

SUBSTITUTE OR COMPLEMENT? FANTASY FOOTBALL AND NFL FANDOM

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National Football League (NFL) fandom is among the most popular leisure pursuits in North America. Within this fandom lies an ancillary sport activity termed fantasy football. This pastime has exploded in the past two decades to include over 17 million participants and create a \$3.5 billion economic impact (FSTA, 2013). Despite this growth, critics suggest fantasy football diminishes the NFL experience by distracting NFL fans, devaluing defensive players, and most importantly, damaging team loyalties. Given these accusations, this study investigated the moderating relationship of fantasy football-related media consumption on the relationship between commitment and favorite NFL team media consumption. The study was guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). A multiple group structural equation model was proposed. Discussed are the theoretical results as well as practical implications for marketers and managers looking to more completely understand the impact of fantasy football participation on brand loyalty and traditional NFL fandom.

INTRODUCTION

There is no question professional sport fandom is a highly popular leisure activity in today's society. The sport marketplace has responded to the enormous interest, and sports fans currently have a litany of opportunities and outlets in which to spend their recreational time and disposable income. Sport consumption, consequently, comes in many forms including, but not limited to the following: live event attendance, merchandise acquisition, broadcast viewership, social media interaction, and publication subscriptions (online and in print). Fantasy sport participation, or the act of managing a fantasy sport team, is also a form of sport consumption that has grown rapidly over the past few decades.

Fantasy sports participation is defined as an ancillary service of professional sports that is directly tied to real-life game outcomes and sport statistics. It is mostly played online and includes several influential factors (psychological, social, & market-driven) that draw in participants and keep them engaged throughout an entire regular season (Roy &

Goss, 2007). The current North American fantasy sports market is estimated to include over 35 million individuals over the age of 12 competing in some form of the activity (Fantasy Sport Trade ---Association [FSTA], 2013). It is also estimated to have a \$3.5 billion economic impact when one includes the media products and services associated with the activity and accounts for over \$800 million in direct spending annually (FSTA, 2013). Nearly every major professional sport from the National Football League (NFL) to the National Lacrosse League has a fantasy game. Fantasy activities have also recently gained popularity among non-sport entities such as politics, movies, and primetime television like *The Bachelor* (ABC) and *The Deadliest Catch* (Discovery).

Of particular interest to marketers, recent research has found the activity influential in altering a sports fan's connection with professional sport (Drayer, Shapiro, Dwyer, Morse, & White, 2010; Dwyer, 2011; Roy & Goss, 2007). This is an intriguing because, as stated above, it is an ancillary service of professional sport where the unique competitive outcomes associated with playing create borderline addictive behaviors for its participants, but it is not directly tied to a professional team's or the league's primary objective of team achievement. The average

fantasy football participant owns and manages 15 NFL players/units spread throughout the entire league. Each week this participant competes against an additional nine players/units owned by an opponent. The participant is left with a competitive interest and/or curiosity in nearly every NFL game played each week. For participants with a previously established connection to an NFL team, the result of the added competitive interest potentially puts individuals in position of choosing between one's fantasy and favorite team. That is, with a limited amount of time and money to consume NFL football and limited supply of games, the compelling nature of fantasy football participation has the potential to dilute one's connection to their favorite team or brand loyalty (Dwyer, 2011).

In other words, with its unique orientations and a limited supply of games, it could be argued fantasy sports participation is in direct competition with traditional (team-focused) sport fandom. Some commentators have gone so far as to argue it is destroying the integrity of professional sports (Spyridakos, 2011; Swartz, 2008). For instance, Spyridakos argued fantasy football (1) challenges team loyalty when your fantasy players play against your favorite NFL team, (2) devalues defensive players because most fantasy leagues do not include individual players on defense, and (3) undermines watching live games because fantasy participants are often equally interested in other games occurring simultaneously. While these claims are bold, they may be warranted as research in this area is in its infancy. From a league or individual team perspective, understanding the impact of fantasy football participation is paramount as it will aid in their positioning of the activity within the organization's brand strategy. Currently, the league and teams have enthusiastically supported the activity, but is this unquestioned support beneficial? Given this intriguing circumstance, this study employed Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to investigate the impact of varying levels of fantasy football participation on traditional NFL team loyalty and media consumption.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Brand Loyalty

The relationship between a team and a sport fan, regardless of intensity level, is ultimately a form of brand loyalty. According to Aaker (1996), brand loyalty is a consumer's resistance to change from one product to another in the face of shifting attributes (i.e., product features, advertising, distribution, etc.). Keller (1998) refers to loyalty as brand resonance, a four factor element that includes repeat behavior, attitudinal connection, sense of community, and active engagement. Extended to the spectator sport, team performance is uncertain and nearly impossible to manage from a marketer's perspective; thus, brand loyal sport consumers are paramount to organizational sustainability and ensuring fan interest in spite of team performance (Boone, Kochunny, & Wilkins, 1995; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Ross, 2006). In addition, spectator sport is influenced heavily by one's social networks and by the active engagement of vicarious achievement (Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). As a result, opportunities to build loyal fans exist, yet it is crucial for sport marketers and managers to constantly monitor brand perceptions and implement strategic brand management.

