

Challenge Accepted: Why Women Play Fantasy Football

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Women represent the fastest growing demographic for the fantasy sports industry, making up approximately 38% of fantasy football participants. To help understand this growth, this study was an attempt to explore why women play fantasy football. Themes and statements derived from qualitative data collected through open-ended survey responses and face-to-face interviews were tested on two samples of female fantasy football participants. In all, 450 unique individuals were studied, and five distinct motive factors were uncovered: *Challenge*, *Enjoy*, *Enhance*, *Socialize*, and *Connect*. The first three dimensions mirror the motives of male participants, and the other two are unique to women. While the factors were correlated, the results provide evidence that the factors impact different outcomes associated with the activity.

Keywords: consumer behavior, fantasy sport, mixed methods design, motivation

With annual spending estimates surpassing \$25 trillion and 75% control over all discretionary expenditures, women dominate the consumer economy (Ernst & Young, 2013). Women represent a growth market larger than the Chinese and Indian markets combined (Ernst & Young, 2013). Opportunities exist for marketers and managers looking to further engage female consumers. However, many companies still produce products that are not optimized for women and advertise them using female stereotypes, leaving them feeling underserved (Silverstein & Sayre, 2009). Research by Farrell, Fink, and Fields (2011) underscored a particular need for engagement in North American spectator sport, and Sveinson and Hoeber (2016) called for additional research on the experiences of female sport fans.

One method for better understanding this segment's needs and wants is to explore consumer motives (Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004). Simon (1959) was one of the first to posit the substantial influence motivation plays within the consumer decision-making process. Motivation is thought of as the key catalyst within the study of consumer behavior (Schmitt, 2015). Mowen and Minor (1998) defined the concept as an activated state within a person that leads to goal-oriented behavior and found that it is a vital psychographic indicator. For contemporary marketers, understanding consumer motivation is a vital first step in creating successful marketing strategies, as it provides a baseline for communication with potential customers (Schmitt, 2015).

Sport fan motives have been explored empirically for decades, primarily not only within the context of event attendance, but also including television viewership, social media use, and fantasy

sport participation (cf., Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Hu & Tang, 2010; Wann, 1995). The examination of female sport fan motives, however, has been limited despite the known influence of female consumers (Farrell et al., 2011; James & Ridinger, 2002). In general, spectator sport has been viewed as male-oriented where women are seen as invaders or outsiders (Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). This dominant ideology has made it difficult for female sports fans to have their own voice (Esmonde, Cooky, & Andrews, 2015). Despite such an ideology, the National Football League (NFL) fan base is now estimated to be half women (Epstein, 2016), and in perhaps the most male dominated of all football-related activities, fantasy football, female participation has grown to 14.2 million or 38% of the total population (Fantasy Sports Trade Association [FSTA], 2017). This growth is intriguing, as previous researchers have found fantasy football leagues to be almost entirely male and sites for reinforcing masculine dominance and traditional gender stereotypes (Davis & Duncan, 2006). We are led to the question, "Why are women playing fantasy football?" The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to explore and validate distinct motives of female fantasy football participants and (b) to examine the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of these motives. The following research questions (RQ) were devised:

RQ1: What motivates women to play fantasy football?

RQ2: To what extent do the motives of female participants impact social media usage, television viewership, and participant emotions?

Fantasy football is designed to give fans the experience of being a general manager. Participants own and manage a roster of professional football players in an online environment and compete against other owners based on the statistical output of players each

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week. The fantasy sport industry is estimated to have a \$15 billion/year economic impact and an estimated 57.4 million participants (FSTA, 2017). Karg and McDonald (2011) found fantasy sport participation complements traditional fandom and that fantasy participants outscore nonparticipating fans on several attitudinal and behavioral consumption measures including team identification, loyalty, game attendance, and television viewership. In addition, Drayer, Shapiro, Dwyer, Morse, and White (2010) found that fantasy sport participation increased the general consumption of professional sport. Nesbit and King (2010) discovered that fantasy participation directly increased television viewership, and Fisher (2008) reported that fantasy sport participants out-consume nonparticipating sports fans and the general population when it comes to the leading product categories.

Fantasy football, however, has overwhelmingly been considered a male domain and marketed accordingly. Most empirical research conducted with fantasy participants has had samples with gender disparities (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Ruohley & Hardin, 2011; Spinda & Haridakis, 2008). Little is known though about female participation.

A lesson from history is that despite the magnitude of women as consumers, marketers and managers have missed opportunities to connect with this segment. Communication with this group is often just trickle down marketing originally intended to reach male consumers (Contrera, 2016; van Tilburg, Lieven, Hermann, & Townsend, 2015). Sport, and in particular spectator sport, is no different, and it is likely that the industry and sport managers, in general, are missing a substantial opportunity (Dodds, Degaris, & Perricone, 2014; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). Better understanding what drives females to participate in fantasy football could allow marketers and managers to design and distribute other sport products and services that better meet the segment's unique needs and wants.

The Literature Review section begins with an introduction to the theoretical framework and Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory. U&G theory has played a foundational role in explaining consumer motivation and media usage in a number of areas including fantasy football. Next, previous fantasy football motivation studies are reviewed to provide a baseline for why male participants play. Literature related to female sports fandom is then explored. An explanation of the mixed methods design and results is then provided followed by a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications.

Literature Review

Uses and Gratifications Theory

U&G theory was devised in the mid-1970s as a means to understand how and why individuals use media to satisfy their unique needs and gratifications (Blumler & Katz, 1974). U&G theory is user/audience-centered in which it acknowledges the active role an individual plays in selecting and participating in the conversation (Ruggiero, 2000). Most research utilizing U&G theory as a framework has focused on the motives and impacts of media consumption or media usage (Rubin, 2002). Mass media initially was the focus; more recent work has examined interactive online media formats, such as websites, video games, mobile phone applications, and social networking applications (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013).

