

Fantasy Sport: Divided Loyalty or Unconditional Love for the Game

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Aim and Theoretical Background

Fantasy sports participation is one of the fastest growing revenue generator in all of sports. In 2015, it reached out more than 56 million participants across the United States and Canada only, a growth of approximately 27% (FSTA). During the same year, participants spent on average 465\$ on league-related costs such as fees and materials (Fantasy Sports Trade Association). Summed up quickly, those numbers lead to a 26 Billion industry that was only a fifth of that amount 7 years ago (FSTA).

Such numbers lead to a growth of attention both in managerial research and in academic research. Researchers have found that fantasy sports engaged people in this activity on average 5 to 7 hours per weeks (Weiss, 2007). So far, studies have mostly looked at fantasy participations relationships with media consumption, attendance, and gambling as well as developing a better understanding of the fan's motives and behaviors. For instance, previous results suggest that fantasy sports participants consume more sports-related content through even more diversified media such as: televised sports contents (game, news, post-game show) and internet (Dwyer & Drayer, 2010; Dwyer, Shapiro & Drayer, 2011; Pritchard & Funk, 2006). Attendance intention has also been shown to be higher with consumers who participate in fantasy sports leagues (Dwyer & Drayer, 2010). It has also been suggested that fantasy sports participation should be considered as gambling because of the potential gain or loss of money of such activity (Lee, Kwak, Lim, Pedersen & Miloch, 2010). Lastly, the major concern for league and team manager was the effect of fantasy sports participation toward fan loyalty. It was expected that such cognitive activity would decrease one's loyalty to a favorite team in favor of fantasy players. Surprisingly, researchers have demonstrated that one's attitude toward their favorite team remained the same or improved when participating in a fantasy league (Dwyer, 2011).

In this context, the purpose of the current study is to dive into these issues of fantasy players' loyalty and to better understand the mechanisms through which their team and players identifications are affected by fantasy participation. In addition, as several potential moderating mechanisms are often mentioned in the literature (type of sport, motivation to participate in fantasy...), this study aims at testing these effects.

Methods

Using individuals who are part of a Fantasy Football and/or a Fantasy Baseball community on Reddit, the 46-item survey was administered (posted) on both the Fantasy Football and Fantasy baseball community. A total of 4337 were received with a usable yield of 2643 surveys.

Findings and Discussion

Results are currently analyzed but initial results are summarized hereafter. According to Dwyer (2011), the nature of fantasy sports provides participants with a competitive interest in nearly every game and should, as a result, strengthen the overall league brand without weakening individual team brands. Not only does this research failed to confirm Dwyer's

work, it mostly mainly suggests the opposite. Fantasy sport participants who spent more time playing fantasy football identified more with their favorite fantasy player and showed higher level of attitudinal loyalty. Fantasy participation seemed to have little to no effect on team identification or attitudinal team loyalty. In the end, highly involved fantasy participants could consume more NFL/MLB products than lowly involved FP and therefore strengthen the overall league brand but it does come with the cost of weakening individual team brands. In addition, our results clearly demonstrate how fantasy participants' loyalty towards their favorite fantasy player negatively affect their behavioral decision towards their favorite team. Finally, the most surprising result of this study is most certainly the fact that highly motivated fantasy participants are more likely to lose interest in their favorite team as the years go by and to transfer their loyalty towards their favorite fantasy player.

With the increase of fantasy sport platforms and the growing trend of Daily Fantasy Sport, there is a real danger for NFL teams, in years to come, to have a weakened relationship with their fans.

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