Strategic brand thinking is a complex system of goals and objectives, programmatic decisions, and performance evaluations (Keller, 1999), and it is evident by the amount of interest in the subject that brand strategy is crucial in an organization's success or failure (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1998; Pearson, 1996; Weilbacher, 1993). The service brand loyalty literature, in particular, points to customer satisfaction as an important factor creating loyal consumers (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995; Caruana, 2002). Brand saliency has also been found to directly influence the choices and decision making of consumers (Ehrenberg, Barnard, and Scriven, 1997). Brand saliency refers to the clarity, conspicuousness, or pronouncedness of the product or service (Reber, 1997). If differences exist between the brand's core concept expressed by the organization and perceptions of the product by the consumer, an abstract brand meaning will result (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Ries & Trout, 2000). In this case, the visibility, importance, and relevance of the

brand concept are at risk as the mind of the consumer is clouded. This can ultimately undermine brand equity. Brand saliency is of distinct importance for this study as fantasy football could be seen as a competitive brand extension of traditional NFL team fandom with the potential to challenge favorite team loyalty.

Team Loyalty

The construct of team loyalty has roots in both marketing and branding literature as well as the fields of leisure and sport management. Similar to customer loyalty, it is considered a multi-dimensional construct with an attitudinal and behavioral component (Backman & Crompton, 1991a; Dick & Basu, 1994; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). As depicted by Jacoby (1971), a loyal consumer displays intense recurring behavior and a strong, positive attitude toward a product. The same can be said for sports fans except the product is a team (Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000). Most of the behavioral work has focused on frequency of consumption, but psychological commitment or the attitudinal component of loyalty has received a great deal of attention in the fields of marketing, leisure, and sport.

Initially defined as an individual's attitude strength or a tendency to resist change in preference (Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Robertson, 1976), the construct and measurement of psychological commitment has evolved. Pritchard (1991) developed a three factor instrument for hotel customers, golfers, and airline patrons based on resistance to change, volitional choice, and cognitive complexity. James (1997) extended the scale to sport fans and confirmed the scale's reliability and factor structure. Gahwiler and Havitz (1998) extended the scale further and added a fourth dimension – position involvement.

In 1999, researchers Pritchard, Havitz, and Howard synthesized the previous work and developed a five dimensional construct in which “a consumer's commitment is determined by a complex structure in which their resistance to change is maximized by the extent to which they identify with important values and self-images associated with the preference, are motivated to seek informational complexity and consistency in the cognitive

schema behind their preference, and are able to freely initiate choices that are meaningful” (p. 344).

Mahony et al. (2000) were the first to develop a construct and instrument solely within the context of spectator sport. Drawing from the work of Pritchard et al. (1999), the researchers developed a 14-item Psychological Commitment to Team (PCT) scale. The scale specifically emphasized the resistance of changing preference toward a particular professional sport team. To tie this construct to the current study's theoretical framework, psychological commitment is viewed as an enduring relationship between an individual and their favorite team; thus, from a theoretical perspective it was logical construct to encompass the normative aspect of the TRA.

Fantasy Sport Participation

As the activity has grown, it has garnered more and more attention from academics as an original source for measuring contemporary sport fandom. For instance, Roy and Goss (2007) developed a framework of influences on fantasy sports consumption. The pair's framework included psychological, social, and marketer-controlled influences that were multi-dimensional and interrelated in guiding fantasy sports consumption. The model was the first in a growing literature base of fantasy sports research. It was seminal in signaling the importance of this population to marketers and media companies, and in foreshadowing a transition from passive follower to empowered fan.

In 2010, researchers Drayer et al. also developed a framework for fantasy football consumption. In particular, the authors provided the following three propositions to explain the impact of fantasy football on NFL fandom: (1) fantasy football activated new attitudes within the study's participants to create a redefined NFL product; (2) this redefined NFL broadened a participant's consumption of league-associated media services, and (3) the weekly game outcomes repeatedly influenced participant norms and newly developed perceptions so as to keep the redefinition process actively engaged. Similar to Roy and Goss (2007), the authors suggested

that fantasy football is creating innovative and highly-involved sport fans with a broader, yet stronger interest in the NFL, as a whole.