U&G theory was incorporated within this study's research design as prescribed by Filo, Lock, and Karg (2015) by strategically

examining the fantasy football experience of female participants and examining the associated social media and television viewership outcomes (Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). According to McQuail (2001), the three key principles of U&G theory include: (a) to explain how individuals use media to gratify needs, (b) to discover underlying motives for individuals' media use, and (c) to identify the positive and the negative outcomes of individual media use. These components were applied to the context of fantasy football, as (a) the gratifications of female participants were assessed, (b) motives were explored, and (c) relationships were examined between the motives and specific attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

Filo et al. (2015) found that U&G theory has been utilized as a guiding framework for several user-focused sport media studies including the exploration of athlete Twitter usage (Hambrick et al., 2010) and sport video game motivations (Kim & Ross, 2006). It has also guided work on sport-related message boards and online communities (Guerin-Eagleman, 2015; Mudrick & Lupinek, 2015). This theory also has been the primary framework for exploring the motives of fantasy football participants.

Fantasy sports motives. Researchers have uncovered a number of dimensions believed to drive fantasy sport participation, in particular, fantasy football participation (see Table 1). Farquhar and Meeds (2007) reported the following set of participant motives: surveillance, arousal, entertainment, escape, and social interaction. Dwyer and Kim (2011) uncovered similar motives (social interaction, entertainment/escape, and competition) and also discussed a financial motive, which failed the predictive validity test, but was still found to be an influential motive. Additional motives for fantasy football participation identified through empirical research include achievement/self-esteem, bragging rights, amusement, fandom, social sport, game interest, hedonic experience, substitute for a losing team, becoming a general manager/head coach, sport knowledge application, and love for the sport (Lee, Seo, & Green, 2013; Ruohley & Hardin, 2011; Spinda & Haridakis, 2008).

While the fantasy sport literature has expanded in recent years, few researchers have explored motivational differences that occur between genders. Ruohley and Billings (2013) mainly found similarities and a few differences in their assessment of previously established fandom and motives scales. The constructs of arousal, entertainment, surveillance, self-esteem, and escape were the same for men and women; passing time and enjoyment were statistically different (with men scoring higher), yet still important motives for both groups. While this study was an important step in examining female fantasy participants, five of the seven scales utilized were created outside of the context of fantasy football or fantasy sports (online sport consumption or event attendance). Of the two scales that were created with fantasy participants, the samples for the scale development were primarily male.

Female participants may be motivated by factors not previously discovered, as it has been established that female consumers are motivated for different reasons than male. James and Ridinger (2002) found female sports fans were motivated to consume team sports differently than male fans, as female fans scored significantly lower on the achievement, empathy, aesthetics, knowledge, and family motives. Outside of sport, Noble, Griffith, and Adjei (2006) found that gender plays an influential role in shopping motives, as males were more driven by information attainment and convenience seeking, and females were motivated more by uniqueness and assortment seeking, social interaction, and browsing. Kim, Matilla, and Baloglu (2011) uncovered different motives

Table 1 Fantasy Sports Motivational Scales

	Farquhar and Meeds (2007)	Spinda and Haridakis (2008)	Dwyer and Kim (2011)	Lee et al. (2013)
Method(s)	Qualitative (one study)	Qualitative and Quantitative (three studies)	Qualitative and Quantitative (three studies)	Qualitative and Quantitative (two studies)
Context	Baseball	Football and baseball	Football	Football and baseball
Sample(s)	42 participants (38 males, 4 females)	Study 1: 50 participants (gender not mentioned) Study 2: 42 participants (gender not mentioned) Study 3: 829 participants (gender not mentioned)	Study 1: 23 participants (23 males, 0 females) Study 2: 235 participants (208 males, 27 females) Study 3: 201 participants (187 males, 14 females)	Study 1: 283 participants (272 males, 11 females) Study 2: 376 participants (357 males, 19 females)
Motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entertainment • Escape • Arousal • Social interaction • Surveillance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership • Achievement/self-esteem • Escape/pass time • Socialization • Bragging rights • Amusement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • Social interaction • Entertainment/escape • Financial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game interest • Becoming a general manager/head coach • Knowledge application • Competition • Prize • Entertainment value • Bonding with friends or family • Social interaction • Love for the sport • Hedonic experience • Escape • Substitute for a losing team

for men and women in their use of online hotel reviews. Women were prone to using online reviews for convenience, quality control, and risk reduction; men's use was dependent upon level of expertise (Kim et al., 2011). Altogether, while Ruihley and Billings (2013) established differences in fandom between males and females, there is a chance that other factors, not previously uncovered could motivate female fantasy football participants.

Female Sports Fandom

For professional sports leagues in North America, women represent nearly 50% of the respective fan bases (Angus, 2017). Despite this representation, female sport consumers are often ineffectively marketed to as they are treated to be a tangential or less important market. Sveinson and Hoeber (2016), Osborne and Coombs (2016), and Crawford and Gosling (2004) demonstrated that female sport fans are often classified as inauthentic sport fans. An example of inauthenticity as a sport fan is the perception that women are attending games because of attraction to the players, which is not a typical male sport fan motivation (Crawford & Gosling, 2004; Osborne & Coombs, 2016; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). Specifically for female NFL fans, Osborne and Coombs (2016) suggested the inauthenticity women are perceived to exhibit may be because they are not recognized as engaging in typical sport fan behaviors, such as analyzing player statistics, participating in online discussion boards, covering their homes in team logos, or talking with friends about sports.

Sport marketers must be more strategic in targeting women to increase their spending. Despite a push from the NFL to foster committed female fans (Funk, Alexandris, & McDonald, 2016), Sveinson and Hoeber (2016) found that women are on the outside of sport fan culture. The authenticity of their fandom is questioned, they are perceived as being less knowledgeable than their male counterparts, and they feel a constant need to be more masculine when demonstrating their fandom (Osborne & Coombs, 2016). In

addition, the storylines of sport commercials seem to focus on women fulfilling stereotypical roles relying on the old narrative of what it means to be a female, which should be amended to include the voice of the female fan and her authentic experience to truly connect with this market (Wenner, 2012). Merchandisers agree with this increased need for a focus on the female consumer base and have identified women as the new most valuable purchasers of sport merchandising (Moyer, 2017).

