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Pay-to-play fantasy sports may lead sports fans to gamble

What this research is about

Pay-to-play (P2P) fantasy sports are games of contest among sports fans. Sports fans pay money to create their own imaginary sports team with their favourite athletes. They earn points based on how well the athletes on their team do in real life sporting events. Fans with the highest points win prizes. People play P2P fantasy sports because they love sports. They may also play because they want to win the prizes. Past research has shown that sports fans consider playing fantasy sports and sports betting to enhance their sports experience. Sports betting is when people bet money on sports games that happen in real life. It is known that people who are materialistic (i.e., believe it is important to own material things) are more likely to gamble. But, few studies investigate whether people who are materialistic are also more likely to participate in sports betting.

The U.S. government does not have laws regulating P2P fantasy sports. However, P2P fantasy sports games have rules, rewards, and messages that are like the ones in gambling games. Sports fans can win money when playing P2P fantasy sports like gamblers do when they play gambling games. Research suggests that some people who play P2P fantasy sports, such as college students, have similar addictive behaviour as people who have problem gambling (PG). PG is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences like debt and poor health.

In this study, the researchers investigated whether playing P2P fantasy sports leads sports fans to participate in sports betting and online gambling. They also recommended policies that could be put in place to regulate P2P fantasy sports games.

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers investigated whether pay-to-play (P2P) fantasy sports leads sports fans to participate in sports betting and online gambling. Participants were 480 people from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) who had an interest in sports. They completed questionnaires that measured their level of fanship (i.e., how much of a sports fan they were) and materialism (i.e., how important they thought owning material items was). The researchers found that P2P fantasy sports might drive sports fans to participate in sports betting and online gambling. This occurred regardless if they were materialistic or not. Policy makers could use this research to consider regulating P2P fantasy sports and classifying them as a form of sports betting.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 480 people with an interest in sports from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is a website where businesses can hire people to do tasks on a computer. The researchers used questionnaires to determine how much of a sports fan the participants were and if they were materialistic. They asked the participants how much money they spent on fantasy sports, sports betting, and online gambling. They also determined whether the participants demonstrated socially desirable behaviours and what their yearly income was.

The researchers used two-part models to guide their investigation. The first part examined the probability that participants would participate in P2P fantasy sports, sports betting, or online gambling. The second

part examined the relationship between how much of a sports fan the participants were (also known as fanship) and the amount of money they spent on fantasy sports, sports betting, and online gambling. It also examined whether being materialistic affected the relationship between sports fanship and gambling.

What the researchers found

The researchers found that participants who were big sports fans were more likely to spend money playing fantasy sports. Being materialistic did not affect how much money they spent on fantasy sports. People who spent money on fantasy sports were more likely to participate in sports betting and online gambling.

Participants who were big sports fans and were less materialistic participated in sports betting only because they were introduced to P2P fantasy sports first. Big sports fans who were more materialistic were likely to participate in sports betting, whether or not they played P2P fantasy sports previously.

Similarly, big sports fans who were less materialistic participated in online gambling only because they were introduced to P2P fantasy sports first. Big sports fans who were more materialistic were likely to gamble online because they participated in sports betting already, or because they participated in both P2P fantasy sports and sports betting.

Together, these findings suggest that P2P fantasy sports might drive sports fans to participate in sports betting and online gambling. The findings highlight the need for appropriate policies to be in place with regard to P2P fantasy sports.

How you can use this research

Policy makers could use this research to consider regulating P2P fantasy sports. The researchers recommend classifying fantasy sports as a form of sports betting since the two activities share similar characteristics. Policy makers could also require that fantasy sports companies let fans know about the risks involved in playing fantasy sports. Prevention service providers could run campaigns that encourage sports fans to gamble responsibly.

More research is needed to determine if people who are big sports fans participate more in fantasy sports and sports betting than people who are not big sports fans. Researchers could also investigate what the effects of legalizing sports betting would be on people who play P2P fantasy sports.

About the researchers

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