they do for the rest of the stadium may alleviate crowding issues as well.

Crowding was also an issue in regards to stadium seating within the student section. One interviewee indicated that often times fans with non-student section tickets will sneak into the student section to sit with their friends and enjoy the unique atmosphere and experience that comes along with that part of the stadium. This means that there are more fans than seats in this section and attendees are forced to squeeze together on the benches, sometimes leaving people on the end with no room to sit. Having stricter security near the student section entrances or additional personnel checking tickets throughout the game in the student section may alleviate this issue in the future. Not only will these personnel members be able to ask those with non-student section tickets to return to their assigned seat, but they may also act as a deterrent from sneaking into those sections in the first place. Lastly, replacing the bench seats currently used in the student section with traditional stadium seating may ensure that only those with proper tickets would have a place to sit.

The critical incidents relating to being with friends, Wisconsin Badger traditions, and game atmosphere provided multiple instances of satisfaction and were discussed frequently in the e-mail survey responses. Having an understanding of the impact of these three elements on a fan's experience at a Wisconsin Badger home football game provided through the research conducted in the study, provides reason to incorporate them in future marketing events and strategy. Capitalizing on the exciting atmosphere at the game and in the community on game day in advertisements and other marketing pieces may entice and encourage more fans to attend a game. This could be accomplished through testimonials or quotes from other fans that have attended a game and enjoyed the atmosphere on the Wisconsin Badger football website, in TV and radio commercials, and on fliers and billboards. A similar approach should be taken to promote the traditions that take place during the game. Though the survey responses it was evident that fans thoroughly enjoyed the Badger traditions they got to partake in during the game. Moving forward, these traditions should continue to be included, if not more so, in future marketing strategies for Wisconsin Badger home football games. During the interviews, as shown on the customer journey map, few events take place prior to the game that have a direct relation to the Wisconsin Badgers specifically. While all of these events occur because of the game, they are executed separately at personal venues unrelated to the Badgers or the University. Using the aspect of tradition and being with friends, both major categories of satisfying critical incidents, events could be created that would promote the Badgers and encourage fans to attend in lieu of house parties at a friend's house. Tailgating events with more specific targeting to college aged Badger fans that provide inexpensive food and drinks may excite this particular group of people and facilitate closer brand interaction before the game. After gaining some popularity, these events could potentially become a new pregame ritual for college students, capitalizing on the idea of "tradition." This same strategy can apply to postgame events. While the majority of interviewees indicated going out and socializing after the game, none of them mentioned anything specifically related to the Badgers. Holding a tailgating type event after the game was finished where students could purchase refreshments and interact with their friends may also provide an opportunity for further brand engagement.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The group studied in this research only represents a fraction of the attendees at Wisconsin Badger home football games. The recommendations for improving their experience may have implications on the experiences of other groups of attendees not included in this research. To gain a complete understanding of the fan experience of a home Badger football game, similar research should be conducted with each attendee group and compared.

The individuals chosen for interviews in this research were all acquaintances of the researcher and selected

based on their availability to participate in the study. This group is not a fair and true representation of all fans that sit in the student section at home Badger games. A larger sample of a wider variety of attendees would provide a more accurate representation of the student section and offer a more accurate picture of the true customer journey map. These individuals were also selected on the basis that they had attended a Wisconsin Badger home football game in the last three years. Choosing individuals who had attended more recent games would have avoided potential recall and memory biases providing a clearer picture of the true customer journey. Additionally, the responses used to generate the customer journey map were collected from individuals that were UW-Madison students, UW-La Crosse students and similarly aged individuals that did not attend a college or university. This wide variety of interview participants produced conflicting customer journey maps that were difficult to compare and contrast. Interviewing a group of just UW-La Crosse students or just UW-Madison students would also provide a more accurate representation of the processes these individuals go through when attending a Badger home football game and would allow more extensive analysis to be conducted. Additionally, when conducting the personal interviews, further probing and more detailed questions would have provided better information to analyze and compare to the critical incidents identified in the survey. This would have provided better insight to the specific events that led up to the critical incidents and allowed more effective recommendations to be made. This was not executed to its full advantage due to the inexperience of the researcher.

Lastly, the sample of students used for the e-mail surveys were drawn from the UW-La Crosse student database. These responses were then compared against a customer journey map created from interviews of UW-Madison students and college aged individuals that did not attend a school in addition to UW-La Crosse students. A more accurate analysis could be conducted if the survey responses and interview responses were collected from individuals with the same academic background. In addition to a more refined survey sample, a larger sample would have provided a higher response rate and a larger quantity of critical incidents. With this higher volume of responses, trends and patterns could have been identified and analyzed as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher of this study is especially thankful to Dr. Ryan White from the University Of Wisconsin – La Crosse Marketing Department. Without his guidance, advice, and frequent e-mail checking though the planning and research process, this report would not have been successful. The author would also like to thank the individuals that participated in the personal interviews and the students from the University Of Wisconsin – La Crosse that were randomly selected to receive the e-mail surveys. Their time and engagement allowed for insightful analysis to be conducted and helpful recommendations to be made.

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