Changes in fan gratifications and sports media dependency after the postponement of sports due

to the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Throughout most of written history, there has been a fascination for sports, from gladiator fights to the first Olympic Games, which has turned into a form of dependence worldwide. Today, a bevy of professional sports and a plethora of professional teams fill stadiums, television slots, and streaming sites. With every sport comes fans, and with every fan comes an assortment of reasons as to why they are fans of certain sports, teams or athletes. Most of these fans use sports as an escape from under-stimulation (i.e., boredom, apathy) as well as over-stimulation (i.e., stress and anxiety) in their daily lives (Wann, Allen & Rochelle, 2004). Some fans, especially those dedicated to specific teams, may even consider their sport or team a religion of sorts (Price, 2005). What would a typical fan do if *all* sports were taken away from them quickly and without warning? How would fans react if their favorite team was suddenly unable to participate in playoffs or championship? That is exactly what happened in March of 2020 because of growing concern about COVID-19. This thesis explores how the average sports fans and fantasy sports fans spent their time quarantining without their beloved sports, and it examines how dependent the common fans are on sports and sports media before, during, and after being forced to remain at home without any new games or matches for months on end.

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Dedication

As my tenure as a student at Kansas State University is coming to a close, I realize now just how lucky I have been and how blessed my time has played out here. I will never be able to truly express how thankful I am for the A. Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications for shaping me into the person I am today and helping me push myself to review, repair, and replenish my goals and aspirations—very much like I did to my thesis—over the past 7 years in Manhattan, Kansas.

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And finally, I'd like to thank my wife for being by my side throughout the entirety of the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and still managing to say "I do" on our wedding day. I could not have done this without her support and her love.

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Chapter 1 - COVID-19 and The Importance of Canceling Sports

With the growing severity of the COVID-19 pandemic during the early months of 2020, there were instant stoppages of prominent sports, both amateur and professional, across the globe. Three of the "Big Four" North American professional team sports leagues—basketball, football, hockey and baseball leagues—had already begun their season or spring training when COVID-19 forced sports to stop beginning March 11, 2020. For sports organizations outside the Big Four, such as college basketball or NASCAR, the disease and its effects were just as difficult to manage around, even if their respective season had not begun yet. Organizations such as the Professional Golfers' Association of America (PGA) postponed almost all events, while other sports organizations such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) canceled major events altogether (i.e., March Madness).

The cancellation of the NCAA Men's and Women's Division I Basketball Tournaments was especially controversial because the decision to cancel came just days before they were set to begin, after thousands of fans already bought tickets, and after major cities like Houston, New York and Indianapolis were prepared to take in those fans. Not only was this a detrimental blow to the forecasted television ratings and the sociocultural phenomena that surrounds March Madness, but it also severely impacted the NCAA's yearly revenue that was set to gain upwards of $860 million (McGee, 2020). COVID-19 had major effects on ratings and revenue, but it also had a dramatic impact on the upcoming sports tourism that would be felt by cities hosting tournament games (Cooper & Alderman, 2020; Ratten, 2020). The economic downturn that came with worldwide stoppages of sports would soon be felt by everyone associated with the events, including team owners, coaches, players, sideline officials, stadium workers, and most

importantly the cities that house the sports teams. For some sports organizations, this unprecedented stoppage was a first, while others had already suffered the displeasure of stopping prematurely in the past, which may have given some a better road map than others.

Previous Cancellations in Sports History

There are very few times in history where multiple sports across multiple continents were effectively shut down or canceled in the middle of a season, making the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on the world historically unique. Before COVID-19, the most recent worldwide shutdown was when Adolf Hitler was in power in Germany and World War II was in full force. The stoppage of sports from the war shut down sports leagues all over Europe; but even with a war in their backyard, the people wanted their sports. The fans showed their desire for sports both legally and illegally. The Finnish Football Association held vetted, proper soccer tournaments that eventually restarted in the middle of wartime. But soccer was eventually fully stopped again in 1944, just two years after restarting. Meanwhile, there were illegal, underground soccer games being played in front of large audiences, like a match in 1942 that drew 1,500 fans (Tovar, 2020.

It was clear from the beginning that not every sport would return within the same parameters as others. It was also clear that some might not return at all, like The Xtreme Football League—also known as the XFL—which declared bankruptcy one month after sports were postponed or canceled. Along with national sports leagues and events being canceled, there were a multitude of major international events that were canceled such as the Arctic Winter Games, the ASEAN Para Games (similar to Paralympics), and the X-Games. On top of these annual and biannual international events was the quadrennial 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, whose gold medals are signifiable as the highest achievement a singular athlete can achieve outside a

team sport. But the Olympics, like many sports organizations, have had practice in the art of adjusting to world events.

The Olympics

The 2020 Summer Olympics, being held in Tokyo, were postponed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) until 2021, causing the Olympics to be postponed for the first time since the modern Olympic Games started in 1896 (Macnaughtan, 2020). While this is the first time the Olympics have been postponed, it is hardly the first occasion where they are not being played because of worldly problems. In 1916, during the middle of World War I, the Summer Olympics were scheduled to take place in Berlin before they would eventually be canceled. This happened again to both the 1940 and 1944 Summer and Winter Olympics because of World War II; ironically, the 1940 Summer Olympics was also scheduled to be played in Tokyo, which makes Tokyo the only host city to have two Olympic Games rescheduled or canceled. This most recent postponement of the Summer Olympics into 2021 created its fair share of problems for the 11,000 athletes expected to participate, as well as the 90,000 volunteers and hundreds of thousands of officials and spectators from across the globe who were slated to attend the events (Shervani et al., 2020). Not only are the individuals who had the 2020 Olympics circled on their calendar feeling the effects, but the host city, Tokyo City, must now take the bludgeon of $6 billion in foreign tourist and advertising revenue loss (Imahashi & Regalado, 2020) as well as face new competition with events like the 2021 World Athletics Championship slated to start in August.

[*Note:* Currently the Olympics are slated to return on July 23, 2021, exactly one year from when they were supposed to start in 2020].

National Basketball Association

The National Basketball Association (NBA) was the first North American organized sports league to shut down because of the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States, doing so with 259 games left in the regular season. NBA commissioner Adam Silver was immediately in touch with several experts (Zillgitt, 2020) when discussing how to continue the 2019–2020 season and in doing so created the NBA "bubble" experiment. The bubble experiment took the best 22 teams in the NBA and put them inside the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex at Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. With daily testing, apps, and bracelets to help keep tabs on players, and virtual fans in the stands, the NBA seemed to check every box before restarting. This well thought-out plan came as the result of many conversations with medical experts over computer screens and phone apps, but it also came from the history of the NBA, which has had multiple lockouts and two shortened seasons in its past.

Before the 1995 NBA season, the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) pushed for a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA) after the previous one expired at the end of the 1993–1994 season. The NBPA protested key issues such as revenue sharing and salary cap. The new CBA was eventually signed before the beginning of the season, resulting in zero games lost (Brown, 1995). Similarly, a year later, the NBA players performed another "lockout" before the season over the additional $50 million in profit sharing from television revenue; but, once again, no games were lost (Bembry, 1996). In fact, the only times the NBA has had to resort to shortened seasons before COVID-19 forced them into a corner was during the 1998–1999 and 2011-2012 seasons.

The 1998–1999 lockout was because NBA owners reopened the CBA to change the league's salary cap system. This was firmly opposed by the NBPA and created discussions between the two that would last 204 days, ending in a decisive victory for then-Commissioner

David Stern and the owners. This lapse in play caused the season to shorten to a mere 50 games as opposed to the normal 82-game schedule (Samuels, 1999). Finally, the 2011–2012 season's NBA lockout resulted in a canceled preseason, a shortened 66-game season, and the reformation of the NBPA as a union after negotiations fell through over issues regarding basketball-related income percentage, harder salary cap restrictions, and luxury tax (Iqbal, 2019).

After all the different lockouts and strikes that the NBA has had to fight through and adapt to, they seemed to be one of the most prepared leagues for such an unprecedented stoppage of all things sports related. Also, after the Los Angeles Lakers won the NBA Championship against the Miami Heat in the 2020 NBA Finals, the NBA bubble finished the bubble experiment with zero positive COVID-19 tests in almost 100 days (Woike, 2020).

National Hockey League

The National Hockey League (NHL) has also been prone to lockouts and strikes, which seemed to prepare it almost as well as the NBA. The 1992 season was postponed right before the playoffs—a purposeful timing by the players so that team owners would lose out on much more money in the playoffs (upwards of $500,000 per playoff game) than they would during the regular season (Wulf, 1992). The 1994–1995 lockout, as well as the 2012–2013 lockout, shortened the season from 82 games to 48, canceling the NHL All-Star game and all interconference games while the NHL and the National Hockey League's Players Association (NHLPA) worked to reconstruct and ratify new CBAs. Between those two lockouts was one of the most dramatic and long-lasting lockouts in sports history spanning more than 10 months and 1,230 unplayed games. Another major hiccup in the NHL's past is the 2004–2005 season, which was ultimately canceled with no team being awarded the Stanley Cup for the first time since

1919 when Spanish Influenza forced Montreal and Seattle to cancel their series at 2–2–1 (Hunter, 2014).

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman went into the restart with a "four-phase plan" that eventually ended in zero positive COVID-19 tests from mid-July (during Phase 3) through the Stanley Cup Finals, stretching over nine weeks (Gretz, 2020; Gregory, 2020). This four-phase plan was built by a history plagued with shortened seasons, but it ended with the NHL creating a dual-bubble system, much like the NBA's bubble experiment, with 12 Eastern Conference teams stationed in Toronto, Canada, and 12 Western Conference teams in Edmonton, Canada. The conference championship games and the Stanley Cup Finals were also all played in Edmonton.

[Note: After the NHL and NBA "bubble" seasons concluded, it was reported neither organization had a positive test, let alone an outbreak, for the entirety of their postseasons.]

National Football League

The National Football League (NFL) has had only two occasions where seasons were shortened and regular season games were canceled. Both instances occurred more than 33 years before COVID-19 and since the NFL introduced its own Rules Committee in 1932. The newly founded NFL Rules Committee quickly introduced a rule that began punishing teams for canceling games, something that was somewhat common before standardized scheduling, by declaring the game a forfeit in favor of whichever team did not wish to cancel (NFL, 2021). During the 1982 NFL season, eight weeks of games (weeks 3–10) were lost because of a 2-month strike by the players regarding collective money issues. The 1982 season was almost completely canceled after Week 2, however the players united before eventually coming to an agreement (Garvey, 1989). In all, 14 games were missed and the season resumed with Week 17, the final week of the 1982 regular season. There was still only a total of 9 weeks' worth of games

instead of the usual 16 weeks before playoffs began. Meanwhile, the 1987 players' strike was swiftly silenced by the NFL owners who resorted to using replacement teams with replacement players. Only one week was missed to the strike, which was once again started after Week 2. By Week 7 of the 1987 season, all teams' players had crossed the picket line and had to live with the results of games played without them (Schmitt, 1991).

[*Note: After 9/11, all NFL games were postponed to the end of the season but were never explicitly canceled.*]

Without these instances, the NFL might have been much less prepared for the scheduling mishaps and loss of games that COVID-19 and the 2020 season would bring. Fortunately for the NFL, it had the benefit of COVID-19's forced stoppage of sports happening during its offseason, almost one month after Super Bowl XIV where the Kansas City Chiefs defeated the San Francisco 49ers. This gave Commissioner Roger Goodell and the NFL ample time to create a plan that the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) and owners could agree upon. Unfortunately, they were unable to come to such an agreement until late July—right before training camps were scheduled to open—causing the entire NFL preseason to be canceled for all 32 teams. After the deal was finally struck, COVID-19 testing became mandatory every day for two weeks or until positive cases were below 5% league-wide (Dove et al., 2020). When the NFL finally did return, teams did so under a "virtual football bubble," a term coined by NFL Chief Medical Officer Dr. Allen Sills (Seifert, 2020), meaning that players would have a personal responsibility to contain themselves as best they can when they are not at training facilities or playing in games.

Immediately the NFL looked different than it ever had before, with offseason workouts and all preseason games being canceled. The highly-televised NFL Draft resorted to a virtual

setting where Commissioner Goodell announced and congratulated incoming players from his living room rather than a large stage in front of fans and draft prospects. The regular season also had moments of disparity, especially amongst certain teams like the Baltimore Ravens and Tennessee Titans, which were both fined at least $250,000 for their inability to contain outbreaks inside their respective locker rooms throughout the season (Rapaport, 2020). The Denver Broncos also felt the sting of new COVID-19 protocols in late November 2020 when the team was forced to play a regular season game against the New Orleans Saints without any quarterback available to take snaps because all its quarterbacks had been deemed close contacts to quarterback Jeff Driskel, who tested positive for COVID-19 (Maya, 2020).