The Drayer et al. (2010) model was quantitatively tested by Karg and McDonald (2011) and Dwyer and Drayer (2010) and then extended by Dwyer and LeCrom (2013). In particular, the work of Karg and McDonald (2011) suggested the activity of fantasy Australian Rules football was a complement to traditional Aussie Rules fandom, while the work of Dwyer and Drayer (2010) noted significant differences in attitudes and behaviors of participants at differing levels of fantasy football participation. The extension work studied media consumption behavior in association with fantasy participation and found both strong positive correlations between fantasy participation and media consumption and dramatic behavioral changes in media consumption due to newly experienced fantasy participation. In addition, new attitudes such as perceived control, cognitive dissonance, and increased arousal during live games were noted and added to the model (Dwyer & LeCrom, 2013).

With respect to team loyalty and fantasy sport participation, Dwyer (2011) investigated the relationship between service involvement with fantasy football and both the attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of NFL team loyalty. The author found that participants with higher levels of fantasy involvement scored higher on the attitudinal construct yet scored lower on the behavioral intentions of watching their favorite NFL team. In other words, engaged fantasy participants proclaimed to be loyal NFL team fans, yet were reluctant to actually watch their team's live games on television. It was concluded that fantasy football divided attention away from one's favorite team despite the strong attitudinal connection; thus, circumventing the two highly correlated components of team loyalty. This study, however, was limited to television viewership of live games as the only mode of NFL consumption and used a service involvement scale (attitude) to measure a fan's interest in fantasy football as opposed to actual behaviors related to the activity.

Other empirical work in this area has focused on motives and segmentation strategies. For instance, several studies have tackled the question of why people play and the following motives have been discovered: arousal, social interaction, knowledge acquisition, competition, entertainment, diversion, and economic gain (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007; Spinda & Haridakis, 2008). Researchers have also uncovered strong correlations between fantasy participation and event attendance and television viewership (Nesbit & King, 2010a; Nesbit & King, 2010b). Dwyer, Shapiro, and Drayer (2011) segmented fantasy baseball participants by different motives and found the activity to be somewhat complementary to traditional fandom, but suggested further research investigating the impact of varying levels of fantasy consumption on traditional team fandom. Once again, one focus of the current study was to investigate the moderating impact of fantasy football related media consumption on the relationship between commitment to team and team-related media consumption.

Theory of Reasoned Action

Stemming from Heider's (1946) Balance Theory, the TRA was the first cognitive consistency framework to include behavioral intentions as an outcome. The premise suggests behavior is predicted by the combination of an individual's attitude and norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In other words, an attitude drives us to action but it can be moderated by subjective norms. This theory has been well-established and validated in the field of consumer behavior. However, one aspect with which the theory was initially criticized, including by authors Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), was related to its application with choice alternatives. That is, the model was not intended to include choice alternatives among actions. In a meta-analysis performed in 1988, Sheppard, Hartwick, and Warshaw found that this initial criticism was unjust as the framework held up well when consumers had an explicit choice alternative. The researchers, however, suggested further research in the area. As an intriguing extension of this theory, the current study examined choices that are not completely explicit or mutually exclusive. That is, a fantasy football participant can consume

both their favorite NFL team and their fantasy team(s) simultaneously via different media platforms (i.e., television, online streaming, and written publications).

Using the Reasoned Action framework, this study proposed that traditional, favorite NFL team fandom was the attitude, psychological commitment to this team represented the normative attitudes, favorite team media consumption was the behavioral intention, and level of fantasy football fandom was an alternative intention moderating the relationship between one's attitudes and behavioral intention (see proposed model in Figure 1). The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) validate the positive relationship between psychological commitment and behavioral intention, and (b) answer the critics whom vocally believe fantasy football participation undermines brand loyalty by testing the moderating impact of fantasy football on the relationship between psychological commitment and favorite NFL team fandom. The following two hypotheses were developed:

H₁: Psychological commitment to one's favorite NFL team will positively influence the intended media consumption of that team.

H₂: The level of fantasy football media consumption intentions will moderate the relationship between psychological commitment to one's favorite NFL team and the intended media consumption of that team such that it will be weaker for higher-involved fantasy consumers.

