

The Impact of Social Influence on the Decision-Making Process of Sports Consumers on Facebook

Sosyal etkinin Facebook'taki spor tüketicilerinin karar alma süreci üzerindeki etkisi

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The purposes of this study were to determine the phase of decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook that social influence affects the most, and investigate the most influential factor for social influence. An empirical study conducted in Turkey included 392 participants who followed their favorite football team on Facebook. The results of the structural equation model showed that social influence has the strongest effect on the evaluation of alternatives phase. Social influence source and social platform activities significantly affected social influence; social platform activities had a stronger effect. Additionally, the effect of social influence is differed for some team supporter groups.

Bu çalışmanın amaçları sosyal etkinin Facebook'taki spor tüketicilerinin karar alma sürecinin en çok hangi aşaması üzerinde etkili olduğunu belirlemek ve sosyal etkiyi en çok etkileyen faktörü araştırmaktır. Türkiye'de yürütülen bu ampirik çalışmada, tuttıkları takımın Facebook sayfasını takip eden 392 katılımcı yer almıştır. Yapısal eşitlik modelinin sonuçlarına göre sosyal etki en çok alternatiflerin değerlendirilmesi aşaması üzerinde etki göstermektedir. Sosyal etkinin, sosyal etki kaynaklarından ve sosyal platform aktivitelerinden anlamlı şekilde etkilendiği ve sosyal platform aktivitelerinin etkisinin daha yüksek olduğu bulunmuştur. Ayrıca sosyal etkinin farklı takımların taraftarları arasında değişiklik gösterdiği görülmüştür.

Keywords: Social Influence, Decision-Making Process, Sports Consumer Behavior, Social Network Sites, Facebook
Jel Codes: M31.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Etki, Karar Alma Süreci, Spor Tüketicisi Davranışı, Sosyal Ağ Siteleri, Facebook
Jel Kodları: M31.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers can use online sources to obtain product information that are important for their purchase decisions (Wang & Chang, 2013). Social networking sites are one of the online sources and they are channels for social influence that affect purchase decision-making. In these sites, social influence is created by user's virtual social activities such as liking, commenting, and sharing information, opinions, or experiences. As stated by Currás-Pérez et al. (2013), social networking sites allow users to access opinions of not only close friends, family, and colleagues but also other people who have used a particular product or service. Moreover, online social networks such as Facebook enable business organizations to create product pages, and users who follow these product pages can receive or disseminate product-related information (Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012). The access to product information facilitates purchasing decisions (Wang et al., 2012).

Internet has become a primary source of information for sports consumers, who can obtain sport-related information and enjoyment and purchase sports products from websites related to sports (Hur et al., 2007). Individuals have been empowered by social media and they have become actual participants in the sports communication process: They can create content and comment on existing contents about sports at any time (Newman et al., 2013). According to a research, 35.1% of all sport fans go online for sports-related reasons at least once per day. Moreover, social media is frequently or very frequently used to comment on, tweet/retweet, share or link to online sports content and video by 34.7% of 18-34 year-olds, 15.2% of 35-54 year-olds, and 2.5% of 55 year-olds and older (Burst Media, 2012).

In literature, there are several studies that focus on different aspects of sports consumption, social influence and decision-making process. Seo and Green (2008) focused on developing a valid scale to measure motivation for sports online consumption. Witkemper et al. (2012) examined not only motivations but also constraints that influence sports Twitter consumption. Wang (2013) investigated the motivations and factors that predict sports spectators' intentions towards social media use while viewing mediated sports. Stavros, Meng, and Westberg (2013) provided deeper insight into fan motivation to interact on social media about sports by revealing additional motives. Riegner (2007) investigated the consumer adoption of Web 2.0 and its impact on purchasing decisions; concluding user generated content has an influence over some product categories and user segments. Kim and Srivastava (2007) focused on capturing social influence data from e-commerce platforms and how this influence can be used by e-commerce sites to affect consumer decision-making. Some studies support the effect of informative social influence on decision-making related to product evaluations (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Cohen & Golden, 1971). Lee et al. (2011) empirically proved informative social influence has a positive effect on online purchasing decisions.

There are not any studies about social networking sites, especially on Facebook, which focus on the impact of social influence on the decision-making process. The present study has tried to fill this gap in literature. From sports consumers' perspective, our study contributes to the literature by determining the phase of decision-making process which social influence affects most for online social network sites. Another contribution is that we identified "social

influence source” and “social platform activities” as two factors and developed a research model investigating the effect of these two factors to social influence.

The purposes of this study are as follows: (a) to determine the phase of the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook which social influence affects most, (b) to investigate whether the social influence source or social platform activities affect social influence, (c) to determine the factor that most affects social influence, and (d) to investigate if the effects of social influence on decision-making process phases differ between gender and among different team supporters.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sports Consumers

Sports consumers are different from ordinary consumers (Bühler & Nufer, 2006; Crow et al., 2012). The differences become obvious especially in the case of football supporters, and can be explained as the following (Bühler & Nufer, 2006): 1) They are more passionate about the football team they support, 2) They are highly loyal to their team, 3) Passion and loyalty lead them to be irrational in their consumer behavior and purchase decision-making is rarely based on commercial grounds. According to Smith (2008), a sports consumer is a person or a group who directly (buying a ticket for a game) or indirectly (buying a TV package that includes sports) purchases sports-related goods or services.

