

Understanding the Fantasy Cricket player: An *Emerging Market Perspective*

Keywords: *Fantasy Sports; Emerging Markets; Segmentation; Motivation; Multivariate Analysis.*

PAPER: TRENDS18-41340-1881

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Introduction: Spectator sports, especially in team games such as football, obtained a new definition post the introduction of a disruptive customer engagement occurrence, namely *Fantasy Sports*. The phenomenon gained recognition and structure in the early 2000. However, in the last decade the Fantasy Sports market has grown exponentially, post the advancement of technology and the availability of interactive participation and competition through multiple platforms, like smart phones and mobile apps. The Fantasy sports trade association (FSTA, 2017) has stated that there were 59.7 million fantasy sports player in the world in 2017. 71% of these players were males, with an average age of 32 years ; the most popular fantasy sport was football and the average spend per player was \$ 653.¹ The phenomenon has also found huge traction in Developing countries like China and India; that have a large base of young tech-savvy internet users. Hence, the contextual nature necessitates that the phenomenon be examined from a regional and country perspective.

Thus, India being a country where cricket is the most popular sports, there is a prevalence of Fantasy cricket. The popularity and the exponential rise in the possibility of online gaming can be derived from the fact that the number of operators in 2018 have doubled from what were the service providers in 2017. Secondly the user base that was 2 million in 2016 rose to more than 4 million at the end of the fantasy league played during IPL 2018. Secondly, considering the diverse demographics of the population that plays fantasy cricket it was felt that the heterogeneity of the population was more a function of motivational and lifestyle factors rather than simple demographics. In fact, it is predicted that at the rate the engagement with the sports format is increasing in India; and that the Indian fantasy sports consumers may far exceed the fantasy sports consumers in US and Canada (5.93 million) which is the highest in the world. As an industry the sector is considerable and has been stated to be between 40-70 billion US dollars (Forbes 2013). However, despite a gigantic and exponentially growth rate, there has been little work done, especially in the Developing-in particular the Indian sub-continent-world to understand the phenomenon of fantasy sports.

In the light of this, the objective of this exploratory study was to understand the factors that influenced cricket fans to indulge in fantasy cricket league. Secondly it was felt that it may be prudent to examine this fan-group to assess if there were distinct and different segments (Weiner and Dwyer, 2017) who pursued the online sports for different reasons and had varied winning expectancies. Thirdly from the academic as well as the practitioners' perspective the study could profile the obtained clusters to design segment centric strategies that worked.

Review of literature: Fantasy sports has been defined and conceptualized differently by various researchers (Mahan & Mc Daniel, 2006, Holleman, 2006). However, all of them identify it as a competition between an individual and an entity or a person. A simple, yet holistic definition is one provided by Baerg (2009) who describes it as a phenomenon that '*involves a group of people who choose a set of individual athletes for a fantasy team from a given sport, aggregate the statistical performances of these athletes, and then compete with one another to see whose team generates the highest point totals.*'

The origin and the manifestation of the game is however, tabled differently by researchers, while some look on it as a new phenomenon (Davis & Duncan, 2006), others trace it to *Rotisserie*- a fantasy baseball sports played amongst journalists in the early 1960's (Holleman, 2006). Various research and industry

¹ Available at <https://fsta.org/research/industry-demographics/>. Accessed on May 2, 2018.

reports state that it is a male dominated (80%) sports, most participants are well-educated and net savvy (78.1% are college graduates). Though others report that there is an increase in fantasy sports consumption amongst female consumers as well (Ruihley & Billings 2013; Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013). However, what is interesting to note is that the motivation and drivers to fantasy sports consumption is by and large similar amongst the two genders (Ruihley & Billings, 2013). Further, it was found that, the activity borders between a mere hobby to a means of making money. Peer group advice and service provider trust are important facilitators to the phenomenon (Burke, Meek and Norwood, 2016).