Professional Golfer's Association

The PGA Tour's focus when dealing with the COVID-19 crisis seemed to be its four Major Championship tournaments: The Open Championship, U.S. Open, PGA Championship, and The Masters. Three were postponed; the Open Championship was completely cancelled, making 2020 the 13th time in history that the Open would not be played. While World Wars I and II are the main reasons for many of the previous cancellations of major tournaments, 2020 marked the first year that a worldwide health crisis was the sole reason for golf's majors to be canceled or postponed (Golf Without Majors, 2020). The benefit of the PGA is that crowds are not necessarily needed for the players to compete any differently than they normally would, whereas the NFL and NBA have screaming crowds that can create what is commonly known as home-field advantage. The downfall of not having fans at a PGA event, especially any Major Championship, is the loss of capital that would otherwise go to support charity organizations or support the game of golf through youth golf programs, regional golf chapters, agronomic research, course maintenance, and other golf championships (Sullivan, 2020).

Eventually the PGA restarted on June 11, 2020, testing every person that would touch the courses including the golfers, caddies, announcers, and television crews. Players who tested positive for COVID-19 were forced to withdraw from any-and-all upcoming tournaments until fully quarantined. The player would be replaced by another golfer; if one were to test positive midway through a tournament, that individual would be handed a last-place payout and forced to quarantine immediately for at least 10 days. (Kerr-Dineen, 2020).

While leagues such as the NBA, NHL, and Major League Baseball (MLB) had to pause in the middle of their seasons, they all eventually came back and had an augmented schedule to determine playoff positions with fewer games and, for the most part, no fans in the stands. Unlike the NBA and NHL—which had two separate league-mandated bubbles—players in the MLB and NFL were not required to be in a bubble, which quickly resulted in multiple games or series being postponed because of outbreaks and positive tests. At the end of their respective seasons, the NBA had zero positive tests over the last 172 games (73 days), and the NHL had zero positive tests after conducting 33,174 tests throughout the four phases that spanned 9 weeks (Gregory, 2020). Compare those two scenarios to the spike in numbers across the NFL leading up to the playoffs and the consistent spiking in the MLB. The MLB ended its season with a player testing positive in the final game of the World Series. At least nine others were infected during a celebration after that win (Schuster, 2020) .

Impacts on Ratings and Revenue

Not all sports came back so eloquently or without hiccups. Some allowed fans in the stands; others decided against any attendance, even family members. Some organizations back-peddled regarding COVID-19 safety; others leaned into it, for example the NBA allowed fans to virtually attend games and instilled new sideline cameras that made fans feel like they were

sitting courtside. Many different historical events happened in the world of sports during the forced isolation from COVID-19, all impacting the rebooting seasons and their respective ratings and making it difficult for sports to retain the same viewership and ratings at the high—or even stable—level that might be expected in a normal season. This included events like the flood of protests and social activism in the wake of George Floyd's death in May 2020, which sparked Black Lives Matter movements across the globe, not just in America (Maqbool, 2020).

The high rate of COVID-19 deaths worldwide will also be a determining factor when reviewing ratings because of the likely scenario that some of the more than 3 million individuals who have passed away because of COVID-19 were avid sports fans with deep-rooted interests in certain teams or players. With the loss in jobs, money, and interest in sports aside, there is also the probability that games or matches were streamed illegally or through a third-party site. While many factors could impact the ratings and revenues of sports, it is still the hope of this thesis that the numbers speak for themselves:

NBA

Containing all NBA players, coaches, and other NBA employees inside at Walt Disney World Resort seemed to work out most, if not all, of the problems that come with a disease like COVID-19 that is spread through contact. Although the NBA was one of the only sports to return by August, ratings plummeted with record-lows in viewership, especially during its coveted NBA Finals series between the Los Angeles Lakers and Miami Heat. The NBA Finals, which was played 4 months later than normal, averaged only 6.4 million viewers over the five-game series. Compare 2020's numbers to the 2019 NBA Finals between the Toronto Raptors and Golden State Warriors, which averaged 15.1 million viewers (Carp, 2020; Cancian, 2020). Viewership aside, the ratings and social media presence showed that the NBA could not attract

the same numbers it did the previous season—or anytime in recent years. In fact, the Lakers'

championship-clinching Game 6, which only delivered a 2.1 rating in the 18–49 year old

demographic (the NBA's main demographic), is the lowest-rated NBA Finals on record

(Cancian, 2020).

The 2020 NBA title-clinching game had such low ratings for many possible reasons, but

one of the main reasons had to be that it was forced to compete with the NFL Sunday Night

Football game between the Minnesota Vikings and Seattle Seahawks, which was viewed by 11.4

million people—almost 6 million more than Game 5 of the NBA Finals. On top of the abnormal

competition for viewership, there was also a much more truncated television schedule with

multiple sports playing throughout the week that would not normally be scheduled in the middle

of October. For example, there are not typically multiple NHL, NBA, and NFL games on during

the same week because of their somewhat-separated seasons in a normal year. Add on the NBA's

heightened stance with the Black Lives Matter movement—putting "Black Lives Matter" on all

courts in large lettering, sporting social movement slogans in place of last names on jerseys, and

certain teams' decisions to boycott games (Stein, 2020)—and suddenly the entire league is

criticized as too political (Badenhausen, 2020).

As far as revenue, the NBA severely underperformed, especially according to its

preseason revenue projections that stated the NBA lost as much as $1.5 billion because of the

pandemic and the expenses of the NBA bubble, which cost almost $180 million (Reuters, 2020).

The bubble, although somewhat costly, essentially salvaged the NBA season and helped shine a

spotlight on commissioner Adam Silver's reputation as well as on teams that may not have been

heavily viewed before the bubble (Lahinsky & O'Keefe, 2020).

Overall, it is estimated that the NBA lost more than $450 million in gate revenues, money that is spent on single-game and season tickets, and $200 million in non-ticket revenue (Gough, 2020). The NBA bounced back quickly though; its next season started mid-December 2020 and featured all 30 teams for the first time since before COVID-19 appeared on the world map.

NHL

The first U.S. sport to crown a champion after the forced cancellation from the COVID-19 pandemic was also one of the few leagues to have zero positive COVID-19 cases among players throughout its postseason, and this was in thanks largely to the success of its dual-bubble system (Crupi, 2020). The Stanley Cup Finals finished on September 28, 2020, just 65 days after restarting. Two separate bubbles kept the playoff teams from contact with anyone outside the league—including family and friends—before bringing the final two together to battle it out for the Stanley Cup. The Tampa Bay Lightning ultimately defeated the Dallas Stars in six games, but the real winner was the NHL for being able to accurately show how a professional sports postseason could function during the worst pandemic in U.S. history.

Before the Stanley Cup Finals, only one game saw an increase in ratings—Game 4 of the conference finals between the Vegas Golden Knights and the Dallas Stars—which was aired on NBC instead of NBCSN (Lucia, 2020). Otherwise, the NHL saw a dip in viewership, as expected, throughout the entirety of the postseason that ended 3 months later than normal. Although this Stanley Cup Finals averaged a measly 2.04 million viewers, it was not the least watch Finals on record, only trailing the 2007 Stanley Cup Finals between the Anaheim Ducks and the Ottawa Senators (Crupi, 2020). What the NHL can be thankful for is that the previous year's Game 7 between the Boston Bruins and St. Louis Blues was the most watched, highest-rated game in 25 years, which bodes well for when the world gets back on track and allows

normalcy in sports to return. Overall, the NHL could not recoup the $1.1 billion in potential

losses from having no fans in the stands, but it was able to show that playing a professional team

sport without COVID-19 altering any more games was possible (Crupi, 2020).

NFL

The NFL was not immune to the pandemic's effect on ratings, which showed more than

ever with Super Bowl LV's viewership numbers (91.63 million) falling to the lowest they had

since 2006 according to Sports Media Watch (2021). Not only that, but Super Bowl LV failed to

record a rating of 40 or higher for the first time since Super Bowl III in 1969 (Paulsen, 2021).

Although the NFL's ratings were not nearly as low as the NHL's or NBA's, the viewership of

the NFL was a roller coaster almost every week, especially during the playoffs. While some

regular season games sported a positive uptick in viewership or ratings from previous years (i.e.,

the NFL kickoff game between Kansas City and Houston), the bulk of the season was a ratings

disappointment.

Not only did the NFL have to uncommonly compete with other sports at the beginning of

the COVID-plagued season, but it also had to compete with the most eclectic and vocal

presidential election years in recent memory. Football had to fight with cable news stations such

as MSNBC, CNN, and FOX News that all gained flocks of viewers because of the entertaining

debates and constant election coverage (Traina, 2020). Many factors attributed to the dip in

viewership for the NFL this season, but there were high notes that should be mentioned. For

instance, NBC's Sunday Night Football averaged 17.4 million viewers per week (AP, 2020) at

the midway point of the season—putting it on pace to be the prime-time's top show for the 10th

straight year.

Combine the mixture of social activism, political decisiveness, lack of fans or homefield advantage, and the hoard of lost television subscriptions from all consequences of COVID-19 and there are countless variables that could have created the drastically low viewership across the NFL's and all sports media ratings.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Using Sports as an Escape

Throughout time there has been a need to escape the normal dredge of everyday life and the chaos that comes with it. For many people that escape has been found within sports and sports media. The feeling of escape can come through watching sports, playing sports, gambling on sports, or just simply celebrating a win or championship with the rest of the fanbase. The different motives that people have go hand-in-hand with subconscious preferences when deciding which sport and which media to use for that escape.

The term *fan* is short for fanatics and comes from the Latin fānāticus. It is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "persons, their actions, attributes, etc.; Characterized, influenced, or prompted by excessive and mistaken enthusiasm, *esp*. in religious matters,". Studies have shown that sports fans tend to differentiate their motives to consume sports into eight different gratification categories: escape, economic, eustress (i.e., positive arousal), self-esteem, group affiliation, entertainment, family and aesthetics (Wann et al., 2008). It is important to note that feeling some of these motives does not necessarily make one a fan of specific teams, players, or even particular sports. The economic motive, for instance, which is found most among those interested in sports for the potential monetary gains through gambling is not a direct indicator of fanaticism (Eastman & Land, 1997; Gantz & Wenner, 1995; Guttman, 1986; Wann, 1995).

According to a 2008 study that tested motivational differences in fans of 13 different sports, the escape gratification was the only motivation that was not found to differ amongst all sports fans, meaning sports fans of every dichotomy (i.e., individual sports, team sports, etc.) use their sports and sports media as an escape more consistently than they do with the other seven gratifications (Wann et al., 2008). It is also very possible, and very likely, that people can carry multiple motivations when it comes to consumption of media (Tüzün, 2006). With this information, it is not a stretch to believe the same can also be true in sports fans when contemplating how and when to consume their favorite sport or sports media (i.e., a fan who uses a day at the ballgame with their family to escape the stress of their daily workload while also gaining excitement, positive arousal and productive stimulation in their lives).

While some fans escape using phone apps, websites, and other online or social media platforms, there has always been an abundance of fans who are willing to escape through a very specific form of cosplay. Cosplay, short for costume play, is typically depicted as people portraying fictional characters from comic books, novels, TV shows or movies, and video games; but it can be so much more than just the fictional characters everyone knows and loves. The cosplay sensation has become a popular subset of mainstream culture in the past 70–80 years, commonly on show at conventions such as Comic-con and WonderCon. It is a form of fashion that involves detailed costumes based on fictional—and sometimes factual—characters from all sorts of media (Flatt, 2015).

Unknowingly, many sports fans partake in their own form of cosplay when attending games dressed in jerseys, headgear, and sometimes makeup. Some fans may not look at their colorful outfits, body and face paint, or props as actual cosplay; but cosplay itself is just another

"layer" to a person's identity and that is what seems to be exhibited by most fans every gameday through creativity and dedication to their respective costumes (Flatt, 2015).

Cosplay is seen as a form of escapism because those partaking in cosplay are different people, someone they could not be in everyday life (Ogonoski, 2014)—whether that person is an insurance salesperson dressing up as a video game character, or a school bus driver painting their entire torso red and donning a Native American headdress and fake tomahawk for a Kansas City Chiefs football game. With the shortage of sporting events to attend during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, sports fans of all genders, ages, and races would have had to mitigate and stifle their sports cosplay tradition, maybe even into another faction of cosplay or another hobby that could satisfy the goals that were once fulfilled by attending games dressed head-to-toe.