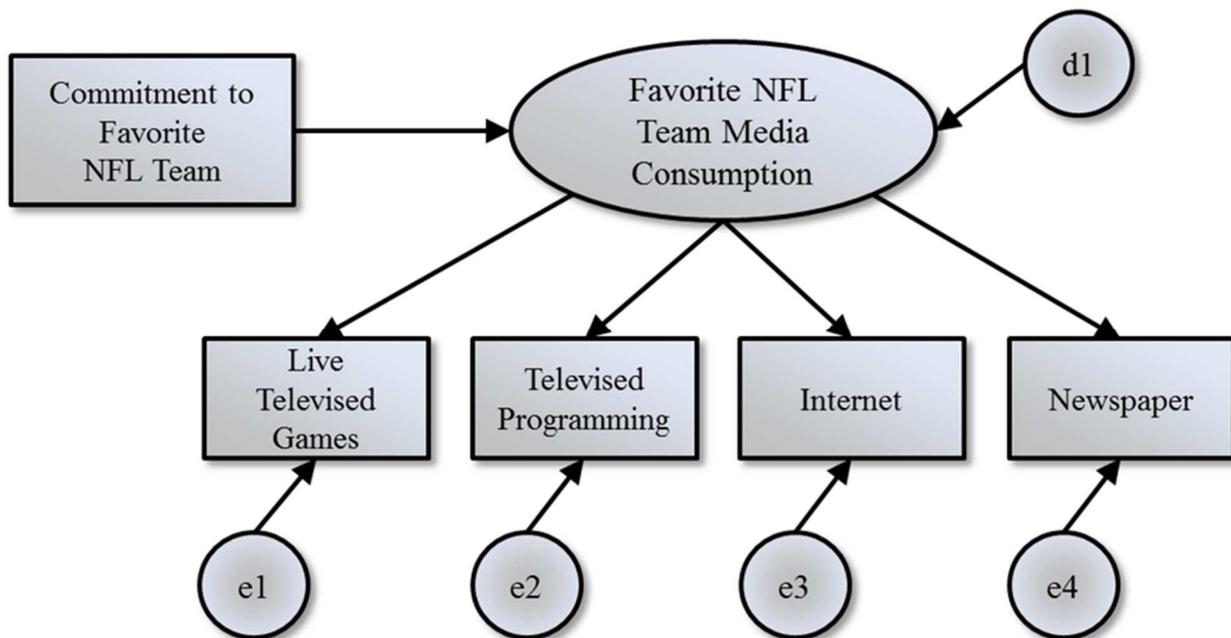
METHODS

Measures

The survey instrument was developed through a literature review of consumer behavior antecedents, marketing theory, and fantasy sports market research. In addition, the questionnaire was analyzed by an expert panel for content and face validity. Three independent investigators from a mid-sized university in the southern United States examined the measures and suggested alterations related to wording and question order. The following sections provide more detail to the scales utilized.

Fantasy team and favorite NFL team media consumption. As mentioned above, behavioral loyalty is often measured by an individual's

FIGURE 1:
Proposed Model



frequency of behavior. Using this as a guide, four statements regarding the intended frequency of sport media consumption relative to both one's fantasy team and favorite team were used to assess an individual's behavior. With an abundance of NFL programming available, the current study looked to previous sport media consumption and fantasy sport participation research as a guide to narrowing down the consumption modes (Dwyer, 2011; Dwyer & Drayer, 2010; Pritchard & Funk, 2006; Roy & Goss, 2007). The resulting forms of media measured included newspapers, the Internet, live event programming (televised games), and sport journalism programming (e.g., ESPN's SportsCenter, & CBS's NFL Today). Respondents were then asked to estimate the number of hours per week they intend to engage in the media for both their fantasy team and their favorite NFL team.

Psychological Commitment to Team. With several instruments available to utilize, the current study used a slightly revised version of Mahony et al. (2000) PCT scale to assess a participant's connection with their favorite NFL team. The revisions included small tweaks to the wording related to one's favorite NFL team. In general, the PCT is a psychometrically sound instrument that was tested on several samples similar to this study's targeted population (Mahony et al., 2000). The instrument was measured on a five point Likert-type scale (Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree), and was interpreted as a manifest variable that predicted favorite NFL team media consumption. Lastly, the questionnaire included demographic items such as gender, income, age, education, ethnicity, and years participated to ensure the generalizability of the sample.

Participants and Procedures

Three popular fantasy sport websites were used to solicit survey respondents: CBSsports.com, ESPN.com, and Yahoo.com. These sites currently own most of the fantasy sports provider market share. In fact, according to Tedeschi (2012), these three sites owned 85% of the fantasy football market in 2012. Fantasy football message boards, in particular, were used as the mechanism to attract respondents. The survey was hosted by Formsites.com and potential respondents were provided the survey

link within a thread of each website's message board. Potential respondents were engaged in fantasy football-related dialogue and offered an incentive to complete the online questionnaire.

A total of 2,536 individuals viewed the initial postings over the course of two weeks during the NFL season. Of these individuals, 509 began the survey. Sixteen were removed from the sample due to not meeting the age requirement of 18 years old. An additional 187 cases were excluded because of missing data. Cases with missing data were eliminated due to the multivariate non-normality of a few of the dependent variables which required a Satorra-Bentler maximum likelihood of estimation method. The final sample was 306 respondents, which equates roughly to a 12% response rate. The sample demographics (Table 1) mostly mirrored the general fantasy sports population with one real exception. The sample was slightly younger than the FSTA's samples. This could be due to a few scenarios: (1) the procedure of using message boards, and (2) only soliciting fantasy football participants as opposed to both football and baseball. The fantasy baseball population is considerably older (FSTA, 2008).

