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**A study of information behaviour in the Fantasy
Premier League community**

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Abstract

Introduction

Using Stebbins' concept of 'serious leisure' and Savolainen's concept of everyday life information seeking', this study investigates the information behaviour of Fantasy Premier League players and explores the role the online fan community plays in this behaviour.

Method

A mixed method approach was taken which included a questionnaire and semi structured interviews. 115 questionnaire responses were collected, and 8 interviews were conducted by videocall. Participants were asked to describe their information practices and the sources they used each week.

Analysis

Qualitative analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts and triangulation occurred with the results of the questionnaire.

Results

Results show a preference for distinctive information behaviours, a preference for informal sources and differences between casual players and those active in the online community. The role of Twitter in the information behaviour of players was notable.

Conclusions

The study shows that players use exhibit distinctive and sophisticated information behaviours and that online communities are increasingly important sites of information in serious leisure contexts.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This small-scale research study focuses on the information behaviour exhibited by players of the Fantasy Premier League online fantasy sports game. Fantasy sports are competitions in which participants select an imaginary 'team' from among a league's athletes. Points are awarded based on the athletes' real-life performances. Fantasy sports players compete against each other to gather the most 'fantasy points'. They do this by selecting athletes for their 'team' who they predict will perform well statistically. Those who most successfully predict athletes' performances, are those most likely to be successful in the game.

Fantasy sports today are significant global phenomena with many millions of players around the world. Each week competitors navigate a complex information environment to inform their game decisions. Participants look to gain an advantage by seeking information to help them predict athlete performances. This can take the form of news about an athlete's injury, analysis of their recent statistical performances, research into the difficulty of upcoming fixtures, or a host of other factors.

As Otto, Metz & Ensmenger (2011) note, fantasy sports themselves consist of a layer of statistical information which is placed over sports. The games use the statistical data generated by 'real-life' sports to create a new competition, which rewards fans for their knowledge. As such, they are information-rich environments which require high levels of information literacy of their players (Waelchi, 2008).

The idea to study this area was partially inspired by the researcher's own experiences as a Fantasy Premier League player and member of the fan community: the #FPLCommunity. It was noticed that this online community expends remarkable amounts of time and effort collectively seeking and sharing information to inform their hobby. It is notable the extent to which players will go to gain an information advantage over rivals, utilising innovative information behaviours (Whittaker, 2021).

It is an observation which has been made before in literature. Waelchi (2008) described fantasy football as the 'librarians sport of choice'. He demonstrates that the skills exhibited by fantasy football players correspond notably with recognised information literacy standards, a fact which provides librarians with opportunities to improve information literacy skills teaching. Jacobsen (2017) makes similar observations after interviewing 3 librarians/fantasy sport players about their information practices.

All of this suggests that fantasy sport could be a productive area of study for LIS. There have been many studies conducted into the information behaviour of hobbyists, yet few have explored the area of fantasy sport (Mansourian, 2020). Studies of fantasy sport have the potential to be particularly valuable as, unlike many other hobbies, they are a competition and information is a key factor to success. Those who perform the most successful research, are directly rewarded by competitive success in game.

Only one previous study has been conducted into information behaviour in fantasy sport. Hirsh, Anderson & Caselli (2012) focussed on American sports, but this study was conducted at a time when social media was in its infancy as a source of fantasy sport information. Nine years later the landscape much different, as social media now appears to play a key role for many participants.

This study will focus on players of just one fantasy sport, the English Premier League's official fantasy football league: Fantasy Premier League (FPL). FPL currently has over 8 million players (Premier League, 2021). It is difficult to measure the number of fans actively engaging with the fan community online, however some indication can be found via social media numbers. The official Fantasy Premier League Twitter account has 2.8 million followers, while the official Facebook page has 1.7million followers (Fantasy Premier League, 2021a; Fantasy Premier League, 2021b). The Fantasy Premier

League Reddit discussion page has over 500k members, while a community YouTube channel 'Let's Talk FPL' has over 250k subscribers (Let's Talk FPL, 2021; Reddit, 2021). These numbers suggest there is a thriving community on social media and that a significant percentage of the game's players are engaged with it to some extent.

The purpose of the study is to form an understanding of Fantasy Premier League players information behaviour. This includes the way they encounter, gather, share and process information during their FPL play. This involves both identifying information sources preferred by individuals and exploring the role the online community plays in these behaviours. The study also seeks to establish whether, and in which ways, there are distinctions between those players who are active members of the online community and those who are not.

To achieve this a mixed methods approach was taken. Firstly, a review was undertaken which examined the previously existing literature relating to fantasy sport information and of information behaviour in a serious leisure context. This was followed by an online questionnaire which asked participants to identify the importance of a variety of information sources to their play. The quantitative research was designed to complement a qualitative element. Online semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore information practices of participants in more depth, and to examine the impact of the fan community upon them.

This study contributes to, and brings up to date, what was previously known about the information behaviour of a little studied, but information-rich population: fantasy sport participants. It is also a contribution to the literature on information behaviour in a serious leisure context and of fan communities. The competitive nature of information seeking in fantasy sport is a relatively unique feature in a serious leisure context and in fan behaviour, making it particularly worthy of study. If the research is to be of any practical value it might help to highlight the ways humans increasingly use social media for their information needs, which might be of benefit to those designing information services. It also highlights the potential for using competition as way to encourage information literacy, something librarians are always seeking to do.

Aims and Scope

The aim of this study is to investigate the information behaviour of Fantasy Premier League players. It aims to explore the ways they seek out, share, and use information to inform their fantasy football decisions. It also seeks to explore the role of the online fan community in fantasy football information behaviour. In doing so, the intention is to contribute towards an understanding of information behaviour in serious leisure, and among fan communities.

Objectives

1. To investigate the information behaviour of Fantasy Premier League players; Particularly to identify information sources used and favoured by players.
2. To explore the factors which motivate player's information activities.
3. To consider the role of the social media fan community in player's information behaviour.
4. To suggest if, and in what ways, the findings might contribute to an understanding of information behaviour in serious leisure.

Scope and Definitions

This study is focussed on players of the English Premier League's official fantasy football game 'Fantasy Premier League' (FPL). Although the majority of participants are based in the UK, recruitment took place in online forums and participation was welcome to players from overseas.

Two definitions presented by Bawden & Robinson (2012) inform this study's conception of Information Behaviour. It is "the many ways in which human beings interact with information, in particular the ways people seek out and use information" (Bates, 2010, 2381). This includes both active and passive information seeking and information use (Wilson, 2000). This broad interpretation allows for the study of participants' practices holistically, as is appropriate for the study of information behaviour in such a modern and 'online' community.

The term 'Fantasy Premier League community' refers to anyone involved in playing the game but most specifically refers to those active in the online fan community. This community is a notable feature of fantasy football information; the relationship between it and the information behaviour of individual players are an important element of the study.

Because fantasy football is an 'fantasy' information layer placed over sport, difficulties of language can emerge, meaning it is useful to clarify terms before the project begins. Describing players of fantasy football as 'players', can sometimes lead to confusion when the same terminology is also used to describe real-life footballers. To avoid this confusion, the terms 'athletes' or 'footballers' are used to describe the real-life sportsmen.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will explore what is currently known about the research topic and will assess what existing literature might tell us about the information behaviour of Fantasy Premier League players. As FPL is an example of a fantasy sport, literature relating to information behaviour in other fantasy sports will be considered. Fantasy sport can be considered an example of a 'serious leisure' activity, therefore literature emerging from the study of 'serious leisure' will also be included (Mansourian, 2021).

The first section of this review will focus on the conceptual background of the research. The study is situated within Savolainen's model of 'Everyday Life Information Seeking' (ELIS) and this perspective, and its approach to human information behaviour, will be explained. As will the concept of serious leisure, which is also valuable to this study as the context of the research. Subsequent sections will review the literature relating to research objectives 1-3. The discussion chapter will address object 4, where the results of this review will also be combined with the findings of the empirical research. Finally, the results of the literature review will be summarised to explain what is currently known about research topic and to identify gaps in what is currently known.

Conceptual background

ELIS

The study of human information behaviour originally emerged from 'user studies'. These were attempts by libraries and information services to survey the information needs and habits of their users. The hope was that collecting this information would lead to the creation of better services for users, which were more responsive to their needs (Wilson, 2000). Perhaps understandably, the initial focus of information behaviour studies were largely academic and professional groups, particularly those within the STEM subjects (Bawden & Robinson, 2012).

However, beginning in the 1970s more interest started to be paid to information seeking in non-work settings. As Savolainen (1995) notes it can be argued that questions of non-work information seeking deserve equal attention. There are many important activities not relating to professional tasks such as healthcare and hobbies. Initial surveys revealed that people tended to prefer informal information sources for their everyday needs and rarely sought assistance from public libraries (Savolainen, 1995).

As fantasy football participation is an example of an everyday life activity (a hobby), this study is informed by Savolainen's (1995) 'everyday life information seeking' (ELIS) framework. ELIS is a model frequently used in studies of serious leisure information behaviour as it emphasizes information in everyday life and is concerned with the way information is shared and received in those contexts. ELIS is a holistic framework which understands everyday life activities in the context of social and psychological factors. It is concerned both with the set of dispositions individuals bring to information seeking and with the context in which it occurs.

ELIS uses Bourdieu's theory of habitus to understand information activities in everyday life. This is 'a socially and culturally determined system of thinking, perception and evaluation internalised by an individual' (Savolainen, 1995, p261-262). These values determine people's 'way of life', the 'cognitive order' which makes their informational choices seem natural to them. Savolainen's concept of 'mastery of life' describes the way people orient themselves to seek information based on their 'way of life'. Savolainen & Kari (2004) added the concept of 'information source horizons' to describe the conceptions people have of information sources and channels which are available to them.

What can be learned from the ELIS perspective is that factors such as a person's social class, occupation or amount of leisure time are relevant to the way they engage with everyday life information. It is noted that there is considerable overlap between job related and non-work

information seeking. ELIS emphasizes that the two complement each other. In both contexts, studies have shown that people often adopt the same strategies to both and that this is an effect of their 'way of life' (Savolainen, 1995). Studies of ELIS have tended to show that people tend to prefer sources which are familiar to them, informal sources such as asking other people are important. People are most likely to seek help in their social circle before consulting any other information source in everyday life settings (Savolainen & Kari, 2004). The law of least effort has also been found in both work and ELIS settings, when people consult information sources (Savolainen, 1995).

Serious Leisure

The Serious Leisure Perspective is the name given to the theoretical framework developed by Canadian sociologist Robert Stebbins to describe, and therefore study, the three main forms of leisure (Stebbins, 2020). The three forms identified were casual, serious, and project-based leisure.

The Serious Leisure Perspective is multi-disciplinary concept which has been useful to researchers in several areas, but of the three identified types of leisure, serious leisure has been the most fruitful topic for LIS. This is because it is the most complex form of leisure, frequently involving a continuous pursuit of knowledge in its participants (Mansourian, 2020).

Serious Leisure is described as:

“the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience.” (Stebbins, 2009, p622).”

It is said to have six qualities, which identify a leisure activity as 'serious leisure'. These are: perseverance and commitment, the potentiality to turn into a career, significant personal effort based on specific knowledge, durable personal and social benefits, unique ethos within a social world and developing new identities associated with the chosen activity (Stebbins, 2020).

As a hobbyist activity it seems clear that fantasy football has these qualities and is therefore an example of a 'serious leisure' activity within the Serious Leisure Perspective. This assumption is supported by Mansourian's (2021) inclusion of online fantasy sport as an example of serious leisure. Therefore, we can say that FPL information behaviour is an example of ELIS within the context of serious leisure.

In contrast to work-life situations, serious leisure participants passionately engage in the activities for their own sake. Serious Leisure activities are an avenue for improving skills, developing new forms of identity, and becoming involved in a community of interest. Serious leisure has been reported to bring several benefits for people including self-actualisation and a feeling of accomplishment (Mansourian, 2020).

The study of information in Serious Leisure began to develop after the year 2000 and was pioneered by LIS scholar Jenna Hartel, who argues serious leisure is information-rich and deserves special attention in information science (Hartel, Cox & Griffin, 2016). Since then, there have been numerous studies of information behaviour among various instances of serious leisure activities. Mansourian (2020) offers a useful review of the existing literature about information behaviour in the context of Serious Leisure, which will be discussed further below.

Research Objective 1: What can the existing literature tell us about the Information Behaviour and source preferences of FPL Players?

Information Behaviour in Fantasy Sport

It seems that little has been written about the information aspects of Fantasy Premier League, despite the millions of players globally; and there appear to be no studies of player's information behaviour. The closest examples appear to be Goldstein, McAfee and Suri's (2014) conference paper which performed statistical analysis on FPL game data to advance a theory of the wisdom of smaller, smarter crowds of 'elite' players. Another is O'Brien, Gleeson, and O'Sullivan's (2021) paper which, similarly, performed a statistical analysis of FPL player data to identify skill in the game. One potential useful finding of this paper was the existence of 'template teams'. Fantasy teams often display a high degree of similarity to others, which suggests a form of herding dynamic occurs among FPL players (O'Brien, Gleeson & O'Sullivan, 2021).

More has been written about the information aspects of fantasy sport in general. However, much of this has been from the disciplines of sports marketing, media studies and sociology; and most of the literature emanates from the US and focuses on American sports. Otto, Metz & Ensmenger (2011) discussed fantasy sport information from an LIS perspective; particularly Baseball and American Football. They note the players display 'aggressive information seeking habits' to gain an advantage over rivals. They also detail the turn to statistics which has occurred among sport fans as being influential to the increasing popularity of fantasy sport. For some sports fans statistics have always been one way to enjoy sport and 'fantasy' allows them a fresh avenue to that as well as rewarding their knowledge.

An important point made by Otto, Metz & Ensmenger (2011), are differences in information behaviour between, what they term, 'expert' players and 'novice' players. They observe that expert players are more likely to look at the game like it is an investment. They will search for statistics and consult numerous specialist source before making decisions. While novice players also perform research before making decisions, they are more likely to stick to mainstream news sources and are less likely to use statistical data. Instead, they are more likely to base decisions on an athlete's reputation or on team loyalty. While Otto, Metz and Ensmenger's work is based on observation rather than empirical data, their claims are mostly supported by the findings of other studies of fantasy sport information.

Hirsh, Anderson & Caselli (2012) conducted, what appears to be the only study of information-seeking behaviour in online fantasy sports; albeit one which comes from the perspective of 'human computer interaction' rather than LIS. They interviewed 15 fantasy sports players including players of both fantasy American Football and NASCAR. They too noted the differences between information behaviour of casual players and serious players. They found that players generally use multiple online information sources when managing their teams. Numerous websites were consulted including fantasy sites, forums social networks and search websites. The average participant in the study used 3.9 sources when managing their team.

They also found that television was an important source of information for players. Participants watched sports news tv and fantasy-oriented segments on sports shows to inform their decisions. The participants were frequently frustrated by inadequate information on which to base decisions and the study suggested improvements to games might help overcome this issue. They concluded that social media was increasingly being used to seek information for online fantasy sports play but that more research on this was required (Hirsh, Anderson & Caselli, 2012). As this study was conducted almost 10 years ago it seems likely that social media will now play a much larger role than it did at the time of this study.

Ruihley & Hardin's (2013) study examined whether the needs of fantasy sport players were being met by the fantasy sport host websites. They also discovered a frustration among users who found the

information available on the fantasy host websites was insufficient for their needs. They found that most users looked elsewhere online for information, using the web as a source of research. They too found that television was an important source of information for the participants in their study, 79% used television to seek information and statistics, as well as to watch games. In comparison they noticed that radio and newspapers were not being used much by participants to inform decisions (Ruihley & Hardin, 2013).

Wohn, Freeman & Quehl (2017) interviewed highly committed players of daily fantasy sports to understand their information management and decision-making behaviours. They found that participants 'engaged in sophisticated and complex methods of information compilation and evaluation, using a wide range of digital and analogue tools to help them organize vast amounts of information in a short amount of time' (Wohn, Freeman & Quehl, 2017, p11). Players used social media and a variety of specialist 'fantasy' websites to inform their decisions. Participants mentioned using YouTube, Twitter, and Reddit, as well as sports forums.

Many participants exhibited highly developed methods of information management, such as using spreadsheets to organise and compute all the information they encountered. Several reported using email or paper to save information. They discovered that players were not satisfied by a single source and used a variety of data points to 'triangulate'. Players would consciously combine 'quantitative' statistical data, alongside 'qualitative' assessments of an athlete's character to gain a holistic view of the athletes they were considering drafting into their fantasy team. By combining so many sources, Wohn, Freeman & Quehl describe players creating their own eco-system of 'hacked together' tools to increase their chances of winning.

It is notable that this more recent study records the importance of social media as an information source to participants, in comparison to older studies. Likewise, while earlier studies mention that participants were sometimes frustrated by the lack of available information, the more recent study discusses players abilities to manage 'vast amounts of information'. Could this be because the amount of information available to players over time has increased and might that be related to the increased importance of social media?

In summary, several themes emerge from a review of the existing literature on information behaviour in fantasy sport. Firstly, it appears that players prefer to use informal sources. None of the reviewed studies mention books or libraries as sources of information, and newspapers were also not considered important (Ruihley & Hardin, 2013). Television was considered an important source. Televised matches and sports shows seem to be a popular way for players to encounter information. Players all seem to use numerous web resources to inform their decisions however an important theme was that the behaviour of serious players differs from casual players. Serious players appear to consult more resources and have a greater preference for statistical data. Although social media was mentioned as a source in some studies it is likely that it's prevalence as a source of information has increased since they were conducted, leading to a need for further study.

Information Behaviour in Serious Leisure

While studies of information behaviour in fantasy sport are few, there are many examples which consider other serious leisure activities. Mansourian (2020) reviewed the literature and found that people involved in serious leisure are passionate about their hobby. Because they are enthusiastic about the information they engage with, this influences the way they seek, share, and produce information. Frequently they develop a great amount of knowledge about the area they are interested in. This is partly because information seeking is fun to them, they are likely to be persistent and comprehensive in their pursuit of information (Mansourian, 2020).

However, he did find that different kinds of serious leisure activities corresponded with different information source preferences and behaviours. Based on his review, he proposed a model which categorised serious leisure participants into groups to describe their distinct behaviours. This can be viewed in the figure below.

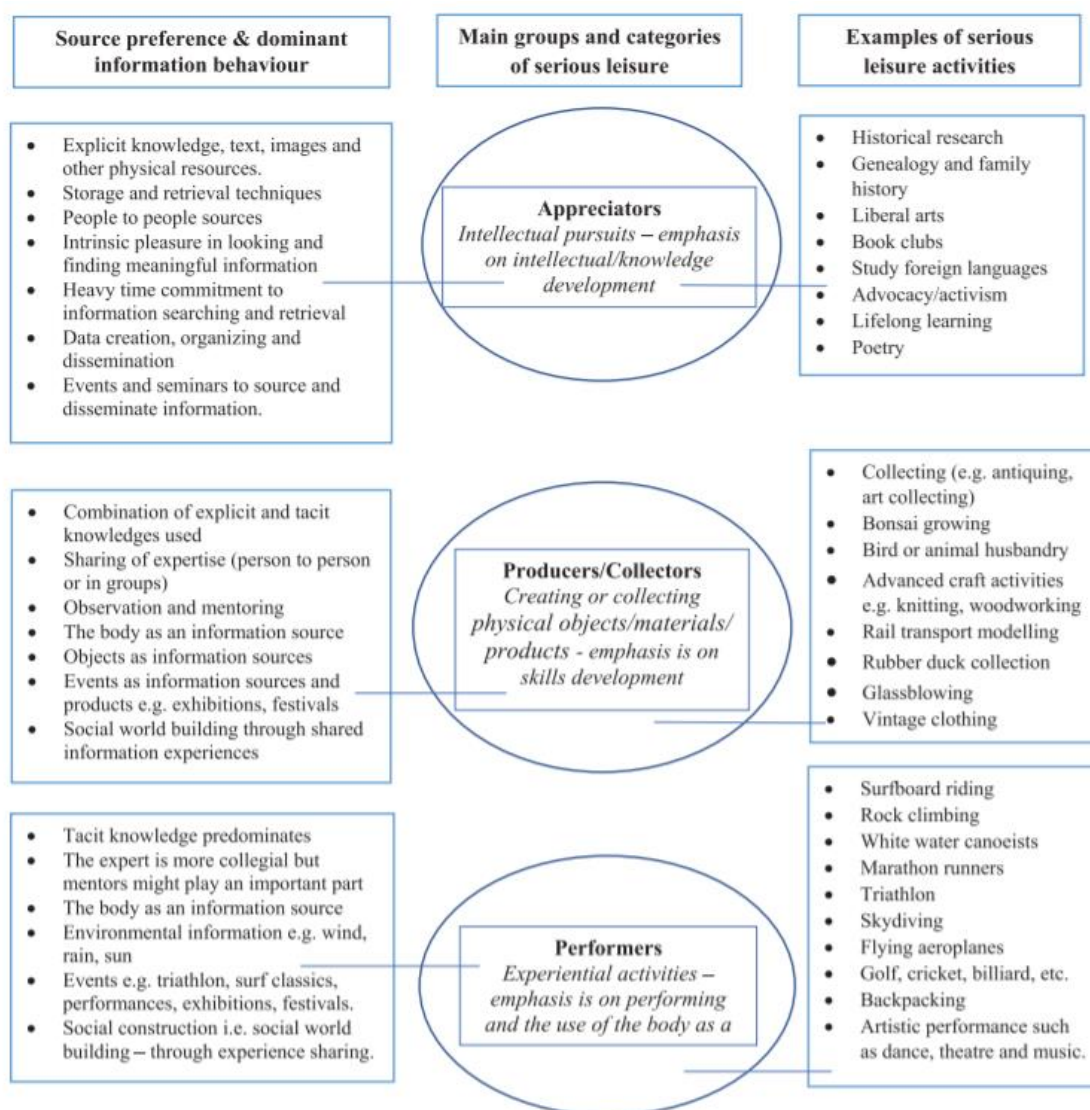


Figure 1: Mansourian’s (2020) Predominant information sources in serious leisure by group and category.

