

## The Reasons Behind Pirated Broadcasts: An Investigation from the Perspective of Football

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### Research Article

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### Abstract

This research aims to determine why football fans watch pirated broadcasts. In this qualitative study, the phenomenological design was used, and snowball sampling and maximum variation sampling methods were used to select the participants. In this context, 12 participants with different income levels who watch football matches with pirate broadcasting constitute the research group of the study. In the study where the individual interview method was used, an unstructured interview form was used as a data collection tool. The data were analyzed by content analysis method. As a result of the analysis, four subcategories were obtained regarding the reasons for fans to watch pirated broadcasts. These are broadcasting organizations, federations, state, and other policies. Fans stated that they watch pirated broadcasts due to many factors, such as high broadcast package prices, many packages, lack of single-match viewing options, broadcast quality, inadequate league and team performances, and broadcast tender processes. When the reasons for watching according to income level were examined, it was determined that although pricing was an essential factor in the first place in all income levels, the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts varied in medium and high-income levels. As a result, it was determined that watching pirated broadcasts cannot be associated only with pricing, and the reasons consist of many elements. Although blocking pirated broadcast sites and applying personal penalties are elements that will help reduce the popularity of pirated broadcasts, it can be said that the attractiveness of legal broadcasts should also be strengthened for permanent solutions.

**Keywords:** Illegal broadcasting, Broadcasting revenue, Sports media

## Korsan Yayınların Arkasındaki Nedenler: Futbol Taraftarları Perspektifinden Bir İnceleme

### Öz

Bu araştırma, futbol taraftarlarının korsan yayın izleme sebeplerinin neler olduğunu belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma kapsamında, futbol maçlarını korsan yayın ile izleyen farklı gelir düzeyine sahip 12 futbol taraftarı çalışmanın araştırma grubunu oluşturmaktadır. Bireysel görüşme yönteminin kullanıldığı çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak yapılandırılmamış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Yapılan analizler sonucunda; taraftarların korsan yayın izleme gerekçelerine yönelik olarak 4 alt kategori elde edilmiştir. Bunlar; yayıncı kuruluş, federasyon, devlet ve diğer politikalar şeklindedir. Taraftarlar; yayın paket fiyatlarının yüksekliği, paket sayısının çok olması, tek maçlık izleme seçeneklerinin olmaması, yayın kalitesi, lig ve takım performanslarının yetersizliği, yayın ihale süreçleri gibi birçok unsur nedeniyle korsan yayın izlediklerini belirtmişlerdir. Gelir düzeyine göre izleme gerekçeleri incelendiğinde, tüm gelir düzeylerinde her ne kadar ilk sıralarda fiyatlandırma önemli bir etken olsa da orta ve yüksek gelir düzeyinde korsan yayın izleme gerekçelerinin çeşitlendiği belirlenmiştir. Sonuç olarak; korsan yayın izlemenin sadece fiyatlandırma ile ilişkilendirilemeyeceği ve gerekçelerin birçok unsurdan oluştuğu tespit edilmiştir. Korsan yayın sitelerinin engellenmesi ve şahsi cezaların uygulanması korsan yayının popülaritesini azaltmaya yardımcı olacak unsurlar olsa da kalıcı çözümler için yasal yayınların çekiciliğini de güçlendirmek gerektiği söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yasadışı yayın, Yayın geliri, Spor medyası

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## INTRODUCTION

Pirated publishing has existed for years in many sectors, such as cinema, books, and music. To prevent pirate publishing in these fields, professional associations have created reports and fought against it (Yaybir, 2018). Sports broadcasting also has its share of piracy. Until 1996, competitions were broadcast on open channels, but with the Cines5 channel, the era of encrypted broadcasting began. Since then, the Turkish League has been broadcast on encrypted channels (BBC, 2021). With the transition of competitions to encrypted channels, pirate broadcasting has also become widespread in sports.