Women represent a large and lucrative portion of the sport spectating population and must be treated as a viable target group. Researchers suggest female consumers are motivated differently than males in certain contexts including sport (Kim et al., 2011; Noble et al., 2006). Osborne and Coombs (2016) succinctly explain that female fans are "less invested in sport than men, less committed to their teams they follow, and motivated primarily by the social aspects of fandom" (p. 5). However, these researchers underscore the importance of more research on female football fan motives and behaviors that are free from preconceived notions and focused on women telling their own stories. Understanding the reasons why females play fantasy football is essential to capitalizing on this population's potential within fantasy football and spectator sport, in general.

Method

A mixed methods design was conducted to explore females' motives for fantasy football participation. The design included (a) a qualitative assessment and (b) an examination of the qualitative results on larger samples (RQ1; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), followed by (c) two surveys. The quantitative elements provided an opportunity to test the qualitative findings on a larger sample, to provide evidence of construct reliability and validity for the measurement tools, and to assess attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (RQ2).

Data Collection and Analysis: Phase 1

The focus of the first data collection was identifying motives. This phase was an iterative process beginning with open-ended survey responses from 32 female fantasy football participants. These individuals were solicited from a previous study of fantasy football participants that utilized convenience and snowball sampling of known fantasy football league commissioners. All female participants that responded to the (previous) study ($N = 41$) were given the option to fill out the additional open-ended questions. The open-ended questions are included in the Appendix and were developed based on previous work in fantasy football (Dwyer & Kim, 2011). The responses were analyzed, and a semistructured interview guide was developed (see Appendix).

Eight qualitative interviews lasting between 20 and 35 min were conducted. A purposive and convenience sampling method was utilized (Marshall, 1996). Participants were selected based on accessibility; a concerted effort was made to select participants of varying age, level of professional football fandom, and fantasy football experience. More information about this sample is included in the Results section. A third-party transcribed the interviews verbatim, and a three-person research team independently coded and analyzed the transcripts through three iterations. Following the eighth interview, it was deemed that saturation was reached, as no new topics were discussed for the second consecutive interview.

The first step of the qualitative analysis utilized open and axial coding as prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Each team member examined the transcripts line-by-line. Statements were grouped together into categories based on their shared meaning and themes emerged. The second iteration of coding (axial) involved further statement refinement; statements related to “why participants play fantasy football” were retained.

Then, the research team discussed and refined the initial statements for redundancy, clarity, and content validity. The resulting motives were converted into survey items on a 7-point agreement Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). A pilot study of 31 female fantasy participants was conducted to provide additional evidence of face and content validity of the instrument.

Data Collection and Analysis: Phase 2

The resulting motives were sent to a sample of female NFL enthusiasts who play fantasy football, through a partnership with NFLFemale.com (now ourturffb.com), an independent website dedicated to NFL coverage by women and for women. A total of 600 members were randomly selected from a larger membership base (3,500) and solicited through e-mail. To qualify for the study, respondents

had to self-report that they were current participants. Those who did not play fantasy football were removed from the sample. Participants responded to the motive statements (see Table 2) produced from Phase 1. Demographic information and activity enjoyment/frustration based on Kendzierski and DeCarlo's (1991) adapted two-item Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale were also collected. The two items include a 7-point semantic differential from very frustrated to not at all frustrated and very enjoyable to not at all enjoyable (Dwyer, Achen, & Lupinek, 2016).

Motive testing and purification. Motive testing and purification were a two-part process. First, the pilot data were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with oblique rotation. The total number of factors was determined by: (a) the Kaiser Criterion,

Table 2 Phase 1 Motives Following the Coding and Triangulation of Open-Ended Items and Focus Groups

I play fantasy football . . .	
1	to compete with friends, family, or coworkers.
2	because it is entertaining.
3	because it's fun.
4	because it is something to do during football season.
5	to win.
6	to win money.
7	because I enjoy beating male opponents.
8	because I can win at something in which I am not very knowledgeable about.
9	because I can defeat men at something they are supposed to be good at.
10	to show others that I am knowledgeable about football.
11	to show that women can compete with men.
12	because I enjoy the competition.
13	to compete with other women.
14	because it gives me a reason to increase communication with family, friends, or coworkers.
15	to stay in contact with family, friends, or coworkers
16	to have a conversation starter with family, friends, or coworkers.
17	to be more sociable during NFL games.
18	to meet new people.
19	for bragging rights.
20	to talk trash.
21	because I enjoy the social gatherings.
22	to have a small amount of control over NFL football.
23	because I like football.
24	to learn more about the NFL or football, in general.
25	because I enjoy learning about the background of my players as individuals.
26	to enjoy Sundays more.
27	to make watching NFL games more enjoyable.
28	to make watching the games more exciting.
29	to give me common ground with other people in my life.
30	to have a reason to watch more NFL football.
31	because I have no control over the outcome.
32	to be able to contribute to football conversations.
33	so I'm not left out of conversations or the group activity.
34	to have a stronger connection with the game of football.
35	to connect more deeply with the individual players in the NFL.
36	because I care for players as individuals.
37	to follow the entire league as opposed to just one team.
38	to be an informed fan.

Note. NFL = National Football League.

(b) factor loadings above .49, (c) at least two items per factor, and ultimately, (d) interpretability of underlying items within a factor (Field, 2013). Second, the U&G theory information and EFA results were sent to three independent reviewers for conceptual, theoretical, and statistical review. Review panelists were chosen based on their expertise in sport consumer behavior, women in sport, and/or fantasy sports.