Although, the match is not perfect, it seems most helpful to include Fantasy Premier League players in the ‘Appreciators’ group in Mansourian’s model. This is because players do not produce or collect, nor do they perform any physical activities. As a game which requires real-world research, Fantasy Premier League play has much in common with intellectual pursuits, such as historical research, even if it might not have those connotations in the popular imagination. ‘Appreciator’ behaviours include finding intrinsic pleasure in looking for and finding meaningful information. They are also likely to invest a lot of time into information searching and retrieval and are likely to favour ‘people to people’ sources (Mansourian, 2020).

Many studies of information behaviour in serious leisure have emphasised the social nature of information seeking. Lee & Trace’s (2009) influential paper studied a community of hobbyist rubber duck collectors. They found that this collecting community represents its own social system with complex interactions responding to the specialised information needs of collectors. They found that

only serious collectors engaged in information seeking in a traditional sense yet sharing in online forums meant information still flowed through the community and acted as a critical resource for collectors.

Case (2010) also found that the collecting community itself was a crucial resource for coin collectors. He noted that while collecting communities had existed before the internet, technology is now facilitating the pursuit of hobbies by providing easy access to material and more importantly to the human information sources found in online communities of other hobbyists. Studies of information behaviour in online games have similarly noted the importance of virtual communities in answering players information needs (Adams, 2009; Nyman, 2010; Sköld, 2015).

Several conclusions can be drawn about information behaviour in serious leisure and how that might relate to FPL. Firstly, serious leisure participants are passionate about their hobby and this influences them to seek out and share information recreationally. It is also clear that online communities have come to play an important role in serious leisure information, as information activities are social or communal, not merely the concern of the individual.

Research Objective 2: What can the existing literature tell us about the factors which motivate player's information activities

When considering which factors motivate FPL players' information activities, it seems apparent that many have been mentioned in the previous section. The evidence from the serious leisure seems to suggest that players interest in the topic might mean that they gain intrinsic pleasure from the process of finding information about their hobby and this explains them spending (often a lot) of time on research (Mansourian, 2020). Other potential motivations were also mentioned, for example serious leisure is often an avenue for improving skills and developing a sense of accomplishment. Mansourian (2020) observed that SL participants are usually searching for meaning in their lives along with information.

While it seems likely that these are motivating factors, there are likely to be others which are more specific to FPL. For example, unlike collecting coins or rubber ducks, FPL players are in competition with each other. It seems likely that this might be a factor which motivates the 'aggressive information seeking' identified by Otto, Metz & Ensmenger (2011). In fact, there is a quite substantial body of literature surrounding fantasy sport players motivations. This literature all seems to be focussed on American sports, rather than FPL and largely comes from disciplines such as Sports Studies rather than LIS. Because of this the focus is usually on players motivations for playing the game rather than information aspects. However, this literature is still useful as fantasy sports are 'games of research' and information activities are integral to gameplay (Wohn, Freeman & Quehl, 2017).

A review of the literature shows that there seems to be a degree of agreement around a few motivating factors. An influential study in this area was Farquhar and Meeds' (2007) study of fantasy sport users. They reviewed the literature on the sports fan motivations and investigated how similar these were to those of fantasy players. The principal forms of motivation they identified as being important factors for fantasy players are what they call 'surveillance' and 'arousal'.

Surveillance is the process of gathering information, working with statistical data, and staying closely connected with sport (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007). Although surveillance is a rather broad concept, which requires some level of unpacking, this suggests that one of the major motivations for fantasy sports players is the informational aspect itself. This corroborates the literature from serious leisure which has found that participants gain intrinsic pleasure from looking for information related to their hobby (Mansourian, 2020). It is also notable that working with statistical data is a motivator for fantasy sport players, something which aligns with Otto, Metz & Ensmenger's (2011) observations regarding

the way some fans enjoy sport via statistics. That 'staying closely connected to the sport' is part of the motivation suggests that fantasy sport allows sport fans to be more than a passive supporter, it gives them an outlet and justification for their fan knowledge allowing them to be a participant rather than a mere spectator.

Arousal involves participating for the thrill of victory. This motivation is fulfilled through victory and is pursued with the thought that the next victory is just around the corner (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007). That 'arousal' is a major motivational factor in fantasy sports is a result of their competitive nature. Unlike many other serious leisure activities, participants are in competition with each other and everyone else playing the game. This element makes fantasy sport an interesting case study as it seems little has been written about competition as a motivating factor in information behaviour.

The concepts of surveillance and arousal are useful but are perhaps more succinctly expressed by Halverson & Halverson's (2008) concept of 'competitive fandom', to describe the kinds of knowledge and motivation required in fantasy sport. They explain that sports fandom becomes competitive when knowledge acquired in the fan domain is transformed into strategic information in fantasy sports. After drawing together research on fan cultures and games communities they describe an interaction present in fantasy sports which can be expressed in the figure below. In a study of fantasy baseball, they found that player's motivations could be placed within this framework. They found that while some players were motivated more by their baseball fandom, placing little regard on the competition element, the inverse was true for some players. They discovered some players whose interest and knowledge of baseball was minimal but who came to the game from a competitive gaming background. These players approached fantasy baseball as another example of competitive gaming and winning was their primary motivation.

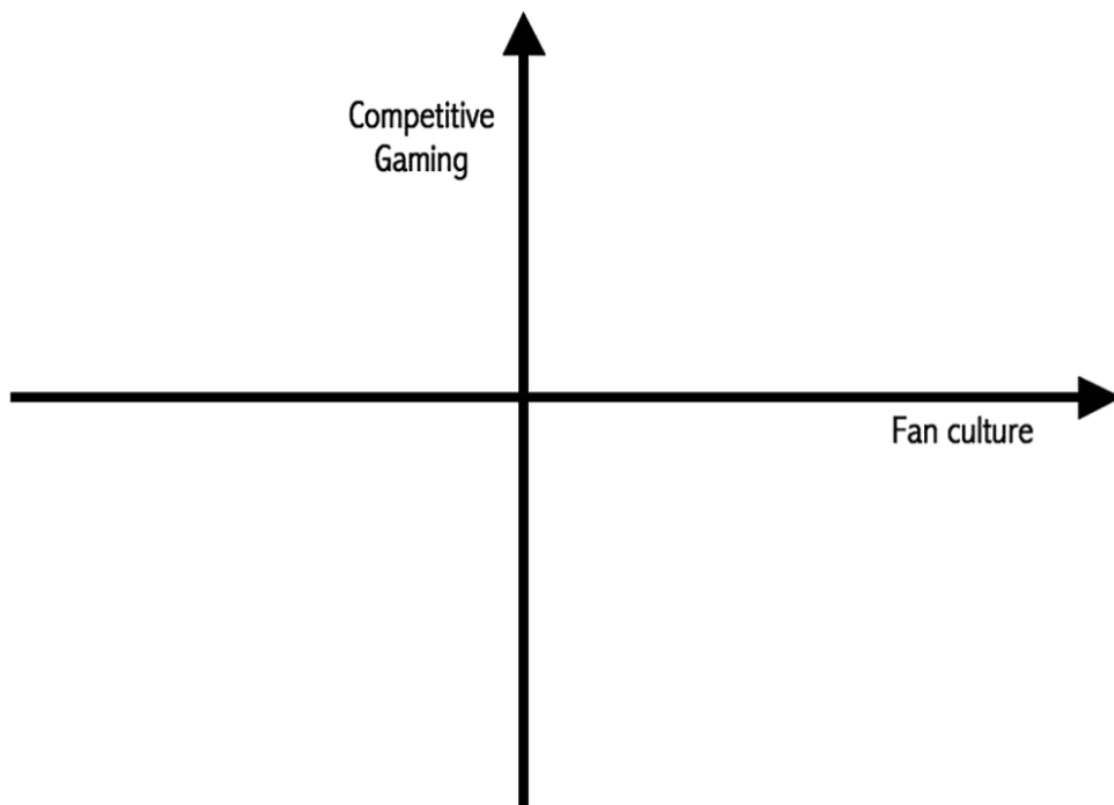


Figure 2: Halverson & Halverson's Competitive Fandom Framework

The concept of 'competitive fandom' is a potentially useful one for the study of information behaviour in fantasy sport as it neatly expresses the interaction between fan behaviours and competitive gaming which motivates the information activities of players. However, other motivating factors have also been identified in the literature. Other studies have identified motivating factors such as entertainment, escaping daily life, demonstrating sports knowledge, helping others to find information, and increasing levels of self-esteem (Billings & Ruihley, 2013; Dwyer & Kim, 2011).

A consistent finding of studies has been that a desire for social interaction, or inclusion in a community, are motivating factors for fantasy sport participants (Dwyer & Kim, 2011). Research has shown that players use fantasy sport to stay in contact with friends, family, and co-workers, and that this is part of their motivation for playing. Similarly, it allows players to form new relationships and to interact with like-minded individuals online, enabling them to create new forms of identity for themselves (Billings & Ruihley, 2013; Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Shah et al., 2020).

This desire to become part of a community of interest is a finding which has often been made in studies of other serious leisure activities (Mansourian, 2020). One useful case study from serious leisure explores motivations for information seeking in a virtual community of Eurovision fans. Bronstein & Lidor (2020) identified 4 themes which reflected the motivations of the fan's information seeking. These were: fulfilling a need for serious leisure, making social connections, finding a sense of belonging and forming an identity. Although not all FPL players are members of an online 'community of interest' many are, and it may be that similar factors motivate their information activities.

To summarise, the literature from serious leisure and fantasy sport tend to point toward similar factors being motivators for information activities. Participants appear to gain intrinsic pleasure from seeking information about their hobbies. Social interaction and the desire to become involved in communities of interest are also important. In fantasy sport there is also the additional element of competition, as players seek to gain an informational edge over rivals and experience the thrill of victory

However, it seems that nothing has been written so far about the motivations Fantasy Premier League players and this represents a gap in what is known about the subject. Shah et al (2020) found that motivations for play differed notably between different examples of fantasy sports. They found that the competitive and social aspects were much more important motivators in fantasy American football and hockey, than they were for baseball and basketball. This means it cannot be taken for granted that what is known about motivation in fantasy sport will be replicated in FPL.

Research Objective 3: What can the existing literature tell us about the role of the social media fan community in player's information behaviour?

The role of social media fan communities in the fantasy sport, and its relationship with information behaviour, does not appear to be something which has been studied before. Although some studies have noted that social media is an increasingly important source of information for players, little has been written about what form this information takes (Hirsh, Anderson & Caselli, 2012; Wohn, Freeman & Quehl, 2017). Likewise, although studies have mentioned social interaction and the importance of community to players, no study has explored what form this takes (Billings & Ruihley, 2013; Dwyer & Kim, 2011). However, it seems clear from even the merest glance at FPL social media that the #FPLCommunity plays an important role in the information activities of a significant number of players (Whittaker, 2021).

The role of online communities in some serious leisure contexts have already been discussed. Studies of communities of collectors have found online communities act as a complex social system which allow specialist information needs to be met (Case, 2010; Lee & Trace, 2009; Margree et al., 2014). It was also notable that, in Lee & Trace's (2009) community of rubber ducks, different members had

distinct roles, with serious collectors disseminating information to the rest of the community. The existence of expert players acting as informational gatekeepers, or mentors, was also a theme in the virtual communities of online games. In fact, gamers seem to prefer this as a method of gathering information (Adams, 2009; Nyman, 2010; Sköld, 2015; Price & Robinson, 2017).

None of these studies have looked specifically at communities on social media. Khoo (2014) conducted a literature review of what is known about information behaviour on social media. He found that social media users tend to share certain types of information, typically experiential and practical knowledge. Types of information behaviour such as asking and answering were important (Khoo, 2014).

This makes sense because as Savolainen & Kari (2007) noted, people's first preference tends to be to look for human sources to find information. And only humans can provide some types of information, such as opinions or advice. On social media people receive information specific to their questions in a way which cannot be achieved in other settings. Khoo argues this may lead social media sites to become people's preferred sources of information, because they offer an amount of social presence, replicating the immediacy of face-to-face communication. More passive forms of information behaviour are also seen. Browsing and monitoring are important types of information seeking behaviour on social media. People often encounter information which others have shared serendipitously (Khoo, 2017).

Social media also encourages social information behaviour and the development of information communities (Khoo, 2017). Fan communities are a classic example of the kind of social information behaviour which social media has enabled. In their study of the information behaviour of fans, Price & Robinson (2017) observed that fan communities make extensive and sophisticated use of social media and exhibit information practices that are both rich and complex.

Fan's information behaviour can be characterised as informal and collaborative, yet they are frequently responsible for new and innovative forms of information and organisation (Price & Robinson, 2017). While Price & Robinson's study concentrated on cult media fans it seems likely that similar observations might be made about the fantasy football community. For FPL players the sport of football might be considered the original text and FPL allows players to share information about the sport they enjoy, while living out the fantasy of being a football manager.

To summarise, it seems nothing has so far been written about the information behaviour of a social media fan community which is dedicated to fantasy sport. However, studies of other online communities have revealed that they tend to be complex social systems organised around interest in a topic. In these communities, experts often act as mentors to other less experienced members and information flows freely through the community. Social media has further facilitated the growth such online communities, with other fan communities exhibiting distinct information behaviours. Fan communities make extensive and innovative use of social media for informational ends. Their practices tend to be informal and collaborative but also hugely creative.

Summary

In summation, this study is situated within Savolainen's model of Everyday life information seeking and takes place within the context of serious leisure. Research shows that people tend to prefer 'people to people' and informal sources in everyday life and that people's social and psychological background affects the way they seek information (Savolainen & Kari, 2007). From the study of serious leisure, we know that participants tend to be passionate about their hobby and that this influences them to invest considerable time and effort into finding and sharing information about it. We have also seen that serious leisure participants are often searching for a sense of identity and meaning and that they frequently find that within communities of interest centred around their hobbies (Mansourian, 2020).

Although little has been written about the informational aspects of Fantasy Premier League, studies of other fantasy sports have shown players exhibit aggressive information seeking habits as they seek to gain an informational edge over rivals (Otto, Metz & Ensmenger, 2011). Players tend to use multiple online sources to inform their decisions with television also being an important source. There appear to be marked difference between the information behaviour of casual players and committed players. Committed players are likely to consult a higher number of sources and have a greater preference for statistical data. They are also likely to use sophisticated methods of information compilation and evaluation. Although some studies have listed social media as a source, no study seems to have evaluated the role social media plays in fantasy sport information.

It seems that fantasy sport players, as well as other serious leisure participants, are motivated by an intrinsic pleasure they gain from seeking information about their hobby. The thrill of victory and competitive feelings are also an important factor for players as well as the desire for social interaction and a sense of belonging within a community. Although the literature finds these factors to be a constant in fantasy sports players, there do seem to be differences between motivations in different fantasy sports, and it is still unknown whether Fantasy Premier League players are motivated by the same factors.

Although the role of social media fan communities in fantasy sport is not something which seems to have been discussed in literature before, we know from other communities that complex social systems tend to be emerged around interest in a topic. In these communities, information gatekeepers or experts tend to emerge who guide less experienced members and are responsible for a larger share of the information seeking. Social media has further encouraged the formation of online fan communities, who tend to display distinctive informal, collaborative, and creative behaviours. The effect of competition in fan communities does not seem to have been explored before in literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study takes a pragmatic approach to methodology which might be placed within the postpositivist research paradigm. Post-positivism believes in the existence of an objective social reality but accepts that human infallibility inhibits our ability to detect its nature (Pickard, 2013). Informed by this, a mixed methods approach was taken, combining both an online survey and semi-structured interviews. It was hoped that these approaches would complement each other and produce a more complete picture on which to build an analysis.

Qualitative and quantitative methods have different strengths and limitations, using them together allows for conclusions to be drawn which could not be achieved by one method alone (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Pickard (2013, p10) describes mixed methods research as a 'clearly pragmatic way' to approach research questions and details that the combination of large-scale survey, followed by a more detailed case study is a common and productive approach in LIS research.

Research in ELIS has most often emphasized the need for a person-centred perspective and is consequently associated with qualitative methods (Bates, 2004). While Mansourian (2020) also noted that studies of information behaviour in serious leisure have predominantly used qualitative methods. He concluded that there is a need for more studies producing quantitative data, to validate existing knowledge in this area.

Although this study uses mixed methods the qualitative element is the main component, with the survey being used in a supporting role. This combination of research methods is preceded in ELIS studies by O'Connor's (2013) study of the information seeking behaviour of retired investors. It was hoped that the survey would serve to generate volunteers to take part in the interviews while also producing some useful quantitative data which might support the findings.

Questionnaire

Description

A short online questionnaire was delivered using Qualtrics online survey software. A questionnaire was chosen as it is simple to disseminate online and can reach people wherever they are located (Pickard, 2013). Questionnaire fatigue was acknowledged as a factor, so the intention was to produce a short questionnaire which would encourage a higher response rate and attract a larger sample (Denscombe, 2017).

The survey ran in two stages. The pilot was distributed among 5 friends, and alterations were made based on feedback. The result of this was that several questions were removed, and the wording of others was amended. This included removing the request for respondents to leave an email address, as those piloted felt the ethics documents associated with collecting personal data were likely to deter responses. It was also decided that asking participants to include their game rank was likely to be impractical.

The final questionnaire ran from 22 September – 15 October 2021 and gathered 115 responses. The questionnaire was promoted online via email, Facebook and Twitter. In addition to posting the questionnaire on the researchers own social media accounts, links were also posted to the Fantasy Premier League Facebook page. Influential accounts in the FPL Twitter community were approached and requests were made that the survey be retweeted to their network. All communications referenced that the completion time was just 2 minutes and encouraged respondents to share the link to ensure the widest possible sample.

Questions

The structure of the final questionnaire was straightforward and contained only 7 closed questions (the full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix VI). Six of the questions asked for background information about the respondent. This included demographic information (gender, age, nationality), information pertaining to their FPL play (years played, time spent weekly), and their social media use (frequency of FPL social media posting). Each of these questions were intended to provide context to the main question, Question 6, which asked respondents:

‘how influential are each of the following information sources to your fantasy football decision making?’

Respondents were then asked to rate 9 information sources on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1 being ‘Not at all influential’ and 5 ‘extremely influential’. A Likert scale was chosen as they are a straightforward tool for gathering quantitative data which are familiar to audiences and easily embedded in a questionnaire (Denscombe, 2017). It was decided to ask respondents to rank sources using the language ‘influential’, rather than ‘use’, in order to ensure passively encountered information could be included.

The information sources named were identified after a review of Fantasy Premier League information was conducted. This review was conducted in order to produce a Fantasy Premier League subject guide. Sources were identified and organized into categories which form the basis of information sources named in the questionnaire. The subject guide can be found in the appendix VIII.

Questions were written after a review of the literature and aimed to produce data that would correspond to the aims and objectives of the research study. Question 6, by asking respondents to rank information sources was intended to help answer Objective 1 ‘To identify information sources used and favoured by Fantasy Premier League participants.’ Each of the other questions, by establishing background information about the respondents, aimed to help answer Objective 2 and 3. It was hoped that breaking down the results of information source preference would reveal distinctions between casual players and experienced players; as well as those who were active in the online community and those who weren’t.

Respondents

With over 8 million Fantasy Premier League players, it was not possible to survey the entire population (Premier League, 2021). The dearth of publicly available data about the make-up of players, along with the limits of time and resources meant that probability sampling was not possible.

The questionnaire was widely distributed via social media and respondents were asked to further share the questionnaire to their networks. Therefore, the sampling methodology could be said to incorporate elements of convenience sampling, volunteer sampling and snowball sampling (Vehovar, Toepoel & Steinmetz, 2021).

Interviews

Description

Once the survey responses had been collected 8 participants were recruited to take part in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were selected as they are a particularly good way to produce data that deals with a topic in depth and detail (Denscombe, 2017). By conducting the interviews in a semi-structured way, it was hoped that the additional flexibility would allow the conversation to flow naturally, allowing new topics to be introduced by the participant and further explored.

The interviews were conducted in November 2021 by video call and each lasted 30-60 minutes. It was decided to conduct the interview online for practical purposes. The restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic meant that meeting with participants face-to-face would be subject to safety concerns. Conducting the interviews online also meant that there were no geographical limitations, participants only needed a device connected to the internet, and could participate from anywhere in the world. As Denscombe (2017) explained, these types of interviews share the benefits of social interaction without the inconvenience associated with travel.

As Fantasy Premier League is a game played online, with an online based fan-community, this method had the additional benefit of taking place in the same 'place' as the behaviour being studied. When combined with the researchers own status as a member of the FPL online community this lends the study an ethnographic element (Denscombe, 2017).

Most of the interview participants were recruited via Twitter. Tweets were posted asking for interview volunteers, which included the #FPL and #FPLCommunity hashtags. In addition, users were approached by direct message and asked to volunteer, or to share the request to their networks. Once some interviews had been conducted snowball sampling occurred and this generated more volunteers. 6 Out of the 8 participants were recruited in this way, the other 2 were known by the researcher and approached separately.

Questions

Because the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way there was, for the most part, no formal set of questions. Instead, there was a list of informal questions and talking points (found in the appendix VII). This list was separated into 5 sections, with the first asking for some biographical information to establish the participant's background. This included their occupation and was used to build a profile and to examine how this background affected their information behaviour.

The second centred on participants motivations for playing the game and their emotions. This was included as much of the literature on serious leisure information emphasizes the passionate nature of their interest in the subject and it was hoped that light might be shone on how the competition aspect of FPL influenced their information behaviour.

The third section was the most important, this incorporated a narrative interviewing technique as it asked participants to tell the story of an 'FPL week' and to recount all the different information sources which inform their gameplay and to reflect on their information behaviours. Narrative interviewing techniques are particularly useful for studies of everyday life information-seeking behaviour (Bates, 2004). This was included as it directly addressed the aims and objectives of the research, as data was collected on preferred information sources and detailed descriptions of participants information styles were noted.

The next section concentrated on social media use and how it related to their FPL play, this was included as it would help to explore the role of the fan community in FPL information. The final section asked participants to reflect on how their information behaviour around FPL related to the way the use information in the rest of their lives.

Throughout the interviews, the participant's thoughts were summed up and reflected back to them to ensure they had been understood, and that the participant agreed with the researcher's interpretation of their comments. In addition to spurring further conversation, this also acted as a verification stage which is good practice in interviews (Pickard 2013).

Participants

Purposive sampling was partially involved in the recruitment for the interview participants. The logic of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth (Pickard, 2013). Because

the objectives of the study called an exploration of the role of the online fan community in FPL information behaviour an attempt was made to recruit participants who were active members of that community.