Triggers to fantasy sports consumption: As stated earlier, being a new phenomenon, a number of studies have looked at establishing possible antecedents to the consumption behavior. Broadly the researchers have looked at these from the motivation and the attitudinal perspective. Drayer et al. (2010) were one of the first to examine the attitude-consumption relationship through a conceptual model. The active participation in the sport was perceived to create new learning platforms for the formation of positive attitude towards players, teams. Also, the consumer started viewing the game(football)from a league perspective and this further increased the consumer's media (social media) consumption. The model thus clearly posited that fantasy sports consumption also impacted the sports fan's consumption of the game through increased game attendance, merchandise purchase as well as media consumption. The framework was validated by other studies as well (Karg and McDonald, 2011; Nesbit & King-Adzima,2012; Dwyer, 2013). There are also researchers who have looked at fantasy sports in the same category as what the sports fan seeks for entertainment. Farquhar & Meeds (2007) were one of the first who identified five primary motives of a fantasy sports enthusiast as -entertainment; surveillance; arousal; escape and social interaction. The role of sports as an entertainment source was further corroborated by other researchers subsequently (Lee, Seo and Green, 2013; Ruihley & Billings, 2013). ***Thus, seeking entertainment could be a basic motivational trigger for a consumer seeking Fantasy sports.***

Further on examining the fantasy sports consumers with the non-consumers a strong and important difference was in the level of attachment of the consumers with the game (Krag & Mc Donald). Sondhi & Basu (2018) have identified sports involvement as an important determinant of a spectator's sports consumption and as a key driver to his degree of fandom. ***Thus it may be worthwhile to examine the role of game involvement for a fantasy sports consumer.*** Fantasy sports consumption is also influenced by a sense of identification, and satisfaction of a need for belongingness. The collaborative nature of being part of a community (Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000) and sharing the experience can be a significant driver to the consumption motive. Robinson & Trail (2005) developed a point of attachment(PAI) with the team, community and others to explain the consumption behavior. This viewed alongside Funk & James (2006) Psychological continuum model(PCM) explains the development of a team attachment. ***This may be useful in understanding a fantasy consumer's commitment to a team and more importantly creating his/her own team.***

A few researchers (Farquar & Meeds, 2007; Roy and Goss, 2007) have looked on the engagement with the sporting format as a means of satisfying the individual's feeling of control and empowerment. This is in conjunction to Langer's (1975) definition of 'illusion of control' which was particularly useful in expanding gaming behavior where the player has an inflated-often irrational- belief about the desired outcome. ***Thus illusion of control over outcomes in an otherwise chaotic everyday world of a consumer, can serve as a strong determinant for him/her to indulge in a fantasy world where the odds of winning are perceived to be higher.***

Thus, research indicates that assessing the antecedents to fantasy sports may be an important starting point to create typologies (Farquar & Meeds, 2007) of the Indian fantasy sports consumers. And an additional point to consider is that it may be prudent to assess the consumer's self- analysis of the probable outcome as this may important implications for predicting his/her actual gaming or fantasy gaming behavior. For the purpose of the study, the author has identified *Winning Expectancy* as the

construct to assess this. Winning expectancy has been defined as the *degree to which an individual feels confident about winning his/her fantasy league* (Kwak et al. 2010).

Study Methodology: The exploratory study, involved an extant review of literature, followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with 37 fans who had played fantasy cricket in the IPL 2018 season to find out their motivation for playing the fantasy league. The qualitative themes generated from the interviews and basis instruments from past researches, a short questionnaire (25 statements) was formulated and pilot tested on 65 respondents to arrive at a final instrument (14 statements).

The instrument began with a qualifying question that established that the respondent knew what was Fantasy sports and whether he/she had played the format. The next set of questions were on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). These 14 statements measured the individual's attitude towards fantasy sports as well as sports per se. These statements were followed by an interval scale (single item) question to measure the person's winning expectancy. The question (s) posed was: How confident are you that your team will win in the league (name the league) that you are currently playing in? The options were - very unconfident (1); unconfident (2); Can't say (3); Confident (4) and Very confident (5). In case the person stated that he/she was not currently playing any league then they were directed to another question i.e. How confident are you that your team will win in the league (name the league) that you are going to play in the near future? Options were - very unconfident (1); unconfident (2); Can't say (3); Confident (4) and Very confident (5).

The next set of questions were related to the fantasy sports participation measures. Here the person was asked questions related to the number of years since the person had been watching fantasy sports; the number of years since the person had spent playing fantasy sport; In case he/she had played then the number of teams owned. Number of hours per week spent watching/playing fantasy sports. The initial pilot questionnaire had a question probing into the amount of money spent; however, respondents were not willing to share the information so the question was dropped. The last section had questions related to the respondent's age, gender, education and Annual household income.

Data collection process: The final sample for the study was collected during the period of April to June 2018. The respondents were mostly in the age group of 18-35 years, the reason being that the exploratory study had shown that by and large the consumers who played Fantasy sports league were in this age group. It is important to note here that unlike the average age of a fantasy player- especially Fantasy football- which was 32 years found in the developing countries(FSTA2017), the average age for the fantasy cricket player was quite diverse and there were very young teenagers as well as older (35 years) players that was found (refer exploratory study above). Care was taken that the demographic profile of the two samples- i.e. Pilot study and the final survey were matched in terms of age gender, income education etc. This was to be able to maintain consistency during the data validation at the final stage.