Pirated broadcasting is a significant problem not only in Türkiye but also in Europe and the USA (Robertson, 2014). For example, Tebas, the president of the Spanish Football Federation, stated that 1.1 million people in Spain illegally watch sports content (Ajansspor, 2023). More than one million illegal streams of the Manchester United-Liverpool match were detected. According to research, one in 11 English people admitted to watching a Premier League football match as a pirate. Although 83% of Italian viewers know that piracy is a crime, 38% have done it at least once (Dascal, 2021). A survey of 3,200 NFL fans in 2023 revealed that 35% of the respondents regularly watch NFL games via pirated broadcasts (hbr, 2024). In Türkiye, it is reported that the rate of watching sports competitions with pirated broadcasts is around 85% (Beinsports, 2022; Hürriyet, 2021).

This phenomenon, which is a significant problem all over the world, has financial consequences for clubs. Brydon (2023) noted that the annual cost of sports piracy could be as high as \$28.3 billion, a significant amount considering that the entire sports media rights market will be worth \$55 billion by 2022. Property damage in the Premier League has been estimated at around £1 million per match (Dascal, 2021). Regarding the financial losses in Türkiye, the then Trabzonspor club president Ahmet Ağaoğlu stated at the exit of the clubs' union meeting, *"... So, if we calculate it out of only 100 liras when a match is broadcasted, only 15 liras goes to the clubs, and if we consider the remaining 85 as money coming out of the clubs' coffers in the pirate broadcasting market, we would not be wrong at all"* (Beinsports, 2022). The inability to prevent pirated broadcasts causes broadcasting revenues, an indispensable income item for clubs, to decrease yearly. While the broadcasting tender for the Turkish Football League was 500 million dollars per year in the 2017-2018 season (TFF, 2016), this figure dropped to 213 million dollars in 2023 (TFF, 2024). In addition to negatively affecting clubs, pirate broadcasting also economically affects countries. Chief Legal Advisor of Digiturk, one of the providers of digital pay television services in Türkiye, Onur Günel explained this situation: *"The reflection of this is that in terms of our industry, 1 out of 2 people can get something. We have an annual loss of at least 500 million TL. After all, Digiturk is an institution that declares corporate tax and pays tax on what it declares. There is a serious tax loss for the state here"* (BBC, 2021).

There are many methods to prevent this situation, which negatively affects sports clubs and broadcasters. One of these methods is blocking pirated broadcast sites. However, since this method was under the Criminal Court of Peace's responsibility until 2020, applications made during the match period took a long time to finalize. Ahmet Ağaoğlu, Trabzonspor president at the time, explained this issue as follows: *"The process of detecting the illegal broadcast and*

*taking measures by the prosecutor's office to shut it down takes 80-81 minutes, the match is almost over in this time...*" (Beinsports, 2022). For this reason, to combat pirate broadcasting more effectively, the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) was given the authority to block it through a regulation made in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. Although this decision was criticized (Taşkın, 2022), the TFF immediately started intervening and blocking illegal broadcasting sites with the "Instruction on the Prevention of Illegal Football Broadcasts." For example, 866 websites were blocked between February 4-21, 2022 (Sözcü, 2022). Blocking attempts have psychological effects, such as tiring out viewers and illegal broadcasters. However, pirate publishers can quickly get a new domain even though pirate publications are blocked. In addition to blocking piracy sites, methods such as imposing criminal sanctions against those who make and watch these broadcasts are also used in the fight against piracy. Article 163, paragraph 2 of the Turkish Penal Code states that those who watch pirated broadcasts are imprisoned for six months to two years or a judicial fine. However, this problem has not been solved for years, despite both attempts to prevent it and criminal sanctions.