Some researchers classify sports consumers in two categories as participants and spectators (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002; Schwarz & Hunter, 2008) or participants and fans (Mullin et al., 2000); whereas others classify consumers into three categories as spectators, participants, and sponsors (Shank, 2009) or four categories as sporting goods consumers; sports services consumers; sports participants and volunteers; and sports supporters, spectators, and fans (Smith, 2008). In this study, spectators, who can be defined as individuals who watch a performance at a sporting event (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008) by either attending the event or experiencing it through TV channels (Shank, 2009), are considered. The reason for us to focus on spectators is because Branscombe and Wann (1992; cited in Wakefield, 1995) state that spectators’ identification with the team refers to the extent to which spectators involve with the team as fans, concern about the team’s performance, and perceive the team as a representation of themselves. Smith (2008) considers spectators with supporters and fans and states that these consumers are interested in the performance of sports but not at a professional level.

2.2. Decision-Making Process of Sports Consumers on Facebook

The decision-making process gives meaning to the cognitions occurring inside the mind of a sports consumer, which includes thoughts, process of information, and judgment of choices (Blakey, 2011). A sports consumer’s decision-making process has been examined by various researchers (Mullin et al., 2000; Schwarz et al., 2013; Shank, 2009), and in this study, a five-phase approach was used, which is explained in Table 1.

The information generated as a result of user interactions on social networking sites influences the decision-making process of consumers (Wang & Chang, 2013). According to Li (2011), users’ behaviors are affected not only by their own motivations but also by other users of the consumers’ online network. As stated by Wang and Lin (2011), people tend to

follow others' choices instead of making their own decisions to reduce the cognitive effort when faced with too much online information. In addition, consumers search for product and company information on social media sites because they find these sources more reliable than information provided by marketers (Sinclair & Vogus, 2011). The role of Facebook in each phase of the decision-making process is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Decision-Making Process of Sports Consumers and the Role of Facebook

Decision-making process of sports consumers	Role of Facebook(*)
<p>Problem/Need Recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Starts with recognizing the need for sports consumption (Blakey, 2011). -Need is activated with internal or external stimulants (Roberts & Lilien, 1993). -The magnitude and importance of the problem or need are determined (Schwarz et al., 2013; Shank, 2009). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Facebook acts as an inspiration source for consumers' pending purchases. -Decide with or conform to reference groups
<p>Information Search</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information is either actively searched or passively gathered with high awareness (Roberts & Lilien, 1993). -Can be in two forms (Bettman et al., 1991): from consumer's existing memory (which is usually used in routine decisions (Shilbury et al., 2009)) or from external environment (which is used because of consumers' realization of the risk of purchase (Shilbury et al., 2009)). -External sources have four types: personal sources (friends, peers, followers from social networks, etc.) (Schwarz et al., 2013; Shank, 2009), non-personal sources (articles in newspapers, consumer reports, efficient bloggers, etc.) (Schwarz et al., 2013; Shank, 2009), experiential sources (watching the games in different sports leagues and deciding) (Shank, 2009), social conformity (deciding based on others' purchases and peer / reference group pressure) (Schwarz et al., 2013). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Facebook acts as a source of information or confirmation for planned purchase. -Reducing risk
<p>Evaluation of Alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consists of two components (Roberts & Lilien, 1993): perception formation (based on the beliefs about products' features) and preference formation (based on the perceptions). - The alternatives in the evoked set are evaluated according to the evaluation criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Facebook acts as a source for evaluating the alternatives. -Finding the right alternative
<p>Actual Purchase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Three purchase types in sports are (Schwarz et al., 2013): trial purchase (a sample purchase before re-purchase), repeated purchase (satisfied consumers will re-purchase), long-term commitment purchase (consumers are emotionally or cognitively committed to the sports product). -The brand, place and quality of the purchase are determined (Roberts & Lilien, 1993). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Facebook acts as an information source for the place and time of purchase. -Coordinating the purchase
<p>Post-purchase Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -After purchase, sports consumer can be (Mullin et. al., 2000): satisfied, not satisfied, marginally satisfied or unsatisfied. -Satisfaction level will affect the future participation and the positive word-of-mouth about the sports product/event (Shank, 2009). - Continuous purchase is ensured if cognitive unconformity is eliminated (Schwarz et al., 2013). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Facebook acts as a platform for spreading opinions and experiences. -Generating and sharing experiences, helping others

(*) Adapted from Yadav, De Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann (2013).