Data Collection and Analysis: Phase 3

Once motives were refined through statistical and panel review, a survey was sent to the members of Titan True, the official women's fan club of the Tennessee Titans (2,700 members). A total of 1,000 randomly selected individuals were solicited through e-mail during the 2016–2017 NFL season. Similar to Phase 2, respondents had to self-report that they were current fantasy football participants to participate in the survey. Nonparticipants were removed from the sample. The data from Phase 3 were used to confirm the factor structure and assess construct validity and reliability (see later). The selection of one NFL team's fan club was purposeful in that it provided a younger sample. According to Leger, The Research Intelligence Group (2017), over 70% of female fantasy participants were between the age of 30 and 49, and the Phase 2 sample was older, highly educated, geographically dispersed within North America, and most importantly, connected to an interactive website. Women's fan clubs are not solely an online community; the members also tend to be younger (Beahm, 2017).

The survey questionnaire included the fantasy sport participation motives, fantasy league composition items, demographic items, and the outcomes associated the second RQ. The outcome variables included fantasy-related NFL viewership, fantasy-related social media usage, and enjoyment of and frustration with the activity. Previous research utilizing U&G theory has included or suggested the use of associated attitudinal and behavioral measures as outcomes (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

NFL consumption was assessed by asking approximately how much time the participant spent watching NFL games for fantasy purposes. Fantasy league composition was a mark-all-that-apply question that included male competitors, immediate family, extended family, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, strangers, and others. Finally, inspired from the study of Achen (2016), fantasy-related social media usage was measured using an adapted eight-item frequency scale from *never* to *a few times a day*.

The Phase 3 data were assessed for evidence of construct reliability and validity. First, a Satorra–Bentler maximum likelihood of estimation method confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed in *Mplus7* to verify the underlying factor structure. Key CFA-related assumptions, as noted by Brown (2015), were first tested prior to running the CFA analysis. Second, motive scores were then subjected to testing for evidence of reliability (composite reliability and interitem correlations), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted [AVE]), and discriminant validity; Fornell and Larcker's (1981) AVE test. To answer RQ2 and to assess concurrent validity, a series of multiple linear regressions were conducted, where the attitudinal and behavioral outcome variables were regressed on the motive factors.

Results

Research Question 1

A total of 32 female participants responded to the open-ended survey questions. Six distinct themes for female participation emerged from the analysis of open-ended responses (in no particular order): connection with family/friends, fun, interest in football, interest in winning, trash talking with opponents, and appreciation of athletes. A semistructured interview guide was developed based on these distinct orientations. Eight individuals were interviewed; the participants (average age = 33) were mostly White (87%), highly educated, and had an average of 2.5 years of fantasy football

experience. After the initial round of coding and analysis, 140 fantasy football participation statements were independently reported by the research team. Following two additional rounds of qualitative analyses, 38 motives were retained for the pilot test (see Table 2). Most of the eliminated statements were deemed redundant or not true motives for fantasy football participation.

A total of 203 participants began the Phase 2 survey, with 184 (31% response rate) finishing the questionnaire. The demographics of this sample are available in Table 3. Compared with a study by Leger (2017), this sample was slightly older than the average female fantasy participant (39) but was similar in levels of education and income. The EFA resulted in 19 items fitting within five distinct motive factors. See Table 4 for the motives and factors, factor loadings, mean interitem correlations, and Cronbach's alpha scores. Table 5 provides the operational definitions for each motive. The factors accounted for 74.3% of the model's variance. Three panelists reviewed the EFA results for statistical and theoretical purposes. Based on the panelists' recommendations, two items (ENJ1 and ENH2) were eliminated due to high interitem correlations.

A total of 217 Titan True members began the Phase 3 questionnaire, with 194 finishing (19.4% response rate). The sample demographics are available in Table 3. In the sample, 89% competed against men in their most preferred league, with only 23% playing against acquaintances and only 16% playing against strangers. In comparison with the general female fantasy football market (Leger, 2017), this sample was younger (33), slightly less educated, and with a lower household income. Figure 1 provides the CFA model that was tested to provide evidence of validity. Two additional items (SOC4 and SOC5) were eliminated at this step, as the items' factor loadings were less than .49 (Brown, 2015). To measure the overall fit of the model, the Satorra–Bentler scaled chi-square statistic (χ^2), the comparative fit index, the Tucker Lewis index, and the root mean square error of approximation were examined. The χ^2 value (127.80) was statistically significant at $p < .004$ ($df = 79$), and the χ^2/df ratio (1.62) was greater than one. It has been well covered that the χ^2 test is sensitive to sample size and the violation of distributional assumptions (Brown, 2015). While it was not ideal to have a statistically significant χ^2 , it was not reason enough to reject the model. The component fit scores indicated an adequate to good fit to the data (root mean square error of approximation = .057, comparative fit index = .945, and Tucker Lewis index = .960). As a result, the 15-item, five factors model was confirmed as structurally sound (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 6 includes the composite reliability, convergent validity, and correlation scores for the Titan True sample. Four factors reached the established .50 criterion for AVE scores, while the *Enhance* factor was slightly below .497 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The same factor (*Enhance*) had a composite reliability score below .700, while the rest were above this threshold. As suggested by Lance, Butt, and Michels (2006), an additional reliability test is advised for exploratory studies. Thus, interitem correlations were assessed, and the scores met the .40 standard set by Clark and Watson (1995). Table 7 provides the results of Fornell and Larcker's (1981) AVE test; the AVE scores were greater than the squared correlation between respective factors.

Research Question 2

Each of the five multiple linear regressions computations were statistically significant at $p < .001$ and R^2 's ranged from .29 to .51.

