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<u>Abstract</u>

Game Changer:

The Effects of Fantasy Football on NFL Fan Behaviour

Fantasy football is one of the most popular pastimes in the USA. After spending much of its existence as an obscure hobby partaken in by only a handful of hardcore NFL fans, the advent of the internet was the catalyst for an explosion in its popularity. Today, it has become part of the American cultural fabric. There are approximately 32 million participants in North America alone; roughly one in six American adults are fantasy football players. As a result of its widespread popularity, a debate has sprung up around fantasy football about whether it is a positive or negative phenomenon. Critics claim that, due to its emphasis on individual players, fantasy football undermines the traditional team-first focus of American football and weakens the allegiance of fans to their favourite franchises. Advocates of fantasy football argue that fantasy football benefits the NFL by giving fans another source of interest in the league. Regardless of which side of the debate they are on, the people involved tacitly agreed on one important point; fantasy football participation affects the behaviour of NFL fans. Evaluating the validity of this hypothesis was the objective of this research paper. To do so, data was extracted from a wide range of academic studies on the subject of fantasy football. This data was then used to evaluate whether fantasy football participants and non-participants differ in terms of quantity of NFL-related media consumed, behaviour while consuming NFL-related content, and identification levels with various aspects of the NFL. Evidence was found of differences between fantasy football participants and non-participants in each of these three areas. This supports the overall conclusion of this research paper that fantasy football is indeed affecting the behaviour of NFL fans.