2.3. Social Influence

Social influence is an important subject in experimental social psychology (Kelman, 1961). Turner (1991, p.1) defined social influence as “the processes whereby people directly or indirectly influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of others”. Social influence is related to the information about other people, and it may not necessarily happen via face-to-face interactions (Robins et al., 2001; Trusov et al., 2010). In contrast with the past (when people’s influence was limited to their narrow social circle), social influence has broadened due to use of the Internet and social media (Kwahk & Ge, 2012). According to McKenna and Bargh (2000), from the social psychology perspective, social interaction on the Internet has four differences from real life: (a) Users can interact with others anonymously, (b) Physical distance is not important, (c) Physical appearance is not important, (d) Interaction does not need to be simultaneous.

Social influence can be classified as informative and normative (Bearden et al., 1986; Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Chung et al., 2013; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Lee et al., 2006). Informative social influence occurs when consumers accept the information obtained from others as evidence of reality (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Chung et al., 2013). In contrast, normative social influence occurs when consumers conform to the expectations of other people or groups (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Normative social influence is usually referred as subjective norms (Lee et al., 2006) and perceived social pressure for performing or not performing a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Normative influence on behavior is caused by either explanatory norms (what is typical or normal) or preventive norms (what most of the others approve or not) (Cialdini et al., 1990). According to Henningsen and Henningsen (2003), if normative influence is effective, individuals change position due to the mostly preferred choice to conform to the group; however, if informative influence is effective, individuals reevaluate their position due to the discussion of the group members about reality, evidence, and other forms of information.

Chen et al. (2011) asserted that the influence of online word-of-mouth on purchase behavior is significant. Jalilvanda et al. (2011) pointed out that online consumer reviews play two roles in social influence: informative (providing additional user-focused information) and suggestive (giving positive or negative signals of product popularity). O’Brien (2011) stated that users who feel tied to a social network consume social media by searching for others’ activities, and this creates a virtual type of peer pressure. Consumers’ tendency to communicate with peers about consumption highly influences their attitude toward products and services, which results in either buying the same brand or avoiding other brands in order to be like peers (Wang et al., 2012). According to Power and Philips-Wren (2011), peer pressure on social media is quicker and more comprehensive than face-to-face experience.

Yadav et al. (2013) pointed out that the social environment is often an important factor in influencing and determining perceived needs and observing others may encourage people to adopt the same products and services. Others’ product evaluations are used as information sources for products, and people tend to perceive a product more favorably when they observe that others evaluate the product favorably; thus, based on these evaluations, people infer that the product is a better product (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). According to

Richins (1983), customers repurchase products they are satisfied with and they may influence other people's perceptions of the brand by talking about particularly satisfying products.

Based on this literature, we hypothesize the following:

H1: Social influence positively affects the need recognition phase of the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook.

H2: Social influence positively affects the information search phase of the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook.

H3: Social influence positively affects the evaluation of alternatives phase of the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook.

H4: Social influence positively affects the actual purchase phase of the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook.

H5: Social influence positively affects the post-purchase evaluation phase of the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook.

Park et al. (2007) stated that online consumer reviews are important in purchase decision-making because this kind of consumer-created information provides indirect experiences of products. According to Ling and Yazdanifard (2014) consumer reviews are evaluating options which influence consumer buying decision, and they state that this influence has been proven to be more for females than males. A study conducted by Bea and Lee (2011) revealed significant gender differences about consumers' perception of online consumer reviews and concluded that females are more influenced by the recommendations of others than males on purchase intention. Garbarino and Strahilevitz (2004) found that friend recommendations about a site reduce the perceived risk and increase the willingness to buy online more for females than males. According to Wakefield (1995), fan identification and loyalty increases with positive social influence from peers. On the other hand, he also states that if team ownership or players involve in actions that reduce the social approval of community or reference groups this directly affects the fan identification with the team and future patronage. Based on this literature, we suppose that gender and team membership may have a moderating effect on the impact of social influence on the decision-making process.

According to Kwahk and Ge (2012), social media interaction ties and social media commitment affect social influence on e-commerce. In the current study, we described social influence source and social platform activities as the factors that affect social influence on online social network sites.

2.3.1. Social Influence Source

Social influence sources can be dealt with two dimensions: social ties, which can be classified as strong or weak, and media (i.e., media pages on Facebook).

Social influence between the members of a group can trigger individuals to revise their estimations and affect the wisdom of the crowd (Lorenz et al., 2011). People adapt to social influence that comes from several sources including peers they do not recognize or even

intangible reference groups (Sridhar & Srinivasan, 2012). According to Song and Kim (2006), social influence from internal referents is related to family, friends, and colleagues. Song and Kim (2006) also emphasized external referents and observed that under certain conditions using external referents to explain individual behaviors is more powerful. Postmes et al. (1998) argued that in computer-mediated communications, when a common social identity is shared by the communicators, they become more susceptible to group influence.