In general, the use of message boards could be a limitation to the study given the typology of message board participants. According to Walsh, Kiesler, Sproull, and Hesse (1992), self-selected respondents participate because of ease, accessibility, and online status, and it is logical to assume active message board participants could be considered highly-involved fantasy users. The fantasy team consumption rates, however, resulted in adequate variance among respondents. Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations for the fantasy football consumption metrics. According to the FSTA (2013), the average fantasy participant spends three hours managing their team; the current sample mean for hours on the Internet per week related to fantasy football was 2.99. In addition, Weiss (2007) estimated that participants spend an average of five to seven hours per week engaged in activities related to their fantasy team, and the current sample had a total hours engaged mean of 7.69. As a result of these comparisons and the similarities in education,

ethnicity, and income, the overall sample was deemed generalizable.

Statistical Analyses

Using the responses from the 306 fantasy football participants, a multiple group Structural Equation Model analysis was performed in Mplus 7.1 to test the two hypotheses. Groups were formed based on the media consumption results related to one's fantasy football team. A respondent's total hours of fantasy team media consumption were summed. The median score was just over six hours per week; thus, all respondents indicating six hours of interaction or less were grouped as low consuming (*n*=140) and the rest were in the high consuming group (*n*=166).

The models were all tested with standardized coefficients obtained from a Satorra-Bentler maximum likelihood method of estimation.

This estimation method was used because of the multivariate non-normality of the data. To determine the model fit, the chi-square test statistic, the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI), and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) were all interpreted. The means, variances, covariances, and correlations between the variables are available in Table 3.

Model comparison was also facilitated by positing a nested ordering of models (measurement invariance) where the parameter estimates for a more restrictive model (more parsimonious) were a proper subset of those in a less restrictive model (Bentler, 1990). Measurement invariance refers to the consistency of a model across some form of group demarcation (Ellis, Aguirre-Urreta, Sun, & Marakas, 2008). In this case, level of fantasy football participation was the group distinction (high & low). Thus, measurement invariance

**TABLE 1:
Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample (n=306)**

Variable	%	Variable	%	Variable	%
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Education</i>		<i>Income</i>	
Male	95.1%	< High School	3.9%	Less than \$25,000	11.4%
Female	4.9%	High School	12.1%	\$25,000 - \$49,999	20.6%
<i>Age</i>		Some College	31.4%	\$50,000 - \$74,999	19.3%
18-24	34.0%	College Graduate	33.7%	\$75,000 - \$99,999	17.3%
25-34	37.9%	Technical School	3.6%	\$100,000 or more	16.0%
35-44	19.9%	Graduate School	10.5%	Rather Not Say	15.4%
Over 44	8.2%	Other	8.5%		

**TABLE 2:
Fantasy Football Consumption Scores in Hours/Week (M, [SD])**

	FANTASY TVGAME	FANTASY TVSHOW	FANTASY INTERNET	FANTASY NEWSPAPER
HIGH	5.321 (2.641)	1.977 (1.125)	5.186 (2.085)	.874 (.125)
LOW	1.817 (1.581)	.754 (.812)	1.713 (1.741)	.316 (.201)
TOTAL	2.955 (2.947)	1.218 (.181)	2.998 (3.035)	.522 (.181)

* Variances on the diagonal, covariance's lower triangle, and correlations upper triangle

TABLE 3:
Means, Variances, Covariance's, and Correlations

	MEAN	COMMIT	TVGAME	TVSHOW	INTERNET	NEWSPR
COMMIT	16.373	10.719	.422	.366	.328	.231
TVGAME	3.889	1.773	1.620	.663	.563	.287
TVSHOW	2.136	1.803	1.260	2.230	.730	.325
INTERNET	3.771	1.672	1.109	1.687	2.393	.241
NEWSPR	1.089	.917	.440	.584	.450	1.368

* Variances on the diagonal, covariance's lower triangle, and correlations upper triangle

TABLE 4:
Measurement Invariance Results

Step	df	χ^2	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	$\Delta\chi^2$
1. Original (Non-Invariance)	10	19.335*	.078	.977	.954	---
2. Metric Invariance	13	20.290	.061	.982	.972	.955
3. Metric and Path Invariance**	14	21.092	.058	.983	.975	.802

* Statistically significant at $p < .05$

** Output available in Appendix

was used to evaluate the lack of variance between psychological commitment, the observed media consumption variables, and the latent variable of NFL media consumption between the two groups. In other words, measurement invariance was used to confirm that the same attribute relates to the same set of observations in the same manner for both groups (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