On top of these escapes is the added escape that many fans have from participating in fantasy sports, played by more 59 million U.S. and Canadian citizens in 2017 alone according to the Fantasy Sports & Gaming Association (2020). Fantasy sports can be their own form of escape and have been found to be a time-consuming way for sports fans to enhance their love of sports while also sometimes adding economic benefits (e.g., cash prizes, trophies). Although most fantasy sports participants are younger (Suh et al., 2010), they share similar features with sports consumers, including similar motivations like eustress, also known as "positive stress" or "good stress" (Kupriyanov & Zhdanov, 2014, p 179) and stimulation-seeking behaviors (Sloan, 1989: Suh, et al, 2010). What also comes with the often-added stress of fantasy sports is the concept of intrapersonal conflict, which is "the contradiction or incompatibility of attitudes, values, and opinions pertaining to personally relevant concepts in the significant areas of a person's life" (Spielberger et al., 2014, p. 85). Essentially, this means that fantasy sports participants have a "multiple-goal conflict" (Lewin & Cartwright, 1951) where they must choose

between their personal interests in their favorite players or players on their favorite team and their overall interests in the performances of the multitude of players who they have acquired on their fantasy team that span more than one team (Drayer et al., 2010). These multiple interests create the conflict within the fantasy sports participant because of the incompatible goals between the successes of fantasy teams and actual sports teams (Yuksel et al., 2017). Suddenly this escape from the real world into a fantasy world has created new conflict and stress for the sports fan. Although fantasy sports can cause added stress amongst other things in the fantasy members' lives, there would likely still be a select percentage of fantasy sport participants who would want sports to return for their own, somewhat selfish, reasonings related to their desire to win money or bragging rights through fantasy sports apps.

Searching for patterns is what the uses and gratifications theory is all about (Schreindl, 2012), and it seems that escape is a very common pattern when it comes to why people tend to use media—and when it comes to somewhat addicting media, like the internet or video games.

Fan Loyalty and Spending Money on Sports

While escaping can mean both mentally and emotionally avoiding the stress and hardships of real life, the term can also relate to the physical experience of traveling to attend games or watch at a different location than normal. In this instance the escape can come at a serious cost to the average sports fan depending on their team's winning percentage, recent championship runs, or cost of the stadium where the team plays. According to a recent survey, about $56 billion was spent on attending sporting events in America alone during the 12 months from 2016–2017 (Kutz, 2017). This includes, but is not limited to, the cost of tickets, transportation, food, beverages, and parking passes.

Amit Bhattacharyya, head of data science at Vox Media, examined "how much it cost to cheer" for the typical sports fan by comparing the cost of attending games for every team in the MLB, NFL, NBA and NHL. The study showed significant correlations between market size, local cost of living, winning percentage, and a team's monetary value with the average ticket, parking and concession cost. A perfect example is the Dallas Cowboys—one of the most recognizable brands in the world; one of the most successful franchises in the entire National Football League; and one of the highest valued teams in the NFL—which is located in a city where the cost of living is higher than average and it costs an average of $199.20 per game to attend (Dosh, 2018). That is more than $95 per ticket more than the average ticket cost for the Jacksonville Jaguars—a team in a poorer market with a much lower cost of living and a lower team valuation ($2.7 billion less). This is where fan loyalty really comes into play, especially with COVID-19 affecting stadium capacity and ticket prices.

Fan loyalty is essential to sports teams, athletes, and the owners because the more loyal fans are, the more willing they will be to repeatedly purchase merchandise, attend games and pay for mediums (i.e., television packages, going to a bar, etc.) to consume the sport (Dwyer, 2011). During the past 2 decades, more marketers have been specifically targeting the sports fan psyche by using relationship-building marketing strategies, rather than trying to attract new fans; the companies are trying to build longer lasting relationships with existing fans (Wang, 2006) because of their allegiance to the team in previous instances. When looking at fan loyalty, "both a person's behavioral *and* attitudinal disposition toward a sport, team and/or player" must be considered (James, 1997, pp. 4–5). This is incredibly important when viewing how fans spent their money and their free time during COVID-19's forced seclusion from the world.

Many factors determine whether fans will spend money to attend games in person, especially after a pandemic has attacked their wallets and the health of them and their family. For instance, one factor that has been proven is participation in fantasy football, which leads to higher motivations to attend more NFL games in person (Armfield & McGuire, 2014, p. 34) even despite the rising prices and the freedom that comes with viewing at home or a local establishment. It is these ever-increasing costs, as well as inflated prices of jerseys, hats, memorabilia, and other sports merchandise that will shape a key variable in this study regarding COVID-19's impact on sports fans and their fan loyalty.

Overall, the money that fans spend on their favorite team or player can be spread out amongst all sorts of mediums such as television packages, merchandise (i.e., jerseys, hats, memorabilia), and tickets to live games, but all that money collectively shows how much more dedicated and devoted one set of fans might be to their team than another set.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory goes back to the earliest days of media, such as, in 1944 when Herta Herzog conducted studies on listeners and nonlisteners of daytime radio serial dramas (Signorielli, 1996). These studies regarding what was later rebranded as soap operas sparked decades of extensive tests and research into what makes humans consume what they consume, all coming to the same conclusion: humans do things for different forms of gratification. The results of the study led to three major gratifications categories, since expanded upon, which were: emotional release, wishful thinking, and to learn "recipes for making adjustments" (Herzog, 1944; West & Turner, 2010). The Uses and Gratifications theory can simply be summed up as people using the media, not the media using people (Katz, Blumler, et al., 1973). The research of the theory can be viewed from both angles: the user (whether active or

not) gaining gratification or the media providing the gratification. Although perspectives have

changed around the uses and gratifications theory from active audience research to consumer

research to bullet theory research, the same result was always present: humans use particular

things or media to gain particular gratifications. Nowadays with social media, cellular phones,

laptops, and every other technological marvel that has reshaped the media world, it is easier than

ever for someone to obtain immediate gratification, which has both altered and united traditional

media such as print and broadcast television (Carey, 1998). This blitz of technology on the

average media consumer will be a key facet in this study, especially concerning how sports fans

choose to obtain their favorite teams or select certain games over other games.

Although written far before the technological boom of the 21st century, a 1973 study

helped set the footwork for more comprehensive uses and gratifications testing with a model

consisting of five elements:

1. The audience is active and its media usage is "goal directed"

2. The audience member has the "initiative in linking need gratification and media choice"

3. Media competes with other sources of need satisfaction

4. The audience has sufficient self-awareness regarding its media "interest and motivation"

5. Value judgements about the cultural significance of what is being consumed should be evaluated by the audience (Katz, Gurevitch, et al., 1973, pp. 510–511)

While gratifications come in all shapes and sizes, the specificity of sports media and the

people who depend on it more than other media may end up leading to differing results or

outliers in the data retrieved. For instance, some fans are only fans of one sport or one player on one team, so their gratifications may come intermittently (i.e., their favorite player hits a home run every now and then) compared to more heavily identified fans who root for multiple teams or multiples sports. The fan who watches and roots for more sports can gain the same, or more, gratifications from simpler, less rare moments in games such as when a player on their team gets a hit which gives the team a runner on base (Goldstein, 2012). With these discrepancies being a possible factor, it is important to get a sense of how identified with sports the participants' might be to categorize them into separate groups for equal comparison.

Sports Fans' Identification

The degree to which fans identify with their team can range from extremely high to embarrassingly low and can affect behavior, loyalty, and attitude toward their teams (Meyer, 2014). A highly identified fan will invest more time, effort, and money in watching their teams, purchasing team merchandise, and holding positive expectations about future team performances no matter how poorly the team may seem to be performing; a highly identified fan is also more likely to attend games and will generally have more involvement with the team while also monitoring them more in the media (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Kerr & Emery, 2011; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). But being a highly identified sports fan comes with consequences regarding self-worth and psychological health (Wang, 2006) that can have lasting effects on the fan themselves.

The three discernible levels of fan identification are based off different quantitative and qualitative factors and traits that the fan possesses. According to a 1997 study, the three levels are: low identification (i.e., social fans), medium identification (i.e., focused fans), and high identification (i.e., vested fans). Lower identified social fans tend not to invest much emotion,

money, or involvement toward their team or athlete of choice, but the relationship still exists

even if it is purely for entertainment purposes. It often means that the fan is simply a fan of the

sport and not usually a team or player. Medium identified focused fans can be a legitimate fan of

the team or player; but typically focused fans seek some sort of achievement or better

performance to ride on. This normally leads to the fans being called a bandwagon fan—a fan

who only roots for the best teams to celebrate victories and championships only to switch to

another team after the winning performances slow or halt. Finally, the highly identified vested

fans normally are the most loyal fans with longer tenures of fandom to the team or athlete,

typically investing money and emotions year-in and year-out while also seeing the team as an

extension of themselves or their community. These levels of fan identification are important

when looking at the results of this survey, especially with the traits that come with the differing

levels of fan identification it will be easier to see where certain participants rank in their depth of

identification with their team or athlete. (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997).

Many highly identified fans tend to thoroughly internalize team success as personal

success (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and even though they will most likely not have done anything

to legitimately affect the outcome of the game (i.e., playing or coaching) other than perhaps

screaming in the stands, they believe they were a benefactor to whatever the final score is. This

is called "basking in reflected glory" (*BIRGing*) of their sports team's triumphs (Cialdini et al.,

1976). The same is true on the opposite side of the coin: the highly identified sports fan will also

likely internalize team failures, or losses, as personal failures (Wann et al., 2001), which can lead

to higher stress levels and repression of internal feelings (Cialdini, et al., 1976; Ware &

Kowalski, 2012). When a team does poorly, the normal behavioral reaction is to disassociate

with the team to preserve some sense of positive self-image (Ware & Kowalski, 2012), this is

known as "cutting off reflected failure" (also known as *CORFing*). Both BIRGing and CORFing are traits of fans who seem to identify with their teams more heavily than the average fair-weather fans or bandwagon fans, something that will come into play during the review of data from this thesis.

No matter the strength of identification, identifying with a team or group is something that most people in the world do one way or another throughout life (Heider, 1958). But many sports fans do so unwillingly and unknowingly. Whether their family brought them to games as children, or they found a single athlete they liked and stuck with them throughout their careers, eventually sports can engulf parts of people's lives (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) like many things do after years of affiliation. Not every sports fan is the same though; many will often subconsciously categorize themselves and others as part of in-groups or out-groups and often prefer in-group behaviors compared to out-group behaviors (Voci, "*Relevance of Social Categories…*", 2006).

Three characteristic factors relate to group or member identification according to a 1995 study: organizational and product characteristics, affiliation characteristics, and activity characteristics (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). The first characteristic, organizational and product, relates to the fan's perception of the organization (i.e., team or athlete) and its offerings (gratifications from wins, big plays, playoff berths, etc.) (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Sutton et al., 1997). Affiliation characteristics are the actual membership attributes of the fan (i.e., length of membership, visibility of the membership, and number of similar organizations that the member is a part of), which can all be relatively quantitative and could easily discern certain participants grouping into either focused fans or vested fans. And finally, activity characteristics are the behavioral patterns of the fan, such as the level of contact with the actual organization or team,

whether in person or through social media. Activity characteristics can also include the voluntary donation of money or goods to the organization, which may include paid attendance at the actual games and "can lead to increased involvement" with the organization or team (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Sutton et al., 1997, p. 19). These three factors will be heavily researched through the survey. Through their results, one will be able to put together how vested of a fan the participant is by piecing together the total amounts of money, time, and eventual effort put forth toward their favorite team or athlete.

One thing that many fans tend to do somewhat unconsciously is affiliate with groups; this is called group identification. Whether it be a larger group (e.g., being a fan of the Chicago Cubs) or a smaller group (e.g., being a member of a Chicago Cubs fan page on Facebook), has been shown to be a key aspect of fan identification and self-concept (Kraszewski, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Ware & Kowalski, 2012). When sports fans fall into group identification, they will typically fall into two groupings: in-group and out-group. In-groups are defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a small group of people, within a wider context, whose common interest tends to exclude others". Out-groups are defined as "those people, not necessarily forming a group themselves, who are excluded from or do not belong to a specific in-group". The in-group will be looked at by the fan as more complex, less stereotypical, and will be evaluated under a less extreme lens than out-groups (Linville & Jones, 1980, Park, et al., 1992).

