

For love or money: Exploring and developing a motivational scale for fantasy football participation

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Abstract 341**

The psychological, sociological, and behavioral study of sport spectators and consumers has been a prosperous area of study for over three decades (Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1995; Trail & James, 2001; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2003). The demand for sport has been the primary focus of the majority of the previous research on sport consumption as understanding consumer motivation is paramount in our field. Within this process, the development of measurement instruments is an important step in examining motives behind why people watch or follow sports (Trail & James, 2001).

Within the past decade, fantasy sports has blossomed into a highly-lucrative enterprise. The Fantasy Sports Trade Association (FSTA, 2005) estimates the total economic impact of fantasy sports could be as high as \$4 billion, annually. According to Fisher (2006), more than 15 million Americans participate in some kind of fantasy sports league. This number is expected to grow to 30 million participants by the year 2010. For the sport marketer, this explosion of fantasy sports has introduced a new, highly-engaged sport consumer that craves interactivity and real-time information combined with the traditional, old-fashioned spectatorship associated with professional sports (Shipman, 2003). Due to the habitual commitment associated with fantasy sports, sport marketers have just begun to use it as an easy, cost-effective means of reaching a loyal group of consumers (Leporini, 2006).

Despite the ever-increasing popularity of fantasy sports and the tremendous growth of its lucrative demographic, there is a significant lack of empirical research studying the motivational factors behind fantasy sports participation. Given this limited amount of research, the current study is intentionally exploratory in nature. The purpose of this study is to develop and validate a comprehensive fantasy sports motivation scale, as well as attempt to answer the following research questions:

What specifically motivates an individual to participate in fantasy football?

Does the motive of gambling significantly affect fantasy football participation?

While previous research has not yet identified motives for participating in fantasy sports leagues, there have been a few empirical endeavors examining the issues associated with fantasy sports participation (Shipman, 2001; Bernhard & Eade, 2006; Davis & Duncan, 2006). Previous research on fantasy sports demonstrated similarities between fantasy league play and gambling in terms of the possibility of monetary loss and the uncertainty of outcome in nature (Bernhard & Eade, 2006; Davidson, 2002). In addition, Winkler (2006) emphasized that monetary incentives motivate players to participate in fantasy sports leagues. As such, it seems logical that the theoretical frameworks employed in studies on gambling behaviors may be applicable to examine psychological and behavioral aspects of fantasy sports league participants.

In media literature, Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory assumes that people are motivated to participate in activities and select content that will satisfy a specific need. The primary purposes of the U&G approach are to explain the psychological needs that motivate audiences to examine needs, motives, and media behavior (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 1994). As such, participants may choose and select to participate in fantasy sports leagues to fulfill their needs and wants. Accordingly, a focus on fantasy league participation from the U&G point of view may aid researchers and practitioners in understanding the motivations and characteristics of these mediated participants. Thus, the U&G perspective has served as the starting point in understanding consumers' experience with fantasy sports leagues.

Analogous with past motivational scale development procedures, the current study will implement a three-stage procedure to develop and validate an instrument for measuring motives for fantasy sports participation. First, three focus groups were conducted to identify the principal reasons for fantasy sports participation and to develop pilot survey items for the factor dimensions of the fantasy sports motivational scale. Five motivational factors were identified: entertainment, competition, sport-knowledge application, social interaction, and gambling. Second, a pilot study was conducted at a mid-sized public institution in the West using the five factor instrument. Fifty-seven participants were surveyed and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) by principal component extraction and promax rotation was conducted to determine the number of factors and to obtain reliable and valid factors. Four factors emerged which accounted for 71.7% of the total variance explained by the model. According to Mundfrom, Shaw and Ke (2005), to achieve an excellent-level criterion (0.98) with a sample size near 200 participants, it is

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recommended that each factor have a minimum number of variables. As a result, a four factor solution containing 24 variables was accepted as the most appropriate. The factors identified were competition (6 items), social interaction (6 items), entertainment (6 items), and gambling (6 items).

Data collection is currently under way and will be concluded by November 30, 2007. The study is being conducted at two major universities in the United States, a mid-sized public institution in the West and large public institution in the Midwest. Participants represent a convenient and purposive sample based on the criterion of fantasy football participation, and are being solicited from Sport and Exercise Science classes on both campuses. Finally, once data collection has ended, another EFA will be performed followed by a confirmatory factor analysis to verify the internal consistency and the construct validity of the fantasy sports motivation scale. The completed study will be finished by December 31, 2007.

The aim of this study is to provide preliminary insight into the lucrative demographic of fantasy sports consumers by developing a motivational scale exploring fantasy sports participation. Using theoretical frameworks from gambling literature and the U&G model as a backbone, the results of this study will aid sport managers, sport marketers, and media conglomerates in their attempt to leverage fantasy sports into a successful vehicle for reaching sport consumers. The phenomenon of fantasy sports has transformed the traditional passive fan into a more interactive sports spectator (Shipman, 2001), and for perhaps the first time in history, the subculture of fantasy participants is driving strategy at the country's biggest broadcasters (Zeitnick, 2005). The potential for fantasy sports consumers to alter the sport consumption landscape is very much a possibility, but in the meantime, this group of fans needs to be properly researched. In addition, the findings of this study will provide insight into the professional leagues' most significant fan base, the media-dominant consumer, a segment that deserves a significant amount of attention according to researchers Pritchard and Funk (2006). It is recommended, regardless of this study's findings, that more research be conducted in this area.