Users on Facebook can establish different types of relationships by classifying "friends" regarding their closeness level ranging from "close friends" to "friends of others" (Sosik & Bazarova, 2014). These friendships on Facebook typically contain clear social ties (Sun et al., 2011). Different types of social ties have different effects on purchasing decisions. For instance, messages from strong ties (e.g., close friends) have more effect on the decision-maker than messages from weak ties (e.g., acquaintances) (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Wang & Chang, 2013; Yang, 2012). As stated by Yadav et al. (2013), "social influence increases with tie strength," and tie strength between communicators is an important factor for creating awareness in online social networks.

Facebook was designed for individuals at the beginning, but later firms and brands were enabled to create Facebook pages. According to Haigh et al. (2013) Facebook pages enable companies to share their news and company information. These pages can also be used to inform consumers or fans about events and special promotions (Miller, 2014). Corporate Facebook page followers may either passively observe discussions or actively express their opinions (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014). Sports teams can use Facebook as a communication way to connect with their fans, promote their events and sell licensed products (Argan et al., 2013).

New media, which provides several options for gathering information, has dramatically changed the way that consumers collect and exchange information about products and how they provide and consume products (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Mangold and Faulds (2009) stated that consumers look to social media sites more often to search for information and make purchasing decisions; the large amount of information communicated by customers about products via social media platforms influences other customers at every stage of consumer behavior.

Social media acts as a rich information source and influences consumer decision-making through the information and opinions obtained from the connections (Power & Philips-Wren, 2011). Kwahk and Ge (2012) indicated that social media interaction ties are channels for transferring normative social influence to group members and getting more knowledge, which provides informational social influence in social network groups. Kwahk and Ge also found that social media interaction ties positively affect informational and normative social influence.

Based on this literature, we hypothesize that:

H₆: The social influence source positively affects social influence.

2.3.2. Social Platform Activities

Social influence is created by different activities on social media platforms. For example, social networking sites are one of the main platforms for users of the Internet to interact. In addition to creating profiles, users on social networking sites can share information, like posts, make comments, and send private messages.

Influence in online social networks can occur either in the form of a direct invitation from another node (e.g., a friend) or only indirect observation of the activities of another node related to the group (e.g., a picture post of a friend to a social group) (Hui & Buchegger, 2009). According to Yadav et al. (2013), consumers are informed about product “likes” and purchases made by their friends in their online social network. Chu and Kim (2011) pointed out that users of social networking sites help their social connections’ purchasing decisions by sharing valuable product information and experience. McKinsey & Company (2012) stated in a report about the social economy that social technology has made a strong connection with main sociological patterns and behaviors by sharing information with members of the network, comparing experiences and social status with others, etc.

According to Hunt et al. (2012), Facebook puts users into online interaction by allowing them to use tools designed for interpersonal communication. In this study, for Facebook, like, comment and share activities are examined for social influence platform activities; private messaging activity is excluded. We suggest that these platform activities affect social influence; thus, we hypothesize that:

H₇: Social platform activities positively affect social influence.

Figure 1 introduces the conceptual framework of this study. The effects of social influence on need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, actual purchase, and post-purchase evaluation are shown as hypotheses from H₁ to H₅; the effects of social influence source and social platform activities on social influence are shown as H₆ and H₇.

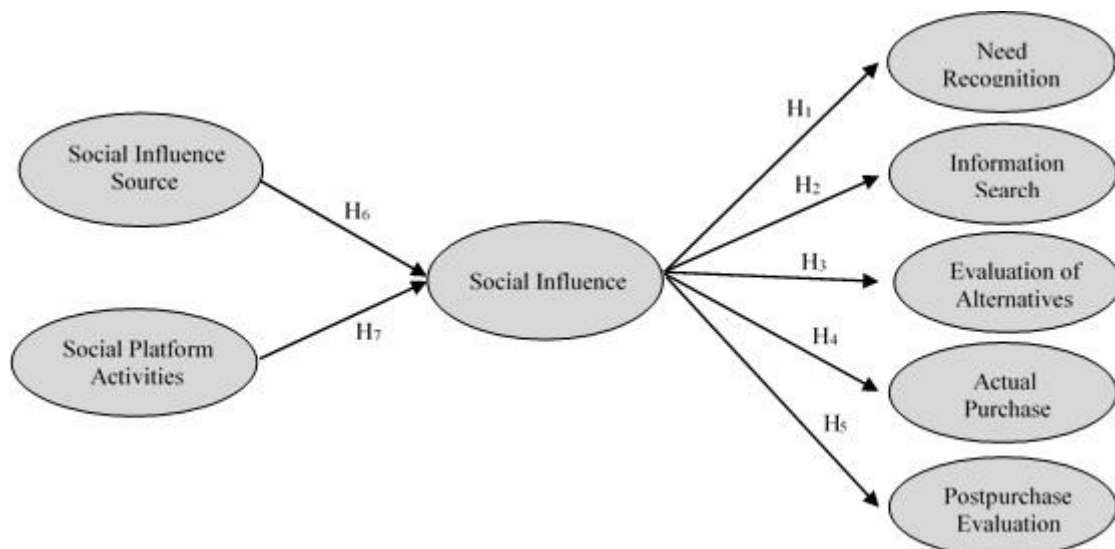


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework and summary of research hypotheses

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Setting and Sample

This study was conducted in Turkey, and the target population of the study included people who have an account on Facebook and who followed their sports team's official Facebook page. In Turkey, football is the most popular sport, and most football spectators are fans of three leading football teams, Fenerbahçe, Beşiktaş, and Galatasaray. Therefore, only supporters of these teams were considered in the study. An online questionnaire was prepared, and data were collected from March to June 2014. The number of people who follow Fenerbahçe, Beşiktaş and Galatasaray's official Facebook pages was 24.145.438 as of April 28, 2014.