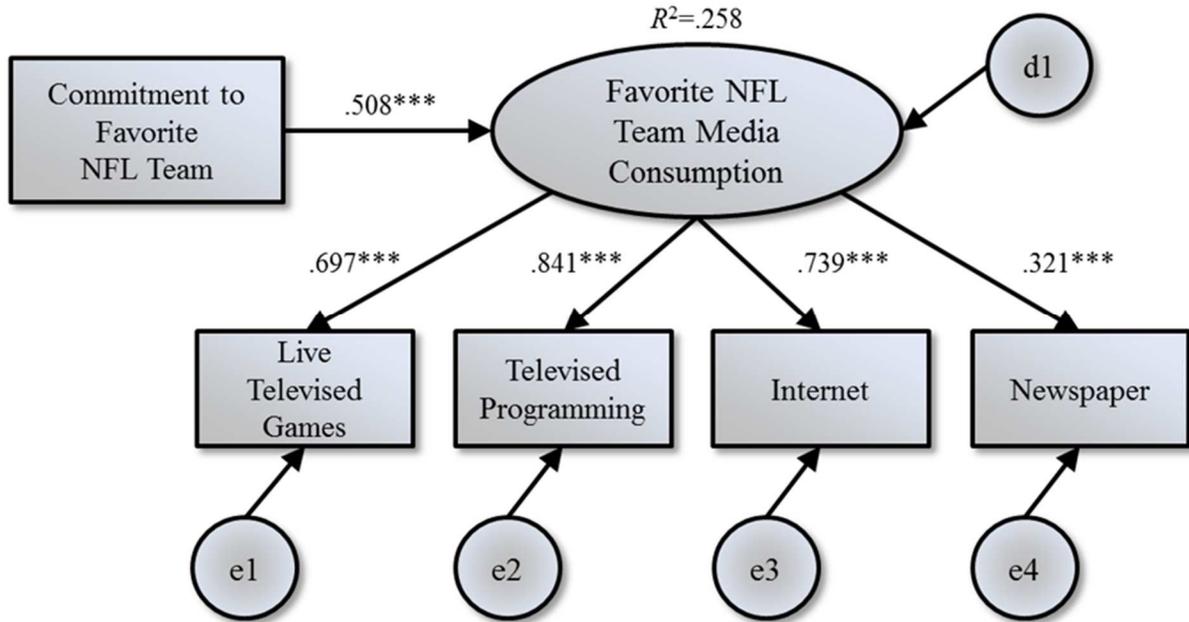
Under appropriate assumptions, the difference in the chi-square test statistics between nested models was tested in relation to statistical significance. In the current study, for example, models with invariance constraints due to the multiple group analysis were nested within models without invariance constraints. In addition to these objective measures, some subjectivity and professional judgment was ultimately used in the selection of the "best" model. The statistical significance and direction of the path coefficient between PCT and the favorite NFL team media consumption latent variable was interpreted to answer hypothesis 1. The measurement invariance results between the two groups (high & low) were used to answer hypothesis 2.

RESULTS

Following proper measurement invariance techniques (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000), the equivalence of two sets of parameters were evaluated in addition to a free parameterized model: (a) factor loadings between groups and (b) factor loadings and the path coefficient between PCT and NFL team media consumption between groups. The fit indices for the three models are found in Table 4. Model 3 was the most parsimonious model and the chi-square difference was not statistically significant; thus, it was selected as the "best" model representing the data. The estimates for both groups are available in Figures 2 and 3. According to cut-off criteria, the model fit was adequate to good (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996).