Therefore, this research focuses on determining why football fans prefer these broadcasts to find a permanent solution. Understanding why fans prefer pirated broadcasts can contribute to developing strategies to prevent pirated broadcasts. One of the most important strategies for this problem is eliminating the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts. The public also widely believes that the reasons why fans watch pirated broadcasts are based on pricing. However, fans with high-income levels can also watch pirated broadcasts. Journalist Mehmet Demirkol explained this situation as, *"There are very high-income people around me. It is not a problem for them to become subscribers to broadcasters, but they do not"* (BBC, 2021). Therefore, including fans with different income levels in the research aims to reveal whether the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts vary according to income distribution.

When the literature on pirate broadcasting in football is examined, there are no scientific studies on this issue. However, some field studies have been conducted by media companies (Dascal, 2021; YouGov, 2023; Oddspedia, 2023; Synamedia, 2020). Therefore, the results of this study will be significant in guiding future studies. The main objective of this study is to determine the reasons football fans watch pirated broadcasts in order to contribute to the solution of this phenomenon that has not been prevented for years.

## **METHOD**

This section provides information about the research model, the selection of the research group, data collection, the data collection tool, analysis, and validity and reliability.

### **Research Model**

In this study, which was conducted to determine the reasons behind watching pirated broadcasts, the phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Phenomenology was preferred because it is a research method that aims to obtain information about phenomena by using the experiences of individuals (Merriam, 2015; Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2016).

## Research Group

Snowball sampling and maximum variation sampling methods were used to determine the study participants. In the snowball sampling method, a relevant person is selected, and others are reached through them (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The maximum diversity sampling method aims to obtain the experiences of different shareholders in various contexts (Yağar & Dökme, 2018). In this context, the researchers classified as different stakeholders according to their income levels. The reason for selecting participants according to various income levels is the public opinion that the most important factor of using pirated publications is the wage policy and the researchers' observations. In this context, it is essential to reveal the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts of fans with different income levels and loyalty to a team to address the issue more comprehensively. Accordingly, in the income-level selection, the fans were categorized into low, middle, and high-income groups based on the poverty line of TÜRK-İŞ, the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions. According to TÜRK-İŞ April 2024 reports, the poverty line for a family of four is 57,736.00 TL. The cost of living for one person is determined as 22,992.00 TL. Fans with a family of four and individuals living alone were classified based on these figures. Individuals with household incomes below these wages are defined as low-income. The middle income was determined as those with an income between 57,736.00 TL and 100,000.00 TL for 4-person households and 22,992.00 TL and 50,000.00 TL for single fans. Those with income higher than the upper limit used to determine middle income are defined as high income. In this context, 12 fans who watch pirated broadcasting and have different income levels constituted the research group of this study.

**Table 1.** Descriptive information of fans

Participant	Income Level	Match Watching	Followed League	Previous Legal Publication Usage Status	Current Preferred Broadcasting Style
P1	Low	Always	Super League-Europe *	No	Illegal
P2	High	Always	Super League-Europe	Yes	Illegal
P3	High	Always	Super League-Europe	Yes	Legal-Illegal
P4	Middle	Sometimes	Super League	No	Illegal
P5	Middle	Often	Super League-Europe	No	Illegal
P6	High	Always	Super League-Europe	Yes	Legal-Illegal
P7	Low	Always	Favorite team	No	Illegal
P8	Low	Always	Super League	No	Illegal
P9	High	Sometimes	Super League-Europe	No	Illegal
P10	Middle	Always	Super League	No	Illegal
P11	Middle	Always	Favorite team-Europe	No	Illegal
P12	Low	Always	Super League-Europe	Yes	Legal-Illegal

\*England-Spain-Germany-France-Italy

## Data Collection Tool

The study used an unstructured interview form developed by the researchers as a data collection tool. The unstructured interview form was preferred due to the limited research area literature and the lack of detailed prior knowledge on the subject. Thus, it was tried to provide in-depth and diverse information (Dömbekci & Erişen, 2022) by allowing the course of the interview to progress more in line with the information provided by the respondent. In this

context, after the descriptive information of the fans was obtained, the question ‘What are the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts?’ was asked to the fans.

