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Does psychological reactance affect how people respond to government restrictions on sport gambling and daily fantasy sport?

What this research is about

People do not like when their freedom is restricted and will sometimes defy such restriction. For example, adolescents who receive strict restrictions on smoking may want to smoke more because of the restrictions. This is an example of psychological reactance, where people react when they feel their freedom is threatened. A common example is consumer reactance. Consumers are usually free to choose which products to use. However, if this freedom is threatened by government regulations, it may change how they use the product. For example, regulations on the advertising or availability of gambling can affect people's gambling habits.

Sport gambling is popular in the United States even where it is not legal. Many people wager on professional sports matches, such as the Super Bowl. They may also engage in fantasy sport. Fantasy sport is when a sports fan drafts and manages athletes in a virtual world where they compete with other fans. Traditional fantasy sport occurs over the entire sport season. However, daily fantasy sport allows people to bet money daily with strangers online.

Both fantasy sport players and sport gamblers are consumers of sport gaming products. Thus, they may show consumer reactance to changes in government restrictions on these activities. In 2018, the US Supreme Court passed legislation to allow individual states to legalize sport gambling. Since then, 11 states have legalized some types of sport gambling and other states are proposing similar regulation. The new ruling has affected fantasy sport participation as well. This study looked at how consumer reactance affects sport gambling and daily fantasy sport. Specifically, it

What you need to know

Gambling on professional sports and fantasy sports are both popular in the US. Recently, some types of sport gambling have been legalized in some states, while they are restricted in others. People with 'high reactance' tendencies have a stronger desire to perform an activity if it is restricted. The researchers showed some participants a scenario where sport gambling or daily fantasy sport would become legal in their state, and told others it would be illegal or discouraged. They then asked participants to rate their desire to gamble in the future. Participants generally had stronger desires to gamble if they were told it would be legal to do so. However, for daily fantasy sport, participants with high reactance had stronger desires to gamble when they were told it would be illegal or discouraged.

focused on how different regulatory scenarios might affect people's desire to gamble.

What the researchers did

The researchers did two experiments with a survey design. The first survey took place before the 2018 ruling and focused on daily fantasy sport. The second survey took place after the 2018 ruling and focused on sport gambling. All participants were adults from the US, and 65% of participants were male.

For the first survey, 748 people who were fantasy sport consumers participated. The survey first measured their psychological reactance tendencies. Based on their responses, they were categorized as having 'low' or 'high' reactance. It also asked if they

played daily fantasy sport or just traditional, season-long fantasy sport. Next, participants read one of three scenarios about the future of daily fantasy sport. The 'illegal' scenario said that the government would make daily fantasy sport illegal. The 'legal' scenario said that the government would fully legalize it. The 'discouraged' scenario said that the government would regulate it but highly discourage the activity. Then, participants rated how much they wanted to play daily fantasy sport in the future.

For the second survey, 300 people who had bet money on the National Football League (NFL) participated. This survey also measured psychological reactance and asked participants how often they engaged in sport gambling. Then, participants received one of the three scenarios about the future of sport gambling (i.e., it would be 'legal', 'illegal', or 'discouraged'). Finally, participants rated how much they wanted to wager on sports in the future.

What the researchers found

Survey 1: Daily Fantasy Sport

Participants with high reactance tendencies had stronger desires to gamble on daily fantasy sport. Additionally, participants who already played daily fantasy sport had stronger desires to play in the future. Overall, participants in the 'legal' scenario had the strongest desire to play fantasy sport. Meanwhile, participants in the 'illegal' scenario generally had the lowest desire to play fantasy sport in the future. However, this general trend did not apply to all participants. Compared to those with low reactance, participants with high reactance had stronger desires to play fantasy sports in the 'discouraged' and 'illegal' scenarios. Therefore, reactance tendency can affect how people respond to government restrictions.

Survey 2: Sport Gambling

Participants' reactance tendencies did not affect their desire to gamble on professional sports. Similar to Survey 1, participants in the 'legal' scenario had the highest desire to gamble on sports in the future. Likewise, participants in the 'illegal' scenario had the lowest desire. In this case, however, participants' reactance tendencies did not affect how they responded to the three scenarios. Finally, participants

who gambled more frequently had stronger desires to gamble in the future in the 'legal' scenario.

How you can use this research

This study shows that restrictions on sport gaming tend to decrease people's desire to gamble in the future. However, people's reactance tendencies can affect how they respond to restrictions on daily fantasy sport. Governments could consider this when implementing restrictions on different sport gaming.

About the researchers

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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