Identifying with an in-group that may not share all of one's views has also been a subject of research through the years, and that research has found that fans who consider themselves leaning one way on a particular subject, for example not allowing homosexuals on their favorite team, when presented with an opposing view from the in-group will begin leaning the other way to confirm or normalize their in-group membership (Harrison & Michelson, 2016). This is just

one extension of what in-group identification can lead to. Other extensions have been known to affect the sports fan's social identity as well as their trust issues (Voci, *"The link between…"*, 2006). Belonging to a group is one of the eight main gratifications that can come from consuming media, even sports media, and can be felt around stadiums and cities during a local game or major championship (Wann, et al, 2008).

Another way that sports fans identify with one another is very similar to something that has been around and identified with heavily for thousands of years, something that is also celebrated weekly in many homes and public gathering places: religion. Some religions claim to have the keys and meanings to life; but to some sports fans, their fandom towards their team or sport "has come to form …. one of the principal sources of meaning in life for many people" (Dunning et al., 1986, p. 221-222). So, why do some people identify so heavily with a team that they forgo other options for meaning in their lives? It has to do with emotional responses throughout a game or match, much like how people's emotions fluctuate while attending a well-versed sermon (Dunning et al., 1986).

Sigmund Freud's (1961) conception of emotion states that "tension and other negative emotions require forms of release," which is then categorized into different fields of emotion such as anger or happiness. With that in mind, the cathartic, simultaneous release of emotions can be felt in sociocultural gathering spaces like a stadium as well as a church, synagogue, or other religious sanctuary. While some fear believing that sports can be considered a religion, so to speak, sports can be viewed as more than that to some and less than that to others (Voci,*"The link between…",* 2006). It is unlikely that many fans will be on the same page when it comes to how heavily they identify with their team or sport, especially when relating it to religion. To nonbelievers research suggests that the idea that sports is prevalent in many sports fans' lives as

a form of folk religion. Folk religion is the "combination of shared moral principles and behavioral customs" (Price, 2005, p. 142), which is exactly what sports fans participate in every game day whether it be at home with their friends and family or at the game with thousands of other hollering and screaming fanatics. Folk religions base themselves around interaction rituals and emotional behavior that is expressed with others, whether that be at church while singing a hymn or at a tailgate reciting a sports team's classic chants. It is important to note that the common interaction ritual ingredients are more informal and varied at tailgates or bars compared to those at the stadium or at a church or synagogue (Collins, 2004). No matter what way one might look at it, sports can be as deeply rooted as religion to some people while they may recognize it or not. This will be a key aspect in the study at hand with questions on the survey that revolve around how much the participants are indebted to their team and how heavily they identify with their specific team or athlete.

Overall, the strength and depth of identification that fans have within their team can lead to different decision-making skills, grouping behaviors, and overall attitudes that one has before, during, and after sports events (Wann & Branscombe, 1993).

Media Dependency Theory

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's (1976) Media Dependency theory helped explain the many different effects that media can have on people as well as begin to show how those effects can form dependence based on the media's continued satisfaction of the user's goals. They stated that dependency on media resources is "an ubiquitous condition" in society, which can be found in plenty of different settings like searching for the best deals or obtaining specific information like the weather or election results (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 6). Some believe this theory is "based on a set of assumptions which include that audience is active and goal directed,

thus not a passive recipient of information" (Sangwan, 2005) and that audience members are completely conscious of their media consumption needs (McQuail, 2000).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, people would determine what they watched based on many different innate reasonings—which all can build dependency to certain media—such as the desire to escape from daily problems or the need to understand one's social world (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). But during a crisis situation, like the COVID-19 pandemic, media dependence was believed to be heightened because of the high degree of change or conflict as well as the reactionary need to understand and stay up to date (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In fact, one of the main reasons people tend to need more information during a crisis situation is to reduce anxiety and uncertainty caused by the crisis itself (Liu & Liu, 2020). Considering how this applies to the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis that started in February 2020 and has changed the face of the world in countless ways, it is easy to imagine how dependent people might be on information given to them by the media outlet of their choice when being told to stay indoors and avoid human interactions as much as possible.

Overall, the theory is based heavily on the viewer and the three main motivational goals, similar to the motives of a sports fan discussed earlier, that they need satisfied which are: understanding, orientation, and play/recreation (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1989). The average sports fan's dependence on sports media would most likely be headquartered in the play/recreation motivation because it typically provides valuable coping mechanisms such as tension release and the ability to escape (Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998). While play/recreation motivations are meant to help the user escape the world around them, the understanding and orientation aspects are meant to help the user interact with the very world they are escaping by guiding them with information about things outside recreational activities such

as sports, singing competitions or amateur dancing shows (Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998). It is with these traits in the chosen media that sports fans associate happiness and emotional responses that can lead to celebrations, fits of rage, and increased shopping for sports tickets or sports merchandise (Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998). For some sports fans, this goal satisfaction might come only from watching football, whether it be professional, collegiate, or even local high school games. For others, it might be more satisfying to watch baseball or soccer, perhaps even just the highlights at the end of a long day.

No matter where or how the satisfaction being consumed comes from, it is most often coming from new and continuously changing technology, which can become very complex and difficult for mass media companies. With this complexity in modern day society, it is up to the media to take on more unique information functions (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). And with the ever-growing complexity of society, the scope of personal and social goals also grows and has become extremely personalized (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1989). With modern technology it has become easier to personalize what news or sports people see first when they open their mobile phones, turn on their televisions, or boot up their computers. For example, the ESPN app, as well as many sports-streaming apps, allows users to pick which teams and players are their favorites to send breaking news, current game stats, news articles and more directly to the user as quickly and conveniently as possible. These factors can fuel fans' dependency on their app as the main source of satisfaction for the goals regarding these specific teams or players, especially in younger generations who have grown with the technology through the years (Schreindl, 2012).

Because age is directly related to dependency of both traditional and new media (Loges, 1994; Mafé & Blas, 2006; Yang et al., 2015), it's important to remember when viewing restart-

related television ratings that certain age groups spend more time consuming media on new media devices rather than on traditional media like TV or radio (Ha et al., 2013; Statista, 2013; Yang et al., 2015). For instance, a recent study showed that college students prefer to consume college football through social media and streaming sites rather than through cable or radio (Osen, 2019). This could be because when a college student uses new-age media devices such as a mobile phone or social media to view their team's game they are fulfilling multiple needs at that very moment, like the need to understand the score, the desire to stay up to date, or simply the need to escape (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). With younger generations fulfilling more and more internal goals while consuming media through newer technology, they have shown that they are more dependent on new media than older generations (Yang et al., 2015). This will be studied heavily during this research, and the results of studies and surveys past and present will show whether media dependency for new media rose during the pandemic or if it fell to traditional media in certain aspects.

Building on the literature reviewed above, the following hypotheses and research questions are formulated to help understand how pandemic-related sports cancellations affected sports fans and fantasy sports fans.

H1: The more a participant identifies with their sports team/athlete, the more likely they will be to attend games during the restart.

H2: The more a participant identifies with their sports team/athlete, the less likely they will be to watch other teams/sports during the restart.

H3: Fantasy sports users feel more gratification from sports returning than nonfantasy sports participants.

H4: Fantasy sports users will be more dependent on sports media after sports have restarted than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic

RQ1a: What gratifications did sports fans seek most while watching sports before COVID-19 paused all sports?

RQ1b: What gratifications did sports fans miss most during the cancellation of sports?

RQ2: What sports media did younger participants depend on most during the COVID-19 pandemic? What about older participants?

RQ3: Did fans who identified strongly with a team or athlete spend more money on attending live sports events after the restart compared to the amount they spent on average before COVID-19?

Chapter 3 - Methodology

In order to reach as many participants as possible with the many different protocols and mandates regarding COVID-19 this study is imposing an internet-based survey through Amazon Mechanical Turk (M-Turk). Using M-Turk allows the option to pay a national sample of participants for answering the survey. For this particular study, the researcher offered participants $1 to answer the 43-question survey and aimed for at least 400 responses. The 400 responses were on a "first come, first served" basis and was regulated by the opening five questions which validated the participants' identification level.

This decision to survey anonymously through the internet was far-and-away from the original plan which was to conduct in-depth interviews with vested sports fans at sporting events or sports-related events to see how they spent their time in quarantine and what filled the time that was previously held by sports media. That plan was no longer a viable option due to the

increasing severity of COVID-19 and the extension of laws and mandates regarding social distancing, mask usage, and stay-at-home orders. Because this study is unique in the sense that the coronavirus pandemic is still altering the world at the time of publication and not many studies have occurred during the pandemic at all, the survey will be used to try and decipher how sports fans have been affected by this disease and the subsequent chain of events that have ensued.

On top of demographic questions, the survey instrument included questions that helped decipher how the fan viewed their sport of choice before COVID-19 and after the restarts began as well as how heavily they identified with their team before COVID-19 and how they feel about aimed at media usage, team identification, range of gratification and how they feel about how sports have handled the return and how they handled the players' and fans' safety. Some questions were asked with both 6-point and 7-point Likert scales, the reasoning being that some answers would not be necessarily viable to the data analysis if there was a middle-ground answer like "unchanged" or "neither increased/decreased". With certain Likert scale questions having no stagnant answers it made for more legitimate answers due to the honest insight into their own viewing and spending habits.

Although there are always concerns with any survey, whether it be truthfulness or validity, there is a heightened concern when conducting internet surveys due to the anonymity that comes with it. With the numbers of emails, online messages, and overall spam that many people receive on the internet daily it is likely that an internet survey request might be overlooked or ignored (Theberge, 2005), however, M-Turk is an opt-in service, so this is not an issue in this case. The main concern about this particular survey is the validity of the

participants' level of fanhood considering the incentive of payment. With that concern in mind the opening questions in the survey included conditional questions that asked about the participants' favorite team or athlete as well as their level of fanhood for nine separate sports before continuing to the actual survey.

This survey aimed to obtain 400 respondents by the beginning of the Spring 2021 semester. The survey was uploaded electronically on Qualtrics and deployed on M-Turk by the end of December. With the survey being conducted nationwide, there was a larger opportunity to see how different parts of the country were handling the pandemic as well as handling their lack of sports. Having this survey be answered by people nationally rather than locally created the possibility of showing differences in sports fans due to their respective state's mask and social distancing mandates, which was not a main focus at the beginning. Although many of the questions were posed around the pandemic and how it affected the sports fans' gratification and identity, there was also a heavy focus on how sports affected participants' media usage. Overall, this survey aimed to truly see how COVID-19 affected the average sports fan, as well as the vested sports fans, across the country.

Variables

The variables that this survey will be recognizing revolve around the different levels of fan identification (i.e., social, focused, vested) by identifying factors such as money and time spent on their favorite team or athlete, afterwards the questions will hone in on how the COVID-19 truly changed their media habits surrounding sports.

Variable #1 will be split in to two parts: the money spent on the participants' sport or team of choice before coronavirus (i.e., attending games, merchandise, television packages to

watch games, etc.) and money spent after the sport returned. This variable is very useful in

determining how sports fans allocated their money after the effects that COVID-19 had on sports

the sports world. Questions based on this variable will largely use multiple choice options with

different monetary values scaled to the question itself.

Q15 BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began what was the maximum amount of money you

would spend to attend one of your favorite team's games?

○ $0 - $100 (1)

○ $101 - $200 (2)

○ $201 - $300 (3)

○ $301 - $400 (4)

○ $401 - $500 (5)

○ $501 - $750 (6)

○ $751 - $1000 (7)

○ $1000+ (8)

Questions based around monetary spending will also help determine how much sports-media

money could have potentially been lost based on the lack of sports (i.e., canceled TV packages or

less money spent on pay-per-view fights).

This is also the section of the survey where questions will be asked regarding money spent on

fantasy sports throughout an average year, whether they be through season-long fantasy apps or

through the use of daily fantasy sports (DFS), which can yield "significantly larger payouts" if

the participant risks more money than just the minimum bet (Shapiro, 2016, pp. 280).

Q18 How likely are you to spend money on fantasy sports? (i.e. Draft Kings, FanDuel, etc.)

○ Extremely likely (6)

○ Moderately likely (5)

○ Slightly likely (4)

○ Slightly unlikely (3)

○ Moderately unlikely (2)

○ Extremely unlikely (1)

It is with these questions regarding money spent on sports and sports media that fans can

begin to determine how heavily they identify with their favorite team or athlete. Social or low-

identification fans tend to not spend much, if any, of their finances on their favorite sport or team

or athlete. Focused or medium identification or bandwagon fans often spend money on team

apparel or something that shows they are a fan and tries to build a positive relationship with the

team and other fans quickly (Sutton et al., 1997). These questions could also yield important

information that could potentially be used by future researchers or members of media to study or

prepare for another possible widespread global pandemic and the financial consequences that

come with it.