### **Research Ethics**

Ethics committee approval was received for this study from the ethics committee of Gazi University (Date: July 30, 2024, Decision Number: 13, Protocol No: E-77082166-604.01-1007168).

### **Data Collection**

This study collected data using an individual interview method, one of the qualitative data collection techniques. Some data were collected face-to-face, and some were collected online via Zoom. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the areas determined by the researchers and where they felt comfortable. Before all the interviews, a comprehensive consent form was presented to the fans by informing them about the purpose of the research, that the data obtained from the interviews would be used only within the limitations of the research without using their names, that face-to-face interviews would be recorded with a voice recorder and online recordings would be recorded through the program, and that they could stop the interview whenever they wanted. The data collection process was completed in August-September. The interviews were carried out per the fans' approval and lasted between 15 and 20 minutes on average.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was applied to the data obtained within the scope of the research. Content analysis in qualitative research is analyzed in four stages: coding the data, finding categories, organizing codes and categories, and defining and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Firstly, participants' descriptive information were concealed, and each was given codes from P1 to P12. The interview records obtained from the fans were deciphered and transcribed. During the analysis, the bulk data were reduced by removing the sections irrelevant to the research scope. Afterward, the researchers coded the fans' opinions separately, and categories and subcategories were formed by combining the codes obtained according to their common characteristics. Categories, subcategories, and codes were explained about each other and interpreted, and conclusions were reached. For each category obtained from the analysis, direct quotations were included by selecting examples from the opinions assumed to represent it best.

Three lecturers working at Gazi University Faculty of Sport Sciences examined, criticized, and approved the categories, subcategories, and codes obtained from the research. In this direction, while the lecturers approved the subcategories and codes, they made technical editing suggestions about how the codes were expressed. The suggestions were considered, and arrangements were made regarding the code writing.

### **Validity - Reliability**

Credibility, transferability, reliability, and verifiability concepts used in qualitative research literature correspond to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity

in quantitative research. In this context, to ensure the credibility of the research, the method of comparing the findings obtained with the participation of more than one researcher from triangulation techniques (Merriam, 2015) was used. Within the scope of analyst triangulation, the researchers coded separately, and then the codes created by each researcher were checked by another researcher. The codes that were found to be different were reorganized after discussion. The purposive sampling method increased data transferability within the studied group and environment (Merriam, 2015). In addition, the stages of the study were explained in detail to ensure transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Merriam, 2015). The codes were tabulated and presented to the readers, and direct quotations were made from the fans' opinions.

## RESULTS

**Table 2.** Opinions on fans' reasons for watching pirated broadcasts

Category	Subcategory	Code	f
<b>Reasons for Watching Pirated Broadcasts</b>	<b>Publisher Policies</b>	High pricing	9
		Lack of single-match viewing option	6
		Poor broadcast quality	4
		Multiple users cannot watch the match at the same time	2
		Easy accessibility of illegal publications	2
		Inadequate customer relations	1
		Biased broadcast	1
		Distrust of broadcasters	1
		Broadcast quality is no different from pirated broadcasts	1
	<b>Government Policies</b>	Lack of penal sanctions	9
		Failure to prevent illegal broadcasting	2
		Economic problems	2
		Injustice	1
		Failure to fulfil its duty	1
	<b>Federation Policies</b>	Broadcasting tender processes	3
		Broadcast revenue distribution	2
		Inadequacy of management	1
	<b>Other Policies</b>	Multiplicity of broadcast packages	11
		Poor team performance	5
		Poor quality of the league	3
		Circle of friends	2
		Monopolisation protest	1

When Table 2 is analyzed, four subcategories were obtained for fans' reasons for watching pirated broadcasts. These subcategories include the publisher policies, government, federation, and other policies.