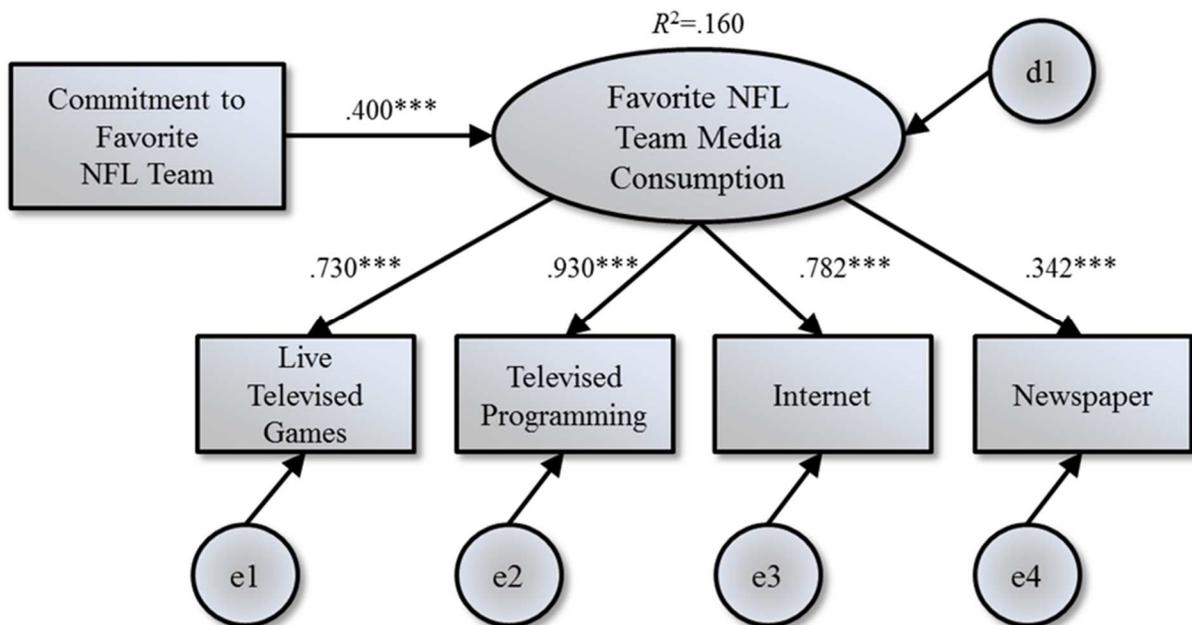
With regard to hypothesis 1, the path coefficient between PCT and media consumption intentions of one's favorite NFL team was both positive and statistically significant at $p < .001$. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results appear to support the positive influence of PCT on

FIGURE 2:
Model Results for Low Fantasy Football Consumers (n=140)



*** Statistically significant at p < .001

FIGURE 3:
Model Results for High Fantasy Football Consumers (n=166)



*** Statistically significant at p < .001

behavioral intentions related to that team. Lastly, given that model 3 was selected as the “best” fit to the data, we failed to reject the null for hypothesis 2 that there are no significant differences between groups. In other words, fantasy football-related media consumption does not appear to moderate the relationship between PCT and favorite NFL team media consumption.

DISCUSSION

The fantasy sport industry is a multi-billion dollar per year enterprise with over 35 million participants (FSTA, 2013). However, critics have recently claimed fantasy football participation is a detriment to the overall NFL experience (Spyridakos, 2011). Given this allegation and guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action, the current study tested the moderating impact of fantasy football-related media consumption on the relationship between a fan and his/her favorite NFL team. The following section describes some of the key theoretical and practical findings and provides insight for future inquiry.

Our first hypothesis was a straightforward attempt to solidify the relationship between attitude, subjective norm, and behavioral intention. The results confirmed this positive relationship. However, it was not as predictive as one would think. The R-squared was much lower than anticipated ($R^2=.288$). This could be the result of a few things, most notably, the lack of variance within the PCT instrument. Based on this sample, it appears that commitment to one’s favorite NFL team is extremely high. Media consumption, on the other hand, varied quite a bit between participants and this could be due to televised game access that is geographically limited or other higher priority activities needing to be accomplished.

The notion of participants indicating elevated levels of commitment to team is not new. Dwyer (2011) received a similar response despite using a different commitment instrument. This phenomenon could be due to the social desirability surrounding NFL team commitment. Certainly, it is a strongly supported social norm to be brand loyal to your favorite team. However, it appears to be more difficult to follow through with a consistent

behavior that matches one’s attitudinal commitment. More research in this area is advised. Regardless, the premise that psychological commitment positively influences media consumption intention was supported which validates this extension of the TRA.

With regard to fantasy football’s moderating impact, recent fantasy sport related research has been mixed on the topic. Dwyer and Drayer (2010) found that fantasy team-dominant fans had lower NFL team commitment scores than favorite team-dominant fans. Similarly, Dwyer (2011) uncovered a disconnect between the attitudinal and behavioral constructs within an individual’s team loyalty, as highly involved fantasy participants were not behaving in accordance with their attitudinal cues. Dwyer (2013), however, found that as the season progressed fantasy football participants’ attitudes and behaviors with respect to their favorite NFL team did not deteriorate unless the team was unsuccessful that year. In other words, if one’s fantasy team and favorite team were both successful in a given year, participants would consistently consumer both teams. As a result of these studies, the substitute or complement question has been posited several times, yet it had not been explicitly tested. Based on the current study’s results, it appears the activity of fantasy football participation is a complementary activity that does *not* moderate the commitment to team/consumption relationship.