Variable #2 is also split into two pieces: the average time spent watching, attending, and

focusing (e.g., playing fantasy sports) on sports events before coronavirus; and how much time

was spent on average watching, attending, and focusing on sports media after the return of

sports. To collect data on this, there will be a specific set of questions that help group participants into different levels of fanhood based on their involvement with their sport of choice, team of choice or favorite athlete in addition to the amount of time spent consuming specific sports media. The questions will differentiate how the participants consumed media between the different major media outlets: TV, online/social media, radio/podcasts, magazines, newspapers and cell phones. The questions will feature time ranges that the participant chooses from ranging from "less than one hour" to "more than 20 hours" per week.

Q23 Before COVID-19 how much time would you say you spent watching live sports during an average week?

○ < 1 hour (1)

○ 1-3 hours (2)

○ 3-6 hours (3)

○ 6-9 hours (4)

○ 9-12 hours (5)

○ 12-15 hours (6)

○ 15+ hours (7)

The questions regarding different times consuming media will then have a follow-up question regarding the same media outlet, but it will address how much the participant had consumed post-COVID-19stoppage to compare.

Q24 Since sports have returned would you say your average time spent watching live sports has increased or decreased?

○ Extremely increased (6)

○ Moderately increased (5)

○ Slightly increased (4)

○ Slightly decreased (3)

○ Moderately decreased (2)

○ Extremely decreased (1)

This is also the section where questions will determine who an avid user of fantasy sports is and who is not, whether it be fantasy football, basketball, baseball, or through a DFS like FanDuel or DraftKings. After the conditional question asking the participants whether they participate in fantasy sports, there will be questions regarding which fantasy sports they participate in and how heavily indebted to them they are.

Q26 How much time would you say you spent focusing on fantasy sports during an average week? (i.e. setting lineups, checking waivers, researching, etc.)

○ <1 hour (1)

○ 1-3 hours (2)

○ 3-6 hours (3)

○ 6-9 hours (4)

○ 9-12 hours (5)

○ 12-15 hours (6)

○ 15+ hours (7)

Questions like these will help further differentiate the heavily identified sports fan and the social or fair-weather fans both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. After the data is collected and analyzed, these questions can have serious importance when determining whether the depth of identification in the participant rose, dropped or remained the same after COVID-19 flipped the sports world on its axis.

Variable #3 is the change in participants' entertainment during the pandemic: did they cancel their satellite package, did they begin watching other sports because they had resumed instead of their sport of choice that was still delayed, did they move to streaming services instead of cable television did they start a new hobby to take the place of sports media. These questions will be multiple choice and Yes/No questions regarding the participants newly found free time after the forced stoppage of sports during the Spring and Summer of 2020.

Open-ended questions give a closer look into what certain fans did with their time during the forced seclusion across most of the United States. And although there are limitless options as to what someone can do with their free time, especially when a pandemic provides such extra free time, it is important to put the focus on certain options such as streaming services, reading and working from home because those involve different media outlets that the participant is replacing sports media with.

With many young people preferring to opt out of classic TV subscription packages and instead move toward streaming and online services, it will be these questions that help reaffirm previous studies regarding the massive switch to streaming and online media or possibly the data could show that the pandemic has brought a change of pace and returned many people to classical ways of receiving sports media at home (Pisharody, 2013).

The questions concerning changes in media consumption will lead directly into the discussion regarding the participants' dependence on specific media and whether that dependence nurtured the participant during the forced solitude or if they moved off the selected media choice for another option. With COVID-19 shutting down businesses, keeping people from work, and taking a toll on the average American's wallet there was a high chance that participants were forced to cut costs somewhere in their lives, there could be data in this section of questions that media members and researchers find valuable.

By the end of the survey, there will be a full slate of information that will help gauge the different variables of each participant through the collection of their answers. Variable 1, the amount of money the participant has spent on their sport or team or athlete, will be measured through questions with monetary answers. This will lead to a variety of sums that can help

determine how identified the participant is with their sport or team or athlete when added up and construed.

For example, Participant A spent more than $200 last year on sports packages to watch their team play, they also averaged roughly $500 on merchandise and attending games in the past season. After sports returned, they continued purchasing merchandise and found ways to donate more money to their sport or team or athlete of choice; this participant could be viewed as a vested fan who does not mind spending money on their team because they are profoundly committed to them.

Meanwhile, Participant B has never spent money on any sports package and did not even spend $100 on their team's merchandise or money on attending any events last season. This participant would be ranked much lower than Participant A as far as identification goes because of their passive relationship with their team and their decision to spend their money elsewhere.

After revealing their spending habits on their sport or team or athlete of choice, there comes the next section of questions that revolve around Variable 2: time spent consuming sports media before and after the emergence of COVID-19. With these questions having specific time frames (e.g., 2–4 hours, 10+ hours, etc.), there will be sufficient data to compare the participants' time dedicated to their fanhood as well as some information about their dependence on sports media. This is another viable routine to find the depth of identification fans have with their sports or team or athlete and the commitment they have to them through their choices regarding their time and how they choose to spend it.

For example, Participant A is a student and a football fan. Before COVID-19, they would spend upwards of 15 hours per week consuming sports media specific to their favorite sport or team; they obviously had other options to fill their time with (i.e., homework, class time,

studying, etc.), but their average time spent consuming sports media shows they were indebted to the sport and their team of choice, making them a focused fan at the very least. After sports returned from their forced hiatus, Participant A now averages between 10 and 12 hours consuming sports media per week, which shows a drop in consumption but still shows they are committed and dedicated to the sport.

Meanwhile, Participant B is out of school and makes roughly $65,000 per year, meaning they have a job that should take up much of their work week and possibly some of their weekend. But unlike Participant A, they only spent 3 to 4 hours per week consuming sports media before and after COVID-19 postponed all sports. This would make them appear less dedicated to their sport or their team and less of a fanatic than Participant A.

Finally, the questions regarding Variable 3, entertainment changes, can lead to discussions about dependency in sports media and what a pandemic forcing consumers inside can do to certain media. The questions about media changes give multiple options to the participant about how they spent their time before, during, and after COVID-19 postponed sports. By comparing the results from all three times, possible trends like ditching traditional media such as cable TV or newspapers for mediums such as streaming services or podcasts appear. There are also open-ended answers available on many questions in this section to see the difference in fans' habits; giving the participants the same media choices (i.e., streaming services, cable, magazines, etc.) doesn't allow the participant the chance to truly share what media they might have consumed instead of their preferred sports media pre-COVID. Through this survey we could get a true glimpse of what people did during the forced isolation other than just watch Hulu or read a book.

For example, Participant A, age 24, used to own a sports TV package through their satellite TV company. Because of the cost of it and lack of sports being provided, they canceled their subscription and, instead, switched to paying less for two separate streaming services (let's say Netflix and YouTube TV). But this means they can no longer can watch every football game per week.

Meanwhile, Participant B, aged 42, used to read newspapers and magazines for 5 to 10 hours a week before COVID-19. During the stay-at-home orders, they purchased a brand new TV and they now subscribe to NFL Sunday Ticket to watch all NFL games played. This shows they may not be as dependent on traditional print media as they once were before the pandemic; this also shows that Participant B is growing from a social fan to a focused fan or may even be on their way to becoming a vested fan.

Throughout the survey, the questions posed to the participants are gaining information about their media habits, their sports fanaticism, and their media dependence that will all be compared and correlated between their own answers and answers from other participants. With the variables in play, there is no doubt that plenty of useful data may come out of this survey for any sort of future research, including how media outlets like DirecTV or Time Warner Cable may be able to retain customers if another shutdown or a similar scenario occurs. With this data, there will be a surplus of questions that show what the normal sports fan does with their time and their hard-earned money that could possibly help future researchers study daily habits of people who are infatuated with sports. Overall, this study aims to find out more about the sports fan and how the pandemic affected their media usage, monetary spending, love of sports, and their fanhood.

Chapter 4 - Results

Of the 400 respondents who were surveyed through the online survey tool Amazon Mechanical Turk (M-Turk), nine did not complete the entire survey, which made their responses ineligible. There were also four eligible participants who preferred not to answer the gender question or the age question, lowering the total sample size to 387 respondents.

Demographic Information

As shown in Table 1, the sample ($n = 387$) consists of 67.4% males ($n = 261$), 32.3% females ($n = 125$) and one participant who identifies as non-binary or a different gender than male or female, making up just .3% of the sample size ($n = 1$). Of these 387 respondents, almost half are between the ages of 25 and 34 (45.2%, $n = 175$). The next largest age group was the 35 to 44 year olds with 29.8% (n = 115), and after them the 45 to 54 year olds at 13.7% ($n = 53$). The remaining three age categories contain just over 11% of the respondents with 55 to 64 year olds (n = 21) leading the trio with 5.4%. After that age group, the 18 to 24 year olds (2.8%, $n = 11$) and 65+ participants (n = 12) combine to round out the final 6%.

Almost three quarters of the respondents identified as being white or Caucasian (73.1%, $n = 286$), while the next highest ethnicity reported, Black or African American, only contained 12.3% of the respondents (n = 48). Next, 6.7% of the respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino (n = 26), 4.3% were Asian or Pacific Islander (n = 17), and 2.6% were Native American (n = 10). Also, only 1% identified as something other than these ethnicities (n = 4).

Most of the respondents reported having a bachelor's degree (60.4%, $n = 236$) or at least some manner of college or trade/technical school (18.1%, $n = 71$). No participant reported having anything less than a high school education, but 7.2% of the respondents did report having

only a high school diploma or had gotten their G.E.D (n = 28); on the flip side, 14.3% of the

respondents reported achieving their master's or doctorate degree (n = 56).

Table 1

Descriptive Information for Respondents' Demographics

		Frequency (n)	*Percent (%)*
Gender	Male	261	67.4
	Female	125	32.3
	Non-binary or third gender	1	.3
	Total	387	100.0
Age	18–24	11	2.8
	25–34	175	45.2
	35–44	115	29.8
	45–54	53	13.7
	55–64	21	5.4
	65 or older	12	3.1
	Total	387	100.0
Education Level	High School Diploma/GED	28	7.2
	Some college / Trade school / technical school	71	18.1
	Bachelor's degree	236	60.4
	Graduate degree (master's or doctorate)	56	14.3
	Total	391	100.0
Race/Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	286	73.1
	Black or African American	48	12.3
	Hispanic or Latino	26	6.7
	Native American	10	2.6
	Asian or Pacific Islander	17	4.3
	Other	4	1.0
	Total	391	100

The first hypothesis predicted that the more participants identify with their sports team or athlete, the more likely they will be to attend games during or after the restart. Team allegiance or fanhood was measured with three questions that asked respondents how often they stayed updated on their favorite team or athlete, how likely it was for them to watch every game or match that their favorite team or athlete played, and how much money they would spend to attend games before COVID-19. These results were combined to create a separate variable, labeled allegiance, which took the mean of the three questions' results and put them on a scale of 1–7, with seven being the most vested fans and one being the lowest possible identification ($M = 4.82, SD = .968$). For the purpose of the survey the participants that tested between 1–3 were considered social fans (low identification), 3.1–5 are considered focused fans (medium identification), and 5.1–7 as the more vested fans (high identification). With allegiance as a new control variable, the respondents were asked how many games they had attended since COVID-19 entered the United States; and, whether they had or not, they were asked if they planned on attending any live games within the next season, and if so, how many.

A Pearson correlation was computed to test the relationship between the strength of team allegiance in fans and the likelihood to attend games after the restarting of sports. A significant positive correlation was found between the participants' allegiance to a team and their likelihood of attending a professional or collegiate sports event now, with $r(391) = 479, p<.001$. H1 was supported.

H2 predicted that the more participants identify with their sports team or athlete, the less likely they will be to watch other teams during the restart of sports. A Pearson correlation was computed to test the relationship between the strength of team allegiance in fans and viewing other games that do not involve their favorite team or player. The analysis found a significant,

moderate positive relationship between sports fans of specific teams or athletes and watching other games or sports after the return from COVID-19, $r(391) = .372$, $p<.001$. H2 was not supported. The more a fan identified with a team, the more likely they were to still watch other teams or sports during the restart.

The third hypothesis predicted that respondents who actively participated in fantasy sports would feel more gratification from sports returning than nonfantasy participants. On a 6-point Likert scale, respondents were asked to rank their gratification levels regarding certain experiences associated with watching sports, all of which fall into the eight gratification categories: escape, economic, eustress, self-esteem, group affiliation, entertainment, family, and aesthetics.