### Publisher Policies

Nine codes were obtained from the fans' opinions on the broadcaster's policies. The most frequently expressed codes are high pricing, single-match viewing options, and poor broadcast quality, respectively. Most fans (f=9) stated that they watch pirated broadcasts due to the high pricing of legal broadcasts. Regarding this situation, P10: *"Another reason is that they*



*have an expensive broadcasting policy. I mean, I believe that the service should be a platform like normal channels and I think that there are high sums...”, while P1 stated his opinion as, “Because the fees are too high, we are forced to watch pirated broadcasts, also due to the economic conditions. ’*

In addition to pricing, fans stated that the broadcaster not offering a single match viewing option (f=6) led them to pirate broadcasting. P5: *“First of all, I do not always follow matches...That is why I am not a member of the original platforms. If there were a single-match broadcast, I would prefer legal broadcasts; I have preferred them before. For example, I have preferred it before in derby matches.”* With this statement, he drew attention to the importance of the single-match viewing option for fans who do not watch matches frequently. Likewise, P1 explained that the lack of a single-match viewing option caused him to turn to pirate broadcasting: *“It would be much better if the broadcasting organization had a single-match subscription service. Especially for us students, it would be perfect for big matches such as derbies. We would use it but watch it illegally since it is unavailable.”*

Another reason for fans to watch pirated broadcasts is the poor quality of the competition broadcasts (f=4). P9 said *“At the same time, we can also see that broadcasting organizations cause match disruptions. In other words, even if we follow them legally, there may be freezes and breaks. I can say that these are actually among the factors that push me to pirate broadcasting”*. Additionally, among the factors that push fans to pirated broadcasts are; the inability of two people to watch a match at the same time, easy accessibility of illegal broadcasts, problems in customer relations, the bias of the broadcasting organization, distrust in the broadcasting owners and the quality of legal and illegal broadcasts is the same.

Participants' opinions on the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts are as follows:

P9: *“Now there is a situation like this in these broadcasting organizations, for example, two people want to watch a match on the same platform, but we both want to watch it on our phones, but there is a situation like throwing the other one while one is watching. I honestly think that this also has a negative effect.”* (multiple users cannot watch the match at the same time)

P12: *“I can easily watch any match I want on the internet whenever I want, and only sometimes the name of the site changes by changing one letter, that is all.”* (easy accessibility of illegal publications)

P3: *“ And, for example, my most significant point of dislike is this; there is no problem when buying, but when you return it, they create many difficulties. Here, I bought it 15 years ago; they want me to return the box so I can return it. Otherwise, they say I will be penalized. These are the reasons that turn people off.”* (inadequate customer relations)

P10: *“So we think that the broadcasting policy is more biased. There are some incidents that took place before, there are reactions of our clubs to these incidents...”* (biased broadcast)

P4: *“The owners are biased, they touch the nerve endings of many people, so in a way, we show it as resistance. I do not want to take what the people in charge give us, and we do not want to give them anything. That is why such a thing occurs.”* (Distrust of broadcasters)

P11: *"The most important reason for me is that there is not much difference between pirate broadcasting and broadcasting organization's broadcasting. I can access it easily, and there is not much difference in quality."* (broadcast quality is no different from pirated broadcasts)

### **Government Policies**

In addition to the policies of the broadcasting organization, the fans stated that state policies also affect their preference for pirated broadcasting. Five codes were obtained from the opinions expressed for this subcategory. These codes are as follows: Lack of penal sanctions, Failure to prevent illegal broadcasting, economic problems, injustice, and Failure to fulfill its duty. Most fans (f=9) stated that they resorted to pirated broadcasting because the government did not impose penal sanctions against those who watched pirated broadcasting. P7 explains this situation: *"The fact that there are no legal sanctions, of course, makes it easier and more attractive for us to follow the matches on these platforms. If there were legal restrictions or if they were applied regularly, if some penalties were imposed, I would probably not watch"*, while P12 stated his opinion as follows: *"I do not know if the websites are penalized, but I have not seen anything happen to the viewers so far. However, if the viewers are penalized, I would probably quit pirate broadcasts, and I can say that the lack of penal sanctions is one of the reasons why I prefer it"*. While the lack of criminal sanctions was mentioned among the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts, the fact that these broadcasts are not blocked was another reason. For example, P4: *"...Anyone who wants to access it can do so in any way. It is straightforward, and there is probably a systemic permission for this. Because you can block it if you want...However, it means there can also be a relationship of interest."*

