

How confident are you to win your fantasy league: Exploring the antecedents and outcomes of winning expectancy

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Abstract 239**

The explosive growth of the Internet has dramatically changed the business environment in sport and media (McDaniel & Sullivan, 1998). Increased levels of interactivity and personalization potential have shifted market power from suppliers to consumers (Mahan & McDaniel, 2006; Pires, Stanton, & Rita, 2006). In particular, the online sport phenomenon, "fantasy sport", has gained unprecedented popularity, with about 18 million participants in the United States alone accounting for more than \$1.6 billion spent (Ballard, 2004; Klaassen, 2006).

Despite its proliferation as a multibillion dollar business, fantasy sport games have received far less attention from scholars. Thus, little is known about fantasy sport consumers beyond their demographic information (e.g., income level, gender). Given that the major revenue sources for fantasy sport service providers are advertisement and fees from consumers (e.g., subscription and entry fees, software, etc.) (La Monica, 2006), it is imperative for sport marketers to understand factors associated with promoting adoption and continuance of behaviors. In an effort to improve understanding of fantasy sport consumers, this study investigated some antecedents and outcomes of winning expectancy (Ladouceur et al., Savigny, Blaszczyński, & O'Connor, 2003; Wassarman, 2002), a psychological variable that assesses participants' belief toward winning a chance-based game.

Over the past 30 years, empirical research has contributed considerably to the understanding of psychological processes related to the maintenance of habitual chance-based gaming behaviors. It has been well-documented that people often assume they can exert more control over the chance-based events (i.e., gambling, trading) than the objective circumstances warrant (see Thompson, Armstrong, and Thomas, 1998 for a review). Such inflated beliefs become more salient when skill-relevant factors (i.e., foreknowledge, familiarity, and involvement) are involved in the decision making processes (Thompson et al., 1998). Furthermore, it has been supported that such erroneous beliefs or cognitive illusions lead to an excessive gaming behavior such as addiction or increased monetary involvement (Chau & Phillips, 1995; Jefferson & Nicki, 2003). Following this line of research, the current study explored the influence of perceived football knowledge, perceived ease of using the website, and hedonic involvement on winning expectancy. Further, the study examined monetary involvement and frequency of website visit as behavioral correlates of winning expectancy.

A random sample of college students ($N = 242$) at a large Eastern university were collected for the study by using self-report web-based survey. Data collection started two weeks prior to the kickoff of the 2006 NFL season and continued for three weeks. Multi-item measures (i.e., winning expectancy, perceived ease of use, hedonic involvement, perceived football knowledge) were adapted from previous research and showed good internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha ranged from .84 to .98). Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted and gender was entered in the first block to control for gender effect. Three predictors (football knowledge [FBK], perceived ease of use [PEOU], and hedonic involvement [HI]) were entered in the following block and stepwise estimation approach was used. The results suggested that all independent variables ([FBK: Beta = .168, $t = 2.597$, $p < .01$]; [PEOU: Beta = .264, $t = 4.719$, $p < .001$]; [HI: Beta = .401, $t = 7.459$, $p < .001$]) had significant incremental effects on winning expectancy above and beyond gender. HI had the greatest contribution to the winning expectancy. Taken together, gender, FBK, PEOU, and HI explained 52% of the total variance of the winning expectancy. In the subsequent data analysis, monetary involvement and website visit frequency were regressed on winning expectancy. Findings showed that winning expectancy is positively associated with higher rate of website visit ($R^2 = .17$, $F(1, 241) = 47.563$, $p < .001$) and monetary involvement ($R^2 = .13$, $F(1, 241) = 36.394$, $p < .001$).

Preliminary results support previous literature that knowledge, involvement, and familiarity significantly influence inflated winning expectancy (c.f., Thompson et al., 1998). Findings of this study also highlight the predictive utility of winning expectancy in explaining participants' excessive gaming behavior such as additional time and money investment (Chau & Phillips, 1995; Jefferson & Nicki, 2003). Specifically, higher levels of winning expectancy were related to larger amounts of time and money invested in playing fantasy sport. Moreover, results suggest that winning expectancy is best explained by going beyond demographics to look at cognitive (knowledge), behavioral (ease of use), and affective factors.

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This study is the first known attempt to examine the inflated winning expectancy phenomena in the online sport gaming context. Although this study signifies the implications of winning expectancy as a useful psychological construct in studying fantasy sport consumers, the results of this study leave more to be investigated and answered. Given that this study used a cross-sectional data, the direction of the causality remains unclear. Further studies using experimental approaches would be useful in identifying causal relationships among variables and it would be interesting to further examine how certain features (e.g., expert information, customizability) might relate to inflated winning perceptions (Goodman & Irwin, 2006).