Effects of Personal Involvement and Expert Information on Fantasy Sports Consumers’ Winning Expectancy and Anticipated Emotion

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Nearly 30 million participants in the United States and Canada play fantasy sports (Fantasy Sports Trade Association, 2009). Fantasy sports consumers enjoy the illusion of control in managing their virtual teams to compete with other participants online. According to Kwak, Lim, Lee, and Mahan (2010), such illusion of control (i.e., winning confidence) is an important concept in understanding fantasy sports consumers, as it has direct implications on excessive time and money spent online. However, Kwak et al. (2010) called for more research in this area to apply experimental designs to better explain how such winning confidence is developed. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to explore the roles of personal involvement and expert information on the development of winning confidence and anticipated emotion in an experimental setting.

Some researchers have contended (e.g., Bernhard & Eade, 2006; Davison, 2006; Kwak et al., 2010) that fundamental characteristics of participating in fantasy sports are analogous to engaging in a skill-based gambling. For instance, while fantasy sport participants utilize their sport knowledge and statistical information to increase the likelihood of winning, the outcome remains unpredictable as they have no control over the athletes’ on-field performance (Kwak et al., 2010).

Langer’s (1975) theory of illusion of control provides a theoretical framework for the overestimation phenomena. In Langer’s study (Experiment 1), participants who were allowed to “personally choose” their own football card granted significantly higher monetary value to it than others who were not allowed to choose but randomly assigned their card. The influence of personal involvement on illusion of control has been consistently demonstrated in other gaming contexts (e.g., Burger & Cooper, 1979; McKenna, 1993; Wortman, 1975), suggesting that people overvalue their own choices than the ones chosen by others. In addition, studies have found that the notion of “expertise” also increases the illusion of control (e.g., Cantinotti et al., 2004; Goodman & Irwin, 2006). For instance, Cantinotti et al. (2004) found that sport bettor’s perceived knowledge and near-misses increased winning expectancy in actual sport betting contexts. Also, Ladouceur et al. (1998) found that the horse riding bettors who recognized themselves as experts did not demonstrate better performance than chance. As such, a line of research demonstrates that the information provided by experts reinforces participants’ beliefs in winning, not the actual probability of the outcome in actual sport betting contexts.

In addition to measuring participants’ biased winning expectancy, the current study will also examine anticipated emotions (cf. Bagozzi et al., 1998) as another outcome measure. In particular, Bagozzi and other colleagues (1998) found empirical evidence that anticipated emotion (e.g., both positive and negative) increased willingness to engage in certain goal-directed behaviors. Therefore, along with winning expectancy, anticipated emotions would also serve as important determinants in predicting future behaviors in this context.

Based on the extensive review of relevant literature, the current study will test the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: High level of personal involvement will have a positive effect on winning expectancy and anticipated emotion.

Hypothesis 2: The presence of expert information will have a positive effect on winning expectancy and anticipated emotion.

A 2 (personal involvement: high/low) × 2 (expert information: presence/absence) between-subjects design will be utilized to examine the proposed hypotheses. A pilot study will be conducted to develop the stimuli (i.e., four print advertisements to manipulate personal involvement and expert information). An online experiment program (i.e., Qualtrics) will be utilized for the main study. Participants for the main study will be recruited from undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of four conditions (i.e., high involvement/expert information, low involvement/expert information, high involvement/no expert information, low involvement/no expert information) and will be asked to view the stimuli and respond to questionnaires.

The outcome measures will include winning expectancy and anticipated emotions. Since Presson and Benassi (1996) argued in their meta-analytic review that large effect sizes were measured in the studies of participants’ perceived ability to predict, four items from Kwak and colleagues (2010) will be applied to assess participant’s winning expectancy with seven-point Likert-type scales. In addition, anticipated emotions will be assessed by seven items for positive emotions (e.g., excited, delighted, happy, glad, satisfied, proud, and self-assured) and ten items for negative emotions (e.g., angry, frustrated, guilty, ashamed, sad,
disappointed, depressed, worried, uncomfortable, and anxious) adapted from Bagozzi et al. (1998). The data analysis will include descriptive analysis, reliability test, validity test, and a set of ANCOVA using prior experience of success as a covariate.

From the literature, the results are intuitively expected to demonstrate significant main effects of personal involvement and expert information on winning expectancy and anticipated emotion. Specifically, participants in the high involvement and expert information condition would exhibit the greatest winning confidence and the most favorable anticipated emotion, while participants in the low involvement and no expert information condition would exhibit the lowest winning confidence and the least favorable emotion.

We believe the current study contributes to the sport management literature by demonstrating the causation between the specific antecedents (i.e., personal involvement and expert information) and illusion of control. In addition, the present study extends the literature by exploring the link between involvement, expertise, and anticipated emotions to better understand the psychological underpinnings of fantasy sport consumption experience. Furthermore, the current study’s contribution will provide additional insights for future research on this emerging sport consumption area. The present study also provides important practical implications that utilizing customization options and providing expert information can enhance positive emotional feelings as well as winning confidence. The results of this study will provide empirical insights on the utility of such marketer-controlled features in enhancing consumer experiences (cf. Kwak et al., 2010).