Of the 8 people to be interviewed, 7 of the 8 were male and all fell within the age range of mid-twenties to late forties. Three were based outside of the UK and there was a range of different levels of experience and commitment levels to the game. In addition, two participants were involved in FPL in a professional context, although this makes the sample less representative of the studied population, it allowed for the study of 'information-rich' examples and allowed

Ethics and confidentiality

All participants in the study were over 18 and were not considered to be vulnerable in any way, therefore the study did not have any significant ethical concerns. The research ethics review form can be found in appendix IV. The questionnaire was completely anonymous, and no personal data was collected. The questionnaire's initial statement briefly explained the purpose of the study, and provided the researchers email address. It was indicated that more information about the study could be obtained by contacting the researcher by email. All questionnaire data was stored securely on Qualtrics and will be deleted after the study has been completed.

Those who volunteered to be interviewed were provided with a participant information sheet, which fully explained the purposes of the study, and signed a consent form; both can be found in the appendix. The personal data of participants was securely stored on a password protected device and will be deleted once the study has been completed.

One ethical issue which arose during the study surrounded the identifiability of interview participants. Interviewee names were not included, and participants were instead ascribed codes to ensure anonymity could be maintained when discussing the findings. However, when transcribing the interviews, it became clear that participants might be identified from the content of their answers. This was particularly the case for those who had a public profile in the online community. To counteract this, it was decided not to include the transcripts of the interviews in the study. It was also decided that any mention of the participants publicly available 'content' be described only in general terms, without mentioning the specific details. Although readers who are engaged members of the FPL online community may still be able to identify some of the participants, the information is not of a sensitive nature and participants consented to their data being used in this way.

Limitations of the study

One obvious limitation of the study is the size of the sample. However, with over 8 million Fantasy Premier League players it was impossible for a small-scale study to sample the entire population. Efforts were made to disseminate the questionnaire as widely as possible on social media, but the result of recruiting respondents in this way is users of social media are likely to be over-represented. So too are those who use Twitter for FPL purposes, as it seems this is where most of the respondents encountered the questionnaire. This factor limits the scope for generalising about the entire population based on the results. Further research, using purposive sampling would be needed to establish external validity. Thought would also need to be taken about how to reach players who do not use social media.

The wording of the questionnaire might also be considered a limitation. Respondents were asked to rank information sources by how 'influential' they were to their FPL decision making. However, during the subsequent qualitative phase of the research, it became clear that this was a controversial idea for some participants. A number were keen to express that they 'made their own decisions' and that they

weren't 'influenced' by the media they consumed. This may explain why comparatively few respondents rated resources a 5 on the Likert scale. Despite this the results are still useful for comparing the 'influence' of sources in comparison to the others.

A final limiting factor of the study is researcher bias. As a member of the 'FPL Community' the researcher was aware that this could have an impact on the research. However, as Braun and Clarke (2006) note researchers cannot exist in a vacuum. The qualitative phase of the research was conducted in a person-centred way which necessarily includes the perceptions of the researcher (Bate, 2004). Rather than being a problem the researchers experience allowed a productive conversation to occur, in language participants recognised. This in turn allowed for a richer understanding of participants information behaviour.

Chapter 4: Results

Survey Analysis

The survey analysis reviews the findings of an online survey of 115 Fantasy Premier League participants. The initial questions were used to establish a profile of participants before asking how influential a range of information sources were to their FPL decisions. This was conducted using a 5-point Likert scale, with respondents asked to rank sources from 1 'not at all influential', to 5 'extremely influential'. The final question asked how often respondents made social media posts relating to Fantasy Premier League.

What follows is a detailing of the results for each question, followed by some analysis of the differing responses given by different profiles of participant. As the results are quantitative in nature the results are mainly presented in graphical form with some representative statistics also used.

Participant Profile

In the section below can be found bar charts representing the result for each question in the first section, this represents the percentage breakdowns of the profile of survey participants.

Gender

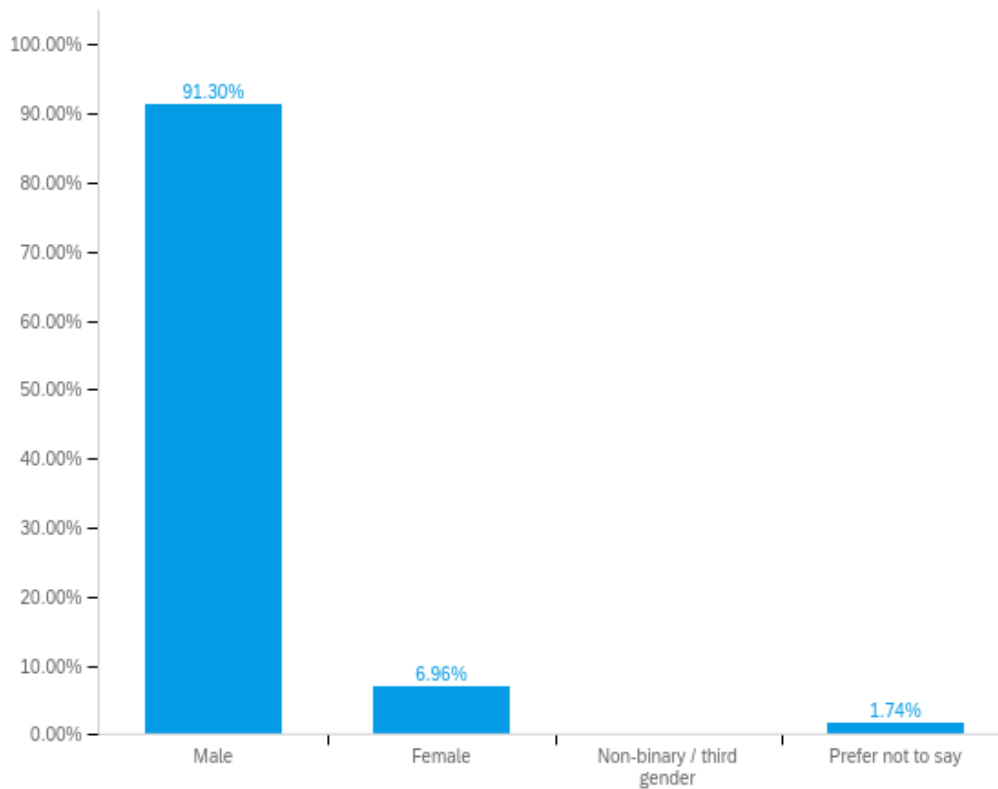


Figure 3: Respondents by gender.

This shows that 91.3% of survey respondents are male. This split is consistent with what we know about the gender profile of Fantasy Premier League players. Although female participation is increasing year on year FPL continues to be a male dominated pursuit (Premier League, 2021).

Age

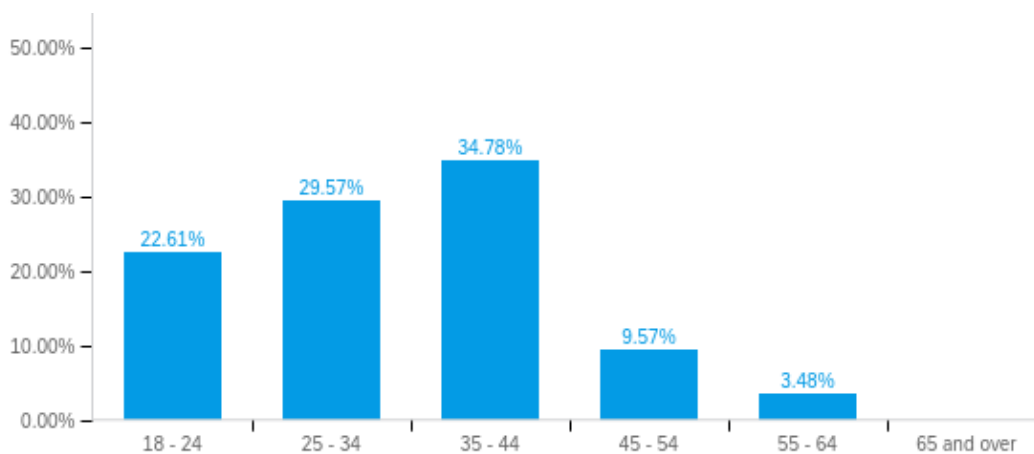


Figure 4: Respondents by age.

The age breakdown shows 35-44 is the most common age group of study respondents with 34.78%. The older age groups are under-represented with those 45 or older making up only 13.05% of the sample.

Nationality

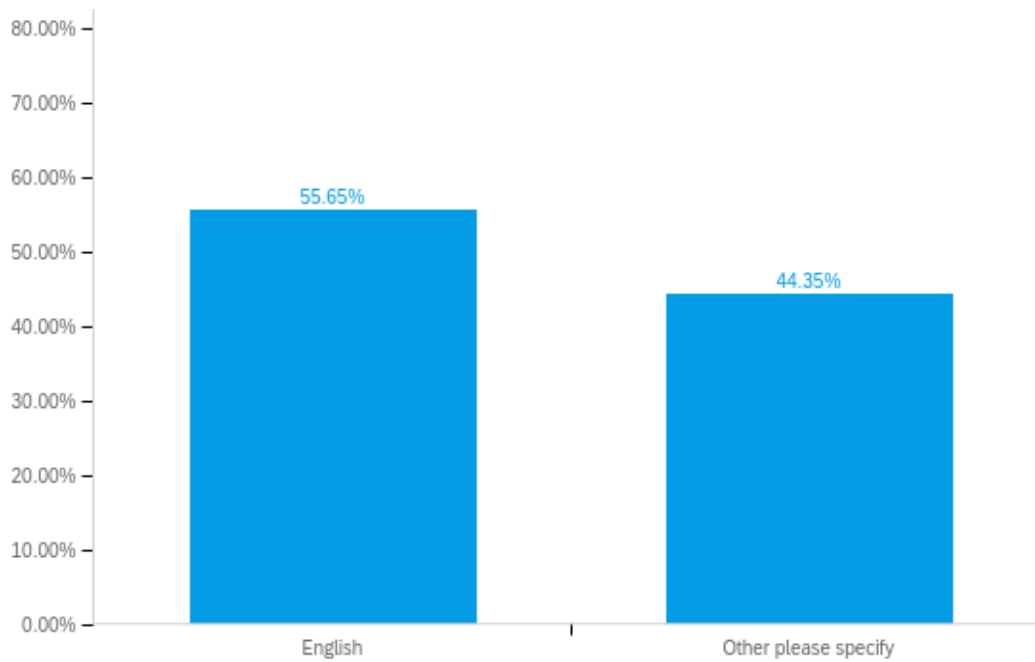


Figure 4: Respondents by nationality

English respondents make up 55.65 % of respondents. If a respondent answered 'Other Nationality' they were asked to specify. The results can be seen below in the table below. 25 Separate nationalities are represented, with Indian respondents being the most numerous of those who selected 'other nationality', comprising 8.7% of the total.

Nationality	Number	Percentage of total
English	64	55.65
Indian	10	8.70
Norwegian	6	5.22
Australian	5	4.35
American	3	2.61
Swedish	3	2.61
Indonesian	2	1.74
Serbian	2	1.74
Nigerian	2	1.74
Bangladeshi	2	1.74
Canadian	1	0.87
Uruguayan	1	0.87
Polish	1	0.87
Kazakhstani	1	0.87
Romanian	1	0.87
New Zealander	1	0.87
Montenegrin	1	0.87
Barbadian	1	0.87
Finnish	1	0.87

Icelandic	1	0.87
Italian	1	0.87
Denmark	1	0.87
Egyptian	1	0.87
Scottish	1	0.87
British	1	0.87
Unrecordable	1	0.87
Total	115	100

Number of Seasons Played

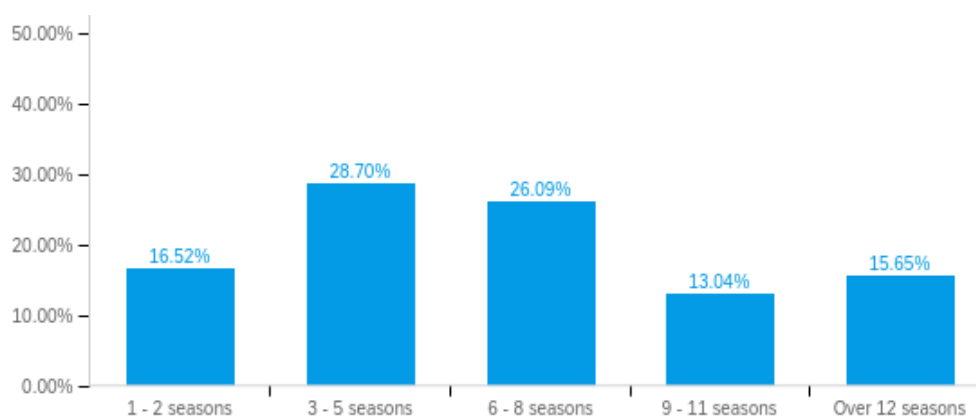


Figure 6: Respondents by number of seasons played.

Respondents were asked ‘How many seasons have you played Fantasy Premier League’, seasons was used instead of years as this is the unit of time used in the game. As can be seen in the graph below. Respondents were most likely to select 3-5 seasons, from the available options, as the length of time they have been playing the game; 28.7% of respondents selected this option. However, adding together the latter three categories shows that a majority (54.78%) have played the game for longer than 5 seasons.

Seasons played	Number of responses	Percentage of total
1-2	19	16.52
3-5	33	28.7
6-8	30	26.09
9-11	15	13.04
Over 12	18	15.65
Total	115	100

Number of seasons played

Time spent on making FPL decisions in an average week

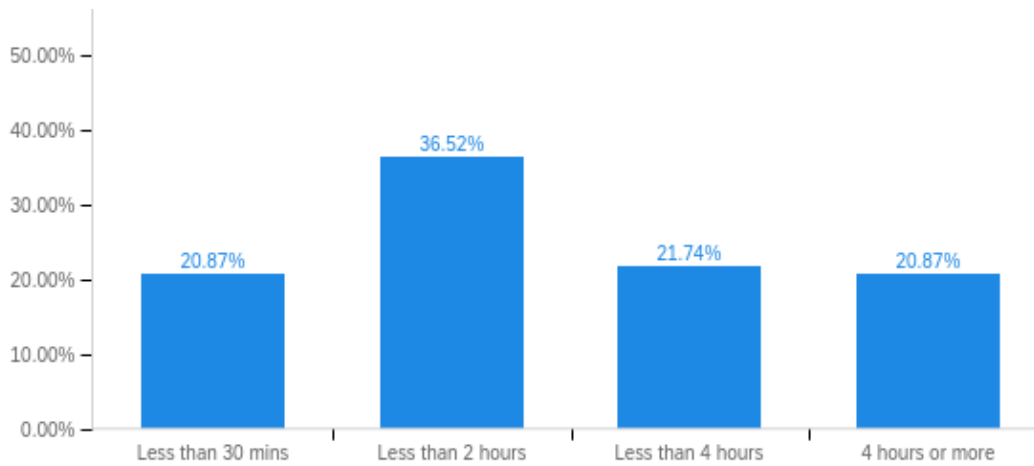


Figure 7: Respondent time spent on FPL each week

Respondents were asked to estimate how much time they spent in an average week on making Fantasy Premier League decisions. The results are fairly evenly spread between the options. 24 (20.87%) Respondents selected 'less than 30 mins' with the same number selecting 'more than 4 hours'. 'Less than 2 hours' was the most frequently selected option, with 42 (36.52%) responses. These results suggest respondents have a range of commitment levels towards playing the game.

How often do you make posts related to Fantasy Premier League on social media?

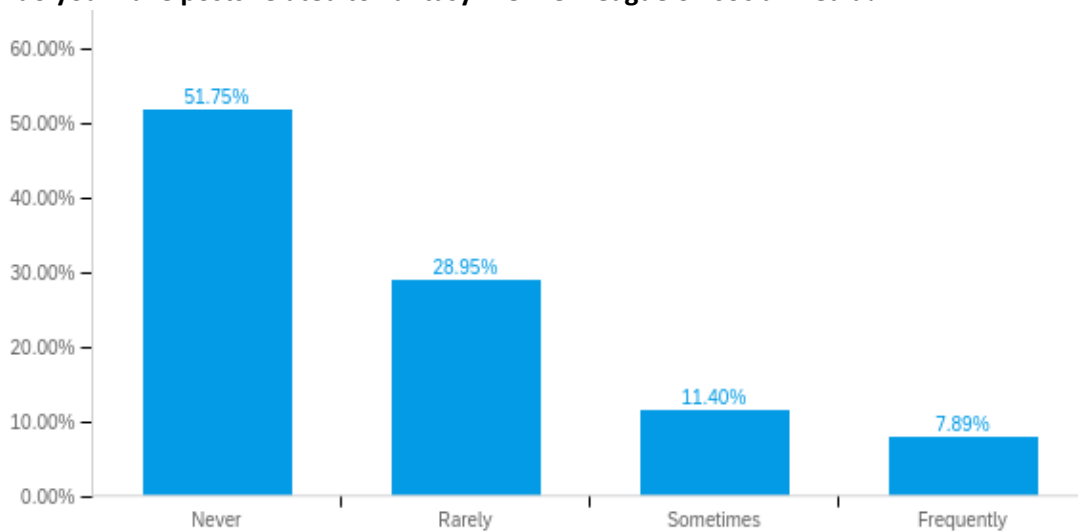


Figure 8: Respondents by frequency of FPL social media posts

Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they made posts relating to Fantasy Premier League on social media. Over half of the respondents (51.75%) indicated that they never post about FPL on social media. A further 28.95% rarely do so, with only 9 (7.89%) reporting that they post about FPL on social media frequently.

Sources of Information

Respondents were asked to indicate how influential a range of information sources were to their fantasy football decision making.

They were presented with 9 separate sources and asked to place each on a 5-point Likert Scale: from 1 'not at all influential', to 5 'extremely influential'. Below is an analysis of the responses for each information source.

How influential are each of the following information sources to your fantasy football decision making?

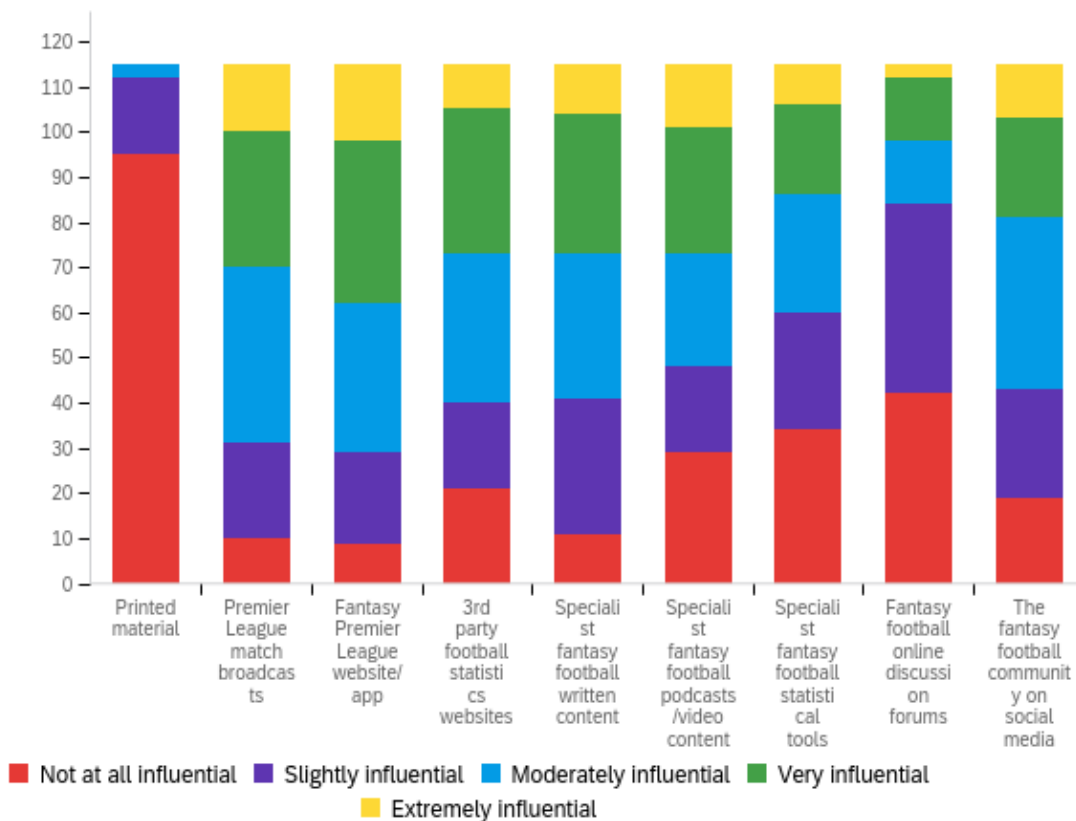


Figure 9: Stacked bar chart representing information source's Likert scale scores for influence.

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
Printed material	95	17	3	0	0
Premier League match broadcasts	10	21	39	30	15
Fantasy Premier League website/app	9	20	33	36	17
3rd party football statistics websites	21	19	33	32	10
Specialist fantasy football written content	11	30	32	31	11
Specialist fantasy football podcasts/video content	29	19	25	28	14
Specialist fantasy football statistical tools	34	26	26	20	9
Fantasy football online discussion forums	42	42	14	14	3
The fantasy football community on social media	19	24	38	22	12

The above chart shows the frequency of response for each information source. The most selected option for each, the mode, is highlighted in yellow. From this we can see that for no source was 'extremely influential' the most selected option. 'Very influential' was the most selected option for 'Premier League website/app'. 'Not at all influential' was the most selected option for 4 of the named resources.

Respondents most clearly indicated that 'printed material' was not an influential source for them when making FPL decisions, 83% answered 'not at all influential', with no one selecting the two most influential categories.

Such a clear consensus was not found with any of the other categories. ‘Premier League website/app’ was most likely to be considered ‘very or extremely influential’. The combined figure for this source was 46%. ‘Premier League match broadcasts’ was 39% ‘very or extremely influential’. These two sources were also the least likely to be judged ‘not at all influential’ (8% and 9% respectively).

‘Fantasy football online discussion forums’ was, after ‘printed material’, the least influential resource. 37% Of respondents indicated it was ‘not at all influential’ with only 15% rating it ‘very or extremely influential’.

‘Specialist fantasy football podcasts/video content’ contained the largest spread of opinion. 36% of respondents answered that it was ‘very or extremely influential’, while 25% answered ‘not at all influential’.