T-Tests were computed to test the differences in each gratification between users and nonusers of fantasy sports. As H3 predicted, the analysis found a significant difference in gratification amongst the fantasy sports participants in most categories (see Table 2). Watching sports to because to keep tradition was the strongest gratification felt by fantasy sports participants once sports returned ($M = 5.63, SD = 1.244$) compared to nonfantasy sports users ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.798$), $t(382)=-5.106, p<.001$). The 'escape' gratification was a close second for fantasy sports users ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.246$) and was also a commonly felt gratification by nonfantasy sports users as well ($M = 4.92, SD = 1.817$), $t(382)=-4.189, p<.001$). The gratification of just passing time with sports media was also high with fantasy sports users ($M = 5.53, SD = 1.336$) compared to nonfantasy members ($M = 5.03, SD = 1.657$), $t(376)=-3.215, p<.05$. And so was ending boredom for fantasy sports users ($M = 5.50, SD = 1.361$) compared to nonfantasy sports users ($M = 4.88, SD = 1.797$), $t(381)=-3.694, p<.001$.

Returning sports were also more likely to gratify fantasy sports fans' need to connect with family and friends *(M = 5.42, SD = 1.256* vs. *M = 5.10, SD = 1.663, t(379)=-2.132, p<.05).* Not only that, fantasy sports users were more likely to feel more gratification from feeling like part of a fan community *(M = 5.32, SD = 1.333)* compared to nonfantasy sports member *(M = 4.60, SD = 1.948), t(383)=-4.303, p<.001).* Fantasy sports users also wanted to know what others are/will be saying about the game *(M = 5.30, SD = 1.459)* more than nonfantasy users *(M = 4.35, SD = 1.888), t(382)=-5.574, p<.001.* And finally boosting self-esteem was found to be significantly different between fantasy sports users *(M = 4.95, SD = 1.678)* and nonfantasy sports participants *(M = 3.31, SD = 1.997), , t(372)=-8.654, p<.001).*

Although the third hypothesis was correct in 80% of the responses, there were two outlier gratifications where nonfantasy sport users scored higher than fantasy sports participants, but the differences were not statistically significant: to cheer on my favorite team, *t(382)= .478, p=.705,* and purely for entertainment, *t(380)=1.504, p=.594.* H3 is partially supported.

Table 2
Differences between fantasy sports participants and nonparticipants in gratifications satisfied by returning sports

	Fantasy Sport Participants		Nonfantasy Sport Participants		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T-Test*
It's a form of tradition	5.63	1.244	4.83	1.798	-4.831****
To escape stress or anxiety	5.57	1.246	4.92	1.817	-3.951***
To pass time	5.53	1.336	5.03	1.657	-3.105**
To end boredom	5.50	1.361	4.88	1.797	-3.694****
To connect with	5.42	1.256	5.10	1.663	-2.043**

family/friend					
To feel part of a community	5.32	1.333	4.60	1.948	-4.062****
To know what others are saying/will say	5.30	1.459	4.35	1.888	-5.351****
To boost self-esteem	4.95	1.678	3.31	1.997	-8.441****
To cheer on my favorite team	5.79	1.183	5.85	1.357	.478
Purely for entertainment	5.61	1.103	5.79	1.249	1.504

**p<.05, ****p<.001

The fourth hypothesis predicted fantasy sports users will be more dependent on sports media after the cancellation than nonfantasy-sports fans.

A T-Test was computed to determine the increase in time spent watching live sports and sports media between nonfantasy sports users and fantasy sports participants. The analysis showed a significant difference between fantasy sports participants' use of media (*M = 4.54, SD = 1.130)* compared to than nonfantasy sports participants (*M = 3.78, SD = 1.124), t(385)=-6.576, p<.05.* Another T-Test was performed to test differences between nonfantasy users and fantasy sports participants in their likelihood to watch every match when sports returned. The analysis showed that fantasy sports users (*M = 4.640, SD = 1.124)* were more likely than nonfantasy sports users (*M = 3.960, SD = 1.411)* to try to watch every game, or match, when sports returned, *t*(384)=-5.074, *p*<.001. H4 is supported.

The last hypothesis helped reaffirm Armfield and McGuire's 2014 study that fantasy sports participants—specifically for football—are more likely to spend money on sports events and sports media. After a t-test was performed on the spending differences between fantasy

sports users (*M = 2.730, SD = 1.366*) and nonfantasy sports users (*M = 1.73, SD = 1.080),*

t(386) = *p<.001,* it was clear to see that fantasy sports participants value sports more, even after

a pandemic has afflicted the entire world.

RQ1 asked what gratification was missed the most by sports fans. To determine which

gratifications were missed the most, the respondents were asked what gratifications they felt

when watching sports before COVID-19, then they were asked what gratifications they missed

most during the sports hiatus.

RQ1a asked which gratification participants felt while watching sports before COVID-19

paused all sports. On a 6-point Likert scale, sports fans were asked to rate their gratification level

for each of the different gratifications that came from watching sports media before the COVID-

19 pandemic, all of which fall into the eight gratification categories: escape, economic, eustress,

self-esteem, group affiliation, entertainment, family, and aesthetics. Descriptive analysis (see

Table 3) showed that the most common gratifications felt by fans before the COVID-19

pandemic was the feeling of cheering on their favorite team *(M = 5.92, SD = 1.115)* and

watching purely for entertainment *(M = 5.87, SD = 1.180).* These top two gratifications fall

under the gratification categories of group affiliation (cheering on favorite team) and

entertainment. The least common gratifications felt by fans before COVID-19 was knowing what

others will say/are saying about the game *(M = 4.87, SD = 1.704)* and boosting self-esteem *(M =*

4.220, SD = 2.027).

Table 3

Gratifications felt by sports fans before the cancellation of sports, in descending order

Gratifications felt pre-COVID	*M*	*SD*
Cheering on favorite team	5.92	1.115
Purely for entertainment	5.87	1.180
To pass the time	5.31	1.430
Keeping up tradition	5.26	1.522
To escape from stress and anxiety	5.25	1.524
Connecting with family/friends	5.25	1.451
Ending boredom	5.09	1.581
Feeling like part of fan community	5.03	1.548
To know what others are/will be saying about the game	4.87	1.704
To boost self-esteem	4.22	2.027

RQ1b asked what gratifications sports fans missed most during the cancellation of sports.

On a 6-point Likert scale, sports fans were asked to rate their gratification level for each of the different gratifications that come from watching sports media, all of which fall into the eight gratification categories: escape, economic, eustress, self-esteem, group affiliation, entertainment, family, and aesthetics. Descriptive analysis (see Table 4) showed that what sports fans missed the most was the chance to cheer on their favorite team (*M = 5.820, SD = 1.255)*, followed by missing sports purely for entertainment (*M = 5.69, SD = 1.166)*. After these two desired gratifications there is an abrupt drop off in means and standard deviations across the rest of gratifications, with self-esteem motivations scoring the lowest *(M = 4.26, SD = 1.995)*.

Table 4

Gratifications that sports fans missed the most during the cancellation of sports, in descending order

Gratifications missed	M	SD
Cheering on favorite team	5.82	1.255
Purely for entertainment	5.69	1.166
To pass the time	5.33	1.495
To escape from stress and anxiety	5.31	1.542
Keeping up tradition	5.30	1.548
Connecting with family/friends	5.29	1.448
Ending boredom	5.25	1.584
Feeling like part of fan community	5.02	1.654
To know what others are/will be saying about the game	4.91	1.716
To boost self-esteem	4.26	1.995

The second research question asked which sports media younger participants, age 18–34 years old, depended on most during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to older participants (35+ years old). Overall, descriptive analysis found that cable TV, national TV, and websites were the top choices of older fans, with no significant differences from younger consumers (see Table 5). Social media emerged as the top source for younger fans, and independent-sample t-tests found a significant difference in the amount of social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter) that young people consume (*M = 5.34, SD = 1.693)* compared to older participants (*M = 4.77, SD = 2.114)*, *t*(384) = -2.93, *p* < .001.

As shown in Table 5, the t-test analysis revealed that younger participants consume podcasts (*M = 4.09, SD = 2.049)* more than older participants (*M = 3.84, SD = 2.285)*, *t*(383) = -1.09, *p* < .001. The analysis also reveals that the younger crowd is also consuming more blogs (*M = 4.22, SD = 2.095)* than older ones are (*M = 3.95, SD = 2.323)*, *t*(383) = -1.18, *p* < .05. Surprisingly, younger fans consume more sports content via newspapers (*M = 3.85, SD = 2.174)* than their older counterparts (*M = 3.63, SD = 2.355)* , *t*(383) = -.956, *p* < .05.

Table 5: Differences in sports media choices between older and younger sports fans

Media choices	**Older fans**			**Younger fans**		
	M	*SD*		*M*	*SD*	*T-Test*
Magazines	3.41	2.284		3.74	2.228	-1.420
Newspaper (print)	3.63	2.355		3.85	2.174	-.956**
Blogs	3.95	2.323		4.22	2.095	-1.181**
Social Media	4.77	2.114		5.34	1.693	-2.930****
Podcasts	3.84	2.285		4.09	2.049	-1.090****
Nat'l TV (ABC, CBS, NBC)	5.14	1.812		4.89	1.756	1.416
Local television	4.89	1.963		4.56	1.951	1.640
Radio	4.34	2.186		4.01	2.116	1.536
Cable or Satellite TV (i.e., ESPN, ESPN 2)	5.53	1.749		5.28	1.651	1.420
Websites of major	5.05	1.908		4.67	1.930	1.936

news/magazine

**p<.05, ****p<.001*

The t-tests found nonsignificant differences between older participants (*M = 5.14, SD = 1.812)* and younger participants (*M = 4.89, SD = 1.756)* in terms of sports media consumption through national television channels like ABC, CBS, and NBC, *t*(385) = 1.42, *p = .833*. They also showed no significant differences between older respondents (*M = 4.89, SD = 1.963*) and younger respondents (*M = 4.56, SD = 1.951*) regarding watching more sports media through local television, *t*(385) = 1.64, *p = .241*.

On top of those forms of television, the t-tests also showed nonsignificant differences in how much satellite television older participants (*M = 5.53, SD = 1.749)* consume compared to younger participants (*M = 5.28, SD = 1.651*) now that sports have returned, *t*(384) = 1.42, *p = .614*.

Lastly, the t-tests showed nonsignificant differences between older respondents (*M = 4.34, SD = 2.186)* and younger respondents (*M = 4.01, SD = 2.116*) when regarding consuming sports media through the radio, *t*(382) = 1.54, *p = .817*.

RQ3 asked whether the more allegiant fans would still spend more money on attending live sports events after the restart compared to the amount they spent on average before COVID-19. Two Pearson correlations were computed to determine the relationship between a fan's allegiance to a team and the amount of money the fan would be willing to spend to attend a live sports event. Data analysis showed that before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant positive relationship between allegiant fans and spending money to attend live events with r(392) = .639., p<.001. The analyses also showed a significant positive relationship between allegiant

fans and spending money on live attendance at games after the postponement of sports ended, but the relationship wasn't as strong, r(392) = .473, p<.001. Indeed, a one-sample t-test comparing spending before the pandemic and after found that on a 6-point scale, where 1 = under $100 and 6 = over $750, which showed allegiant fans were likely to spend slightly more before COVID-19 (*M = 2.53, SD = 1.232)* than they were after the restart of sports (*M = 2.24, SD = 1.223)*. So although the average amount of money spent on live attendance went down it was still positive and significant both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic stopped sports in their tracks.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This study examined the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic had on sports fans and their allegiance to their team as well as to their preferred medium to consume sports media, whether it be television, fantasy sports, or even social media. The main purpose of this study was to apply the uses and gratifications theory, as well as media dependency theory, to determine the immediate effects that COVID-19 had on sports fans in their habits and attitude toward sports media after sports were postponed and after sports ultimately returned later in the year 2020.

The other purpose of this study was to examine whether the COVID-19 pandemic deterred sports fans from attending games or continuing their fanhood at the same level that they did before the pandemic. With these ideas in mind, the survey that was employed to answer these questions revolved around the fans' overall allegiance to their team through the lenses of money spent, time devoted, and gratifications felt before, during and after the pandemic shut down sports momentarily.

The first hypothesis was supported and showed that fans who heavily identified with their team, also known as vested fans were more likely to attend games sooner after the restart of

sports than those who would be classified as social fans or focused fans (Sutton, 1997). This data, for the most part, shows that the more invested, loyal, and allegiant fans are to their favorite team or player, the more likely they would put aside the risks that come with large gatherings in the post-COVID world that is not yet 100% vaccinated. The risk of contracting COVID-19 is not only still prevalent with the use of masks, as well as the newly instilled social distancing aspects, but the single-game ticket prices after the return of sports rose across the NFL and multiple other sports in cities around the country (Gough, 2021) so vested fans are willing to spend more to attend a large gathering of strangers for their favorite team.