Table 3 Sample Demographics

NFLFemale.com Sample (N = 184)				Titan True Sample (N = 194)			
Age	Mean	42.79		Age	Mean	33.23	
	SD	10.78			SD	9.48	
	Range	19–69			Range	19–65	
Ethnicity	Asian	6	3%	Ethnicity	Asian	6	3%
	Black	13	7%		Black	19	10%
	White	145	79%		White	163	84%
	Hispanic	13	7%		Hispanic	2	1%
	Other	7	4%		Other	4	2%
Education	High school	9	5%	Education	High school	15	8%
	Some college	46	23%		Some college	36	19%
	Associate	24	12%		Associate	25	13%
	Bachelor	63	31%		Bachelor	84	43%
	Master's	37	20%		Master's	30	15%
Income	Doctorate	7	4%	Income	Doctorate	1	1%
	Less than \$50,000	37	20%		Less than \$50,000	45	23%
	\$50,000–\$74,999	39	20%		\$50,000–\$74,999	69	36%
	\$75,000–\$99,999	42	22%		\$75,000–\$99,999	33	17%
	\$100,000–\$149,999	48	26%		\$100,000–\$149,999	31	16%
	\$150,000–\$199,999	13	7%		\$150,000–\$199,999	12	6%
	\$200,000–\$249,000	5	2%		\$200,000–\$249,000	4	2%
Geographic location	\$250,000 or more	2	1%		\$250,000 or more	0	0%
	Midwest United States	44	24%	Fantasy league composition	Men	172	89%
	Northeast United States	39	21%		Immediate family	106	55%
	West Coast United States	35	19%		Extended family	57	30%
	Southeast United States	29	16%		Friends	145	75%
	Mountain United States	20	11%		Coworkers	82	42%
	Canada	15	8%		Acquaintances	44	23%
	Other	2	1%		Strangers	30	16%
					Others	4	2%

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 8 provides the results for each outcome variable. Both the *Enjoy* and *Enhance* factors positively impacted enjoyment and time spent watching NFL games. The *Connect* and *Socialize* factors positively impacted the frequency of fantasy-related social media usage. The *Challenge* factor positively impacted frustration and negatively impacted enjoyment.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold (a) to explore what motivates women to play fantasy football and (b) to test whether the motives impact social media usage, television viewership, and participant emotions. In total, 450 unique fantasy football participants were studied, and five distinct motive factors were identified: *Challenge*, *Enjoy*, *Enhance*, *Socialize*, and *Connect*. The results provided evidence of internal consistency and validity (convergent, discriminant, and concurrent), and compared with the previous research on mostly male samples, two of the motives (*Challenge* and *Connect*) were unique to female participants. The following sections include discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Female Motives Are Unique and Multifaceted

Five factors were identified and tested through four data collection processes. Three of the five factors, *Enjoy*, *Enhance*, and *Socialize*, mirror motives developed with mostly male samples (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007), while two, *Challenge* and *Connect*, are unique to women. These results provide some evidence of the heterogeneity of female fantasy football participation. At the same time, some motives identified by the females are consistent with the motives reported in previous literature on fantasy football participation. There were 16 unique factors discovered over 6 years from mostly male samples, yet only three were discussed by the women in the qualitative phase of the study.

The results pertaining to RQ2 also provide insight into female fantasy participation. While the motive factors were correlated, we found the motive factors impact different outcomes associated with the activity. The motives tested did not predict an increase in NFL viewership, as found with mostly male samples (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Dwyer, Shapiro, & Drayer, 2011). Each motive factor and the prediction of other outcomes are discussed later.

Challenge. The *Challenge* motive stands out as a unique factor for participation among females in the context of fantasy football.

Table 4 Factor Loadings and Preliminary Reliability From Exploratory Factor Analysis With Oblique Rotation (*N* = 184)

Factor (Mean, SD)	Abbreviation	Factor Loading	Mean Interitem Correlation	Cronbach's α
Enjoy (6.053, 0.923)			.514	.923
Because it is entertaining.	ENJ1	.918		
Because I like football.	ENJ2	.869		
Because it's fun.	ENJ3	.865		
Because I enjoy the competition.	ENJ4	.750		
Socialize (4.929, 1.271)			.522	.854
To stay in contact with family, friends, or coworkers.	SOC1	.893		
Because I enjoy the social gatherings.	SOC2	.838		
To compete with friends, family, or coworkers.	SOC3	.723		
For bragging rights.	SOC4	.699		
To give me common ground with other people in my life.	SOC5	.697		
Enhance (5.108, 1.124)			.622	.851
Because it is something to do during football season.	ENH1	.830		
To make watching NFL games more enjoyable.	ENH2	.780		
To make watching the games more exciting.	ENH3	.778		
To enjoy Sundays more.	ENH4	.683		
Challenge (4.534, 1.346)			.617	.894
Because I enjoy beating male opponents.	CHA1	.944		
Because I can defeat men at something they are supposed to be good at.	CHA2	.928		
To show that women can compete with men.	CHA3	.821		
Connect (4.731, 1.249)			.588	.887
To connect more deeply with the individual players in the NFL.	CON1	.998		
Because I care for players as individuals.	CON2	.928		
Because I enjoy learning about the background of my players as individuals.	CON3	.703		

Note. Measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. NFL = National Football League.

Table 5 Factor Names and Operational Definitions

Factor	Definition
Gratify	For fun and entertainment
Socialize	To bond, compete, and stay in contact with friends, family, or coworkers
Enhance	To improve time spent engaged in NFL-related activities
Challenge	To engage and defeat male opponents
Connect	To connect with NFL players on a deeper level

Note. NFL = National Football League.

The *Challenge* factor represents the motivation of female participants to challenge the status quo. The motive represents an opportunity for females to challenge traditional gender roles associated with sport. Relative to U&G theory, the other motives are related to affiliation, socialization, or gratification, *Challenge* seems to be an instrumental motive about competition against male participants. Competition or arousal among fantasy participants is a motive that has been identified previously (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007; Lee et al., 2013) but has not specifically dealt with gender. We believe the opportunity to compete against male participants is a motive unique to females. It is important to note, however, the opportunity for women to challenge male players may not always have a positive result. The *Challenge*

motive directly impacted frustration (positively) and enjoyment (negatively). This may be due to a number of factors including the uncertainty and unpredictability of fantasy football participation. More research in this area is advised.