The below table displays information sources ranked in order of the mean Likert Scale rating for influence. Although it is acknowledged that it is controversial to include a mean when displaying Likert Scale data (Denscombe, 2017), it is included because it provides a clear way to rank the information sources in order of preference and does not intend to convey anything meaningful statistically.

Rank	Information source	Mean Score	Median Score	Mode
1	Fantasy Premier League website/app	3.28	3	4
2	Premier League match broadcasts	3.17	3	3
3	Specialist fantasy football written content	3.01	3	3
4	3rd party football statistics websites	2.92	3	3
5	The fantasy football community on social media	2.86	3	3
6	Specialist fantasy football podcasts/video content	2.82	3	1
7	Specialist fantasy football statistical tools	2.51	2	1
8	Fantasy football online discussion forums	2.08	2	1-2
9	Printed material	1.2	1	1

Ranked sources ranked by the mean influential rating

Participant profile analysis

When the Information Source data is broken out by different participant profiles, it seems that some information sources are favoured more by some profiles of player. This effect is most clearly seen with ‘Time spent on making FPL decisions in an average week’. The source with the highest spread of opinion, ‘Specialist fantasy football podcasts/video content’, is presented below.

Specialist fantasy football podcasts/video content

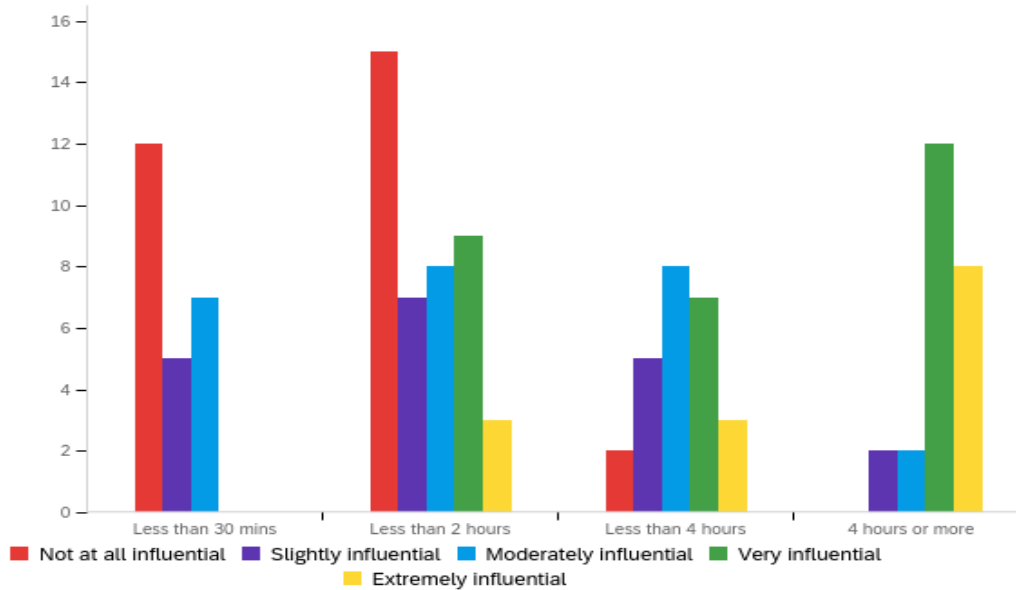


Figure 10: Likert scale influence rating for specialist podcast/video content broken by time spent each week on FPL

This graph shows that of the 24 participants who spend less than 30 minutes per week making FPL decisions, 12 rank ‘Specialist fantasy football podcasts/video content’ as ‘not at all influential’.

In comparison none of the 24 who spend 4 hours or more said the same. 20 out of the 24 who comprise this group rated this source as ‘very or extremely influential’.

Similar patterns are present for other sources:

Specialist fantasy football statistical tools

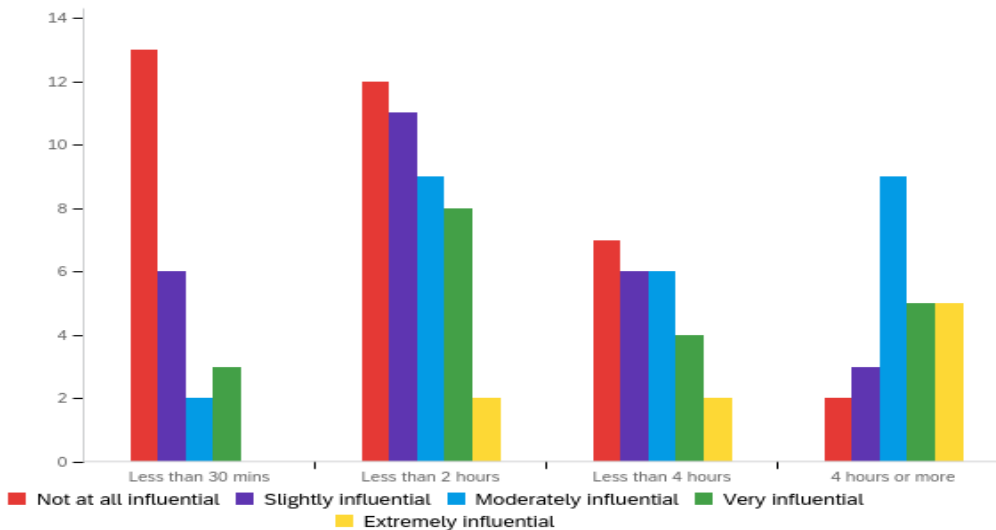


Figure 11: Likert scale influence rating for specialist statistical tools content broken by time spent each week on FPL

3rd party football statistics websites

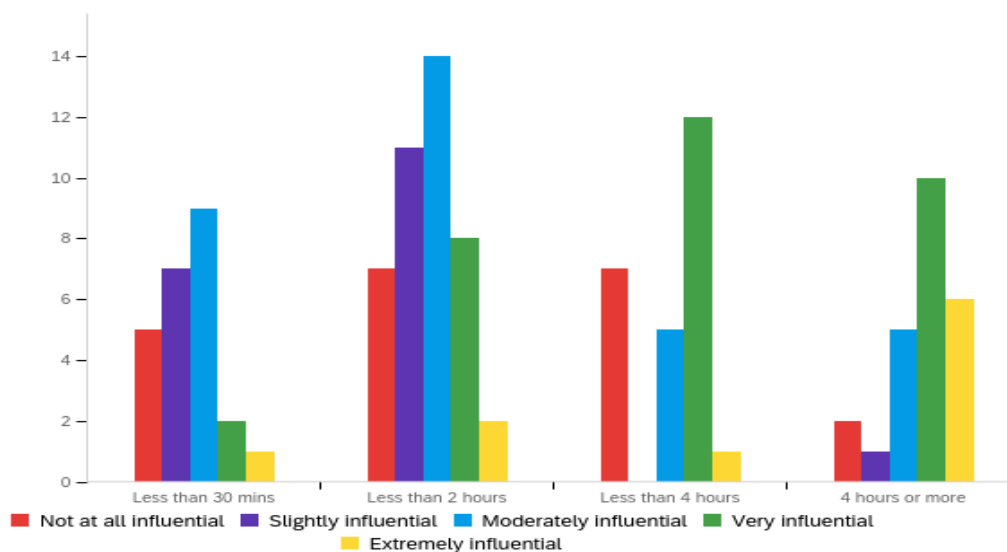


Figure 12: Likert scale influence rating for 3rd party stats websites broken by time spent each week on FPL

Each of the more specialist sources are clearly favoured more by those who spend more than 4 hours a week making FPL decisions. A similar pattern was noticed for nationality. Those who listed their nationality as other than English were more likely to rank 'specialist' resources more influential. Although, this might be considered significant, it was also noticed that this group were also most likely to spend more time per week on the game.

Overall, the questionnaire results show that web resources and broadcast media are the most influential source of information for respondents. The findings most clearly indicate that printed materials are not an influential source of information for any player. The FPL app is the most influential resource to all profiles of player however there are significant differences in the sources preferred by those who spend more time each week playing the game.

Those who spend 4 hours or more each week playing the game were more likely to list 'special video/podcast content', 'specialist written content' and '3rd party statistics websites' as more influential to their play. This suggests those with higher levels of commitment are most likely to seek out more specialist information.

Interview Analysis

Eight participants were interviewed for this study, all interviews were conducted by video call and each interview lasted 30-60 minutes. Participants were asked to describe the range of information sources which inform their FPL play each week, and to describe their 'information strategies', the ways in which they process this information and turn it into a game decision. Other questions centred on whether and in which ways they interacted with the online fan community; and the degree to which their FPL information behaviours related to other elements of their lives.

Each interview was transcribed and anonymised. The transcripts were coded and manually analysed in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis methodology. Each transcript was reviewed, with initial codes being generated. A memo was written summarising the content of each transcript and the initial codes were collated. Themes were then identified using the initial codes.

These were then checked to see whether they matched with the coded extracts before being refined and named. The themes were informed by the aims and objectives of the study, in addition to the reviewed literature. This method of analysis was chosen as it offers an accessible and widely used methodology for analysing qualitative data, while being flexible enough to be used across a range of different epistemologies and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Overview of participants

Before presenting the results of the thematic analysis, a brief biographical summary is offered of each participant.

Participant A (PA):

Male, mid-thirties and lives in Merseyside, England. Describes occupation as 'Incident Controller (call centre)'. Has played Fantasy Premier League for 10 years, but work and family commitments mean he now spends less than 30 minutes each week on the game.

Information sources named (5): In-game data, Twitter, broadcast matches, The Athletic (subscription-based sport website), official FPL written content.

Participant B (PB):

Female, early thirties and lives in Lincolnshire, England. Describes occupation as 'FPL Content Creator', formerly a maths teacher. Has played Fantasy Premier League for 8 years and spends around 10 hours each week on the game.

Information sources named (12): In-game data, Twitter, broadcast matches, YouTube, FPL podcasts (FPL BlackBox, The Athletic FPL Podcast), Subscription-based FPL websites (Fantasy Football Hub, Fantasy Football Fix), Football statistics website (underthestat.com), Specialist FPL online tools (FPL Statistics), Bookmakers' websites, Patreon.

Participant C (PC):

Male, early thirties and lives in Berkshire, England. Describes occupation as 'Telecom Sales'. Has played Fantasy Premier League for 9 years and spends around 12 hours a week on the game.

Information sources named (13): In-game data, Twitter, broadcast matches, Youtube, FPL Podcasts (FPL BlackBox, Fantasy Football Scoutcast, FPL Green Arrow, FPL Wire, Fantasy Football Scout Team News), Subscription-based FPL websites (Fantasy Football Hub, Fantasy Football Fix), Official FPL video content (The FPL Show), Specialist FPL online tools (FPL Team).

Participant D (PD):

Male, late twenties and lives in Lagos, Nigeria. Describes occupation as 'Banking'. Has played Fantasy Premier League for 3 years and spends a couple of hours a week on the game.

Information sources named (7): In-game data, Twitter, broadcast matches, Youtube (Fantasy Football Scout, Official PL), Official FPL video content (The FPL Show), Friend.

Participant E (PE):

Male, mid-twenties and lives in Jakarta, Indonesia. Describes occupation as 'Engineer in a manufacturing company'. Has played Fantasy Premier League for 8 seasons spends around 30 minutes a day on the game depending on the circumstances.

Information sources named (5): In-game data, Twitter, broadcast matches, Youtube, Whatsapp group-chat.

Participant F (PF):

Male, late forties and lives in Somerset, England. Describes occupation as 'Freelance Journalist' and spends part of his professional life covering fantasy football. Has played Fantasy Premier League for 12 years and spends around 12 hours each week on the game; 10 hours professionally and around 2 hours personally.

Information sources named (13): In-game data, Twitter, broadcast matches, Subscription-based FPL website (Fantasy Football Scout), FPL Podcasts (Always Cheating, Planet FPL, FPL Wire, FPL Green Arrow, The Athletic FPL Podcast), BBC Football Daily Podcast, The Guardian Online, Specialist FPL online tools (FPL Statistics, FPL Optimised).

Participant G (PG):

Male, late twenties and lives in Lagos, Nigeria. Describes occupation as 'Financial Services'. Has played Fantasy Premier League for 4 years and spends 1-5 hours per week on the game, depending on circumstances.

Information sources named (6): In-game data, Twitter, broadcast matches, Official FPL written content, Official FPL video content, Friend.

Participant H (PH):

Male, late twenties and originally from India. Moved to the UK 3 years ago and lives in London, England. Describes occupation as 'Data Engineer'. Has played Fantasy Premier League for 9 years and spends 5-6 hours each week on the game.

Information sources named (13): In-game data, Twitter, broadcast matches, Subscription-based FPL websites (Fantasy Football Hub, Fantasy Football Scout), Youtube (FPL BlackBox, FPL Wire, Let's Talk FPL), Specialist FPL online tools (FPL Statistics, FPL Optimised, FPL Team), Sofascore app, FPL open API.

Thematic analysis

Levels of commitment

Participants represent a range of different commitment levels to Fantasy Premier League; from the casual to the 'fanatic'. At the casual end of this scale is Participant A. PA spends less than 30 minutes a week on FPL. He expresses some regret about this and explained that in previous years he was able to commit more to the game but has struggled to find the time since having children. He describes himself as a 'casual' player, and although he is aware of the online community, he does not engage with it.

At the other end of scale are the highly committed group. PB, PC, PF and PH each describe spending 10 hours, or more, on the game per week. In addition, PB and PF also have a professional interest, giving advice and producing FPL content for a living. All are active members of the FPL Twitter community. Each has a dedicated '@FPL' Twitter handle on which they interact with others, post views, advice and content.

In between are a mid-level commitment group, all of whom are based outside of the UK. PD, PE and PG describe spending around 1-5 hours on FPL each week. They take the game seriously and regularly seek information to help their decisions, however they are largely passive information users. Although they sometimes use the online community to gather information they rarely interact or post about the game themselves.

Motivations

When asked about their motivations for playing the game, and for devoting so much time to it, several inter-connected factors were mentioned repeatedly by all those interviewed.

Fandom

All participants mentioned they were interested in football and the Premier League in particular. The majority responded passionately when asked to describe their relationship to football, using adjectives such as 'massive' to emphasise how much of a fan they were; 5 out of the 8 also mentioned that they were a supporter of a Premier League club.

Participants described using FPL as an outlet for this fan association, as it allows them to profit from their fandom and the associated knowledge. Several participants mention that FPL makes watching matches even more interesting to them. Owning players in their FPL team leads them to enjoy matches they wouldn't usually watch, creating a new way to enjoy the sport.

Despite the universal interest in football among participants it does not appear to be the case that the most passionate football fans are most invested in Fantasy Premier League. PA spends the least amount of time on FPL (less than 30 minutes a week) but states "my liking and fondness for football is massive". For him football, and Manchester City, come before FPL.

On the other end of the scale PC, spends 12 hours a week on FPL, but is not so emphatic when asked about his football fandom. When asked how much of a fan he was, he replied that he enjoys it and is a Manchester United supporter but added "I'm not like a diehard fan". He then observed that many diehard football fans don't like fantasy football. Likewise, PB spends around 10 hours per week on the game but describes her relationship with the sport in terms of interest rather than passion. She describes the reason she plays FPL as "because it mixes football, which I *enjoy*, with Maths which I *love*", suggesting that other motivating factors are at play.

Relationships

Participants repeatedly mentioned that relationships with friends was one of the most important reasons for playing. The game allows groups of friends to create 'mini-leagues' in order to directly compete against each other. Many of the respondents mentioned that these were an important parts of friendship groups. They are often accompanied by group chats on social messaging services, in which members exchange tips and advice, but mostly engage in 'banter' and keep in touch with friends. Several participants mentioned that mini-leagues with former colleagues or classmates had helped to maintain ties. PF mentioned that they helped him to remain in contact with old friends after moving cities.

Although relationships with real-life friends seem to be an important factor for all participants. For those active in the online community, the FPL community itself is a source of valued relationships. PB, PC, PF and PH describe interacting with others on Twitter, the community acting as an additional friendship group. PF observed that the Twitter community is for him "an extension of the football crowd", a group of people he can have fun and watch games with, online. Relationships which are formed online sometimes transition to become real-life friendships. PC describes attending an FPL meetup at which he met people he had previously chatted with online. PH also described the "magical" experience of meeting other members of a community at an FPL meetup. While PB describes making friends with many people she met through FPL.

Competition

When discussing their motivations for taking up FPL all 8 participants mentioned that it was to *compete* against friends or colleagues, and that this factor remained an important one for them. When

asked what motivates him to play PD answered: “The competition part is key for me, that’s the major bit, to be honest”.

Many described the feelings that they experienced when they achieved game success. PC describes the season he finished with a high overall game rank: “2015-16 was my highest finish ever, like 20k...smashed every mini-league ... it was euphoric”. Others similarly describe the ‘buzz’ and excitement of success.

When asked to explain why success felt so exciting, PA explained that it is “a test of your knowledge against others”. When his predictions come true, he feels a sense of ‘validation’. Others describe the joy of seeing your research pay off. PD described the joy of winning his mini-league on the last day of the season. He made the decision to captain Sadio Mane and when Mane scored two goals “it felt like an inspired decision. I will never forget that”.

Although competition with friends was a major motivator for all players, those more engaged with the online community were more likely to mention achieving a high overall rank as a factor. PC described his goal to achieve a top 10,000 finish. As someone involved in FPL professionally, PB explained that achieving a high overall game rank was important for her reputation as a content creator.

Intellectual Activity

Some describe the intellectual challenge and associated activities as part of the game’s attraction. After contrasting himself to a friend, who is a ‘diehard football fan’, PC explains “I like the science of it...I like looking through the shots on target stats and predicting a future goal-scorer”. He is not alone, PB, PD and PF all describe enjoying the process of looking at football statistics.

PH is more interested in learning than competition. He describes using football statistics and FPL to improve his analytical skills. He learns from how others in the community use statistics and tries to apply this to his own thinking. He gives the example of learning to use the programming language R in order to analyse FPL data, something he was inspired to do after seeing the work of others in the community.

Although those who were most committed players were most likely to mention enjoying this aspect of the game, they were not alone. PA mentioned loving stats and explained that statistics were one of the aspects of sport that he liked best.

Information Sources

There were several common information sources named by participants as being influential to their FPL decisions. In addition, there were sources which were only named by those in the highly committed group, this meant this group named significantly more information sources than the other participants.

As might expected of a game which is played on the web, the sources are largely online and informal in nature. With only PA and PF mentioning that traditional news-media sources were influential to their play. Only PH named an item of printed material; a book, written by an FPL community member, which discusses eliminating biases from FPL decision making.

Statistics

Although statistics are not an information source in themselves, as a form of information they are integral to the game for all participants. All participants expressed a preference for statistical data to make decisions. A repeated theme of the interviews was a discussion of statistics; where they were found, and which ones had the most merit. Those with the highest level of commitment to the game were most invested in statistics and tended to favour more sophisticated and abstract stats. Although

PA described “loving a stat” the stats he used were limited to the basic ones available in-game. On the other side of the scale PB describes herself as being mainly a stats-based player. When asked to explain how she looks for FPL information she gave the following example which demonstrates the depth of her research:

“So, I was looking at (Harry) Kane in the last four games. I was looking at stats for goal-threat and creativity-threat. I looked at goals, big chances, shots, shots on target, shots in the box and headed goals; and I looked at assists, successful crosses, chances created, big chances created”

PB describes using specialist FPL websites to find stats, but she also uses specialist football statistics websites and book-makers odds to inform her decisions. Other members of the high-level commitment group demonstrated similar behaviours. This group were also more likely to rely on sophisticated predictive metrics such as ‘expected goals’ (XG) and ‘expected goal involvement’ (XGI) to inform their decisions.

The mid-level group also liked to use statistics, but they were less motivated to seek out the stats themselves. Instead, they relied on those posted by others on Twitter and believed they were sufficient for their needs. PG explained that he believes some stats were unnecessary:

“(I like stats) but basic stats...there are some unnecessary ‘analysis-paralysis’ stats. I use XG and goals per minute. Those quantities, not others, some are too granular”. For the most dedicated group it seems no statistic is too granular, poring over tables of statistics is part of the enjoyment. PF recalls that when the specialist website Fantasy Football Scout enabled users to create their own tables of statistical tables “that completely transformed my interest”.

Broadcast media

One commonly named source, which is not (necessarily) based online, is broadcasts of football matches. During the interviews PH and PF mentioned occasionally attending matches but this was not something they mentioned in relation to FPL. All participants reported watching live matches on television and highlights shows. The BBC football highlights show Match of The Day was mentioned repeatedly as an influential source of information to their play.

However, the amount of time spent viewing games differed between participants. As did the perceived importance of broadcast matches as an information source. There seemed to be no clear relationship between high levels of commitment to FPL and high football viewership levels. In fact, this seemed to be more affected by family commitments. Some of the most committed players PB, PF and PH (as well as the lesser committed PA), explained that they spent time with their families at weekends and didn’t have the opportunity to watch many live games.

The mid-level commitment group tended view the most games, though this may be the result of their younger age and having comparatively fewer responsibilities. This group was also the most likely to perceive broadcast games as the most important source of information to their FPL decision making. All three of this group stated that the ‘eye-test’ was the most important factor for them when evaluating a footballer to draft into their FPL team. They described using statistics to ‘back up’ their decisions, as PG explained: “stats sometimes lie, so I always prefer to view the player in the context of a game”. In contrast, the most committed players were more likely to rely on statistics to make their decisions, with broadcast games being equal or secondary in importance.

Fantasy Premier League data

Another source of information named by all participants was data from the game itself. The FPL app, or web-browser application, provides a range of basic ‘fantasy’ statistics and allows users to filter by different metrics such as ‘points scored’ or ‘owned by percentage’.

Although using this data is common to anyone playing the game it was only talked as an important source of information by PA. He described using statistics from the game as his main source of statistical data. In addition, members of the mid-level commitment group described using data from the app to check upcoming fixtures. None of the high-level commitment group attached much importance to game data as an information source.

Fantasy Premier League content

The Premier League produces a range of official 'fantasy' content. This includes a television/online discussion show (The FPL Show) and some other video and written content which offers tips and advice to FPL players. This content seems to be an important source of information for those in the lower-level commitment groups, whereas of high-commitment level group, only PC mentions it at all.

This content is all easily accessible on the FPL website/app meaning that little effort is required to seek it out. Also, in contrast to content produced by the fan community, official content is aimed at more casual players of the game, and at those based outside of the UK. The FPL Show is broadcast on television around the world which may provide part of the explanation for why it was influential to those based outside of the UK.