In addition, the fans also state that the country's general economic problems and injustice cause them to watch pirated broadcasts. P3 explained the situation related to economic problems: *"I mean, both prices have increased exaggeratedly, ...we do not receive an increase in our salaries at the same rate. However, there is a constant increase there"*, while P2 explained that *the rules are generally not followed in the country, and He does not want to be considered a "sucker"*. *If the legislation is in place in the country, if everything is in place, if everyone follows the rules, if there is an understanding that puts people in the place of human beings, then I can empathize more. Maybe I can say that this is theft. I can think about how I can give rights, but when the conditions are like this, one thinks, are we a sucker? Are we a thief?."*

In addition, P10 states that match broadcasts are under the state's responsibility and that he watches pirated broadcasts because this situation is not realized. P10 expressed this view: *"Not everyone can go to every competition; they can follow it at home on televisions and mobile phones. Since I see this as the state's duty, I do not have a membership or subscription to different channels. The state should offer this to its people free of charge so that we can contribute to our state in spreading sports to the masses. This is my main goal,"* he stated.

### **Federation Policies**

Another category obtained as a result of the analysis is "federation policies". Three codes were obtained from the opinions on this subcategory. These codes include broadcasting tender processes, broadcast revenue distribution, and inadequacy of management.



The fans stated that the incidents during the broadcast tender processes affected them and caused them to watch pirated broadcasts. Regarding this situation, P10 stated that transparency was not ensured in the broadcasting tenders'...*if these tenders were made more transparent, people could pass the legal process from pirated broadcasting. There was a candidacy of the Saran group, and even Sadettin Saran made a statement in the previous days that 'I will apply for Qatari citizenship in order to get these broadcasting rights.'* This means that there is a shift towards that direction. Of course, this situation confuses statist, nationalist, and populist people. In other words, it is essential to be transparent in this matter. P3 emphasized the uncertainty in the broadcasting tender as follows: *'But for example, until the last moment, it was not even clear whether the broadcasting organization would win the tender again or not. Of course, these things affect whether or not I buy that channel or broadcasting organization.'*

In addition to the problems experienced during the tender process, it was also stated that the problems experienced in distributing broadcasting revenues caused the fans not to prefer legal broadcasting. P4 stated that he would switch to legal broadcasting if he knew the fee he paid to the broadcasting organization would go to his team: *'If the fans know that the money will go to their favorite team, of course, it affects my choice. So I might buy it just for that.'* P2 stated that the federation is poorly managed and that this situation affects him: *'When there is such a poor quality league, such poor quality broadcasting, such bad federation management, the tender process is already obvious. For example, even if I have much money, even if I am very comfortable, would I want to make money for the broadcaster when the conditions are like this? Would I become a member? I do not think so. Therefore, I would probably prefer the illegal platform again.'*