Connect. The *Connect* motive also stands out as a unique factor in the context of women's participation in fantasy football. In a time, when it has been hypothesized that participants dehumanize fantasy players into game pieces (Henderson, 2017; Rhoden, 2015), this motive highlights the rehumanizing of players. Female participants reported that thinking about fantasy football as a means to get to know individual players better. Getting to know players appears to be at least partially accomplished through social media, as participants scoring high on this reported significantly higher levels of social media usage (RQ2). Social media represents an avenue for professional athletes to connect with fans in an unfiltered and unscripted nature (Hambrick et al., 2010). This study was focused on females only; thus, future work should include a comparison of male and female participants.

Enhance, enjoy, and socialize. The remaining motive factors seem to focus on what fantasy football can do for females' experiences watching games, and/or connecting with friends, family, and coworkers. This embodies the U&G perspective of media usage as participants utilized fantasy football for their own unique purposes. While one item of the *Enhance* motive (ENH3) is

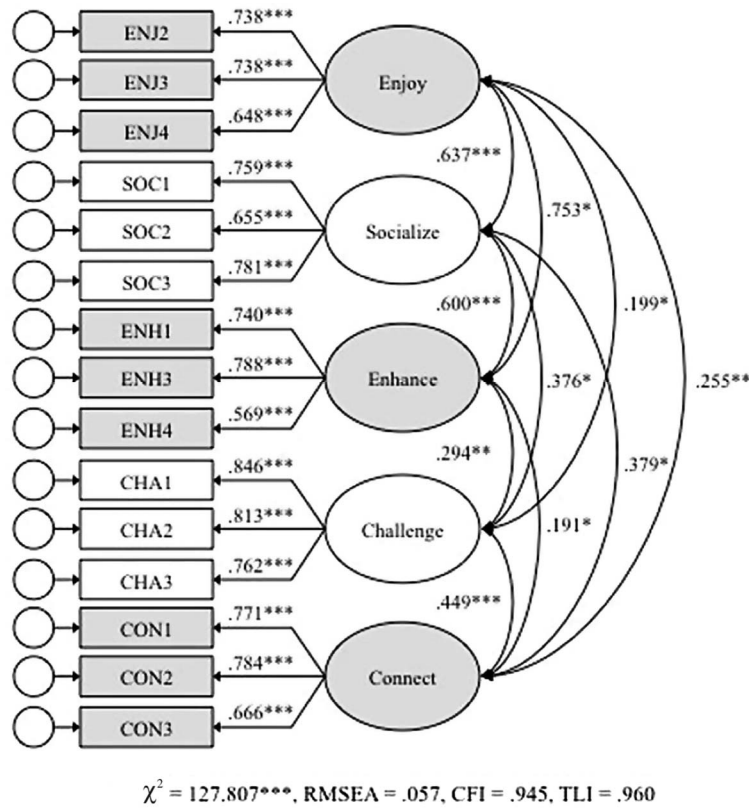


Figure 1 — Confirmatory factor analysis of five first-order factors (*Enjoy*, *Socialize*, *Enhance*, *Challenge*, and *Connect*). All coefficient values are standardized. CFI = the comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. *Statistically significant at $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 6 Female Fantasy Football Motives Reliability and Convergent Validity Scores From Robust Maximum Likelihood Confirmatory Factor Analysis ($N = 194$)

Factor	Composite Reliability	Mean Interitem Correlation	AVE	Correlation Matrix*				
				Enjoy	Socialize	Enhance	Challenge	Connect
Enjoy	.735	.516	.503	1	—	—	—	—
Socialize	.713	.456	.538	.479	1	—	—	—
Enhance	.693	.598	.497	.541	.442	1	—	—
Challenge	.854	.483	.652	.211	.342	.248	1	—
Connect	.793	.598	.551	.248	.367	.218	.411	1

Note. AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

*All correlations significant at $p < .01$.

Table 7 Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Test (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)

Factor (AVE)	Enjoy	Socialize	Enhance	Challenge	Connect
Enjoy (.503)	1	—	—	—	—
Socialize (.538)	.229*	1	—	—	—
Enhance (.497)	.293*	.195*	1	—	—
Challenge (.652)	.045*	.117*	.062*	1	—
Connect (.551)	.062*	.135*	.048*	.169*	1

Note. No correlations failed the AVE test.

*Coefficients are statistically significant at $p < .01$.

Table 8 Concurrent Validity Results for Female Fantasy Football Motives

Outcome Variable (Factor)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient		<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	
Time spent watching NFL games					
Enjoy***	0.461	0.115	0.334	3.998	<.001
Socialize	-0.073	0.106	-0.057	-0.687	.493
Enhance*	0.270	0.110	0.127	1.546	.024
Challenge	-0.004	0.067	-0.005	-0.066	.948
Connect	0.079	0.075	0.080	1.053	.294
Social media usage					
Enjoy	0.143	0.146	0.076	0.975	.331
Socialize*	0.289	0.134	0.166	2.158	.032
Enhance	0.037	0.139	0.020	0.262	.793
Challenge	0.096	0.085	0.079	1.12	.264
Connect***	0.695	0.095	0.515	7.281	<.001
Enjoyment					
Enjoy***	0.398	0.078	0.390	5.107	<.001
Socialize	0.103	0.071	0.109	1.44	.152
Enhance*	0.155	0.074	0.157	2.092	.038
Challenge**	-0.120	0.045	-0.181	-2.639	.009
Connect	0.054	0.051	0.074	1.062	.290
Frustration					
Enjoy	0.241	0.137	0.155	1.76	.080
Socialize	0.065	0.125	0.045	0.520	.604
Enhance	0.072	0.130	0.048	0.552	.581
Challenge*	0.204	0.080	0.203	2.569	.011
Connect	0.160	0.089	0.143	1.797	.074

Note. NFL = National Football League. *N* = 147, as 76% of the full sample had an upcoming game against a male.