Community content

The major difference between the information sources used by the high-level commitment group, and the other participants is the amount of community generated content they name as being influential to their decision making. Although other participants mention encountering this content on social media, they are not familiar enough with it to be able to name the sources. Those active in the online community meanwhile enthusiastically name the podcasts, YouTube channels and websites they find useful.

Podcasts and YouTube

FPL podcasts and YouTube channels, produced by members of the fan community, seem to be an important information source to all of those with high levels of commitment to the game. All members of this group name multiple examples and spend a lot of time each week consuming this content. PH describes downloading FPL videos from YouTube and watching them on his commute. Similarly, PF describes listening to FPL podcasts each day as he walks his dog.

Each of them describes having favoured voices, podcasters or members of the community whose opinions they seek out. PB describes two experts whose opinion she always seeks out: "basically, anything they are on I will listen to". Although many participants were keen to stress that they only like to hear the opinions of others and make their own FPL decisions.

Specialist websites

The use of specialist subscription-based websites is another information source used by this group. All name these websites as an important factor in their play, with some paying to subscribe to more than one site. Participants use these sites to take advantage of sophisticated performance statistics, tools and content. PB gives the example of using Fantasy Football Hub's 'fixture ticker' to assess upcoming fixtures, as it is more sophisticated and adaptable than relying on the in-game version favoured by more casual players. The group also named several free community-created websites which provide statistical data and FPL planning tools as sources of information.

Twitter

A persistent finding was the centrality of Twitter to participants information behaviour. All the participants described using Twitter as a source of information, but those with different levels of commitment used the platform in distinct ways.

Search tool

PA does not use Twitter primarily for FPL and he never tweets about the game. He follows the @OfficialFPL account but most of the accounts he follows are dedicated to general sports news. Despite this he named Twitter as the main source he uses to actively seek information for the purposes of FPL.

When making FPL choices he describes using Twitter's search feature. He gives the example from a previous week when playing his 'wildcard' (a special move in FPL which allows you to completely replace your squad). He searched Twitter for 'wildcard' and included the hashtag #FPL. From this he was able to see examples of other Twitter users who had posted their own 'wildcard' teams. This provided ideas and inspiration for his own team.

PD also describes using the Twitter search feature: "another thing I do is just take the player's name and put FPL at the end and I search on Twitter...I then just scroll through a whole lot of articles and comments". PD also follows no other FPL account aside from the @OfficialFPL but states that he gets most of the statistics he uses from Twitter in this way. He also comments that in any other sphere of life he would use Twitter in the same way, to search out the opinion of experts, adding "Twitter is a hive of information, for almost anything; it's become an important bit of how the world works".

Specialist accounts

Aside from PA and PD all the other participants described following specialist FPL Twitter accounts to encounter information. PG describes getting most of his statistics from Twitter. He says he doesn't use Twitter to search but follows "quite a number" of specialist FPL accounts. It is from these that he obtains the statistics which inform his play. He names several accounts from the fan community but identifies the @FPLCommunity account as particularly useful. This account curates and shares useful statistics and threads each week. Although he may encounter and read articles found this way, he does not remember the names of any of the websites he reads. He finds lots of information this way but for him Twitter is the information source, and he pays little attention to specialist websites or publications.

Creating lists

Two of the participants describe using the Twitter lists function to curate their own list of preferred FPL accounts. PE does not use his account primarily for FPL but has created an FPL list in which he has collected his favourite FPL pundits. He likes to use this list as it condenses the process of seeking information. When asked where he gets statistics from, he replied "the kind of information I need is already provided on Twitter, so it's made me kind of lazy to find myself because it's already provided". This attitude was common among the mid-level commitment group who find Twitter so convenient they feel they need not look elsewhere for their information needs.

PB also described using the Twitter 'lists' function but for another reason. She states that she follows so many people, on her dedicated FPL Twitter account, that she finds her timeline too overwhelming to take in. She uses the Lists feature to curate a group of around 20 trusted accounts which provide useful content.

Interaction and sharing

Interaction and sharing behaviours on Twitter were limited to those in the high-level commitment group. Each described interacting on Twitter to share stats, advice and analysis with other members of the community. PB and PF share their professional content on Twitter but both PC and PH have also shared their work online, both have been involved in producing FPL podcasts in a hobbyist capacity.

PC describes regularly tweeting an offer to help others with their FPL decisions. Other members of the community would then reply to him with their dilemmas, so he could offer advice. Most also describe being involved in DM chats and group chats in which information and advice will be exchanged.

PB describes posting a weekly Twitter thread which curates and shares the most useful community-created content, whether those be articles, Tweets or videos. It seems that although there is an active Twitter community which interacts and shares content, there is also a more passive audience for this content in those with lower levels of commitment to the game.

Information skills

Another common finding was the degree of sophistication participants displayed in their thinking around information. Each participant displayed qualities and thought patterns associated with higher levels of information fluency. Many described seeking trusted information sources and would take steps to assess the source of rumours before acting on them. Most had sophisticated views on the nature of statistics and in what circumstances they might be deemed useful.

None of the participants described having any difficulty in finding the information they needed. Instead, many reported their main issue was processing the abundance of information they encountered each week. PF described this as a 'tsunami of information' which can be completely overwhelming. Most talked about coping with this information-overload as a key skill, and several talked about their ability to 'cancel out the noise' and 'ignore the Twitter hype'. Although this was most common among the high-level commitment group, this was a common sentiment.

Most participants spoke stridently about the ways they process information and had strong opinions on which sources could be trusted. All appeared to have high levels of confidence in their own abilities to find and assess information. When asked to describe his weekly FPL information habits PC replied "oh, I'm meticulous with it", before going on to describe his routine of consuming information in a structured and strategic way.

Even PA, who has little time to spend on the game, described his process in terms of 'triangulation'. He described using statistics and the 'eye-test' in combination to arrive at better judgements of footballers. He also describes keeping a written shortlist, using pen and paper, on which he lists potential purchases along with their relevant statistics. Others described similar behaviours, PE described keeping a spreadsheet for the same purpose, regularly updating the list with new data.

For many of the participants the process of assessing information and arriving at a decision was an inherently social activity. PD, PG both describe chatting to friends about FPL as an important part of their thinking. Most others described group chats with real-life friends or members of the online community as an important part of organising their thoughts before making a game decision. When PH was asked how he processes all the information he consumes, and arrives at a decision, he described himself and a friend posting thoughts to each other frequently throughout the week. When making a decision he goes back to this WhatsApp conversation in order to spur his thoughts. In this way, he claimed the WhatsApp chat acts as an interactive notepad for their ideas.

For those in the higher commitment levels creating and sharing information acted as an important element of the way they process information. PH described how he and his friend decided to turn their WhatsApp chat into a weekly podcast. The aim of the podcast was not primarily to attract listeners but to 'streamline' their thought processes. He explained that it really helped his decision making to

collate, prepare and discuss the data. This was an observation echoed by PB and PF who both produce FPL content professionally. When asked how he processes all the data he consumes, PF replied “Well I’m lucky, in that I have to write and produce content about it...so that helps with my own team inadvertently”. PB also described that having to put her thoughts ‘out there’ really helped to strengthen her arguments and ensure she had done the research to back them up.

Overlaps with work-life information behaviour

Another finding which was mentioned repeatedly by participants was that their FPL information behaviour related in some way to their work-life or academic background. It was notable that 5 of the 8 participants (PB, PD, PF, PG, PH) brought this into the conversation unprompted.

When PB described her data-driven approach to FPL she linked this to her background studying maths. Although the content of her course wasn’t necessarily influential, she described herself as having a ‘mathematical mind’ and as a person who liked to work methodically through problems. Similarly, PD mentions his degree in economics “I think I do my FPL research pretty much the same way I would carry out any other research...because of my background in economics. I read economics, and you know it’s just numbers, it’s opinions, it’s what you can see, and then interpreting everything together by yourself”.

PG talked at length about engaging with FPL in a similar way to the stock market “I’m a finance person so I try to look at it as a stock market thing. I think the psychology is kind of similar. You want to get a lot of information...and you want to be as analytical as possible”. He went on to compare FPL to equities markets, which reward those who are patient and think of the long-term. PH also mentions his work as a data engineer extensively, feeling that his work and hobby both reward the same analytical skills.

However, it is not just those who work primarily with numbers who mention this overlap between work and hobby. PF describes his background as a journalist in much the same way: “one of the things in journalism (is) you get lots of data and information and you’ve got to present it in a way that’s meaningful”. Therefore, his background has helped to develop the skills needed to synthesise information into an FPL decision. He also talks about how his journalistic training influences him to rely on trusted new sources and not to be swayed by unsubstantiated rumours.

The overlap between FPL and work-life information behaviour was not only a one-way process. PH describes taking learnings from FPL and applying it to his work. He described taking inspiration from an analytical tool in the FPL community and developing something similar in his job as a data engineer. PD also mentioned including FPL on his CV to showcase his analytical skills.

It seemed that those with professional jobs, with which they are personally identified, were those most likely to link their information behaviour to work. Despite this, others reported FPL having been influential to other spheres of their lives. PC relates that FPL has helped to improve his decision-making as a person: “When I was younger, I used to run head-first into everything, but now I look for facts to back things up before making a decision...and it’s helped me with my thought process, I’d say it’s massively helped me with that”.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Objective 1: To investigate the information behaviour of Fantasy Premier League players; Particularly to identify information sources used and favoured by players.

In this chapter the results of the questionnaire and interviews will be discussed, and the themes will be compared with those identified in the literature review chapter. The aim of the research is to investigate the information behaviour of Fantasy Premier League players and to explore the role of the social media fan community in those behaviours. The results of the research seem largely to support what was discovered in the literature review, although there are some differences which will be explored.

Whereas the literature review focussed on objectives 1-3, this chapter will also address objective 4 and will suggest if, and in what way, the findings of the research might contribute to the literature on information behaviour in serious leisure. This discussion will take each objective in turn but also includes a section which details additional findings not obviously related to the objectives.

Questionnaire

The most striking result of the questionnaire findings was that printed material is not an influential source of information for any of those who were surveyed. This supports the evidence of previous studies of information activities in fantasy sport, which all found that players used informal sources, with sources such as newspapers and books being unimportant (Billings & Ruibley, 2013; Dwyer & Kim, 2011).

Another notable finding was that 'online discussion forums' were, after printed materials, one of sources rated least influential. This is notable as earlier studies of fantasy sports players had mentioned online discussion forums as important sources of information. It may be that since those earlier studies were conducted, social media have largely replaced discussion forums, as some have suggested (Holt, 2020). An alternative explanation is that the study was disproportionately drawn from social media and that players who use online discussion forums were under-represented in the questionnaire sample.

If this were the case, we might expect the information source 'the FPL community on social media' to have been more highly rated as an influential source. However, the average respondent rated the source only moderately influential. This was an unexpected finding, observation of the behaviour of FPL players suggested it would be a highly influential source. It may be that findings from the interviews help to partially explain this. Despite many interview participants using Twitter extensively, most were keen to point out that they were not influenced by what they encountered on social media. Although this seems unlikely, this desire to be seen to 'make your own decisions' seems to be a feature of the FPL communities' culture; and could be a function of the competitive nature of the game.

Some information sources were scored notably differently by different profiles of players. Specialist FPL content and 3rd party statistics websites were both rated more influential by more committed players. The biggest split was for specialist FPL podcast/video content. Those who spent more time on the game reported were much more likely to score this as influential to their play. This finding supports evidence from the literature review that more committed players are likely to use more specialist resources and statistics (Hirsh, Anderson & Caselli, 2012; Otto, Metz & Ensmenger, 2011).

Analysis of the questionnaire results showed that it was the amount of time players spent on the game each week which was the biggest determining factor of which resources they used. Whereas, Otto, Metz & Ensmenger (2011) distinguished between 'expert' players and 'novice' players, the number of

years playing the game did not seem to have a notable effect on resources respondents found to be influential.

Interviews

The interview findings similarly found differences in source preferences between those with the highest levels of time commitment and the rest. Among the interview participants the distinction between those who were active members of the social media fan community, and the rest was clear. Those who were actively involved on Twitter tended to spend much more time per week researching their FPL decisions and used many more resources than the others.

The source preferences discovered in the interviews correlated with the findings of both the questionnaire and the literature review, in the sense that broadcast games were a popular source of information. Participants all reported watching games and/or highlights shows on television to inform their FPL play. However, the most highly committed players were less likely to consider televised football to be the most important source of information for their decision making. Most considered statistics to be a more valuable source.

All of those interviewed expressed a preference for statistical data; however, the most committed group were the most active in seeking statistical data. All this group reported using numerous specialist FPL websites and statistical tools to find complex predictive stats. Again, this is something found in previous studies of fantasy sport players which found the most committed players used numerous specialist resources and were more likely to consider more sophisticated stats (Hirsh, Anderson & Caselli, 2012; Otto, Metz & Ensmenger, 2011).

Members of the most committed group all reported consuming several specialist podcasts or YouTube videos, and spent many hours each week consuming this kind of content. They enthusiastically named their favourite YouTube channels or Podcasts and tended to give the explanation that they liked to hear a plethora of opinions before making their own game decisions. Notably this kind of behaviour is not something which has been noted before in studies of fantasy sports. However, it makes sense considering the research which has found people tend to prefer 'people to people' sources in everyday life situations (Savolainen, 1995; Savolainen and Kari, 2004). As Khoo (2017) noted, only humans can provide certain kinds of information such as opinions and advice (all participants also described chats with friends, online or offline, as an important source of information).

Additionally, this kind of content is typically produced by other members of the social media fan community, and it seems that this is another part of the attraction. The people creating this kind of content are their peers. They are accessible, people can ask questions in the YouTube comments, give their own opinions, or start their own discussions with other viewers. For these types of players consuming this kind of content is information, entertainment, and community at once. This kind of social information behaviour has been seen before in other serious leisure activities, however the ability to live stream on social platforms such as YouTube have added greater scope for interaction.

Another finding of this study, which has not previously been encountered in the fantasy sport literature is the centrality of Twitter to participants information behaviour. Although some of the literature has mentioned social media as a source of information for fantasy sport players, for the interview participants in this study, it was a crucial element of their information activities. This finding was not limited to those players who had a high level of commitment.

All the participants named Twitter as a source of information, which is interesting as previous research has found people tend not to view social media as an information source (Khoo, 2017). Participants used Twitter in a variety of different way to search, encounter, share, compile and organise information. Some of those participants with the lowest level of commitment described using Twitter

as a search tool. Others described using the Twitter 'lists' feature to compile personalised lists of their favourite 'experts'. Most described following specialist accounts and encountering information serendipitously on their timeline.

However, those who were least committed to the game described using Twitter to passively encounter information. They rarely interacted or posted about FPL. The highly committed group were much more active and described behaviours such as information compilation and sharing opinions, advice, and statistics. This group described having special Twitter accounts dedicated entirely to FPL which adopt the informal naming convention of including FPL in the title together with an alias e.g., @FPLGeneral. For this group engaging on Twitter is to be part of the kind of community of interest commonly described in studies of information behaviour in serious leisure.

Whereas some of the older studies of information in fantasy sport reported players being frustrated by a lack of information, it was notable that none of the players interviewed expressed that sentiment. In fact, most expressed the opposite and stated that dealing with too much information was frequently an issue for them. Many participants described the ability to be able to cancel out the noise as being a key skill needed to be successful in the game. Most players described the kind of highly developed methods of information management described by Wohn, Freeman & Quehl (2017). Players of all levels of commitment described using a variety of sources to 'triangulate' and achieve a holistic appraisal of footballers.

Objective 2: To explore the factors which motivate player's information activities.

From the analysis of the interview transcripts four themes were identified which related to the motivations for players information activities. These motivations strongly correlate with the motivations for playing identified in other studies of fantasy sport. The themes identified were fandom, relationships, competition, and intellectual activity. It was found that these factors did not exist in isolation but were frequently interconnected. For example, many participants answered that competition with *friends* was their primary motivation.

All the participants in the study were fans of football and used FPL to be closer to the sport they enjoyed. Participants described FPL as an outlet for their fan knowledge. This finding is one which has been made in studies of fantasy sport repeatedly. A desire to be closer to the sport is one of the components Farquhar and Meeds (2007) identified as part of their concept of 'surveillance'. One notable finding of this study was that the most passionate football fans were not necessarily those who invested most into FPL. Although Halverson and Halverson's (2008) competitive fandom framework acknowledges this, the findings of this study showed that several interconnected factors were involved and not merely competition and fandom.

Just as in the other studies of fantasy sport motivation, relationships with others were a key part of players motivations. Most participants mentioned that relationships with friends, colleague or former classmates were part of the motivation. Participants reported being involved in group chats with friends centred around FPL. These group chats were sometimes used to share information but mainly allowed relationships to be maintained. For the more committed players, relationships with other members of the community were also part of the motivation. Several mentioned having made friends with people they had met via the online community. The desire to be part of a community of interest is a finding which has often been made in serious leisure studies (Mansourian, 2020).

One factor which has been mentioned in the literature surrounding fantasy sport, but which is not often a factor in serious leisure or in fan communities is competition. Many participants mentioned that competition was a key part of their motivation for playing. Many described the 'buzz' and the feeling of excitement they experienced after success. Being motivated by the thrill of success is the

core of Farquhar and Meed's (2007) concept of arousal which they identified as a key motivation for fantasy sport users.

Likewise, their concept of surveillance seems to encompass the motivational theme 'intellectual activity' which was identified in this study. Participants reported enjoying the process of looking for information and working with statistics. These motivations are also frequently identified in studies of serious leisure. As Mansourian (2020) noted, people are passionate about their interests and find intrinsic pleasure in looking for and finding information.

Objective 3: To consider the role of the social media fan community in player's information behaviour.

For the highly committed players the FPL community serves as the kind of community of interest identified in many other studies of information behaviour in serious leisure. For this group the community is a source of social interaction and friends. It is also a venue for them to create a fresh identity for themselves based around their knowledge of the game. Players find kudos and respect in the community for the informational tasks they contribute. By sharing useful information or knowledge, players gain followers on social media and status within the community.

Members of the community display all of Stebbins six qualities of a serious leisure activity (Stebbins, 2020). They invest significant effort based on specific knowledge, and experience durable personal and social benefits. For many it has the potentiality to turn into a career. Two of those who were interviewed have undergone this process and their hobby has developed into a paid career. For others this remains an ambition. Another member of the highly committed group shared his dream of using the skills and knowledge gained in FPL to pursue a career in football analytics. He views playing FPL and interacting with the community to improve his skills.

The FPL Community is not a formal entity but seems to be based around Twitter and a network of community generated podcasts, YouTube channels and specialist websites. Members identify themselves with specialist Twitter handles and tag their posts with hashtags in a form of DIY information organisation and dissemination commonly seen in other online fan communities (Price & Robinson, 2017).

However, the community is not only of interest to those highly committed players who actively participate and contribute. The findings of the questionnaire showed that more than half never posted about FPL on social media. Those interviewed who were displayed lower levels of commitment all described encountering community generated content on Twitter. This information was both encountered passively, on the timeline, or was actively sought out by players who described using Twitter's search function to find information, sometimes using the hashtag #FPL.

This model of community has been seen before in the communities of collectors described by Lee & Trace (2009) and Case (2010). Lee & Trace described the complex social system involving complex interactions responding to specialist needs. They described the most experienced collectors doing most of the information seeking while information flowed through the community via online forums. Case made the point that the internet had facilitated the existence of this kind of community, and it seems that social media may have further accelerated the trend further.

The dynamic of the FPL community appears to be like that described in other online game virtual communities (Adams, 2009; Nyman, 2010; Sköld, 2015). The more experienced, or committed, players act as information gatekeepers or mentors to others in the community. They do much of the informational work and others enjoy the fruits of their information seeking and dissemination. The social media dynamic of Twitter rewards the most active players with kudos and status. But just as has been described in other virtual communities, this type of information gathering is preferred by the less

committed players. As one of those interviewed stated “the kind of information I need is already provided on Twitter, so it’s made me kind of lazy to find myself”.

Additional findings

One of the most striking findings to emerge from the interviews, which was not obviously related to the research objectives, was overlap with work-life behaviour. This emerged as a theme repeatedly, with several participants independently mentioning that their FPL information behaviour was like, or informed by, their academic or work background. All this group mentioned that their work/academic background required the kind of analytical skills which were also useful in FPL. They were able to take learnings from one sphere of their lives and apply it to the other.

One participant compared the information skills required in FPL as being like those required when investing in the stock market. This is evidence for Otto, Metz & Ensmenger’s (2011) assertion that the most committed players treat fantasy sport decisions like an investment. Many of this group had backgrounds which were rooted in numbers and statistical data, which they explained was how their background related to FPL. However, one participant who was a journalist made a similar kind of statement. He found that his background meant that he was able to evaluate sources effectively, as well as to synthesize large amounts information.

This overlap between work-life and everyday life information is something identified by Savolainen (1995) in his theory of everyday life information. Interestingly it was those with professional work backgrounds who made these kinds of connection, suggesting that they had a higher degree of identification with their work. Savolainen’s concepts of ‘way of life’ and ‘mastery of life’ seem relevant here as it seems participants orient themselves to information in a way which seems natural to them and reflects their cognitive order.

Objective 4: To suggest if, and in what ways, the findings might contribute to an understanding of information behaviour in serious leisure.

Many of the findings of this study support what has previously been discovered about information behaviour in serious leisure. Just as has been shown in other studies, Fantasy Premier League players are passionate about their hobby, and because of this they are enthusiastic about the information they engage with, and this influences the way they seek, share and produce information. Their passion frequently leads them to amass a great deal of knowledge about the topic. The intrinsic pleasure of information seeking is a significant factor which motivates them to participate in FPL as an activity and they are persistent and comprehensive in their pursuit of information.

Another finding of the study, which supports previous studies of serious leisure is the social nature of information activities. Participants have fulfilled a desire to become involved in communities of interest centred around FPL and have found new forms of identity for themselves within the FPL community. As has been observed in other virtual communities, complex social systems have emerged in which ‘expert’ players serve as information mentos to the rest of the community (Adams, 2009; Nyman, 2010; Sköld, 2015). These expert players spend a great deal of time and effort seeking, compiling, and sharing information which is of benefit to the community. In return they receive kudos and status.