According to Malhotra (2007), convenience sampling can be used in exploratory research for generating ideas and insights. The sample size was calculated with the sampling formula, and an adequate sample size was found to be at least 384 (5% tolerance with a 95% possibility, for $\pi = 0.50$, $D = 0.05$) (Malhotra, 2007). Thus, in this study, data were collected using the convenience sampling method because it is the least expensive, the least time-consuming, and easy to measure.

A total of 521 respondents answered the questionnaire. Of these respondents, 113 who did not have an account on Facebook or who did not follow their football team's official Facebook page were eliminated from the data. The study focused on the fans of the three leading football teams (Fenerbahçe, Beşiktaş and Galatasaray), and respondents who were fans of other teams were also eliminated from the data. A final total of 392 questionnaires were included in the analyses. Of the 392 participants, 27% were female, and 73% were male; 36% were fans of Fenerbahçe, 46% of Galatasaray, and 18% of Beşiktaş. Age groups were represented as follows: 14% for ages 20 and under, 68% for ages 21-30, 14% for ages 31-40, and 4% for ages 41 and over.

3.2. Questionnaire Design

The first set of items on the questionnaire were related to social influence, social influence source, and social platform activities, which were adapted from studies by Chung et al. (2013), Mäntymäki and Riemer (2014), Park and Lessig (1977), Venkatesh and Brown (2001), Venkatesh and Davis (2000), and Yang (2011). The second set of items were related to the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook and were prepared based on the literature mentioned in Table 1. The items are included in the Appendix and they were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

4. ANALYSES AND RESULTS

For the statistical analysis, SPSS 20 and AMOS 21.0 were used. Thirty observed and eight latent variables that formed the measurement model were included in confirmatory factor analysis.

4.1. Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the research variables was measured with Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient and composite reliability (CR) values. For all variables, all values ranged from 0,739 to 0,909, exceeding the 0,70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). In confirmatory factor

analysis, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), all factor loadings were found to be significant and higher than 0,50; the average variance extracted (AVE) values were calculated and all AVE values were higher than 0,50. These results are shown in Table 2.

To control the convergent and discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE values must be higher than the correlation between the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For each construct, the squares of the correlation between latent variables (common variance) were smaller than the AVE values. These results with the factor correlation matrix are shown in Table 3. As is seen from the factor correlation matrix, the highest correlation value among social influence and the phases of the decision-making process is 0,690 (between social influence and need recognition). According to these values, reliability and convergent and discriminant validity are assured.

Table 2. Model statistics and factor loadings of the items

	AVE	CR	α	Item	Factor loading
Social influence	0,593	0,743	0,847	SI1	0,71
				SI2	0,82
Social influence source	0,509	0,801	0,739	SIS1	0,81
				SIS2	0,76
				SIS3	0,50
				SIS4	0,73
Social platform activities	0,650	0,848	0,797	SPA1	0,78
				SPA2	0,80
				SPA3	0,82
Need recognition	0,718	0,910	0,909	NR1	0,86
				NR2	0,88
				NR3	0,87
				NR4	0,77
Information search	0,623	0,868	0,825	IS1	0,86
				IS2	0,85
				IS3	0,78
				IS4	0,69
Evaluation of alternatives	0,692	0,899	0,887	EA1	0,80
				EA2	0,89
				EA3	0,88
				EA4	0,75
Actual purchase	0,672	0,890	0,871	AP1	0,90
				AP2	0,88
				AP3	0,84
				AP4	0,64
Post-purchase evaluation	0,672	0,911	0,909	PPE1	0,84
				PPE2	0,81
				PPE3	0,81
				PPE4	0,87
				PPE5	0,77

AVE: Average variance extracted; CR: Composite reliability; α : Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation and factor correlation values of research variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Social influence (1)	2,85	1,09	0,770							
Social influence source (2)	2,97	0,98	0,705	0,713						
Social platform activities (3)	3,04	1,08	0,705	0,759	0,806					
Need recognition (4)	3,16	1,07	0,690	0,690	0,718	0,847				
Information search (5)	3,12	0,98	0,617	0,616	0,767	0,700	0,771			
Evaluation of alternatives(6)	2,83	1,06	0,591	0,707	0,693	0,661	0,756	0,827		
Actual purchase (7)	2,93	1,04	0,610	0,683	0,653	0,709	0,733	0,752	0,819	
Post-purchase evaluation(8)	2,88	1,07	0,576	0,628	0,619	0,667	0,679	0,801	0,686	0,819

Square root of AVE for each construct are shown on the main diagonal. SD: standard deviation; M:Mean

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

According to the existing thresholds (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Kline, 2005; Marsh et al., 1988), the model exhibits adequate fit to the data as the results in Table 4 show. Every path in the model was statistically significant ($t > 1,96$; $p = 0,001$).

