

What psychological factors underline in fantasy sports participants: Uses and gratifications and sport fan motivation inquiry

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Abstract 177**

The fantasy sports industry keeps growing and over 19 million people in the U.S. and Canada are now participating in fantasy sports. A recent survey also shows that 34.5 million people have played fantasy sports (Fantasy Sports Trade Association, 2007). Fantasy sports is a game, typically played on Internet sites, in which fantasy owners build a team and compete against each other based upon the statistical data in actual games. Through an interactive game such as fantasy sports, users have the opportunity to live out their dreams by setting up a complete roster, trading players, competing against other teams, and vying for a championship (Wojtas, 1991). According to Murphy & Church (2000), fantasy sports are one way of creating loyal users and generating frequent and longer visits, thus enhancing marketing, advertising, and sponsorship efforts. In addition, fantasy sports continue to grow as a direct marketing tool, providing an abundant demographic for targeted marketing (Sport Business Journal, 2000). Therefore, sport marketers should be concerned about the future of the fantasy sports industry and examine participants' behavior, as well as the motives to maintain and attract fantasy sports participants. Even though there has been incredible growth within the fantasy sports industry, little research exists relative to the motivations of fantasy sports participants. The phenomenon of modern fantasy sports has become increasingly common among sports fans over a short time period; therefore, understanding and analyzing fantasy participants' motivation is critical to the success of internet communication for the sports world.

Fantasy sports are different from other parts of the sports industry because they are based both on the real world (i.e., to follow real games and data, etc) and on the virtual world (i.e., Internet, new media technologies). In the same manner, fantasy sports participants are unique from other sports fans or spectators in the real sport events. In a previous study, Cooper (2004) developed the fantasy sports participant motivation scale; however, the research failed to notice this uniqueness of the fantasy sports which is mentioned above. In this study, both the uses and gratifications theory and the traditional sports fans motivation scale will be considered as a theoretical framework. This is reasonable because researchers apply the uses and gratifications theory as an effective framework to understand Internet user behavior. This application is appropriate since the major strength of Internet is the high level of user activity (Newhagen and Rafaeli, 1996). In addition, Shank and Beasley (1998) revealed that both fantasy sports fans and traditional sports fans are highly involved and have a similar emotional attachment to sports. Thus, we combined the uses and gratifications theory and Motivation Scale for Consumption (MSSC) by Trail & James (2001) to create the motives of fantasy sports participants.

The purpose of this study is to identify the motives of fantasy sports participants, to create Fantasy Sport Fan Motivation Scale (FSMS), and to revise the instrument. A convenience sample of undergraduate students at a university in the Midwestern United States was selected. First, the expert panel method and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax Rotation were employed to create an initial pool of 30 item FSMS. The instrument is based on 5 point Likert-type scale anchoring from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Second, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Multiple Regression will be utilized to examine the reliability and validity (i.e., construct, predictive, and convergent) of the original scale. The psychometric of the scale will be analyzed with SPSS 15.0 and EQS 6.1. Through a thorough scale development procedure, ten motivation dimensions were identified: competition, social interaction, economic, entertainment, escape, surveillance, fantasy, achievement, knowledge, and pass time. Finally, using Item Response theory, the original 30 item instrument was revised.

The findings of the present study will provide an early step to understand the fantasy sports phenomenon, and why fantasy sports is so popular among sports fans. In addition, the results will show a direction to researchers and marketers for future research to identify the psychological factors of sports consumers in a virtual world, and to explore the potential of fantasy sports market as a marketing tool.