One potentially useful finding of this study is the centrality of social media, particularly Twitter, to information behaviour in the FPL community. Although the dynamics of virtual communities have been explored before in serious leisure, it seems that Twitter has accelerated trends and facilitated an informal but highly complex and dynamic information community. The social media aspect of Twitter has allowed information to be disseminated efficiently, with the potential to reach millions of people. The social nature of the technology means those seeking, sharing, and creating content are rewarded

with followers, likes and status. The findings also show FPL players using functions such as Twitter search and lists to seek and compile information

The popularity of FPL YouTube channels is another feature of the community which is another notable feature of this study. Many FPL players spend many hours each week watching their favourite personalities present opinions and advice. The social nature of YouTube is used extensively as comments and questions are encouraged meaning that YouTube itself is another venue for communal information activities.

One aspect of FPL which is not usually a factor in other serious leisure activities is its competitive nature. It was expected that this might have a significant effect on information behaviour. Competition has been shown to be an important motivating factor for participation and for engaging in informational activities. Participants described the thrill of victory being a major part of the enjoyment and this spurred them invest more effort into their play. However, many of the information behaviours described are similar to those in other serious leisure and fan communities. It may be that the element of competition leads to higher levels of time investment, but this is difficult to substantiate without a comparison with other serious leisure communities.

Finally, a significant finding of the study is that no participant described having any difficulty in finding information to support their play. In-fact many described the problems associated with information overload. It seems the attributes which are valuable in FPL are the abilities to quickly evaluate, compile and organise information. This suggests that in a social media information environment, information scarcity less of a problem than information overload.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This project aimed to investigate the information behaviour of Fantasy Premier League players and to explore the role the online fan community played in those behaviours. The results clearly show there are notable differences in information behaviour between those who are casual players and those who are most committed to the game. The most committed players tend to actively participate in the online fan community and spend many hours each week conducting research and engaging in information activities relating to the game.

The study's findings supported previous studies of information source preference in fantasy sports. Fantasy Premier League players use an array of informal information sources to inform their decisions. The FPL host site or app is ubiquitous, as is television. The studies results show that all participants are informed by watching football matches and highlights shows on television. Web resources are also common however the most committed players report searching further afield and use a variety of specialist online sites and statistical tools.

FPL players information activities are inherently social. Participants describe relationships with others as being a key part of their motivation for playing and many describe sharing information with friends. For the most committed players the online community is a source of friendship, social interaction, and identity. These players describe spending hours each week consuming podcasts and YouTube videos which are produced by other members of the community. YouTube is an important source of both information and community as it allows viewers to interact with the host and other viewers.

This communal activity is most clearly in evidence on Twitter. A key finding of this study is the centrality of Twitter to the information behaviour of FPL players. Players of all levels of commitment in this study described using Twitter to find information. Some of the more casual players described using Twitter as a search tool, other passively encountered information on their timeline. The most committed players were actively engaged on Twitter and had accounts entirely dedicated to the game. They used Twitter to encounter information, but they also engaged in interaction and sharing behaviours.

The FPL community seems to have a complex social system which allows specialist information needs to be met. The most serious members of the community conduct much of the primary research, but this is then circulated through the rest of the community via channels such as Twitter. Although this dynamic has been noted before in virtual communities, the social media dynamic has facilitated its growth (Lee & Trace, 2009). The infrastructure of social sites such as Twitter rewards the 'information work' of the 'expert' players with kudos and status in the form of 'likes' and followers. This then perpetuates a virtuous circle of information.

One finding of this study which contrasts with some of the evidence from previous studies of information in fantasy sport is that FPL players often find the amount of information they are exposed to overwhelming. Previous studies had reported players frustrations at a lack of available information. It seems that in the intervening years this situation has been reversed (Hirsh, Anderson & Caselli, 2012). In a social media information environment information overload is an increasing problem (Zhang et al., 2019). The result in FPL is that the ability to quickly evaluate, compile and organise information are now key skills for players wishing to achieve game success.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Reflection

The subject of this dissertation is inspired by my own Fantasy Premier League 'career'. I had played the game casually for years, but during the Covid-19 pandemic I began to dedicate more of my time to it as other recreational options were limited. I found myself becoming immersed in a dynamic and thriving community on Twitter and YouTube, with the quest for information at its heart. At around the same time, I was attending my online CityLIS classes, and the material I was studying in my lectures caused me to reflect upon the information behaviour I was witnessing and engaging in in my hobby. I began to think that the types of information behaviour seen in FPL were not only distinctive but also innovative and effective. I was inspired to write a blog post about an example of collaborative information seeking the community had engaged in.

Despite this I was still reticent about choosing it as my dissertation topic. I work in an academic library and choosing something more 'serious' and relevant to the academic library sector seemed more appropriate. This indecision led me to do a great deal of reading into information behaviour in serious leisure and I became more convinced by some of this literature that it might have some value.

Writing my research proposal was a valuable experience. I had already read quite a lot around the topic at this stage, and I was inspired during this process to believe in the research I was to conduct. One item of difficulty I had when writing my proposal was creating a clear set of research objectives. I knew what it was that I wanted to study but could not seem to put it into words concisely. This problem remained throughout the research process as I continually tweaked the wording. In hindsight I believe that the scope of the research was too wide and tried to do too many things at once. I am also now convinced that I would have been better served to use research questions instead of formal objectives.

I decided on my methodology because of my literature review. I discovered some similar studies which had used this combination of methodologies and it seemed to me to be a pragmatic way to approach the problem. After conducting a small pilot study with friends of the questionnaire it became apparent that some of the questions would need to be removed. I had intended to ask respondents for their team ID and game rank, but it seemed many people didn't know how to find these, and it deterred them from completing the study. Those piloted also commented that the consent document were a factor which may deter completion so I decided to remove the request for an email address and asked people to contact me by email if they would volunteer to be interviewed.

Initially recruiting respondents to take part in the questionnaire was a slow process. Around this time, I was exceptionally busy at work with the start of term and my energy was diverted elsewhere which set me back in time. Once I was able to dedicate more time, I contacted influential members of the Twitter community who shared the questionnaire on my behalf. From this I gained many responses and interview volunteers.

One of the aspects of the research which was most successful were the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams which worked well. I met some nice and generous people and enjoyed talking fantasy football with people from around the world. I also found that my skills as an interviewer improved with each interview, and I gathered some very useful information in the interviews. Because I used Microsoft Teams, a transcript was automatically created, and I just had to edit it. I found the process of coding the transcripts to be difficult and time-consuming but the thematic analysis technique I used was successful and I believe I achieved great results from it.

Unfortunately, the time constraints of trying to conduct research alongside a full-time job have meant that I have been unable to dedicate as much time as I wish on the process of writing up the research. I am slightly disappointed that I have not been able to do more justice to the topic which I believe is worthy of such effort. However, I have learned a lot during the process about time management and managing a project. In addition it has been valuable to walk in the shoes of the students and researchers I interact with in my job, allowing me to engage with their issues with more empathy.

Working Title

Competitive Fandom in Serious Leisure Information: A study of Information Behaviour in the fantasy football community

Introduction

Fantasy sports are significant global phenomena with many millions of players around the world. Each week competitors navigate a complex information environment to inform their game decisions. The games themselves are competitions in which participants select an imaginary 'team' from among a league's athletes. Points are awarded based on the athletes' real-life performances, with participants competing against each other to score the most 'fantasy points'. As Otto, Metz & Ensmenger (2011) note, fantasy sports themselves consist of a layer of statistical information placed over sports. As such, they are information-rich environments requiring high levels of information literacy in their players (Waelchi, 2008). All of this suggests that fantasy sport could be a productive area of study for LIS. Despite this there appears to be no previous studies of information behaviour in fantasy sport from an LIS perspective

This study will focus on players of one fantasy sport, the English Premier League's official fantasy football league: Fantasy Premier League (FPL). FPL currently has over 8 million players and has an active and thriving online fan community (Premier League, 2021). Although it is difficult to measure the number of fans actively engaging with the fan community online, one indication is the 393,000 subscribers to the Fantasy Premier League Reddit page (Reddit, 2021).

The aim of this study is to investigate and record the information behaviour FPL players exhibit in the course of their fantasy 'careers' and to examine what impact the fan community has on those behaviours. To achieve this a mixed methods approach will be taken. An online survey will ask participants to identify the importance of a variety of information sources to their play. The survey will be followed up by online semi-structured interviews which will dig deeper into the information practices of participants and examine the impact of the fan community upon them. Although the sample is unlikely to be large enough to be representative of such a large community, it is hoped that valuable insights can be gained into the information practices of FPL players which will contribute to a broader understanding of human information behaviour.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore the ways fantasy football participants seek out, share, and use information to inform their fantasy football decisions. In doing so, the intention is to contribute towards an understanding of information behaviour in serious leisure, and among fan communities.

Objectives

1. To identify information sources used and favoured by participants.
2. To examine the different information styles of participants. Particularly to identify differences between casual players and those who are active members of the online fan community.
3. To explore the impact of the fan community in fantasy football information.
4. To suggest ways the findings could contribute to an understanding of serious leisure information and information behaviour more broadly.

Scope and Definition

This study will focus only on the players of the English Premier League's official fantasy football game 'Fantasy Premier League' (FPL). Although it is expected that most participants will be based in the UK, recruitment will take place in online forums and participation is welcome to players from overseas. For reasons of practicality, the study will be limited to players who competed in the 2020/2021 season's game. This is because the research will commence in the close season; after that season has finished and before the new one begins. As participants will be asked to recall their information practices it is important that as short a time period as possible has passed to ensure a sufficient level of detail is recalled. This will also be helpful for purposes of comparison once the data has been collected.

Two definitions presented by Bawden & Robinson (2012) inform this study's conception of Information Behaviour. It is "the many ways in which human beings interact with information, in particular the ways people seek out and use information" (Bates, 2010, 2381). This includes both active and passive information seeking and information use (Wilson, 2000). This broad interpretation allows for the study of participants' practices holistically, as is appropriate for the study of information behaviour in such a modern and 'online' community.

The term 'fantasy football community' refers both to individual players and to the collective as a whole. The online fan community is a notable feature of fantasy football information and its collective practices, and relation to the information behaviour of individuals will be an important area of study.

Because fantasy football is an 'fantasy' information layer placed over sport, difficulties of language can emerge, meaning it is useful to clarify terms before the project begins. Describing players of fantasy football as 'players', can lead to confusion when the same terminology is also used to describe real-life footballers. Likewise, using 'participants' is liable to become confusing when talking about the participants recruited to the study. To resolve this problem the label 'FPL managers' will sometimes be referred to, as it is a term commonly used, and identified with, among the FPL community.

Research Context/Literature Review

The motivation for this research stems in part from observations made during the researchers' own FPL 'career'. Fantasy football is a game which relies upon advanced information skills and its thriving online fan community is responsible for an incredibly rich and diverse array of websites, podcasts, blogs, and statistical tools (Whittaker, 2021). It is an observation which has been made before in literature. Waelchi (2008) described fantasy football as the 'librarians' sport of choice'. He demonstrates that the skills exhibited by fantasy football players correspond notably with recognised information literacy standards, a fact which provides librarians with opportunities to improve information literacy skills teaching. Jacobsen (2017) makes similar observations after interviewing 3 librarians/fantasy sport players about their information practices.

As a hobbyist activity it seems clear that fantasy football would fall within the Serious Leisure perspective. The idea of Serious Leisure was introduced by Canadian Sociologist Robert Stebbins. It describes the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer core activity which captivates the participant with its challenges and complexity (Stebbins, 2009). Participants find serious leisure pursuits so interesting that they launch themselves into leisure 'careers' which are centred around acquiring skills and knowledge. The complex social organisations and information needs of serious leisure participants have proved a fertile ground for LIS. The study of information in Serious Leisure was pioneered by Jenna Hartel, who argues serious leisure is information-rich and deserves special attention in information science (Hartel, Cox & Griffin, 2016).

Mansourian (2020) offers a useful review of the existing literature about information behaviour in the context of Serious Leisure. Several notable studies focus on the behaviour of collectors; of coins (Case,

2009), records (Margree et al., 2014) and rubber ducks (Lee & Trace, 2009). Areas of study which have more in common with fantasy football include Adams' (2009) study of information behaviour in virtual play spaces and Nyman's (2010) study of information behaviour in World of Warcraft. Another area of interest is studies of the information behaviour of fan communities. Price & Robinson (2017) found that fans are responsible for the creation of new forms of information and demonstrate sophisticated methods of information organisation and dissemination. Mansourian's literature review concludes with the observation that people involved in serious leisure activities are passionate about what they do. This passion influences their information behaviour in interesting ways and makes Serious Leisure a rich area for further studies.

Although it seems likely that the information behaviour of fantasy football players could be of interest to LIS it is an area which remains largely unexplored. Otto, Metz & Ensmenger (2011) discussed fantasy sport information from an LIS perspective. They note the varying information gathering strategies of players with different levels of experience and explain that the increasing turn to statistics among sport fans has influenced the growth of fantasy sport. However, their discussion was focussed on sport information more generally and they did not conduct a study of participants information behaviour. It seems that the information behaviour of fantasy football players has not been studied before from an LIS perspective.

Literature more relevant to fantasy sport has emerged from the disciplines of Sport Management, education research and Games Studies. Tacon & Vainker (2017) conducted a useful systematic review of fantasy sport literature which includes several relevant studies. Ruihily & Hardin (2013) investigated whether the information needs of fantasy sport users are being met. Smith, Sharma & Hooper's (2006) study of decision making in online fantasy sports communities is also relevant. Halverson & Halverson (2008) introduce the concept of 'competitive fandom' to describe the kinds of knowledge and motivation required to play fantasy sport. This concept is likely to be a useful one to the study of information behaviour in the fantasy football community. The competitive nature of information use in fantasy sport is a novel factor, not usually present in other serious leisure or fan communities. This novel feature makes fantasy sport an interesting case and further adds to the rationale for studying it in LIS.

This study will be informed by the Savolainen's (1995) 'everyday life information seeking' (ELIS) model. The ELIS model is concerned both with the set of dispositions individuals bring to information seeking and with the context in which it occurs. Whereas information behaviour models have traditionally focussed on students and workers in professional contexts, ELIS is a model frequently used in studies of serious leisure information behaviour as it emphasizes information in everyday life and is concerned with the way information is shared and received in those contexts.

Methodology

To meet the research objectives a mixed methods approach will be taken, employing an online questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. Mansourian (2020) noted that, as an emerging field of research, studies of information behaviour in serious leisure have predominantly used qualitative methods. He concludes that there is a need for more studies producing quantitative data to validate existing knowledge in this area. Although this study will use mixed methods the qualitative element will be the most important aspect. The main function of the questionnaire is to generate volunteers to take part in the interviews, although it is hoped that some useful quantitative data will be generated too. It is likely that the size of the sample will be too small from which wide generalisations can be drawn. This combination of large-scale survey followed by a more detailed case study is a common and productive approach in LIS research (Pickard, 2013).

Survey

The questionnaire will be delivered using Qualtrics online survey software and will consist of closed questions (excepting voluntary fields requesting an email address and FPL team Information). The intention is to produce a short questionnaire which will not be intimidating to respondents and will attract a larger sample; it will consist of fewer than 20 questions. The questions will cover:

- Demographics (Age, gender, nationality, level of education, occupation).
- Years of playing experience.
- Average time per week spent on the game.
- Likert scale questions asking respondents to rate the importance of various information sources to their FPL play.
- Voluntary FPL team information (2020/2021 season rank/ all-time highest rank/ Team Id)
- Request for email address if the respondent is willing to be interviewed.

FPL team information will be used to investigate whether there are potential correlations between information practices and game success. The request for an email address will be accompanied by options to select Skype interview; email interview; or either. Although it is hoped that there are enough interview volunteers to conduct video interviews, via Skype, the option of email interviews will be added as a fallback option, with the thought that respondents may be more willing to engage via this method.

The survey will be conducted in two parts. A pilot study will be conducted, from a sample of 5 colleagues and friends, to determine the suitability of the questions and the format of the survey. Once the results have been collected adjustments may be made before carrying out the full survey.

To recruit participants the link to the online survey will be posted to the researcher's social media accounts using appropriate hashtags. The link will be posted on FPL community forums and websites and influential members of the community will be approached to share the link on their networks. In addition, snowball sampling will be encouraged, respondents will be asked to share the survey with friends. Although it is hoped that a relatively large sample can be obtained by these methods it will nevertheless be unrepresentative of the over 8 million FPL players and will likely under-represent casual fans.

Interviews

Once the survey data has been collected interview volunteers will be contacted by email. Around 8-10 participants will be recruited. If enough volunteers agree to Skype interviews, these will be arranged over a two-week period. The interviews will be semi structured, with each participant being given the same prompts but the conversation being allowed to flow as the respondent wishes. It is expected that the interviews will last 30-45 minutes. The respondents will be asked to describe a typical FPL game-week and the range of information used to inform their decision making. Whereas the quantitative part of the research will focus on 'what' sources respondents use in the course of their FPL activities, the interview will focus on how and why the respondents use these sources, as well as on the impact of the FPL fan community on their information practices. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

If there are insufficient volunteers for Skype interviews email interviews will be conducted. Respondents will be asked the same questions via email with the exchange being limited to a two-week time scale to ensure the interview does not take up too much time.

Once the survey and interviews are completed the data from both will be analysed. It is hoped that rich qualitative data from the interviews will complement the quantitative data from the survey. All

data collected will be securely stored on a password protected device and will be deleted after the study has been submitted. Interviewees will be made anonymous by the assignment of an alias for the purpose of discussion.

Dissemination

It is intended that promotion of the work, and dissemination of the findings will be achieved by writing blog posts and Tweets throughout the course of the research. Promoting interest in the work within the FPL community will hopefully have the additional benefit of attracting participants to take part in the research. If the research meets the necessary requirements, it will be deposited in the humanities commons.

Work Plan

May – June – Preliminary Research/ Literature Review.

July – Preparation of online Survey. Inc Pilot Study.

August 9-29 – Deliver Online Survey.

September 13-26 – Conduct Interviews.

October - Data Analysis and Presentation.

November and December – Write up Discussion/Conclusion.

December 17 – Finish write-up.

January 7 – Submission date.

Resources

No special equipment will be needed, or costs required.

- Qualtrics survey software for the questionnaire
- Statistical software for data analysis (e.g., Excel)
- Skype (Or similar software) for Interviews

Ethics

The participants in this research will all be adults and it is not anticipated any will be vulnerable. Each participant will be given an information sheet and informed consent will be gained before interviews. Interviews will be conducted via Skype. See City University ethics checklist attached (Appendix 1).

Confidentiality

The only personal data participants will be asked for is an email address. This will be a voluntary question in the online survey which will be used to contact those participants who are happy to have a follow up interview. This information will be securely stored on a password protected device and will be deleted after the study has been submitted. Interviewees will be made anonymous by the assignment of an alias for the purpose of discussion.

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Appendix III: Ethics Checklist

<p>A.1 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, approval will be needed from an appropriate external ethics committee for approval. Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case.</p>		<p><i>Delete as appropriate</i></p>
1.1	<p>Does your research require approval from the National Research Ethics Service (NRES)?</p> <p><i>e.g. because you are recruiting current NHS patients or staff?</i></p> <p><i>If you are unsure try - https://www.hra.nhs.uk/approvals-amendments/what-approvals-do-i-need/</i></p>	NO
1.2	<p>Will you recruit participants who fall under the auspices of the Mental Capacity Act?</p> <p><i>Such research needs to be approved by an external ethics committee such as NRES or the Social Care Research Ethics Committee - http://www.scie.org.uk/research/ethics-committee/</i></p>	NO
1.3	<p>Will you recruit any participants who are currently under the auspices of the Criminal Justice System, for example, but not limited to, people on remand, prisoners and those on probation?</p> <p><i>Such research needs to be authorised by the ethics approval system of the National Offender Management Service.</i></p>	NO
<p>A.2 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, approval will be needed from the Senate Research Ethics Committee. Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case.</p>		<p><i>Delete as appropriate</i></p>
2.1	<p>Does your research involve participants who are unable to give informed consent?</p> <p><i>For example, but not limited to, people who may have a degree of learning disability or mental health problem, that means they are unable to make an informed decision on their own behalf.</i></p>	NO
2.2	<p>Is there a risk that your research might lead to disclosures from participants concerning their involvement in illegal activities?</p>	NO
2.3	<p>Is there a risk that obscene and or illegal material may need to be accessed for your research study (including online content and other material)?</p>	NO
2.4	<p>Does your project involve participants disclosing information about special category or sensitive subjects?</p> <p><i>For example, but not limited to: racial or ethnic origin; political opinions; religious beliefs; trade union membership; physical or mental health; sexual life; criminal offences and proceedings</i></p>	NO
2.5	<p>Does your research involve you travelling to another country outside of the UK, where the Foreign & Commonwealth Office has issued a travel warning that affects the area in which you will study?</p>	NO

	Please check the latest guidance from the FCO - http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/	
2.6	Does your research involve invasive or intrusive procedures? <i>These may include, but are not limited to, electrical stimulation, heat, cold or bruising.</i>	NO
2.7	Does your research involve animals?	NO
2.8	Does your research involve the administration of drugs, placebos or other substances to study participants?	NO
A.3 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, then approval will be needed from the Computer Science /Library and Information Science Research Ethics Committee (CSREC). Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case.		Delete as appropriate
3.1	Does your research involve participants who are under the age of 18?	NO
3.2	Does your research involve adults who are vulnerable because of their social, psychological or medical circumstances (vulnerable adults)? <i>This includes adults with cognitive and / or learning disabilities, adults with physical disabilities and older people.</i>	NO
3.3	Are participants recruited because they are staff or students of City, University of London? <i>For example, students studying on a particular course or module.</i> <i>If yes, then approval is also required from the Head of Department or Programme Director.</i>	NO
3.4	Does your research involve intentional deception of participants?	NO
3.5	Does your research involve participants taking part without their informed consent?	NO
3.5	Is the risk posed to participants greater than that in normal working life?	NO
3.7	Is the risk posed to you, the researcher(s), greater than that in normal working life?	NO
A.4 If you answer YES to the following question and your answers to all other questions in sections A1, A2 and A3 are NO, then your project is of minimal risk. If this is the case, then you can apply for approval through your supervisor under PROPORTIONATE REVIEW. You do so by completing PART B of this form. If you have answered NO to all questions in the checklist, including question 4, then your project does not require ethical approval. You should still include the form in your dissertation proposal.		Delete as appropriate
4	Does your project involve human participants or their identifiable personal data? <i>For example, as interviewees, respondents to a survey, or participants in testing.</i>	YES

PART B: Ethics Proportionate Review Form

B.1 The following questions must be answered fully.		<i>Delete as appropriate</i>
1.1.	Will you ensure that participants taking part in your project are fully informed about the purpose of the research?	YES
1.2	Will you ensure that participants taking part in your project are fully informed about the procedures affecting them or affecting any information collected about them, including information about how the data will be used, to whom it will be disclosed, and how long it will be kept?	YES
1.3	When people agree to participate in your project, will it be made clear to them that they may withdraw (i.e. not participate) at any time without any penalty?	YES
1.4	<p>Will consent be obtained from the participants in your project?</p> <p>Consent from participants will be necessary if you plan to involve them in your project or if you plan to use identifiable personal data from existing records. “Identifiable personal data” means data relating to a living person who might be identifiable if the record includes their name, username, student id, DNA, fingerprint, address, etc.</p> <p><i>If YES, you must attach drafts of the participant information sheet(s) and consent form(s) that you will use in section B.3 or, in the case of an existing dataset, provide details of how consent has been obtained.</i></p> <p><i>You must also retain the completed forms for subsequent inspection. Failure to provide the completed consent request forms will result in withdrawal of any earlier ethical approval of your project.</i></p>	YES
1.5	<p>Have you made arrangements to ensure that material and/or private information obtained from or about the participating individuals will remain confidential?</p> <p>The only private information collected will be email addresses to allow interview follow up. This will be stored on a password-protected device and will be deleted after the research is completed and submitted</p>	YES

B.2 If the answer to the following question (B2) is YES, you must provide details		<i>Delete as appropriate</i>						
2	<p>Will the research be conducted in the participant’s home or other non-University location?</p> <p><i>If YES, you must provide details of how your safety will be ensured.</i></p>	NO						
B.3 Attachments		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>YES</th> <th>NO</th> <th>Not Applicable</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	YES	NO	Not Applicable			
YES	NO	Not Applicable						

All of the following documents must be provided to supervisors if applicable. If they are not available when the proposal is submitted, they must be approved by the supervisor later.			
Details on how safety will be assured in any non-University location, including risk assessment if required (see B2)			X
Details of arrangements to ensure that material and/or private information obtained from or about the participating individuals will remain confidential (see B1.5) <i>Any personal data must be acquired, stored and made accessible in ways that are GDPR compliant.</i> <i>See answer to B1.5</i>	X		
Full protocol for any workshops or interviews**	To Follow		
Participant information sheet(s)**	To Follow		
Consent form(s)**	To Follow		
Questionnaire(s)** <i>sharing a Qualtrics survey with your supervisor is recommended.</i>	To Follow		
Topic guide(s) for interviews and focus groups**	To Follow		
Permission from external organisations or Head of Department** <i>e.g. for recruitment of participants</i>			X

Appendix IV: Interview Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of study

Competitive fandom in Serious Leisure information: A study of Information Behaviour in the fantasy football community.