Table 4. Measurement model goodness of fit values

	p	χ^2 / df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	NFI	GFI	TLI	AGFI
Measurement model	0,001	2,019	0,051	0,038	0,96	0,92	0,89	0,95	0,86

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

The structural model, including the research hypotheses and paths, was examined using the maximum likelihood estimation procedure. The structural model exhibits adequate fit to the data as the results in Table 5 show. Figure 2 shows the path estimates of the research model, and all structural path estimates are statistically significant ($p < 0,01$).

Table 5. Goodness of fit statistics for the research model

	χ^2	χ^2 / df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	NFI	GFI	TLI	AGFI
Structural model	846,50	2,176	0,055	0,047	0,95	0,90	0,87	0,94	0,85

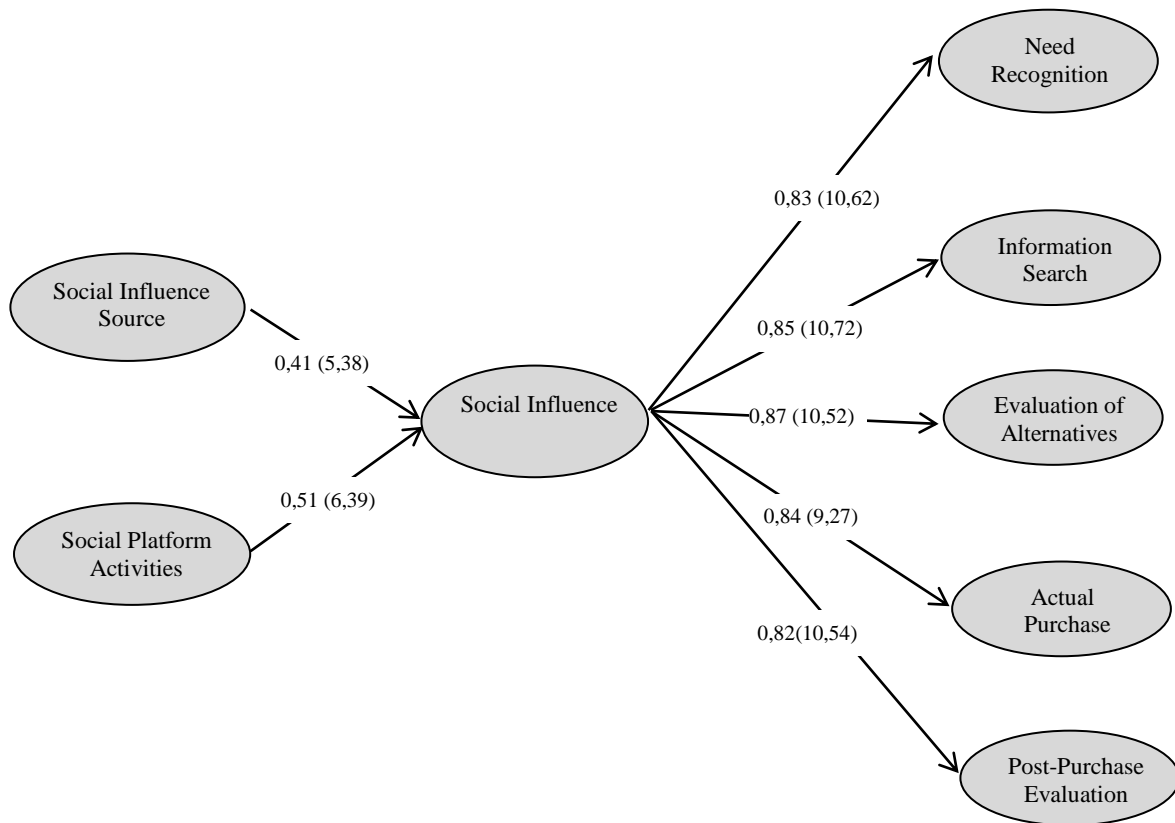


Figure 2. Structural model of the research

According to the results, social influence positively and significantly affected every phase of the decision-making process and had the strongest effect on the evaluation of alternatives ($\beta_3 = 0,87, t = 10,52$). Thus, H₁, H₂, H₃, H₄, and H₅ are supported. The effects of the social influence source and social platform activities on social influence were significantly positive ($\beta_6 = 0,41, t = 5,38$); ($\beta_7 = 0,51, t = 6,39$); thus, H₆ and H₇ are supported. Social platform activities have more effect on social influence as the results show.

The explained variance of the need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, actual purchase, and post-purchase evaluation phases is 63%, 74%, 78%, 68%, and 70%, respectively. These results show that social influence has an important effect on the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook.