Psychological commitment to team, by definition, is resilient to change. However, it does change over time (Yim & Kannan, 1999). And while fantasy football has been around since the 1960s, it has only been in popular culture since the mid-to-late 1990s. Thus, this study’s findings suggest the *current* connection between a fan and his/her favorite NFL team remains strong, but what will this connection look like in 15 years? According to the FSTA (2013), the average fantasy football participant has about nine years of experience. This pales in comparison to a fan’s relationship with a favorite team. Logic would suggest a consistent disruption or distraction in the form of fantasy football participation between one’s attitudinal connection and viewership behavior would weaken the relationship over time. Brand

loyalty is ultimately at stake here, and team marketers and managers must be akin to the core product's (team) place within the contemporary sports fan's mind space (Ries & Trout, 2000). Certainly more longitudinal research is needed in this area.

This is an important distinction for NFL team owners and league administrators looking to position the activity. Competition to attract and retain sport consumers is at an all-time high and with the numerous options available from which sports fans can choose, it is imperative for marketers and managers to know from where direct competition is coming. Brand extensions, such as fantasy football, in particular have a direct impact on a consumer's belief about the parent brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Thus, it is crucial for teams to understand more and more about the constantly evolving sport consumer with the notion in mind that fantasy football orientations and actions can coexist with one's favorite team fandom.

From a strategic perspective, this finding is not limited to a team's media representation. That is, as technological advances are improving the in-home viewing experience, NFL attendance has declined (Hayes, 2012). The impact of fantasy football and the ability to follow several games at the same time has been mentioned as a contributing factor to the decline. In the stadium, a sport fan has the game on the field and scores and statistics available via their cell phone or in-stadium scoreboard. The option to follow other games, teams, and players is an emerging possibility, but is still seen as an ancillary proposition as opposed to the norm. However, the current study's results combined with the attendance data suggest the possibility for providing additional, high quality and high-speed consumption opportunities in the stadium may help attract more fans.

The San Francisco 49ers and Minnesota Vikings are building new, multi-billion dollar home stadiums, and a highly-promoted attribute of both stadia is the blanket presence of accessible Wi-Fi (Hoge, 2013; Nelson, 2013). This will allow fans the opportunity to quickly and easily check fantasy scores from around the league. Adding Wi-Fi at that scale is very costly, but it indicates these teams'

commitment to meeting their fans' needs. In addition, with the in-home experience continually getting better and cheaper, the investment of Wi-Fi may be well worth it to ensure further erosion of the spectator base does not occur.

Additionally, league administrators should embrace the symbiotic relationship ultimately results in more NFL-related media consumption. Despite the notion it may erode one of the league's fundamental elements, individual team loyalty; it appears to provide another highly interactive touch point for NFL fans. From the NFL's perspective, fantasy football is a product extension that has greatly enhanced the overall brand equity of the league. The argument could be made that fantasy football has been important factor in building one the strongest sports brands in the world. The activity has also benefitted league partners, most notably, corporate sponsors and advertisers, given the demographics and psychographics associated with fantasy football participants.

The typical fantasy participant is male, between the ages of 18-45, with above average levels of income and education (Van Riper, 2008). According to the FSTA (2013), the average fantasy participant has played for approximately 8.5 years, owns 5 teams, and spends around \$470 annually on fantasy related products and services. Levy (2005) found that two-thirds of participants in his investigation spent five hours per week managing their fantasy teams with one-third spending 10 or more hours. Fantasy participants also tend to watch more sports on television and spend more money attending sporting events (Drayer et al., 2010; Nesbitt & King, 2010a). In addition, fantasy participants are avid consumers. Not only do fantasy participants out consume general consumers, they also out consume the traditional sport fan population across the major product and service categories (Fisher, 2008). This information has substantial marketing benefits as participation in fantasy sports continue to grow and the typical participants are highly active consumers.

Limitations & Future Research

Limitations within this study certainly existed. First, the sample size was small for a multiple group analysis. This may directly impact the fit indices interpreted. Second, the sampling method lends itself to participation only among highly-involved fantasy users. Third, as mentioned above, the lack of variability in the PCT scale scores could influence the relationship between the constructs. Lastly and this is a limitation to all Reasoned Action research, behavioral intentions were measured as opposed to behaviors. While behavioral intentions have been well-established antecedents to behavioral action, context and timing also play a large role in the equation, and this study examined intentions over the course of a week of professional football fandom.

Looking forward, this model should be tested on larger more diverse samples of fantasy participants. The inclusion of non-fantasy participating NFL fans may also be fruitful for marketers and broadcasters. The extension to other fantasy sports may also lead to illuminating results. Currently, football is at the top of the food chain with respect to North American professional sport. Does this impact fantasy participation? Fantasy baseball and fantasy basketball are very different activities, believe it or not, and the results related to these populations may elicit new information about media consumption patterns related to professional sport. Lastly, new commitment instruments should be applied to this model that may illicit more variance among respondents. Given the relative subjectivity and contextual limitedness of previous commitment instruments developed in our field, other scales may result in different relationships.

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