*Statistically significant at $p < .05$. **Statistically significant at $p < .01$.

***Statistically significant at $p < .001$.

similar to what has been found in primarily male samples (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Lee et al., 2013; Spinda & Haridakis, 2008), two of the items underscore the popularity of NFL football in contemporary society, and the opportunity of fantasy football provides in enhancing NFL spectatorship for women. Each year, professional football games are the some of the most watched events on television in the United States. For loyal fans, watching NFL games are a weekly ritual. Thus, to avoid letting the football season come between their relationships with friends, family, and significant others (Masenda, 2015), fantasy football may be an interactive vehicle for some women who do not connect socially based on standard game viewership. A similar theme emerged in Farrell et al.'s (2011) study of female sport fans, where it was found that women were not truly fans of a team, "but were more supporters of the interest of men in their lives" (p. 199), and as a result, were complicit to their viewing desires. It can be inferred from the results with the *Enhance* motive that fantasy football improves a viewing experience. This motive could also speak to the empowerment process as well, as fantasy football becomes an activity to control their environment. The results pertaining to RQ2 support these claims as the *Enhance* motive positively impacted NFL viewership and enjoyment.

The *Enjoy* and *Socialize* motive parallel previous fantasy sport motivational studies (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007; Lee et al., 2013) and directly support the U&G perspective of utilizing an activity for personal gratification and interpersonal communication (Rubin, 2002). Fantasy football is an engaging activity; thus, it is logical that this study's samples are motivated by enjoyment. The results pertaining to RQ2 also provide evidence confirming previous work, as the *Enjoy* factor positively impacted positive emotion and time spent watching NFL games. This parallels previous research on fantasy football motives (Dwyer & Kim, 2011) and general research on fantasy sport participation, consumption, and social-psychological attributes (Dwyer et al., 2016; Karg & McDonald, 2011).

For the *Socialize* factor, 75% of fantasy participants compete in a league with a friend, family member, or coworker (FSTA, 2017). The activity is an excellent vehicle for maintaining relationships, and this connection may be even further enhanced with social media, as this factor positively impacted usage (RQ2 results). This matches the work of Larkin and Fink (2016) where the authors found participants manage different aspects of their lives, including fantasy football participation, through social media. The results for RQ2, however, deviated from previous work in the area, as the *Socialize* factor had no impact on NFL viewership. Once again, this implies uniqueness with female fantasy football participation.

Managerial Implications

As mentioned in the beginning of the paper, fantasy football provides sports fans with the opportunity to act as a general manager of a team of professional athletes. It is an interactive, yet ancillary sport service for fans, and in the last 10 years, has witnessed a rapid growth in the number of female participants. Understanding more about why these participants engage in the activity may help other sport entities looking to increase female involvement. There are also practical implications for media providers, broadcasters, and fantasy sport organizations, as the results provide information for strategic partnerships and product positioning.

First, the *Challenge* factor may indicate there is a desire among female sport fans to compete with men in a historically male setting (i.e., spectator sport). Fantasy football is not a product or service specifically designed for women or men. It is a sport activity where men and women can compete equally. This is a major shift from the "Pink it and Shrink it" strategy used by firms for decades (Contrera, 2016). This specific marketing tactic of adapting a masculine product to a female target market by making it smaller and pastel has been used in number of product categories including laptops, razors, and football jerseys (van Tilburg et al., 2015).

From a practical standpoint, the findings pertaining to the *Challenge* motive should encourage sport marketers to embrace more than the "Pink it and Shrink it" philosophy and devise methods that reach multiple segments of female sport fans who may be empowered by the process or the outcomes of spectator sport. This can be as simple as selecting a female spokesperson for targeted campaigns. For example, Nationwide Insurance selected comedian Mindy Kaling as their spokesperson for their 2015 Super Bowl campaign, and the company reported that the Nationwide has broadened its appeal to millennials and women (Dosh, 2016).

Empowerment marketing strategies could be an additional opportunity for sport marketers. Empowerment marketing, or Femvertising, is an effective marketing strategy used specifically to engage female consumers. Empowerment is defined in many

ways, but in terms of marketing or advertising, it is thought of as projecting strength, self-efficacy, and individualism as it relates to one's life. While feminist marketing may have begun in the late 1960s with a product like Virginia Slims (Iqbal, 2015), in recent years personal care products, such as Pantene and Dove have successfully utilized themes of empowerment to communicate better with female consumers. Recently, Under Armour's "I Will What I Want" campaign featuring ballerina Misty Copeland and DICK's Sporting Goods "One More Rep" and "Calia" campaigns have utilized empowerment messages to market sport apparel directly to women. Altogether, opportunity appears to exist in spectator sport to utilize empowerment marketing strategies. While these marketing strategies are already in place, they are memorable because they are emerging and limited. The results provide support for continued growth of empowerment marketing strategies.

The *Enhance* factor also provides encouraging practical implications for sport marketers, league managers, and media providers. Fantasy football has been a remarkable brand-building endeavor for the NFL, as the activity extends fandom beyond one's favorite team to a collection of players on 8–10 different teams across the league (Dwyer, 2011). As a result of fantasy participation, outcomes associated with a number of media including television, Internet, and mobile applications have witnessed positive growth, as the activity has been found to complement not to replace traditional team fandom (Karg & McDonald, 2011; Nesbit & King, 2010). Currently, *Enhance* positively impacted enjoyment and television viewership; the "game within the game" aspect of fantasy football has positively impacted female participants' interaction with professional football. This information is beneficial for league managers and media providers looking to use fantasy football as inventory for partners and advertisers. It is important for marketers looking to create similar brand extensions for sport services to a significant population not on the traditional escalator model (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014) with respect to consumption. This information is beneficial for league managers and media providers looking to use fantasy football as inventory for partners and advertisers through online and social media activation as supported by the *Connect* factor.