The second hypothesis was the only one to not be supported, and in doing so, it showed that respondents who identify heavily with their favorite team would in fact watch other sporting events when their favorite team returned from the COVID-19 hiatus. This supports the media dependency literature, suggesting that the ritual of watching sports is well ingrained, and the return of any type of sports programming, regardless of sport or team, allows sports lovers, regardless of their allegiance, to get "their fix" and regain a semblance of normality. The highest reported gratification that respondents experienced before COVID-19—and longed for the most during the absence of sports—was the feeling of "cheering on my favorite team," which the original hypothesis predicted would hold true once their favorite teams returned to playing. With that being said, the gratification that was second-most felt and second-most missed by fans in this survey was "purely for entertainment". The entertainment gratification is likely the main reasoning behind this nonsupportive data.

In terms of gratifications fulfilled among fantasy sports fans and nonfans, the most likely explanation for the first outlier, "cheering on my favorite team," is that fantasy sports participants' loyalty to their fantasy team outweighs their support and loyalty to their favorite

real team because of the fact that their fantasy team is filled with players from all around the league and not one team. So, a fantasy sports participant's loyalty to cheering on a favorite team would likely be a lesser gratifying reason to watch sports after the return from COVID-19's forced hiatus. As for the second outlier, "watching purely for entertainment," fantasy sports participants also watch sports purely for entertainment at a high rate, which is likely because of the COVID-19 pandemic forcing sports off television and movies out of theaters, increasing a desire among the masses for any sort of new entertainment and not mainly among fantasy sports participants. This is also a solid reasoning for the nonsupportive data that H2 uncovered.

"Escaping" through media consumption is one of the most common motivations people have to watch sports or sports media (Wann et al., 2008), and this holds true in this study, especially amongst fantasy sports players, who are people who are essentially already escaping through the act of being a fantasy sports team owner or commissioner. This makes the correlation between them and looking forward to "escaping" through sports television self-evident and understandable.

As mentioned in the literature review, watching sports and sports media—especially with family—can be a form of tradition, especially if one is consuming sports media with family or friends regularly at home or in person. With that in mind, fantasy sports users most likely have their own traditions or familial habits that were missed or lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, which would explain why "keeping tradition" was a largely reported gratification among fantasy sports participants.

For this study, the respondents age 18–34 were classified as younger and anyone over 35 as older. The data analysis revealed that roughly half—52%—of the respondents were 35 or older, which yielded a more even sample size on both ends of the comparison. Also, the age

group under 35 captures young millennials and Generation Z individuals, who are also known as digital natives and share similar views on key social and policy issues (Parker, Graf, & Igielnik, 2019), while the older age groups capture Generation X and Baby Boomers, who are more likely to have families, own homes, and have a larger disposable income. The study revealed significant differences in media choices between younger and older consumers of sports. Younger participants preferred social media, podcasts and blogs more than those past the age of 35, most likely because younger participants have grown up with these technological advancements and consume them with much more ease than older participants. For instance, podcasts and blogs typically cover specific or specialized topics relevant to certain viewers (i.e., podcasts dedicated to specific football teams, or blogs dedicated to game days in Alabama), and younger participants most likely know where to find such specific topics while older participants may not, or they may not be as intrigued by them.

These platforms also tend to offer content free of charge. After running a t-test, (see Table 6) to test the difference in younger respondents' (n = 186) annual income (*M = 2.91, SD = 1.533)* and older respondents' (n = 201) annual income (*M = 3.31, SD = 1*.630), t(385)=2.479, *p=.*122, data found nonsignificant results that showed younger sports fans have less income to spend, which is likely a factor in what participants consume. Surprisingly, young participants also favored newspapers more than their older counterparts for sports content, although print media was not one of their top media choices. This supports similar findings by Taneja et al. (2018), which found that millennials consume sites of legacy newspapers like the Washington Post and the New York Times more than baby boomers.

Table 6

Differences in annual income between older participants and younger participants

	Old	Young	t	p
Income	3.31	2.91	2.479	.122

Finally, the gratifications that were missed by sports fans showed that group affiliation and entertainment were most lingered upon by all sports fans, and rightfully so after months of not having sports media to consume that was not COVID-19 related. All sports fans seemed to miss gratifications that helped pass time easier, like escaping, passing the time and ending boredom. But what respondents did not seem to miss are gratifications related to self-esteem, aesthetics and—surprisingly—another aspect of group affiliation in the form of "knowing what others are/will be saying about the game." This could be because COVID-19 seemingly ended most opportunities to converse with others about recent sporting events and other news because of social distancing rules and the overall fear of contracting the disease.

Overall, the results of this study revealed that sports fans of all ages, whether they are fantasy users or not, missed the chance to cheer on their favorite team and missed the entertainment that came with regularly scheduled sports programming. The escape gratification proved to still be one of the most redeeming gratifications felt by those watching sports media both before and after sports were postponed by COVID-19. Younger age groups use social media more, which should have been expected. What was not expected was the data that showed younger generations used newspapers more than the older participants surveyed. Users of fantasy sports showed their fan loyalty as well as their vested level of identification within their favorite team after the return of sports.

Limitations

This research used anonymous retrospective self-reports from 400 respondents about their gratifications and media usage behavior; this approach has frequently been criticized as being inherently unreliable. The addition of compensation typically also means respondents' honesty is inherently unreliable. By using a purposive sampling approach through the first five qualifying questions, including the Likert scale question, the validity of the selections improved a little.

Secondly, this study was had a higher percentage filled with males (more 67%), which may have limited the ability to detect more differences between males, females, and any other genders. On another note, the higher response from males identifying as sports fans could simply mean more of them watch, pay for, and love sports more overall. If the study were larger, possibly 1,000 participants, worldwide—not nationwide—then perhaps there would be more diversity (more than 47% of participants were between 18 and 35).

Outside of the surveying limitations, the main limitation to this research study was the lack of available and reliable data over COVID-19 and its effects on media or sports (other than financial estimations), which limited the scope of the thesis overall. With the study beginning in August 2020—just five months after the disease was considered a pandemic by the World Health Organization— information on COVID-19 was still constantly arriving and vacillating, not to mention the return of sports was still being debated and tested in separate sports. The lack of prior research about media dependency surrounding sports was also a limitation that became apparent after beginning the study; there was a large amount of prior research regarding media dependency, especially during crises like World Wars I and II, but there was little-to-none about sports media dependency.

Finally, the limitation that presented the most difficulty was the inability to reproduce prior research to further test theories or introduce new variables. Because of COVID-19, the entire study became survey-based and 100% online. The original idea revolved around in-depth interviews with different sports fans. COVID-19 definitely deterred normalcy during the course of this study and with that came multiple limitations that otherwise would not have been present.

Future Research

With COVID-19 regulations and mandates beginning to ease down in most U.S. states and the rest of the world at the time of publication there will soon be a huge influx of research over every aspect of the coronavirus' effects on the world, whether it be about media, or sports, or anything else that could have been touched by the disease. These studies could unknowingly spark more future research and even possibly some form of policy changes or differences in how people, and governments, prepare for another deadly pandemic or disruptive virus.

This study revealed some noteworthy information about media consumers and their media usage during a national crisis. With national crises like a pandemic or natural disasters, which happen 3x as often as they did 50 years ago (Nguyen, 2021; Food and Agriculture Organization), there is cause to study more about people's media habits while shut inside their home or presented with a deadly airborne virus. While certain media like streaming television and social media rose during the stay-at-home orders, others slid down drastically and although some mediums like newspapers and radio might not be progressing well due to thriving technology there is information in this study that might give them a road map to predict or sustain losses and keep individuals consuming their product, even during a crisis.

Another possibility for further research is the results presented around sports fans and their willingness to throw caution to the wind by exposing themselves to the possibility of

contracting coronavirus for the chance to watch their team perform. Not only that, but they reported they were willing to spend more money to attend these events *before* there were any vaccinations approved by the FDA. Future research could look into the mindset of vested fans and their reasonings for putting sports ahead of their health or family, possibly even tying into previous research over sports as a folk religion.

There is also the issue of fantasy sport participants and the way they handled the COVID-19 pandemic considering they put more effort and money into their media choice (fantasy basketball/football/baseball/etc.) than the average sports fan. With fantasy sports participation dropping from 59.3 million participants to 45.9 million thanks to the arrival of COVID-19 (FSGA, 2020) there is plenty to look at within that drop-off alone: why players quit, where fantasy sport money was reallocated, how fantasy sports companies survived the massive fall in numbers, and more.

There are implications that this study can have on the public's perception about sports during future crises or possible pandemics. The first is the impact that the loss of sports had on sports fans' mental health; with sports being a major outlet for those dealing with stress or anxiety (Décamps, Boujut, & Brisset, 2012) it could be perceived that sports and sports media should find ways to endure the possible situations, as safely as possibly, in order to help the general public's mental health. The study could also have implications for future public health policies, especially regarding social distancing and other health factors at sports events, which could help leagues and organizations sustain more revenue by preparing better. Although a pandemic is very rare (there have been two since 1917) the study can still help future policy makers prepare and predict how a large number of civilians will react to lockdowns, quarantines, or even government-enforced mandates restricting them from their main stress outlets. For

instance, the underground soccer matches during the second World War were the public's way of revolting against lockdowns and stoppages of sports leagues (Tovar, 2021). As far as health policies go there will be plenty to learn from this study, especially when looking at what vested fans will do in order to see and follow their team.

Lastly, there was plenty of additional research found in this study that reaffirmed previous studies over fantasy sports participants and their gratifications from playing fantasy sports as well as their enhanced gratifications from simply viewing sports. The results of this study revealed that the feeling of cheering on one's favorite team was the most missed gratification, and it makes sense why, but with this information comes plenty of questions, like would the same gratifications be missed in different areas of the world than they are in America?

There are endless amounts of possible research that could spawn from the data found over media usage and the uses and gratifications of sports fans, not only that but with the likelihood of another national crisis happening or the extension of COVID-19 through variants make the urgency of this possible research apparent.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 virus had its effects on the world and throughout the pandemic every business and person had to adapt to the new way of living, some were able to do so seamlessly while others struggled. With this new way of life came new ways to reach people, new marketing approaches from major corporations, and an unprecedented amount of free time for countless people across the world. The inability to watch live sports and have a cathartic, emotional release made some sports fans pick up new hobbies while it made others watch new sports or other teams while waiting for their preferred team to return to the screen.

The pandemic also showed where individuals rely most when it comes to media during a crisis as well as how large social media is growing amongst everyone, not just younger people. The study found that younger people depend on social media the most during times of crisis, and in the same situation the older generations will reach for the remote and turn on national or local television. Meanwhile, the main medium that everyone, regardless of age, uses to watch live sports is still TV, but the use of a computer or laptop is rising as the younger generations' preferred medium.

At the end of this study, it was apparent that the more heavily identified fans are with their team, the more they needed sports back to feel happy once again, showing sports can have a positive, significant, and emotional response in human beings. Not only are vested fans more willing to still spend money on sports media and sports merchandise but they are willing to fight against a deadly virus to show their love for their team or favorite player.

With the return of all sports finally completed and second seasons preparing to begin soon, there will be more research performed on the revival of sports and fans in the stands. And not only that, there will likely be plenty of studies done on the increase or decrease in ticket and parking prices, merchandise costs, and food or drink prices inside the stadium because of the massive loss in revenue that every professional and collegiate sports organization felt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a nutshell, the pandemic forced sports media consumers as well as the companies pushing the sports media to take a step back and re-imagine how to return to what the world once was.

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Appendix - Survey Questions

Q1 - Dear Participant: You are invited to take part in a research study regarding sports and media. If you agree to be in this study, you will complete a survey. Survey questions include demographic information and questions regarding consumption of sports and sports media. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Risks and benefits: We do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study. Benefits include helping to add knowledge to research regarding sports media. Your answers will be anonymous, and your identity will be kept confidential. If you have questions, you may contact principal investigator Dr. Raluca Cozma at cozma@ksu.edu or graduate student Shawn O'Brate at obrate@ksu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee Chair, Rick Scheidt, at rscheidt@ksu.edu.

Q2 - Agreement: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I acknowledge that clicking the button "Proceed" indicates that I have read and understand this consent form and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure by clicking the button, "Proceed."