Name of principal investigator

Daniel Whittaker (Supervisor: Lyn Robinson)

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to explore the ways fantasy football participants seek out, share, and use information to inform their fantasy football decisions. Data will be collected in November 2021.

This study is undertaken as part of the requirements for obtaining an MSc Library Science from City University London. It should be completed by 7th January 2022.

Why have I been invited to take part?

Because you play the 'Fantasy Premier League' fantasy football game.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the project is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate in the project. You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign the consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Once the data has been anonymised and published participants will no longer be able to withdraw their data.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide to take part, a suitable time to conduct an interview will be arranged. You will take part in a one-on-one semi structured interview with the researcher. This will take place remotely via a video call (or similar). This interview will last a maximum of 30 minutes and will be recorded, anonymised and transcribed.

What do I have to do if I take part?

You will be asked a mixture of open and closed questions relating to your information use when making Fantasy Premier League decisions.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I do not anticipate any disadvantages or risks in taking part.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

An indirect benefit of taking part in the study is it's potential to contribute to a greater understanding of the way people use information in leisure settings. Also, to put on record the particular information activities of the fantasy football community.

How is the project being funded?

There is no funding for this research.

Conflicts of interests

There are no conflicts of interests.

Data privacy statement

City, University of London is the sponsor and the data controller of this study based in the United Kingdom. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The legal basis under which your data will be processed is City's public task.

Your right to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in a specific way in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal-identifiable information possible (for further information please see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/public-task/>).

City will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study as necessary. If you wish to receive the results of the study, your contact details will also be kept for this purpose. The only person who will have access to your identifiable information will be the researcher, Daniel Whitter. City will not keep identifiable information about you from this study.

You can find out more about how City handles data by visiting <https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal>. If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (IOC) <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. No personal identifiable information will be recorded, and your quotes will be anonymised. The recording of your interview will be deleted on completion of the study in January 2022. No personal data will be included in the study.

What will happen to the results?

Your anonymity will be maintained by anonymising your data and removing any identifying information. The results of the survey will be part of my dissertation which will be submitted to City, University of London in January 2022. If you wish to receive a copy, please tick this option on the final page of the survey and I will provide it to you by email.

What will happen when the research study stops?

Results of the research study will be published in a dissertation for the MSc Library Science at City University London. For the dissertation and any potential future academic publications arising from the dissertation, your anonymity will be maintained.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been approved by City, University of London, Department of Library and Information Science Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: Competitive fandom in Serious Leisure information: A study of Information Behaviour in the fantasy football community.

You can also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg

Research Integrity Manager

City, University of London, Northampton Square

London, EC1V 0HB

Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

Further information and contact details

Researcher: Daniel Whittaker (Email: daniel.whittaker@city.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Lyn Robinson (Email: l.robinson@city.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix V: Interview Informed Consent Form



Name of principal investigator

Daniel Whittaker

Title of study

Competitive fandom in Serious Leisure information: A study of Information Behaviour in the fantasy football community

Please tick or initial box

1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the 'Participant information sheet' for the above study. I understand this will involve being interviewed by the researcher and that this interview will audio OR video recorded.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason, without being penalised or disadvantaged.	
3.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the time of submission of the research study.	
4.	I agree to City, University of London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) explained in the 'Participant information sheet' and my consent is conditional on City, University of London complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
5.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant

Date

Daniel Whittaker
Name of Researcher

27.10.21
Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

Information Behaviour of Fantasy Premier League Managers

This research aims to study the ways Fantasy Premier League players use information to play the game. For more information email: daniel.whittaker@city.ac.uk

This very short and anonymous questionnaire will take you around two minutes to complete.

Q1 Gender

- Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary / third gender
 - Prefer not to say
-

Q2 Age

- 18 - 24
 - 25 - 34
 - 35 - 44
 - 45 - 54
 - 55 - 64
 - 65 and over
-

Q3 Nationality

- English
- Other please specify _____
-

Q4 How many seasons have you played Fantasy Premier League? (You can find this information on the 'View Gameweek History' screen in browser)

- 1 - 2 seasons
- 3 - 5 seasons
- 6 - 8 seasons
- 9 - 11 seasons
- Over 12 seasons
-

Q5 How much time do you spend, in an average week, on making Fantasy Premier League decisions? (i.e. transfers, team selection, captaincy etc)

- Less than 30 mins
- Less than 2 hours
- Less than 4 hours
- 4 hours or more
-

Q6 How influential are each of the following information sources to your fantasy football decision making?

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Printed material (books, magazines, newspapers)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Premier League match broadcasts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fantasy Premier League website/app (e.g previous points)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3rd party football statistics websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Specialist fantasy football written content (blogs/tips websites)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Specialist fantasy football podcasts/video content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Specialist fantasy football statistical tools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fantasy football online discussion forums	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The fantasy football community on social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 How often do you make posts related to Fantasy Premier League on social media?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Frequently

Appendix VII: Interview Questions & Themes

Tell me about yourself – How old are you? – What do you do for a living? – Where do you live/come from? – How much free time do you have?

How much of a football fan are you? Describe history/relationship with game.

Motivations for playing – What made you start/keep playing? Why do you spend time on it?

What do you get out of it? -How does it make you feel?

Describe standard gameweek information sources – Imagine a wild card what are your information needs where do you find it?

How do you feel about stats? Do you believe in them? Has that changed?

How do you feel about 'the eye test'? Do you believe in it? Has that changed?

Once you have data how do you process it? Spreadsheets writing etc. Has that changed?

How/do you use social media? Why? Do you post anywhere? Ask questions? Give advice?

Do you consider yourself a member of the FPL community? What does that mean to you?

How do you interact with FPL community, how do they influence you? Beliefs and play.

How successful are you/have you been in FPL? How does that relate to information?

How does this compare to other information activities in your life?

Compare FPL information seeking with other decisions.

Appendix VIII: Fantasy Premier League Resource Guide

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FANTASY PREMIER LEAGUE MANAGERS



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Hello and welcome to this resource guide for Fantasy Premier League managers. With many millions of players all around the world, fantasy football is now a big deal, and it is growing all the time. If you have an interest in football and a competitive streak it might be time to join the party!

What is Fantasy Premier League?

For the uninitiated, Fantasy Premier League (FPL) is a competition in which participants (AKA managers) select an imaginary 'team' from among the Premier League's players. Points are awarded based on their real-life performances, with participants competing against each other to score the most 'fantasy points'.

Who is this guide for?

Although it has something in it for all players, including grizzled fantasy football veterans, it is primarily aimed at newcomers to the game. Each year millions more players are pressured into joining by friends or colleagues. And with mini-league rankings at stake, competition is fierce. This guide hopes to give you the resources you need to quickly make the jump from novice to expert. And in the process make your friends sorry they invited you!

The focus is on the most popular fantasy football game 'Official Fantasy Premier League' (FPL) but players of other games may find it useful too. The English Premier League has fans around the world including millions of FPL managers. The guide is just as relevant to managers from overseas but there are a small number of resources which are exclusive to the UK.

How is it organized?

The guide is organized is intended to reflect the journey from novice to expert. It has four sections, 'The Game', 'How to Follow the Premier League', 'Where to Go for Advice' and 'Stats and Tools'. Each section builds on the knowledge gained from the resources of the previous section. This means beginners are advised to read the guide from start, but more experienced players may wish to use the hyperlinks in the contents to jump to later sections. In addition, each sub-section is loosely organized to reflect the theme, beginning with least challenging resources, before graduating to the more complex.


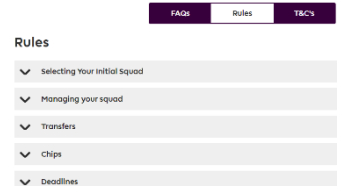
Are other guides available?


Lots of FPL resource guides exist already online, some of which are linked to here. However, many are lists of website links and none I have encountered contain resources as broad in range as you will find here. There are books, magazines, TV programs and more. Whereas other guides tend to be aimed at pre-existing players, this guide starts from the beginning aiming to transform a football fan into a fantasy football maestro.

The Game

The most vital resource of all for fantasy football managers is the game itself. Played by over 8 million ‘managers’ worldwide the Official Premier League fantasy game is the most popular fantasy football game around. Available to play in-browser or on the app, this section shows how to access the game and its rules. If FPL is not enough for you, it outlines other popular fantasy football games.



Fantasy Premier League


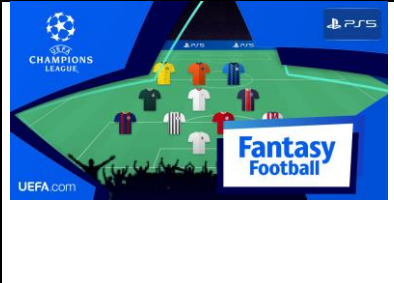
	<p>Official Fantasy Premier League</p> <p>https://fantasy.premierleague.com/</p> <p>@OfficialFPL</p> <p>Free to play</p>	<p>Following this link allows you to create an account, build a squad and officially become an FPL manager.</p> <p>Once you have registered a squad, your team becomes one of 8 million plus vying for top spot in the rankings.</p> <p>If that seems intimidating, you can create ‘mini-leagues’ which allow you to compete against friends in smaller, (hopefully) more winnable competitions.</p>
	<p>Official Fantasy Premier League Rules</p> <p>https://fantasy.premierleague.com/help/rules</p>	<p>Understanding the rules of the game is a vital if you are to succeed. The rules are clearly outlined on this webpage. Subsections of the rules include selecting your initial squad, transfers, how to score points and an explanation of the leagues system.</p> <p>A close reading of the rules is important because a great Premier League player does not necessarily make a good fantasy player!</p>

	<p>Premier League Official App</p> <p>https://www.premierleague.com/pl-app</p> <p>Android / iOS</p>	<p>As well as playing the game via the webpage you can manage your team on the Premier League official app. The app also has useful features which are exclusive to the app, such as a fixture difficulty rating section. If you prefer to play on a mobile this is the way to go.</p> <p>In addition to FPL content the app also has a range of Premier League stats, highlights, and news.</p>
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Other Fantasy Football Games

Although the focus of this guide is on the Official Fantasy Premier League game there are many other fantasy football games out there which you may want to try. You will find many of the same resources and skills are relevant.



	<p>Premier League FPL Draft</p> <p>https://draft.premierleague.com/</p> <p>Free to play</p>	<p>FPL Draft is another fantasy football game created by the Premier League to run alongside the FPL. Similar in many regards to the official game there is one big difference. Each player can be owned by only one manager in a mini-league.</p>
	<p>Sky Sports Fantasy Football</p> <p>https://fantasyfootball.skysports.com/</p> <p>Free to play</p>	<p>The second most popular Premier League fantasy game the Sky game is free to play but has a £50,000 prize for first place alongside other cash prizes.</p>

 <p>GO. PLAY. WIN BIG!</p> <p>Fan team</p>	<p>Fan Team</p> <p>https://www.fanteam.com/</p> <p>Entrance fees vary</p>	<p>Fan Team works on similar principles to other fantasy games but there is an entry fee and cash prizes up to £250,000.</p>
 <p>UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE</p> <p>PS5</p> <p>UEFA.com</p> <p>Fantasy Football</p>	<p>UEFA Champions League Fantasy Football</p> <p>https://gaming.uefa.com/en/uclfantasy/create-team</p>	<p>UEFA's official Champions League fantasy game. The same concept as other games but based on the European competition. Prizes are awarded each matchday.</p>

How to follow the Premier League




Having registered an FPL account, the next step is to choose the best players for your team. The top tier of FPL managers increasingly utilise statistics to predict which players are about to score big, but for everyone else the 'eye test' remains the best way to identify a potential recruitment to our team. This means following the football and choosing players we like the look of most. Below are some of the best ways to follow the Premier League.


Matchday Experiences

	<p>Live</p> <p>Premier League Tickets page</p> <p>https://www.premierleague.com/tickets</p> <p>Estimated Ticket Price: £30-£100</p>	<p>What better way to follow Premier League games and keep an eye on your FPL assets than by catching a game live in the stadium?</p> <p>Premier League matches are always popular, and it is sometimes difficult to obtain tickets for some of the higher profile fixtures. Each club has their own sales processes which can be complicated and expensive. This useful page from the Premier League presents guides to buying tickets at each club.</p>
	<p>Live Screenings</p> <p>Match Pint</p> <p>https://www.matchpint.co.uk/watch-live-premier-league</p>	<p>If you cannot get a ticket to the match, experiencing the matchday atmosphere with friends in front of a big screen is often the next best thing.</p> <p>The Match Pint website is useful database of the hundreds of venues nationwide screening Premier League games. After entering your location, the site presents a list of local venues screening the football displayed on a map of the area.</p>

Television



Watching the football from home remains the most popular way to enjoy the Premier League. Because of broadcasting deals very few live games are ever screened on free to air television. The rights to show games are split between a few subscription channels requiring viewers to subscribe to all if they are to view all televised live games.

	<p>Sky Sports</p> <p>https://www.skysports.com/</p> <p>@SkySports</p> <p>Price: Depends on service provider/package subscription - A online pass is available for £33/month</p>	<p>With a dedicated Premier League channel Sky Sports has the rights to the show 128 live matches per season in the UK including the first choice of games each weekend. Sky televises games on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friday Evening Saturday Evening Sunday Afternoon Monday Night <p>In addition to live games the Sky Sports News channel is an important source of Premier League news and comment.</p>
	<p>BT Sport</p> <p>https://www.bt.com/sport</p> <p>@btsportfootball</p> <p>Price: Depends on service provider/package subscription/ A online pass is available for £25/month</p>	<p>BT Sport has the rights to show 68 Premier League matches per season. Games are screened on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saturday Lunchtime Some midweek games <p>The weekly show BT Sport Score gives updates on Fantasy Premier League points alongside live football scores.</p>
	<p>Amazon Prime Video</p> <p>https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/video/store/front/</p> <p>@primevideo</p> <p>Price: £7.99/month</p>	<p>Amazon Prime Video has exclusive UK rights to screen 20 live matches per season:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All fixtures on a Bank Holiday All fixtures in another midweek

	<p>BBC Sport</p> <p>https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport</p> <p>@BBCSport</p> <p>Price: Free to air</p> <p>BBC One/iPlayer</p>	<p>BBC Sport has rights to extensive highlight packages of all Premier League games.</p> <p>The Match of the Day show is the best place to catch highlights of all Premier League fixtures. It is scheduled to air on Saturday night but is available to replay on the iPlayer app.</p>
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Radio


If you cannot watch the games, you can still follow audio of the action via radio commentary.

	<p>BBC Radio 5 Live</p> <p>www.bbc.co.uk/5live</p> <p>@5livesport</p> <p>Frequency: MW: 693 kHz, 909 kHz, 990 kHz and on selected BBC Local Radio stations' frequencies overnight.</p>	<p>BBC Radio 5 Live provides has an on-site reporter at every match and broadcasts live commentary from approximately 140 live Premier League matches each season.</p> <p>The kick-off slots for these Premier League fixtures are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Saturday 15:00 - Sunday 14:00 - Sunday 16:30 - Fri/Sat/Mon 19:30-20:00 <p>The station also provides regular Premier League news update.</p>
	<p>talkSPORT</p> <p>https://talksport.com/</p> <p>@talkSPORT</p> <p>Frequency: MW: 1053, 1071, 1089, 1107 kHz</p>	<p>talkSPORT and sister station talkSPORT2 broadcast live Saturday Premier League matches in the UK at 12:30, 15:00 and 17:30.</p> <p>talkSPORT also has exclusive UK rights for all matches scheduled to kick off at 12 noon on Sunday.</p> <p>The station provides regular Premier League news, comment, and discussion.</p>

Live Score Apps

Modern smart phone technology means the traditional broadcast media is no longer the sole method of keeping up to date with the football. Live score apps provide instant notifications of goals and incidents from games alongside in-depth stats and additional features. There are many such apps available with the 3 presented below are among the most popular.


	<p>One Football App</p> <p>https://onefootball.com/en/home</p> <p>@OneFootball</p> <p>Android / iOS</p>	<p>Provides news, live scores, highlights, stats and videos.</p> <p>Allows users to personalize their content and receive customised push notifications for teams and competitions of their choosing.</p> <p>Features live text commentary, key event alerts and team news.</p>
	<p>FotMob App</p> <p>https://www.fotmob.com/</p> <p>@FotMob</p> <p>Android / iOS</p>	<p>FotMob provides live scores, stats, and storylines to keep you up to speed with the football. Personalised news and notifications make it easy to follow your favourite teams and players. Match updates ensure you never miss a goal, no matter where you are.</p>





	<p>SofaScore App</p> <p>https://www.sofascore.com/</p> <p>@SofaScoreINT</p> <p>Android / iOS</p>	<p>SofaScore has live score notifications for over 5000 leagues as well as a sophisticated stats package and data visualization tools.</p> <p>There is also a chat section which allows user to connect with other fans.</p>
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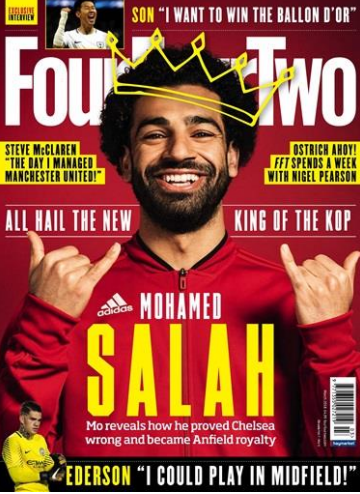

Premier League News


In addition to following the games it is important to keep up with the latest news from the Premier League. Below are some of the best resources for finding out what's new.