The *Connect* factor results are also potentially important for NFL players and the Players' Union. Prominent fantasy football players are aware of their impact on fantasy teams each week; however, the relationship for male participants has been quid pro quo. An enhanced connection with female participants could signify an opportunity for additional endorsements or sponsorships. One suggestion based on the results with *Connect* is that social media could provide the medium for engagement. There is also room for this connection to grow, as female participants become more familiar with players. Encouraging women to join keeper leagues is also a sponsor activation opportunity. Keeper leagues allow owners to retain players for several years as opposed to the standard redraft league where players are only owned for 1 year. This often enhances the connection to the player. Therefore, this type of league could aid in the retention of more female fantasy players who desire to connect with athletes in a more meaningful way. This sponsorship implication is significant as keeper leagues are often the most gender biased in their promotions, as illustrated by the lack of females appearing on the FNTSY Sport Network NFL shows that cater to keeper league participants. In brief, more female participation is needed for fantasy football-based advertisements to capitalize on the current growth of female participants.

Limitations and Future Research

This study had a number of limitations. First, all data were self-reported and not observed. While understandable for the motives data, future researchers should seek to collect actual behavior for social media usage and sport consumption. Second, the research team consisted of experienced fantasy football participants, which could result in bias when collecting, coding, and analyzing qualitative data. Third, some of the triggers used during the semi-structured interviews could be considered leading statements. The triggers, however, were not required and often not used. Fourth, the samples were relatively small. Each met the standard for the statistical analyses conducted, but future researchers should look to confirm the results with larger samples. Other sampling suggestions include the exploration of female-only fantasy football leagues. This format has gained popularity in the last few years and may result in completely different results.

The data collections were cross-sectional; there is an opportunity to explore female fantasy football participation longitudinally. Many participants with high *Challenge* scores experienced frustration playing fantasy football, which should be further studied to determine if the variability of the entire NFL season results in a burnout condition (Larner, Wagstaff, Thelwell, & Corbett, 2017). We did not address why individuals would stop playing fantasy football, and participant retention from a female perspective could be an important line of inquiry.

Finally, this study was limited to football. There are a number of other forms of fantasy games, including activities that do not include any form of sport such as Fantasy Oscars and ABC's *The Bachelor* fantasy. Previous researchers have suggested fantasy football is the gateway activity to other forms of fantasy competitions and potentially forms of illegal gambling (Whitley, 2015). There are opportunities to understand how fantasy football changes fandom for females or ignites other interests in ancillary competition.

A comparison of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes between female fantasy football participants and nonparticipating football fans is also logical extension. It could be hypothesized that fantasy football leads to more emotionally engaged football fans based on previous work with mostly male samples, but given the differences in motives and their impact on outcomes between males and females, there is no evidence to suggest female fantasy participants are more loyal or highly identified. Finally, there is an opportunity for observational or ethnographic research methods that detail the participation experience of female participants. From draft day to the playoffs, the fantasy football season has plenty of online interactions and lived group experiences. How women navigate the relationships and expectations of being a sports fan and fantasy participant may provide informative findings.

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Appendix

Open-Ended Survey Items

1. How did you become involved in (begin playing) fantasy football?
2. What was the main reason you chose to join a fantasy football league?
3. What other reasons encouraged you to play?
4. How would you convince someone else to join?
5. What is your favorite part of playing in a fantasy football league?
6. What do you hope to get out of your participation?
7. How does fantasy football meet your needs?
8. Why do you or do you not plan to continue playing fantasy football?

Semistructured Interview Guide

1. How did you become involved in fantasy football?
 - a. Trigger: Perhaps you became involved through FRIENDS, COWORKERS/COLLEAGUES, FAMILY, etc.
2. What is your favorite part of playing in a fantasy football league?
 - a. Trigger: Perhaps you enjoy the SOCIAL ASPECTS OF FRIENDS and FAMILY, INTEREST IN MORE GAMES, ROSTER MGMT/RESEARCH, and TRASH TALK
 - b. Follow-up: Will you play next year or what brings you back year after year?
3. What is your least favorite part of playing in a fantasy football league?
 - a. Trigger: Perhaps you dislike ROSTER MGMT/RESEARCH, LOSING, SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY ASPECTS OF FRIENDS and FAMILY, and TRASH TALK
4. What do you hope to gain from your fantasy football participation?
 - a. Trigger: Perhaps you hope to gain POSTIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION With FRIENDS and FAMILY, WINNING/SUCCESS, and MONEY/GAMBLING
5. How valuable is fantasy football participation to your personal life?
6. How familiar are you with the gambling comparisons in fantasy football?
 - a. (optional, if needed) Considering you currently play fantasy football, do you feel more or less likely to continue to play fantasy football if the government officially declares it gambling? Why?
7. Do you feel that fantasy football has grown your friendship network? If so, in what ways? Please provide an example.
8. What site or sites do you use to play fantasy football (ESPN, NFL, Draft Kings, etc.)?
 - a. What sites do you visit to research players for your fantasy roster (Rotoworld, ESPN InSider, etc.)
9. Do you feel that your fantasy sport participation ever changes your football consumption behavior?
10. How has fantasy football participation impacted your likelihood of watching NFL teams?
 - a. Do you feel more attached to certain NFL teams' success based on your fantasy football participation? How?
11. How did you first find out about fantasy football? Was there a deciding factor that influenced you to play for the first time?
 - a. How long have you played fantasy football?
 - b. How many leagues do you currently play in?
 - c. How many of those leagues are daily leagues?
 - d. What is the makeup of your most preferred league (family, friends, and coworkers)?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to add, based on our conversation?