The moderation effects of gender and team membership were analyzed with multiple group analysis, which compares the paths belonging to each subgroup. No significant difference was found between men and women for any structural path. Multiple group analysis for team membership revealed that the effect of social influence on need recognition was stronger for supporters of Galatasaray than Fenerbahçe (estimate_{Galatasaray}=1,285; estimate_{Fenerbahçe} = 1,237; $z = -4,114$). Similarly, the effect of social influence on information search (estimate_{Galatasaray} = 1,340; estimate_{Fenerbahçe}= 1,264; $z = -4,795$) and post-purchase evaluation (estimate_{Galatasaray} = 1,394; estimate_{Fenerbahçe} = 1,096; $z = 4,383$) was stronger for supporters of Galatasaray than Fenerbahçe. The effect of the social influence source on social

influence was stronger for the supporters of Galatasaray than Fenerbahçe (estimate_{Galatasaray} = 0,267; estimate_{Fenerbahçe} = 0,249; $z = 4,78$). However, the effect of social platform activities on social influence was stronger for supporters of Fenerbahçe than Galatasaray (estimate_{Fenerbahçe} = 0,344; estimate_{Galatasaray} = 0,293; $z = -4,759$). No significant difference was found between Galatasaray and Beşiktaş supporters, and Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş supporters for any structural path.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the effects of the social influence source and social platform activities on social influence and the impact of social influence on the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook. The findings provide valuable insights for academic researchers and practitioners.

The study reveals that the social influence source and social platform activities positively affect social influence. The finding about social influence source is in line with Kwahk and Ge's (2012) study. Since social platform activities are more effective on social influence than social influence sources, marketers should emphasize on marketing efforts related to platform activities such as trying to increase the amount of social interactivity on online social network sites and encouraging consumers to use platform activities to spread product opinions and experiences.

Our study provides material for sports marketers (sports teams in particular). When they create marketing strategies for sports products, services, and events; marketers should also consider the influence of social networking sites such as Facebook. Sports marketers should plan for not only some aspects but also the entire decision-making process. According to our results, evaluation of alternatives phase is the most affected phase of the decision-making process by social influence on Facebook. Therefore, marketers should especially focus on this phase. For example, sports marketers or teams can promote social influence about products that they want to put forward among all the alternatives because of marketing related issues such as reducing stocks or increasing sales of a specific product.

For the need recognition phase, as Kim and Srivastava (2007) pointed out, it is important for companies to predict consumers' latent purchase needs based on social groups to which consumers belong and the relationships among group members. Thus, needs can be defined correctly, and consumers can be activated to make a sports-related purchase. Consumers should be encouraged to exchange information and experiences about sports-related products, events, and services on Facebook because this may stimulate other consumers to make a new purchase. In addition, marketers can use "Facebook Advertisement Targeting Function" to share posts about sports products which can be viewed in newsfeed of the targeted sports consumers. These types of posts have a higher chance of reaching the right consumers and arouse need about the products. Sports consumers are usually loyal to the team and these posts may not disturb them, nevertheless marketers should be careful about the content and frequency.

The risks that Yadav et al. (2013) mentioned (functional, social, and financial) are one of the main issues that consumers try to reduce in the information search phase of the decision-making process. Sports marketers should spread valuable information for consumers on as

many channels as possible on Facebook. Consumers should be turned into active users who use platform activities such as like, comment or share; rather than just being passive observers. Marketers can organize Facebook campaigns to increase the amount of information sharing (i.e., a present for every tenth like or comment on the sports product).

As Kim and Srivastava (2007) indicated, consumers need more help in the information search and evaluation of alternatives phases than in other phases of the decision-making process. Consumers would like to reduce the list of products in the evoked set. Sports marketers should ensure that their products or events are in the reduced list. Companies or team pages on Facebook should provide valuable and accurate product information and try to encourage consumers, who made a purchase and are satisfied, to share information about their knowledge and experience about sports products or events.

A Nielsen report stated that friends and peers are more trustworthy than anyone else for consumers when they make purchasing decisions (Gibbs & Bruich, 2010). A study revealed that the percentage of social media users surveyed who were at least somewhat likely to make a purchase after seeing a friend's post was 68% for 18- to 34-year-olds, 53% for 35- to 44-year-olds, 40% for 45- to 54-year-olds, and 32% for 55- to 64-year-olds (eMarketer, 2014). Therefore, in the actual purchase phase, companies should pay more attention to encourage consumers' likes, shares, and comments on Facebook rather than their own advertisements. Information provided by Facebook activities helps consumers coordinate the purchase process (choosing the product and brand, the time and place of the purchase).

During the post-purchase evaluation phase, consumers endeavor to confirm that their purchasing decisions are correct, and they tend to compare post-purchase experiences with others on Facebook. A Carat and Microsoft research (2010) stated, these post-purchase experiences can create word-of-mouth and influence future and succeeding purchases. Therefore, it will be useful for companies to enable post-purchase reviews on Facebook pages to help potential consumers in their purchasing decisions. Sports consumers who have made purchases before can be brought together in Facebook groups and encouraged to share their experiences about the products or services.