Newspapers and Sports Sites

	<p>Newspaper Sport pages</p> <p>Guardian / Times / Telegraph / Independent / Mail / Express / Mirror / Star</p>	<p>Whether by taking the print editions or visiting the websites, newspaper sport pages remain one of the best places to find the latest news from the Premier League.</p>
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	<p>Premier League Website</p> <p>https://www.premierleague.com/news</p>	<p>The Premier League's own news page features FPL content alongside general Premier League stories.</p>
	<p>BBC Premier League News</p> <p>https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league</p>	<p>Premier League news, scores fixtures and league tables alongside quizzes and other fun content.</p>
	<p>Football365</p> <p>https://www.football365.com/all-the-news</p>	<p>Premier League news and comment from the long-established football website.</p>
	<p>Fantasy Football Scout Premier League Team Links</p> <p>https://www.fantasyfootballscout.co.uk/premier-league-team-links/</p>	<p>This useful compendium contains links to news sources for each Premier League club. This includes local press as well as fan sites and forums.</p>

 <p>The cover of FourFourTwo magazine features Mohamed Salah in a red Arsenal kit, wearing a yellow crown. The headline reads "SON: 'I WANT TO WIN THE BALLON D'OR'". Other text on the cover includes "STEVE MCCLAREN 'THE DAY I MANAGED MANCHESTER UNITED!'", "OSTRICH ANDY! FFF SPENDS A WEEK WITH NIGEL PEARSON", "ALL HAIL THE NEW KING OF THE KOP", "MOHAMED SALAH", "Mo reveals how he proved Chelsea wrong and became Anfield royalty", and "EDERSON 'I COULD PLAY IN MIDFIELD!'".</p>	<p>FourFourTwo</p> <p>Publisher: Future</p> <p>Frequency: Monthly</p> <p>ISSN: 1355-0276</p> <p>Cover Price: £5.99</p> <p>https://www.fourfourtwo.com/</p> <p>@FourFourTwo</p>	<p>The latest football news, in-depth features, tactical and statistical analysis from the UK's most popular football monthly.</p>
 <p>The cover of WSC magazine features Arsenal players in red kits. The headline reads "WHAT IS NOW FOR ARSENAL?". Other text on the cover includes "THE HALF DECENT FOOTBALL MAGAZINE", "BROADCASTING Football League live in Sweden Turkey threatens TV deals The new superstars of sports", "NON-LEAGUE & THE FA CUP Hatfield's Indian walkout Who were Coventry Sporting? Fotters Bar Town cash in", "Women's football: playmakers, managers, present...", "Plus: Changing times at tournaments? Climate crisis: can football adapt? In praise of Borussia Dortmund Six-a-side World Cup England's World Cup problems Football literature Barry Hines & BS", and "£3.95 October 2019 Issue 395".</p>	<p>When Saturday Comes</p> <p>Publisher: Richard Guy</p> <p>Frequency: Monthly</p> <p>ISSN: 0959-0048</p> <p>Cover Price: £3.95</p> <p>https://www.wsc.co.uk/</p> <p>@WSC_Magazine</p>	<p>A leading independent football magazine. It aims to provide voice for football supporters. Offering both a serious and humorous view of the sport, it covers topics from a fan perspective.</p>

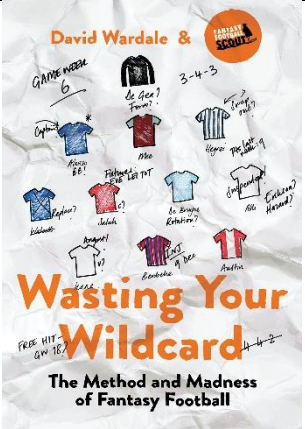

	<p>The Athletic UK</p> <p>https://theathletic.co.uk/</p> <p>@The Athletic UK</p> <p>Price: £7.99/month</p>	<p>The Athletic is a subscription-based sports online publication which features in depth coverage and long form reportage of the Premier League among other sports. With a dedicated FPL section, the site often publishes content relevant to FPL managers.</p>
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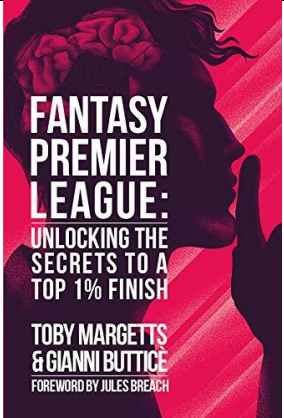
Where to Go for Advice?

For most casual players setting up a team and following the Premier League constitutes the extent of their FPL activity. But here is how you can start to gain an advantage over your friends. There is a whole galaxy of FPL content and advice you can access. Whether in books, websites, podcasts, or video – FPL has a thriving and supportive community which will give you the pointers you need to climb up the ranks.

FPL Books

Being a game that is hosted on the web, it is natural that many FPL resources are found online too. But considering the games popularity, it remains surprising how few books have been written on the subject. Of the those published so far here are the most notable.




	<p>Wasting Your Wildcard: The Method and Madness of Fantasy Football (2018), David Wardale</p> <p>Publisher: Yellow Jersey</p> <p>ISBN: 978-1787290167</p> <p>272pp</p> <p>RRP: £14.99</p>	<p>Intended to be entertaining, as well as informative, sports journalist and fantasy football veteran David Wardale explores the FPL phenomenon. The book details the history of fantasy football and finds entertaining stories of players fantasy obsessions. Along the way he interviews former FPL winners as he tries to understand what brings FPL success.</p>
	<p>The Gaffer Tapes: The A-Z of Fantasy Football (2019), Tom Holmes, Craig Hazell & Ash Kernsworth</p> <p>Publisher: Pitch</p> <p>ISBN: 978-1785315060</p> <p>224 pp</p> <p>RRP: £10.99</p>	<p>Intended to be a comedic rather than a serious guide to the game, this book is filled with anecdotes from players though the years but still finds time to relay tips and advice from the experts.</p>

	<p>Fantasy Premier League: Unlocking The Secrets To A Top 1% Finish (Ebook only). (2019), Toby Margetts & Gianni Buttice</p> <p>Publisher: Ockley Books</p> <p>185 pp</p> <p>RRP: £4.99</p>	<p>Only available in Ebook format this short but comprehensive guide details methods and tactics which can be employed to gain a high rank in the game. Rather than being an introduction to the game this book is aimed at experienced players and covers how to use data and stats as well as how to strategise over the course of a season.</p>
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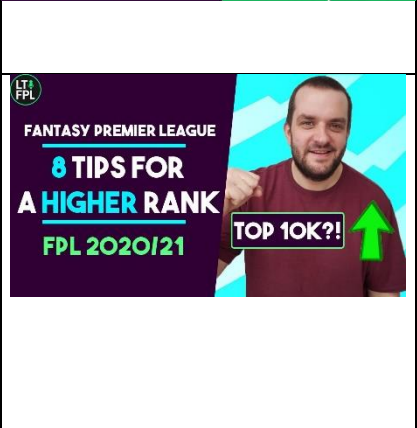
Beginners Guides

For those new to the game and without the time to get to grip with a book there are innumerable beginners guides available online, in both text and video format. Checking out these guides before getting started could be the best FPL decision you make!

Articles




	<p>How to Play FPL: A Beginners Guide</p> <p>https://www.premierleague.com/news/1252542</p>	<p>This very simple guide from the Premier League provides the basics with the intention of setting novice players on their way.</p>
	<p>How to Play FPL: A Beginners Guide to Fantasy Football</p> <p>https://www.fantasyfootballscout.co.uk/2019/08/07/how-to-play-fpl-a-beginners-guide-to-fantasy-football-2/</p>	<p>The Fantasy Football Scout guide is more detailed, providing not just the basics of the game but also some advice and insights into how to improve your team and how to judge which players to sign.</p>
	<p>How to Play FPL</p> <p>https://fantasyfootballhub.co.uk/how-to-play-fpl/</p>	<p>The most in depth of the three beginner's guides, this guide also details how the player price market works in FPL, as well as how bonus points are awarded.</p> <p>The guide gives some more strategic advice regarding how to navigate the Premier League schedule and when to deploy FPL chips</p>



Videos


	<p>How to Play Fantasy Premier League A Beginners Guide FPL Tutorial</p> <p>Channel: FPLTV</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVF-cl8fC0</p>	<p>This entertaining short video tutorial, from the FPL TV YouTube channel, is aimed at the complete beginners. Describing itself as a ‘5-minute crash course’ It explains the rules and outlines the basics of the game.</p>
	<p>8 Tips for a High Rank (A Beginners Guide) Fantasy Premier League 20/21</p> <p>Channel: Let's Talk FPL</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQ4ybbKJ18k&t=120s</p>	<p>Although this video is also aimed at beginners it is more in-depth and has great advice for those looking to boost their rank in the game.</p> <p>The tips given in the video act as principles any successful FPL manager should adhere to, to be successful in the game.</p>

Tips Websites and Online Communities

Once the season has started and the game progresses the next step is making transfers and managing your squad. The good news is lots of help available, whether that is from expert tipsters or supportive communities, it is always a good idea to take advice.

	<p>The Scout</p> <p>https://fantasy.premierleague.com/the-scout</p>	<p>The Premier League's fantasy site, The Scout features FPL news, articles videos and analysis aimed at helping players to improve their fantasy team.</p> <p>The Scout is created with casual players in mind, meaning it does not contain some of the more in-depth analysis featured on other specialist FPL sites.</p>
	<p>The Athletic FPL</p> <p>https://theathletic.com/fantasy-premier-league/</p>	<p>The Athletic's fantasy page contains articles, tips, and analysis from FPL expert Mark McGettigan. Each week there is a live Q + A where subscribers can ask for the advice of Mark and fellow expert Ben Dinnery before making their fantasy decisions.</p>
	<p>All Fantasy Tips</p> <p>https://allfantasytips.com/all-fpl-tips/</p>	<p>All Fantasy Tips is an aggregator site which finds FPL content from across the internet and displays them in one place.</p>




	<p>r/FantasyPL</p> <p>https://www.reddit.com/r/FantasyPL/</p>	<p>FPL managers often need a place to let off steam or to vent their frustration with the like-minded and Reddit's FPL section provides just such a place. With over 380,000 members the Fantasy Premier League sub-reddit is the largest community discussion site for FPL.</p> <p>Contributors can share useful news and information and ask for advice from fellow managers.</p>
	<p>Fantasy Football Scout</p> <p>https://www.fantasyfootballscout.co.uk/</p> <p>@FFSCOUT</p> <p>Free to access</p> <p>Premium member 12 month subscription: £19.99</p>	<p>The original and largest fantasy football website and community. This site is a must for FPL managers looking to get ahead. FFS has a massive range of content including scout reports, podcast, video and more.</p> <p>The comments section of the website is a lively community in which managers discuss the latest talking points and ask for team advice.</p> <p>In addition, the site has a subscription program which allows access to a large collection of additional content, stats packages, and FPL tools.</p>

	<p>Fantasy Football Hub</p> <p>https://fantasyfootballhub.co.uk/</p> <p>@FFH_HQ</p> <p>Free to access</p> <p>Premium member subscription: £3.40/month</p>	<p>Another large fantasy football website and community, FFH has some of the world's best fantasy football managers and contributors.</p> <p>There is a wide range of content, guides and tools for FPL managers and premium subscribers have access to WhatsApp and Slack channels to ask advice from the experts.</p>
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Video Content and Podcasts




If the resources you have used so far have been helpful, and you are eager for more. There are lots of great videos and podcast available to find the latest news and hear the views of experts.



Video

	<p>FPL Show</p> <p>https://www.premierleague.com/news/1841323</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQ_voP4Q3cfexHbGtiBfTXfPJEmIPBat</p>	<p>Presented by James Richardson and Jules Breach the FPL Show is the Premier League’s professionally produced fantasy football television show.</p> <p>The show is televised overseas but is viewable in the UK on YouTube or the Premier League website.</p> <p>Aimed at more casual managers the show nonetheless features expert views and analysis providing useful tips to managers at all levels.</p>
	<p>FPL TV</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfFNeaeljTAEwpKUUbdwCCg</p>	<p>This very popular YouTube channel features very short weekly videos which discuss the progress of the hosts FPL team and discusses option for upcoming weeks. A good channel for casual players who do not have a lot of time to dedicate to FPL.</p>
	<p>Let’s Talk FPL</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxeOc7eFxq37yW_Nc-69deA</p>	<p>With almost 150,000 subscribers Let’s Talk FPL is the FPL communities most popular YouTube channel.</p> <p>With short and snappy daily videos, host Andy provides tips and analysis for the coming weeks. There is also the opportunity for viewers to ask questions during weekly Q + A live streams.</p>

	<p>Fantasy Football Scout – Scoutcast</p> <p>Podcast Link</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkxYKQ8pgJ7V8wwh4hLsSXQ/featured</p>	<p>Fantasy Football Scout produce daily video content including flagship weekly show Scoutcast which is also available as a podcast.</p> <p>Bringing lots of experience, the channel previews the week ahead, discusses transfer targets and combs over the stats making it essential viewing for fantasy managers.</p>
	<p>FPL Blackbox</p> <p>Podcast Link</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGJ8-xqhOLwyJNuPMsVoQWQ</p>	<p>With their weekly live streams frequently running to over two hours FPL Blackbox is more leisurely longer form of FPL content.</p> <p>With a heavy emphasis on examining the stats before making transfers the hosts discuss the talking points and examine their own past decisions with the hope of learning from mistakes and eliminating biases.</p>

Podcasts

	<p>Official FPL Podcast</p> <p>https://www.premierleague.com/official-fpl-podcast/</p>	<p>The Premier Leagues official FPL podcast is aimed at the more casual player. Slick and professionally produced compared to some other FPL content it discusses the talking points and answers listener Twitter questions.</p>
	<p>BBC Fantasy 606 Podcast</p> <p>https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0070hz6/episodes/downloads</p>	<p>The BBC's weekly podcast in which Chris Sutton and Statman Dave update listeners on the world of fantasy football. Rather than being a serious discussion show, Fantasy 606 is lighthearted and entertaining with some tips thrown along the way.</p>
	<p>The 59th Minute FPL Podcast – The Athletic</p> <p>https://theathletic.com/podcast/166-the-59th-minute-fpl-podcast/</p>	<p>The Athletic's weekly podcast features famed FPL expert Mark Gettigan giving his considered view on the players to watch while answering listeners FPL questions</p>

	<p>Who Got The Assist? Podcast</p> <p>https://open.spotify.com/episode/2BiL2N61JMxwBIIZeOpO63</p>	<p>Launched in 2017, the podcast has consistently been rated as one of the top FPL podcasts providing comprehensive strategic discussions every gameweek.</p> <p>They regularly feature expert players and other members of the FPL community on their episodes.</p>
	<p>Always Cheating Podcast</p> <p>https://alwayscheating.simplecast.com/</p>	<p>Hosted by Josh Landon and Brandon Kelley, Always Cheating provides quality analysis and pleasant conversation once every week.</p> <p>Friendly and humorous, the Americans do a good job at keeping the podcast fun and informative at the same time. They also have their own mini league that is very popular every year.</p>

Useful FPL Community Twitter Accounts

Twitter seems to be the natural home of the FPL community. Many of the most notable players in the game are found on there and as a forum for advice and tips it is hard to beat. Although there are hundreds of useful accounts, below are some of the most useful follows.

[@FFScout](https://twitter.com/FFScout)

The account for Fantasy Football Scout tweets updates for every conceivable FPL related issue. From goal alerts to manager quotes. This account is a must follow.

[@BenCrellin](#)

A legend among the FPL community Ben Crellin is *the* expert on fixture rearrangements and scheduling. Following Ben is crucial for his accurate predictions of when double game-weeks will be scheduled. Alongside useful charts and tables to represent the information.

[@insider_fpl](#)

A Twitter bot which scrapes the FPL website for the transfers of football club insiders. This can provide vital clues as to whether a player is likely to play.

[@FPLStatus](#)

This account tweets each time a player is registered injured or suspended in FPL. It tweets daily updates of player price changes.

[@FPLPriceChanges](#)

This account tweets price change predictions allowing you to buy/sell players before the change takes place.

[@BenDinnery](#)

The leading Premier League injury expert.

[@FPL_Rockstar](#)

This account frequently tweets insider information that reveals team news before the FPL transfer deadline.

[@TedTalksFPL](#)

Tweets useful infographics and created from stats about teams and players.

[@Legomane_FPL](#)

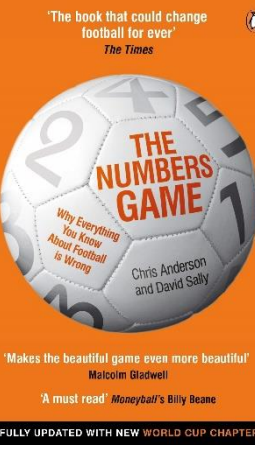
Another account tweeting useful infographics and charts.

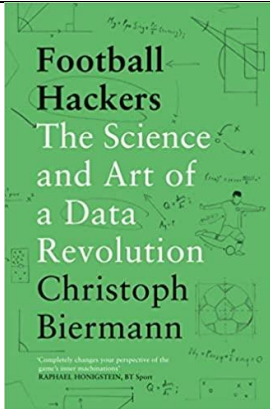
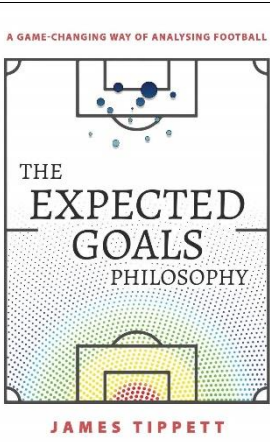
Stats and Tools

The last step towards becoming a true FPL expert is to embrace statistical metrics and tools to improve your FPL decisions. While lesser managers might rely on watching the games and choosing players based on the so called 'eye test', the FPL elite now increasingly talk in the language of stats. While it is possible to rely on FPL content providers to interpret them for you, the real way to get a step ahead of the crowd is to jump into stats yourself.




Football Stats Books


A stats revolution has occurred in football in the last decade which have had a massive effect on the game. These books will help you to understand what has changed and how to use it to your advantage.

	<p>The Football Yearbook 2020-2021 (2020).</p> <p>Publisher: Headline</p> <p>ISBN: 978-1472277220</p> <p>1056 pp</p> <p>RRP: £25</p>	<p>The definitive football reference book, this annual publication is the market-leading book of football statistics.</p> <p>Now in its 51st year of publication, the Yearbook continues to meticulously record the season just gone and look forward to the season about to start, all within more than a thousand pages of pure footballing facts and figures.</p>
	<p>The Numbers Game: Why Everything You Know About Football is Wrong (2014), Chris Anderson & David Sally</p> <p>Publisher: Penguin</p> <p>ISBN: 978-1472277220</p> <p>400 pp</p> <p>RRP: £9.99</p>	<p>Heralding the arrival of statistics to the football world this book argues that football can still be transformed by the power of data and statistical analysis. It serves as an introduction to the thinking behind metrics which have since become commonplace in the sport and which fantasy football managers have embraced.</p>

	<p>Football Hackers: The Science and Art of a Data Revolution (2019), Christoph Biermann</p> <p>Publisher: Blink Publishing</p> <p>ISBN: 978-1788702058</p> <p>304 pp</p> <p>RRP: £14.99</p>	<p>Further exploring the data revolution in football Biermann outlines the advanced metrics and detailed analysis which is reshaping the modern game.</p> <p>Sophisticated statistical models are explained well in this book which has helped to inform a new generation of bettors and fantasy managers; as well as the football professionals.</p>
	<p>The Expected Goals Philosophy: A Game-Changing Way of Analysing Football (2019), James Tippett</p> <p>Publisher: Independent</p> <p>ISBN: 978-1089883180</p> <p>220 pp</p> <p>RRP: £9.99</p>	<p>A useful exploration of the expected goals metric developed by the football analytics community.</p> <p>Long used by professional gamblers to maximize chances of success, it is now becoming more widely used. Although controversial to some, xG has become now become a ubiquitous metric among the fantasy football community.</p> <p>This book explains the thinking behind the model and advocates for it to be more widely used.</p>


Once you understand how stats can help your FPL team it is time to delve into them yourself. There are lots of football statistical databases online, many of which are subscription based. Below is a selection of the most useful free to use databases online.




	<p>Premier League Stats Centre</p> <p>https://www.premierleague.com/stats</p>	<p>The Premier League houses an official list of the basic footballing stats for both this and previous seasons.</p> <p>Although the data is quite basic when you compare it with other websites, you can be assured it is always accurate and up to date.</p> <p>The best part of the official Premier League website is ICT or Influence, Creativity, and Threat Index, which is extremely useful in FPL. With this information, you can change your squad and strategies accordingly.</p>
	<p>TransferMarkt Premier League</p> <p>https://www.transfermarkt.co.uk/premier-league/startseite/wettbewerb/GB1</p>	<p>A good source for basic football statistics that can be broken down by season, competition or to an individual game, across many years.</p> <p>Using Transfermarkt, you can unearth brilliant narratives such as an individual player's record against a particular team, or how they performed in a certain position.</p>
	<p>FBRef</p> <p>https://fbref.com/en/comps/9/Premier-League-Stats</p>	<p>A useful site offering a selection of StatsBomb-powered statistics for teams and players. The Fbref website may look old fashioned and basic, but don't let that fool you. From here, you can find everything from passes completed to a team's pressing stats, from leagues around the world.</p>




	<p>WhoScored?</p> <p>https://www.whoscored.com/Regions/252/Tournaments/2/Seasons/8228/Stages/18685/Show/England-Premier-League-2020-2021</p>	<p>Home to a good range of football statistics that can be broken down by team or player in a series of basic tables. The tremendous depth of data will hopefully give you a significant edge over your competitors.</p>
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FPL Tools

Alongside football stats there are a plethora of specialist FPL tools which have been created by the community to help managers to improve their decision making. Often using data scraped from the FPL site these tools allow for sophisticated analysis of both the sport and the game.

	<p>Fantasy Football Scout Members Area</p> <p>https://members.fantasyfootballscout.co.uk/</p> <p>Price: Premium member 12 month subscription: £19.99</p>	<p>The FFS Members Area offers a comprehensive toolset for fantasy teams, with in-depth data tables, comparison tools, a 'Rate My Team' points prediction tool and more all included.</p> <p>Although there is a subscription cost to access this content it combines the advantages of many other tools into one easily accessible place.</p>
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	<p>Fantasy Football Fix</p> <p>https://www.fantasyfootballfix.com/</p> <p>Price: Free/ £10 subscription for additional features</p>	<p>Uses a powerful predictive fantasy football algorithm to help to improve your performance in a variety of ways.</p> <p>The tool identifies players projected to score highly in upcoming weeks. Analyses your squad and suggests transfers based on stats and value.</p>
	<p>Live FPL – Rank & Transfer Planner</p> <p>https://www.livefpl.net/</p>	<p>A tool which allows users to view their live FPL rank before the official game has updated - plus FPL statistics on the top 10,000 managers and your own immediate rivals.</p> <p>In addition, the site now hosts numerous excellent tools including the Transfer Planner which allows managers to plan ahead more effectively and strategically. Highly recommended.</p>
	<p>FPL Statistics – Price Change Predictor</p> <p>http://www.fplstatistics.co.uk/</p>	<p>A vital website dedicated to predicting FPL price changes before they happen.</p> <p>The player price market in FPL sees players rise or fall in price depending on their popularity. Being priced out of buying a player whose price rises unexpectedly is frustrating but can be avoided with reference to wonderful tool.</p>

	<p>All Fantasy Tips - FPL Fixture Tracker</p> <p>https://allfantasytips.com/fpl-fixture-tracker/</p>	<p>There are many Fixture trackers available (including the excellent Fantasy Football Scout Members Area version) but of all the freely available ones out there this is one of the most powerful.</p> <p>This tracker combines fixture information with expected goal statistics to create a numeric score for the difficulty of fixtures each team has over a four-game period.</p>
	<p>FPL Statistico</p> <p>https://www.anewpla.net/fpl/report/index.php</p>	<p>An FPL tool which provides a detailed analysis for your FPL team's season. Allowing you to visualize where it all went wrong or where you turned it around.</p> <p>Very useful for analysing and learning from your own mistakes.</p>
	<p>FPL Gameweek</p> <p>https://www.fplgameweek.com/</p>	<p>A suite of tools which analyses your FPL mini-leagues producing stats which will give you the edge over rivals.</p>