The questionnaire was rolled out both through the online (through mail) and through the paper pencil format. The questionnaire was sent to 800 urban Indian consumers across the metro cities. The method used was both convenience and snowball sampling (those who were playing fantasy sports shared the details of those known to them who also played in the format). Of these 550 forms were received back (250=physical form; 300=online form), post discarding the incomplete forms, analysis was done on the 497 complete forms.

Data analysis process: After data cleaning, Multivariate Techniques-Factor analysis, Cluster analysis, ANOVA and chi-square tests were conducted on the data in order to segment and profile the fantasy sports consumer. The author adopted a psychographic segmentation approach and has looked at how fantasy sports consumers can be grouped basis their attitude towards the sports format as well as interest

in the game. Hence the first step was to group the attitudinal statements (14 statements) into a smaller number of distinct factors through a data reduction technique- Exploratory Factor Analysis. The obtained factors are then used to group the segments into Attitudinal clusters using a hierarchical and K-means clustering technique. Once the clusters are obtained to obtain the demographic profile as well as gaming habits of the same the Chi-square technique gives clear comparison or similarity in terms of demographics for the groups.

Study findings: The study though exploratory in nature, and conducted on a small group of 497 fantasy sports consumers in the Indian sub-continent, nevertheless identified some significant trends that are worth considering and exploring further. The 14 statements that were part of the final instrument, designed to measure attitude and motivators that serve as a trigger for fantasy sports consumption behavior, were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis to identify the existence of possible factor groupings. The analysis was done on SPSS 21.0. using Principal Component Analysis, with Varimax rotation. This revealed the existence of four distinct factors. The sample adequacy analysis revealed a KMO Value of .774 which is higher than .5 and therefore significant. The Factor analysis was also a robust solution as was evident from the Chi-square value of 1838.636 With a *p-value* of .000.

Table- I: Exploratory Factor Analysis for 14 Attitudinal statements (n=497)

STATEMENTS	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Fantasy sports is good entertainment at very low cost	.636			
I always have fun when in I play fantasy sports	.836			
I believe that fantasy sports is the best form of entertainment	.818			
Playing fantasy sports helps me escape the monotony of daily routine activities	.735			
I play fantasy sports only for the game that I love playing/watching			.827	
Fantasy sports is about keeping my connection with the real game stronger			.824	
Playing fantasy league actually improves my knowledge about that particular sport			.782	
Fantasy sports give me an opportunity to make a team I love		.682		
I am committed to have a team that has members whom I feel are the best		.773		
If my favorite team is losing in the real-time league , my fantasy team keeps me happy		.718		
Once I make a fantasy team I go all out to share how it is a great team with my friends		.692		
Making my own fantasy team improves my odds of winning				.683
Creating my team is like actually owning a team				.619
I feel like the manager of a real team , designing the winning strategy				.686
Total variance explained	26.62	14.03	10.73	8.31
Reliability analysis(Cronbach Alpha	.752	.808	.726	.617

The four factor solution (Table -1 above) explained 59.691% of the variance in the total sample, with 26.62% being explained by the first factor. All the factors also had a favorable reliability index and ranged from .808 for the second factor to .617 for the fourth factor. For ease of understanding a cut point of .50 for the factor loadings obtained (*please note: the factor loadings that were below .50 have been*

blanked out and the statements have been arranged sequentially for better understanding). On examining the commonality of the statements as they group together they were named as-

Factor 1: Entertainment Value: *Fantasy sports is good entertainment at very low cost; I always have fun when in I play fantasy sports; I believe that fantasy sports is the best form of entertainment.*

Factor 2: Actual Sports Involvement: *I play fantasy sports only for the game that I love playing/watching; Fantasy sports is about keeping my connection with the real game stronger; Playing fantasy league actually improves my knowledge about that particular sport*

Factor 3: Team Involvement: *Fantasy sports give me an opportunity to make a team I love; I am committed to have a team that has members whom I feel are the best; If my favorite team is losing in the real-time league, my fantasy team keeps me happy; Once I make a fantasy team I go all out to share how it is a great team with my friends*

Factor 4: Illusion of control: *Making my own fantasy team improves my odds of winning; Creating my team is like actually owning a team; I feel like the manager of a real team, designing the winning strategy*

Segmenting and profiling the Fantasy sports consumer: A psychographic approach: Since the factor analysis revealed the existence of distinct factors, it was considered prudent that instead of using the 14 statements individually there may be more merit in using the uncorrelated 4 factors to segment the respondent group. For the purpose of this the saved regression scores for the four factors were subjected to the hierarchical cluster analysis technique (squared Euclidean distance formula) to identify a distinct and non-overlapping cluster solution. The Agglomeration schedule and the Dendrogram clearly revealed a three-cluster solution. Further, it was important to understand the position of these clusters on the obtained factors. Hence, a K-means cluster analysis was conducted for a three cluster solution.