In the current study, the effect of social influence on decision-making did not differ according to gender. This finding is not in line with previous research (Bea & Lee, 2011; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004); however it supports the result of a previous study conducted by Kwon, Stefanone, and Barnett (2014) that stated gender was not a moderator in the relationship between social influence and online behavioral choice. Our results imply that sports marketers can use similar marketing strategies for both genders.

According to our findings, marketers do not need to differentiate marketing strategies between supporters of Galatasaray and Beşiktaş, and Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş. However, for supporters of Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray, it may be useful to alter strategies. Since social influence is stronger for Galatasaray supporters than Fenerbahçe supporters for three phases (need recognition, information search and post-purchase evaluation), marketers should focus on creating social influence related to these phases for Galatasaray supporters. In addition, social influence source is more important for Galatasaray supporters and social platform activities are more important for Fenerbahçe supporters. According to a research conducted by HTC (DigitalAge, 2014), which included analysis of social media posts about football

teams between January and November 2014, Galatasaray was the mostly mentioned team on social media. Also, the number of followers of Galatasaray Facebook page was the highest among three teams included in this study. More talk about a team will create more sources for social influence. Therefore, it can be said that social influence source is stronger on supporters of Galatasaray. For Galatasaray supporters, the focus should be strategies for activating peer influence whereas for Fenerbahçe supporters, the focus should be strategies for increasing the use of social platform activities. For Fenerbahçe supporters, marketers should try to create efficient and quality content and share on a regular basis.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study sheds some light on the area of social influence and its effect on the decision-making process of sports consumers on Facebook and brings out interesting subjects for further research. First, the study investigated social influence on Facebook. Future research could focus on social influence on other social media sites. Second, this study examined sports spectators who are fans of three leading football teams in Turkey. Future research could deal with all football spectators and extend the study to other sports or countries. Moreover, new studies are needed for sports participants. Finally, other factors could affect social influence such as user characteristics or expertise, etc.; however, in this study, only the social influence source and social platform activities were considered.

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APPENDIX. Questionnaire Items

Social Influence

- SI1.** If most my Facebook friends' likes/comments/shares about a sports product/event are in the same direction, my decisions are influenced to conform to the majority.
- SI2.** My decision-making process is influenced by likes/comments/shares on Facebook because I think I will get true information from them about a sports product/event.

Social Influence Source

- SIS1.** Likes/comments/shares of my family/close friends/colleagues on Facebook are effective on my decision-making process of a sports purchase.
- SIS2.** Likes/comments/shares of not very close friends on Facebook are effective on my decision-making process of a sports purchase.
- SIS3.** Likes/comments/shares on my favorite team's Facebook page are effective on my decision-making process of a sports purchase.
- SIS4.** Likes / comments / shares on Facebook pages of media that I follow are effective on my decision-making process of a sports purchase.

Social Platform Activities

- SPA1.** In my decision-making process of a sports purchase, I am mostly influenced by the "likes" on Facebook.
- SPA2.** In my decision-making process of a sports purchase, I am mostly influenced by the "comments" on Facebook.
- SPA3.** In my decision-making process of a sports purchase, I am mostly influenced by the "shares" on Facebook.

Need Recognition

NR1. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events let me realize my needs about those products/events.

NR2. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events prompt me about purchasing those products/events.

NR3. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events enable me to re-evaluate my needs.

NR4. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events evoke the idea that I might need those products/events.

Information Search

IS1. When I make a research about sports products/events, I examine the related likes/comments/shares on Facebook

IS2. When I make a research about sports products/events, likes/comments/shares on Facebook are important sources of information.

IS3. When I make a research about sports products/events, I think that likes/comments/shares on Facebook are reliable.

IS4. I don't make a purchase decision without examining the related likes/comments/shares on Facebook.

Evaluation of Alternatives

EA1. Before the purchase decision of a sports product I definitely check the related likes/comments/shares on Facebook.

EA2. When evaluating the alternatives for sports products/events, I take into consideration the related likes/comments/shares on Facebook.

EA3. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events enable me to evaluate the alternatives in my mind.

EA4. I don't finish evaluating the alternatives without checking the likes/comments/shares on Facebook about those sports products/events.

Actual Purchase

AP1. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events influence the product/event I choose.

AP2. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events influence my brand choice.

AP3. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events influence the place of my purchase.

AP4. Likes/comments/shares on Facebook about sports products/events influence the time of my purchase.

Post-Purchase Evaluation

PPE1. When I search for solutions to my problems on my sports experience, I check the likes/comments/shares on Facebook related to that sports product/event.

PPE2. I share my satisfaction or dissatisfaction about my sports experience on Facebook.

PPE3. If I am satisfied with my sports experience, I share my next purchase decision on Facebook.

PPE4. If I am not satisfied with my sports experience, I share my decision of not purchasing the same product/event again on Facebook.

PPE5. After purchasing a sports product/event, I check reviews on Facebook to evaluate my decision.