- ○ Proceed (1)

- ○ Exit survey (2)

End of Block: Introduction

Q3 Do you have a favorite professional or collegiate sports team?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

Q4 Out of the following major professional and collegiate sports leagues, I am a fan of...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly disagree (3)	Slightly agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
NBA (National Basketball Association) (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
NFL (National Football League) (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
MLB (Major League Baseball) (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
NHL (National Hockey League) (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) or other forms of MMA (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Boxing (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Professional soccer (MLS, Premier League, etc.) (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
NCAA Basketball (Men's & Women's) (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○
NCAA Football (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q5 Do you have a favorite professional athlete actively playing their sport?

○   Yes (Please specify which sport they play): (1)

_____

○   No (3)

Q6 Before COVID-19 how likely were you to stay updated on your favorite team or athlete? (i.e. following them on social media, receiving notifications and breaking news, etc.)

○   Extremely likely (6)

○   Moderately likely (5)

○   Slightly likely (4)

○   Slightly unlikely (3)

○   Moderately unlikely (2)

○   Extremely unlikely (1)

Q7 Since sports have returned has your likelihood to stay updated on your favorite team or athlete increased or decreased?

○ Extremely increased (6)

○ Moderately increased (5)

○ Slightly increased (4)

○ Slightly decreased (3)

○ Moderately decreased (2)

○ Extremely decreased (1)

Q8 Before COVID-19 how many live sports events would you say you attended during an average calendar year?

○ None (1)

○ 1-3 (2)

○ 4-6 (3)

○ 7-9 (4)

○ 10-12 (5)

○ 13-15 (6)

○ 15+ (7)

Q9 Since sports have returned how many live sports events would you say you have attended?

○ None (1)

○ 1-3 (2)

○ 4-6 (3)

○ 7-9 (4)

○ 10-12 (5)

○ 13-15 (6)

○ 15+ (7)

Q10 If 'None', how likely are you to attend a live sports event within the next calendar year?

○ Extremely likely (6)

○ Moderately likely (5)

○ Slightly likely (4)

○ Slightly unlikely (3)

○ Moderately unlikely (2)

○ Extremely unlikely (1)

Q11 Before the COVID-19 pandemic how likely were you to watch every game (or match) that your favorite team played during a regular season?

○ Extremely likely (6)

○ Moderately likely (5)

○ Slightly likely (4)

○ Slightly unlikely (3)

○ Moderately unlikely (2)

○ Extremely unlikely (1)

Q12 Since sports have restarted has that likelihood to watch every game (or match) increased or decreased?

○ Extremely increased (6)

○ Moderately increased (5)

○ Slightly increased (4)

○ Slightly decreased (3)

○ Moderately decreased (2)

○ Extremely decreased (1)

Q13 Before COVID-19 how likely were you to watch games (or matches) between teams that were NOT your favorite team or did NOT have your favorite athlete on their roster?

○ Extremely likely (6)

○ Moderately likely (5)

○ Slightly likely (4)

○ Slightly unlikely (3)

○ Moderately unlikely (2)

○ Extremely unlikely (1)

Q14 Since sports have restarted has that likelihood to watch other teams' games (or matches) increased or decreased?

○ Extremely increased (6)

○ Moderately increased (5)

○ Slightly increased (4)

○ Slightly decreased (3)

○ Moderately decreased (2)

○ Extremely decreased (1)

End of Block: Fan Identification

Start of Block: Variable #1 - Money spent on sports

Q15 BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began what was the maximum amount of money you would spend to attend one of your favorite team's games?

○ $0 - $100 (1)

○ $101 - $200 (2)

○ $201 - $300 (3)

○ $301 - $400 (4)

○ $401 - $500 (5)

○ $501 - $750 (6)

○ $751 - $1000 (7)

○ $1000+ (8)

Q16 Before the COVID-19 pandemic began what was the maximum amount of money you would spend on your favorite team's sports merchandise (i.e. jerseys, hats, knick-knacks) or sports memorabilia (ex: autographed jerseys or football)?

○ $0 - $100 (1)

○ $101 - $200 (2)

○ $201 - $300 (3)

○ $301 - $400 (4)

○ $401 - $500 (5)

○ $501 - $750 (6)

○ $751 - $1000 (7)

○ $1000+ (8)

Q17 Since sports have returned after COVID-19 postponed their seasons how much would you be willing to spend to attend a professional or collegiate sports event now?

○ $0 - $100 (1)

○ $101 - $200 (2)

○ $201 - $300 (3)

○ $301 - $400 (4)

○ $401 - $500 (5)

○ $501 - $750 (6)

○ $751 - $1000 (7)

○ $1000+ (8)

Q18 How likely are you to spend money on fantasy sports? (i.e. Draft Kings, FanDuel, etc.)

○ Extremely likely (6)

○ Moderately likely (5)

○ Slightly likely (4)

○ Slightly unlikely (3)

○ Moderately unlikely (2)

○ Extremely unlikely (1)

Q19 BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic had you ever gambled on sports? (Either through daily fantasy sports or through newly-legalized sports betting)

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Prefer not to say (3)

Q20 If 'Yes', how much money, if any, would you say you won from gambling on sports?

○ Prefer not to say (1)

○ Unsure (2)

○ $1 - $100 (3)

○ $101 - $200 (4)

○ $201 - $300 (5)

○ $301 - $400 (6)

○ $401 - $500 (7)

○ $501 - $750 (8)

○ $751 - $1000 (9)

○ $1000+ (10)

Q21 Since the return of sports have you participated in sports gambling? (Either through daily fantasy sports or through newly-legalized sports betting)

○ Yes (1)

○ Maybe (2)

○ No (3)

○ Prefer not to say (4)

Q22 If 'Yes' how much money, if any, have you won from gambling on sports?

○ Prefer not to say (1)

○ Unsure (2)

○ $1 - $100 (3)

○ $101 - $200 (4)

○ $201 - $300 (5)

○ $301 - $400 (6)

○ $401 - $500 (7)

○ $501 - $750 (8)

○ $751 - $1000 (9)

○ $1000+ (10)

End of Block: Variable #1 - Money spent on sports

Start of Block: Variable 2 - Time spent on sports media

Q23 Before COVID-19 how much time would you say you spent watching live sports during an average week?

○   < 1 hour (1)

○   1-3 hours (2)

○   3-6 hours (3)

○   6-9 hours (4)

○   9-12 hours (5)

○   12-15 hours (6)

○   15+ hours (7)

Q24 Since sports have returned would you say your average time spent watching live sports has increased or decreased?

○   Extremely increased (6)

○   Moderately increased (5)

○   Slightly increased (4)

○   Slightly decreased (3)

○   Moderately decreased (2)

○   Extremely decreased (1)

Q25 Before COVID-19 did you actively participate in any sort of season-long fantasy sport? (i.e. fantasy football, baseball, basketball, etc.)

○ Yes, multiple (1)

○ Yes, just one (2)

○ No (3)

Q26 If you answered either of the 'Yes' options, how much time would you say you spent focusing on fantasy sports during an average week? (i.e. setting lineups, checking waivers, researching, etc.)

○ <1 hour (1)

○ 1-3 hours (2)

○ 3-6 hours (3)

○ 6-9 hours (4)

○ 9-12 hours (5)

○ 12-15 hours (6)

○ 15+ hours (7)

Q27 Since sports have returned would you say your time spent focusing on fantasy sports have increased or decreased?

○ Extremely increased (6)

○ Moderately increased (5)

○ Slightly increased (4)

○ Slightly decreased (3)

○ Moderately decreased (2)

○ Extremely decreased (1)

End of Block: Variable 2 - Time spent on sports media

Start of Block: Variable #3 - Changes in media and entertainment

Q28 What is your preferred media to watch live sports on?

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Television (cable, streaming or satellite) (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Computer / Laptop (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Smartphone / Tablet (3)	○	○	○	○	○
At a sports bar or restaurant (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Other (please specify): (5)	○	○	○	○	○

Q29 Before the COVID-19 pandemic how likely were you to receive sports, or fantasy sports, news from the following sources?

	Extremely unlikely (1)	Moderately unlikely (2)	Slightly unlikely (3)	Slightly likely (4)	Moderately likely (5)	Extremely likely (6)
National television newscasts (ABC, CBS, NBC) (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Local television newscasts (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Newspapers (print) (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Radio (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cable/satellite television newscasts (ESPN, FOX sports, SEC network, etc.) (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Magazines (print) (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Websites of major news / magazine outlets (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Blogs (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Podcasts (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Friends and family (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q30 Since the return of sports how likely are you to receive your sports, or fantasy sports, news from the following sources?

	Extremely Unlikely (1)	Moderately unlikely (2)	Slightly unlikely (3)	Slightly likely (4)	Moderately likely (5)	Extremely likely (6)
National television newscasts (ABC, CBS, NBC) (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Local television newscasts (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Newspapers (print) (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Radio (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cable/satellite television newscasts (ESPN, FOX sports, SEC network, etc.) (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Magazines (print) (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Websites of major news / magazine outlets (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Blogs (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Podcasts (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Friends and family (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q31 Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic how often did you find yourself using different media devices to consume sports media? (i.e. streaming games from websites rather than watch on cable or at a sports bar)

○ Never (1)

○ Rarely (2)

○ Sometimes (3)

○ Often (4)

○ Always (5)

End of Block: Variable #3 - Changes in media and entertainment

Q32 Before COVID-19 shut down sports why would you typically watch live sports events?

(Please respond based on the following scale: (1 - Strongly disagree : 6 - Strongly Agree)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
To feel like I'm part of the fan community (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To cheer on my favorite team (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To know what others are, and will be, saying about the game (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To pass time (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To escape from stress or anxiety (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To connect with family and friends (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○

To boost self-esteem (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Purely for entertainment (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To end boredom (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
It's a form of tradition (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q33 When sports returned from their COVID-19 hiatus I looked forward to watching or attending games mostly because:

(Please respond based on the following scale: (1 - Strongly disagree : 6 - Strongly Agree)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
To feel like I'm part of the fan community (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To cheer on my favorite team (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To know what others are, and will be, saying about the game (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To pass time (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To escape from stress or anxiety (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To connect with family and friends (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○

To boost self-esteem (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Purely for entertainment (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To end boredom (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
It's a form of tradition (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Highly unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Somewhat unlikely (3)	Somewhat likely (4)	Likely (5)	Highly likely (6)
To see the changes regarding COVID-19 regulations (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Because I thoroughly enjoy them (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○

To fit in with others (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is nothing else on or purely for entertainment (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To feel like part of a fan community (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To monitor a bet or fantasy sport outcome (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is a form of tradition (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To escape boredom (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To keep up on my favorite team (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
To escape from	○	○	○	○	○	○

stress/anxiety

(10)

Q34 Since the return of sports, how likely are you to watch/listen to sports media (i.e. highlight shows, podcasts, etc.) for the following reasons?

Q35 Overall, how happy are you that sports have returned?

○ Extremely happy (6)

○ Moderately happy (5)

○ Slightly happy (4)

○ Slightly unhappy (3)

○ Moderately unhappy (2)

○ Extremely unhappy (1)

End of Block: Gratifications from sports media

Start of Block: Demographic Questions

Q36 What is the preferred gender you identify as?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Non-binary / third gender

○ Prefer not to say

Q37 What is your age?

○ Under 18 1)

○ 18 - 24 (2)

○ 25 - 34 (3)

○ 35 - 44 (4)

○ 45 - 54 (5)

○ 55 - 64 (6)

○ 65 - 74 (7)

○ 75 - 84 (8)

○ 85 or older (9)

Q38 What is your ethnicity?

○ White / Caucasian

○ Black or African-American

○ Hispanic or Latino

○ Native American

○ Asian or Pacific Islander

○ Other (Please specify): _____

Q39 What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

○ Less than a high school diploma (1)

○ High School diploma, G.E.D., or equivalent (2)

○ Some college or technical training (3)

○ Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS) (4)

○ Post-graduate work or degree (5)

Q40 What is your current employment status?

○ Full-time (40+ hrs/wk)

○ Part-time

○ Unemployed

○ Student

○ Retired

○ Self-employed (entrepreneur)

○ Unable to work

○ Prefer not to say

Q41 What is your marital status?

○ Single

○ Married

○ Divorced

○ Widowed

○ In a relationship

○ Other

Q42 What is your household income to your best approximation?

○ Less than $10,000/yr (1)

○ $10,000 - $19,999/yr (2)

○ $20,000 - $29,999/yr (3)

○ $30,000 - $39,999/yr (4)

○ $40,000 - $49,999/yr (5)

○ $50,000 - $59,999/yr (6)

○ $60,000 - $74,999/yr (7)

○ $75,000 - $99,999/yr (8)

○ More than $100,000/yr (9)

Q43 In which state do you currently reside?

▼ Alabama (1) ... I do not reside in the United States (53)

End of Block: Demographic Questions