The psychographic attitudinal results obtained (Table-II) were as follows:

TABLE -II: Final cluster centers for the three cluster solution

FACTORS	Cluster		
	1(n=125)	2(n=183)	3(n=189)
ENTERTAINMENT VALUE-	-.11259	-.75628	.80673
ACTUAL SPORTS INVOLVEMENT	1.12472	-.24247	.50909
TEAM INVOLVEMENT	-.52287	.28725	.06768
ILLUSION OF CONTROL	-.42578	.45966	-.16346

The One-way ANOVA for all the four factors was significant with a *p-value* of .000. On examining the saved regression scores for the four factors it was evident that the first cluster scored the highest on the sports involvement factor, thus this group was named as *Game-involved Fantasy sports consumer*. The second group had the highest score for illusion of control followed by team involvement, hence this group was named as the *Control-centric Fantasy sports consumer*. The last group had the highest score on entertainment value, followed by sports involvement, thus this group was named as *Entertainment seeking Fantasy sports consumer*. To obtain a demographic profile of the clusters the demographic data of

the sample was cross tabulated with the cluster membership and the statistical difference was tested by the Chi Square statistics. The obtained results are presented below in Table -III.

Table III- Demographic composition of the three clusters with chi square values

Variable	Game-centric n=125	Control-centric n=183	Entertainment-seeking n=189	Chi square
Age groups				
18-25	105(84.0%)	131(71.6%)	54(28.6%)	115.992**
26-35	20(16.0 %)	52(28.4%)	135(71.4%)	
Gender				.585
Male	85(68.0%)	125(68.3%)	135(71.4%)	
Female	40(32.0%)	58(31.7%)	54(28.6%)	
Education				.310
School	5(3.5%)	5(2.0%)	11(5.8%)	
graduate	108(87.7%)	162(89.3%)	163(86.2%)	
Post graduate	11(8.8%)	16(8.7%)	15(7.9%)	
Occupation				115.094**
Employed*	18(14.4%)	50(27.3%)	131(69.3%)	
Student	107(85.6%)	133(72.7%)	58(30.7%)	
Household Annual income(INR)				10.183
≤ 5lakhs	113(90.4%)	168(91.8%)	166(87.8%)	
5-10 lakhs	7(5.6%)	9(4.9%)	19(10.4%)	
>10lakhs	5(4.0%)	6(3.3%)	5(1.8%)	

* Private & public sector was merged ** Significant at 0.05 level

Thus, as can be seen the male versus female ratio was by and large similar in all the three groups and the chi-square value was found to be insignificant. As is the pattern in the US and Canadian Fantasy sports consumer (FSTA, 2017) all three groups had a near 70% of the segment as males. Similarly, there was no difference amongst the groups in their educational background, they were mostly graduates (86%), with very few school going (5%). This may also be a function of the convenience sampling approach that was used and the second reason is that at the school level the person either would not be indulging in Fantasy sports; and even if playing will not openly admit that he/she is doing so. There was no significant difference amongst the three clusters in terms of their annual household income, thus clearly the available disposable income of a person is not a driver for his/her indulging in the sport format.

However, when considers the occupation of the three clusters there was a significant difference ($\chi^2=115.094$). The Entertainment seekers were mostly employed (69.3%) where as in the other two groups the respondents majorly belonged to the student community. Also in terms of age ($\chi^2=115.992$) the entertainment seekers were mostly in the 26-35 years(71.4%) as compared to the other two groups who were in the 18-25 years category . Further, to complete the profiling of the clusters along with the demographic data, it was necessary to examine the clusters engagement with the fantasy format and assess whether there was any difference amongst the segments with regards to their behavior pattern (Table - IV):

Table IV- football viewership patterns of the three clusters with chi square values

