Does the Living Room Become the Fantasy Front Office? A Cognitive Evaluation of the Consumption Habits of Fantasy Sport Users

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Introduction

It has been suggested that fantasy sport participation (hereafter FSP) has cultivated a new, highly-involved sport consumer who demands interactivity and real-time information combined with the more traditional, old-fashioned consumption behaviors associated with professional sport spectatorship (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Shipman, 2001). Indeed, while the literature has largely been content to conclude that FSP leads to heightened consumption through media (Drayer, Shapiro, Dwyer, Morse, & White, 2010, Dwyer, Shapiro, & Drayer, 2011), it has also suggested these fans attend more events (Drayer et al., 2010; Shipman, 2001); a paradox with critical research implications. In 2013, Lee, Seo, and Green produced the FanSMI, an inclusive instrument capturing the motivations for FSP. This inventory followed more than a decade of research on FSP motivation (e.g., Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Shipman, 2001), and served to refine and extrapolate many of the existing measures. The final scale included 12 facets of FSP motivation, including: (1) game interest, (2) becoming a general manager/head coach, (3) love for the sport, (4) prize, (5) competition, (6) entertainment value, (7) bonding with friends/family, (8) social interaction with other participants, (9) knowledge application, (10) hedonic experience, (11) escape, and (12) substitute for a losing team.

Dwyer et al. (2011) segmented fantasy sport users (hereafter FSUs) based on motives for participating in the activity and modes of sport media consumption; however, the extant literature has not examined whether consumption patterns beyond media may differ depending on the individual’s motives for participating in the activity. Given the notion that FSUs are a highly involved segment with a wide range of consumption habits (e.g., Drayer et al., 2010; Shipman, 2001), this is an area that warrants further exploration. Accordingly, this study will aim to determine whether an individual’s sport consumption patterns differ depending on their motives for FSP.

Conceptual Framework

The notion that in fantasy sport contexts sport media consumption is for the purpose of information gathering (Drayer et al., 2010) indicates that sport media consumption serves as a support mechanism for fantasy sport performance. Consistent with this idea, Lee et al. (2013) found that performance contingent motives such as competition, prize, knowledge application, becoming a general manager/head coach and substitute for a losing team were significantly correlated with information-seeking behaviors of FSUs. In contrast, motives unrelated to performance had lower correlations (i.e., social interaction with other participants) or were not significantly correlated (i.e., bonding with friends and family, escape from routine, entertainment value and hedonic experience) with FSU’s information-seeking behavior. While the remaining motives unrelated to performance (i.e., love for sport and game interest) were significantly correlated with information seeking, this is not surprising given these motives suggest high levels of importance given to the sport and particular games. Cognitive evaluation theory (CET) explains that individuals have the tendency to feel more constrained in behavioral contexts involving extrinsic rewards (e.g., Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1980). Indeed, FSP motivated by performance contingent motives is characterized by an extrinsic reward structure. In essence, CET suggests that individuals highly motivated by these factors would feel compelled to consume sport through immediate and varied forms of media (e.g., Twitter, injury reports, real time game stats, NFL Satellite packages, etc.) as a means of increasing their likelihood of successfully satisfying these performance contingent motives. CET also explains that behavioral contexts characterized by a lack of strong external rewards enable individuals to feel less constrained. It follows that FSUs motivated to participate in fantasy sport by less performance contingent motives reflect FSP motivation independent of external control and rewards. Therefore, FSUs motivated by these factors will feel less compelled to support their fantasy performance.
through media consumption, and if given the chance, would be more likely to attend sport events in person rather than consume them at home.

H1: FSUs motivated by performance contingent (external) motives (i.e., competition, prize, becoming a general manager/head coach, knowledge application and substitute for a losing team) will be more likely to consume sport events at home even if given the chance to attend in person.

H2: FSUs motivated by less performance contingent (internal) motives (i.e., game interest, love for the sport, entertainment value, bonding with friends/family, social interaction with other participants, hedonic experience and escape) will be more likely to attend a game if given the choice between staying home and attending the event.

However, social identity theory holds that individuals are spurred by the need for high self-esteem, satisfied in part by membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Consistent with this notion, Dwyer and Drayer (2010) found that, given the option, heavy FSUs are apt to associate more strongly with their favorite team than their fantasy team. In addition, team identification has been found to increase the strength of the relationship between motives and attendance intention (Kim, Trail, & Magnuson, 2013).

H3: The relationship between all FSP motives and consumption intentions will be moderated by team identification such that participants high in (favorite) team identification will be more likely to attend a game given the chance – those motivated by internal motives with high levels of identification will be most likely to attend.

Methods & Implications

The FSP motivation factors will be measured using Lee et al.’s (2013) FanSMI, while team identification will be taken from the Points of Attachment Inventory (PAI; Robinson, Trail, & Kwon, 2004). In addition, basic demographic information including gender, age, and income will be solicited. The proposed model and hypothesized paths will be estimated and evaluated through the use of structural equation modeling. Both the psychometric properties of the subscales (CFA) and the fit of the measurement model and the structural model will be estimated through the utilization of Mplus 6. Data collection is currently in progress and the author expects the study to make numerous theoretical and practical contributions. The expected findings will extend the literature on fantasy sport and team identification, thereby extending CET in a fantasy sport context. While the literature has largely been content to conclude that fantasy sport participation has led to heightened sport media consumption, it may not be that simple, and this research provides a framework that explains both when fantasy sport users may prefer to stay home and when they may prefer to attend, via the tenets of cognitive evaluation theory. On a practical note, this study will enable sport marketers to determine if the various types of fantasy sport participants possess distinct consumption patterns (i.e. media vs. attendance). Further, if consumers are able to be distinguished based on motives and consumption methods, practitioners from all areas of the sport industry (i.e. stadiums, media, etc.) will be able to design more effective marketing strategies in order to target specific sub-segments of fantasy consumers.