

Exploring Taiwanese Fantasy Baseball Participation, Team Involvement, and Game Viewing Intention

Yen-Chun Lin, University of Northern Colorado

Dianna Gray (Advisor), University of Northern Colorado

**Marketing
Abstract 2009-214**

**May 30, 2009
3:00 PM**

**Poster
(Lexington/Carolina Prefunction)**

Fantasy sports are virtual games where participants build their own teams that compete with others based on real statistics generated by the players or teams of various professional sports. Recently, the popularity of the Internet has made these games more accessible and profitable. Due to its popularity, Major League Baseball (MLB) is the preferred fantasy game in Taiwan. Playing MLB fantasy baseball can serve as a catalyst for fan avidity and thus, create a larger demand for real time information and baseball game broadcasts. As avid fans, people watch more games, become more loyal to their favorite team, and have a higher level of involvement with their fantasy baseball teams. Therefore, this study explored the relationship among fantasy team involvement, fan loyalty, MLB game viewing intentions, and social factors.

Previous research has revealed that level of involvement influences people's information search effort and volume (Edgett & Cullen, 1993; Elliott, 1994). Thus, greater demands for information are expected from highly involved fantasy sports participants. In regard to fan loyalty, Heere and Dickson (2008) state that loyalty is a highly developed attitude and thus, resistant to change. Therefore, one would ask whether greater exposure to a variety of sources of information, as well as information on other (non favorite) teams, changes the fantasy sports participant's loyalty to his/her favorite teams. Moreover, Mahony and Moorman (1999) revealed that positive attitudes towards teams and players would lead to increased viewing intentions. However, fans still watch games when their favorite team is not playing (Fink, Parker, & Pinson, 2007). Fink et al further stated that following the performance of their fantasy players is one of the reasons fans watch games. Thus, participants with high levels of involvement with their fantasy team tend to have higher intentions to watch MLB games. Finally, social factors such as the number of teams owned and the amount of money spent are additional explanatory variables related to involvement (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007).

This study was guided by the following research questions. 1: Do participants with a high level of involvement with fantasy sports and participants with a low level of involvement differ in their intentions to watch televised MLB games (the games of their favorite teams, the neutral teams, the most disliked team, the best fantasy players, and the opponent's best players)? 2: Do participants with a high level of involvement with fantasy sports and participants with a low level of involvement differ in the loyalty to their favorite team? 3: Are there relationships between respective explanatory variables (the number of friends and family played with, the amount of money spent, the number of years played, the number of team owned, and the perception of fantasy sports is based on luck or skill) and different levels of fantasy team involvement? Methods: A web-based survey was distributed using snowball sampling and convenience sampling protocols. The link for the questionnaire was posted on a fantasy baseball discussion group page with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey. The twenty-eight-question survey was composed of the fantasy team involvement scale, fan loyalty scale, questions measuring viewing intentions and social factors, and demographic questions. One hundred and thirty-six responses were collected. Ninety-three percent of the respondents were males and single with an average age of 24.77 years (SD = 3.66). Additionally, ninety percent spend more than two hours on the Internet, and sixty-one percent spend thirty minutes to ninety minutes on fantasy baseball per day. Seventy percent of the total respondents indicated that they have watched more MLB games since they started playing fantasy baseball. A two-way ANOVA with a mixed design was conducted to answer RQ1. An independent samples t-test was used to answer RQ2; RQ3 was tested by using a chi-squared test of independence.

Results showed that the team by level of involvement interaction was significant ($F(3.03, 206.22)=3.19, p<.05$). Furthermore, significant results were found for main effect for level of involvement ($F>(1, 206.22)=17.91, p<.05$), and main effect for team ($F(3.03, 206.22)=24.86, p<.05$), which revealed that levels of involvement and what teams are broadcasted have significant influence on the fantasy baseball participants' viewing intentions. However, in simple effects analyses, significance was only found for levels of involvement (high: $F(4, 206.22)=20.46, p<.01$; low: $F(4, 206.22)=3.67, p<.01$), the game of their favorite team ($F(1, 274.22)=13.43, p<.01$), and the game of their best fantasy players ($F(1, 274.22)=14.30, p<.01$). The games of neutral teams, the most disliked teams, and the opponent's best players were not found to be significantly different in regard to the viewing intention of highly-involved and low-involved participants. For RQ 2, the results revealed that high involvement respondents had significantly higher fan loyalty ($t(90)=-3.95, p<.05$). To answer RQ 3, the number of friends and family played with and the amount of money spent are not significantly related to the level of involvement. However, the number of years played ($\chi^2(4, N=92)=39.48, p<.05$), the number of team owned ($\chi^2(4, N=92)=15.62, p<.05$), and the perception that fantasy sports is based on luck or skill ($\chi^2(2, N=92)=11.14, p<.05$) are significantly related to the level of involvement. As a result,

2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)

people with high fantasy team involvement levels reported significantly higher intention to watch games and higher loyalty. However, since forty-two percent of the respondents did not spend money on fantasy sports, this may explain the lack of significant results for the social factor in RQ 3. Moreover, socializing with family and friends has been reported as one of the motives driving people to participate in sport related activities (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007); however, in the current research, anti-social effects on fantasy baseball were found. Thus, further research in regard to this aspect is needed.