Variable	Game-centric n=125	Control-centric n=183	Entertainment-seeking n=189	Chi square
Years since watching				
< 3years	104(83.2%)	164(89.6%)	143(75.7%)	18.217**
3-5 years	10(8.0%)	10(5.5%)	12(6.3%)	
>5 years	11(8.8 %)	9(4.9%)	34(18.0%)	
Years since playing				
< 1years	110(88.0%)	168(91.8%)	152(80.4%)	14.179**
1-2 years	9(7.2%)	8(4.4%)	13(6.9%)	
>2 years	6(4.8 %)	7(3.8%)	24(12.7%)	
Number of hours/week				
< 2 hours	105(84.0%)	154(84.2%)	162(85.7%)	.507
2-3 hours	13(10.4%)	19(10.4%)	16(8.5%)	
4> hours	7(5.5%)	10(5.5%)	11(5.8%)	
Number of teams owned				
1-2	120(96.0%)	175(95.6%)	187(98.9%)	4.746
3-4	1(0.8%)	3(1.6%)	1(0.5%)	
5>	4(3.2%)	5(2.7%)	1(0.5%)	

*** Significant at 0.05 level*

There was a significant difference between the three clusters in terms of the number of years since they have been watching fantasy sports-($\chi^2=18.217$). More than 25% of the entertainment seekers have been watching the sports for more than 3 years, while almost 85% of the other two clusters have become active viewers only in the last 3 years. Similar trend can be seen in terms of the time since they have been actively playing fantasy sports ($\chi^2=14.179$); with again 20% of the Entertainment seekers, playing since more than 2 years. However, unlike their Developed counterparts the viewers do not profess to being heavy users of the format. 84% of all three groups played for less than 2 hours/week. Also looking at the number of teams they own-nearly 95% of the three groups said that they have/own 1-2 teams.

The study also looked at the respondents' evaluation of a probable favourable outcome- winning expectancy. The One-way ANOVA test(Table-V) revealed a significant difference amongst the three groups in their confidence of winning($F=22.262$). The entertainment seekers were more confident of their winning expectancy(Mean=3.63) as compared to the other two groups who were more with the 'can't say' option.

Table V-One Way ANOVA: Winning Expectancy for the three clusters

Variable	Game-centric n=125	Control-centric n=183	Entertainment-seeking n=189	F-Value
Winning expectancy	Mean =2.80	Mean=2.88	Mean=3.63	22.262**

*** Significant at 0.05 level*

Study implications and conclusions: The study is an exploratory study, the first of its kind in the Indian sub-continent. The timing is appropriate considering the rapid growth that the country has seen in the fantasy sports- cricket- format. The author conducted an initial qualitative study to identify the motivation and key drivers amongst fantasy sports consumers. Basis this and the existing available literature on fantasy sports, a quantitative study was conducted amongst 497 fantasy sports consumers form across the country. An exploratory factor analysis revealed the existence of four key attitudinal factors that seemed to drive the urge to play the league. These were named as entertainment value; actual sports involvement, team involvement and illusion of control. The factors were in line with those found in the Developed world (Dwyer et al.2010; Lee, Seo and Green, 2013; Ruihley & Billings, 2013). Further, these factors were used to identify possible typologies of fantasy sports consumers (Farquar & Meeds, 2007). The study identified the existence of three distinct groups- *Game-Centric Fantasy Sports Consumers*; *Control-Centric Fantasy Sports Consumers* and the *Entertainment Seeking Fantasy Sports Consumers*). The three groups were predominantly males, educated and had an income of 5 lakhs and below. The Entertainment seekers group had older (26-35 years) and were largely employed, as compared to the other two groups who were in the 18-25-year bracket and were mostly students. In terms of the winning expectancy the entertainment seekers were more confident of the winning outcomes as compared to the other two groups.

The study, clearly demonstrates that- when one looks at the number of years since which the three groups have been playing and watching the format it is 1-2 years. Thus it is a new phenomenon in the country and will take time to manifest as a distinct consumption behavior. The existence of the three clusters clearly has both academic and managerial implications. The need to understand the motivators and consumption relationship as diverse means that frameworks for explaining the phenomenon are complex and have to be understand at the micro level. The study points to the evidence that Sports are a motivational tool. This could be related to the playfulness and enjoying the game as a hobby and a relaxing activity. Further the desire to win, the control and management of players, are important insights for those designing platforms and avenues for Fantasy Sports consumers. This also indicates a need to target the three groups differently as aligned to their winning expectancy. However, this is still in the nascent stage and the role of other factors such as personality and normative factors as well as cultural values- attitude towards gambling. The introduction of these factors may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomena in its totality. And at the rate it is growing in the country there is a need to understand it both from the academic as well as the practitioner's perspective.

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