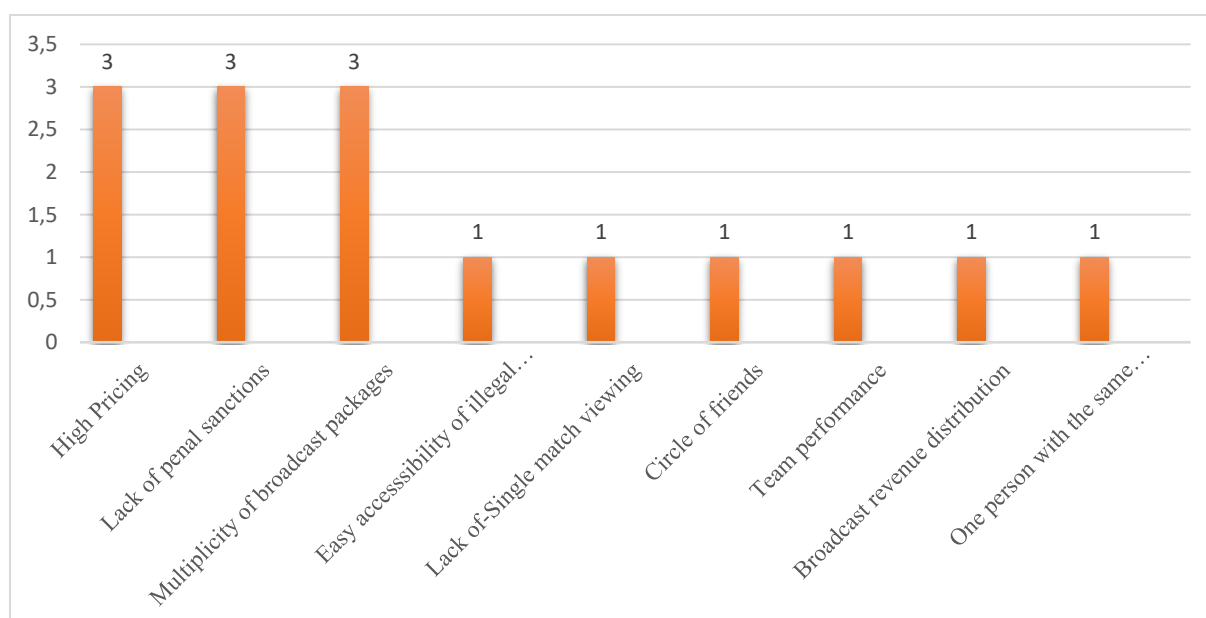
### **Other Policies**

The five codes for watching pirated broadcasts were combined under the other subcategory. These codes are as follows: multiplicity of broadcast packages, poor team performance, poor quality of the league, circle of friends, and monopolisation protest. The most frequently expressed code in this subcategory is the multiplicity of broadcasting packages. Almost all of the fans (f=11) stated that there are many broadcasting organizations, and the difficulties of purchasing each affect their pirated broadcasting. P1 stated that the pricing increased due to many packages: *'Now, for example, I buy something different to watch La Liga, I buy something different to watch European matches; this seems ridiculous. This would be very difficult for me financially.'* While P2 stated that he prefers pirate broadcasting due to the high number of packages, he said that he prefers pirate broadcasting because 'these platforms are very disorganized, another broadcaster gives the Turkish league, a different platform gives some of the leagues in Europe. The advantage of piracy is that it gathers them all in one place, and the price is much more affordable.' P12, on the other hand, explained that although he watched legal broadcasts for domestic matches, he did not want to pay for matches abroad as follows: *'...Apart from that, since I do not want to buy an extra membership and spend money on the Spanish league, Champions League, and European leagues, I watch those leagues in pirated ways. There are no teams I support there anyway'.*

In addition to the abundance of broadcast packages, inadequate team performance and the league's quality were among the factors that pushed fans to pirate broadcasting. P5 stated that his piracy is unrelated to the broadcasting organization and that this is due to the league's quality: *'It has nothing to do with the broadcasting organization. I do not follow the Turkish league much because of its quality. Because the football played, the quality of the footballers, the quality of the coaches, the quality of the referees, and the quality of the officials in the federation at the football level are insufficient, in my opinion, and this is reflected in the field. Therefore, since we cannot watch quality football, I watch pirated broadcasts '*, while P4 stated that the team's poor performance was a factor and that he would prefer legal broadcasts if the team were successful...*If Kayserispor had a Europa League target and were showing up in Europe, I would not prefer pirated broadcasts '*.

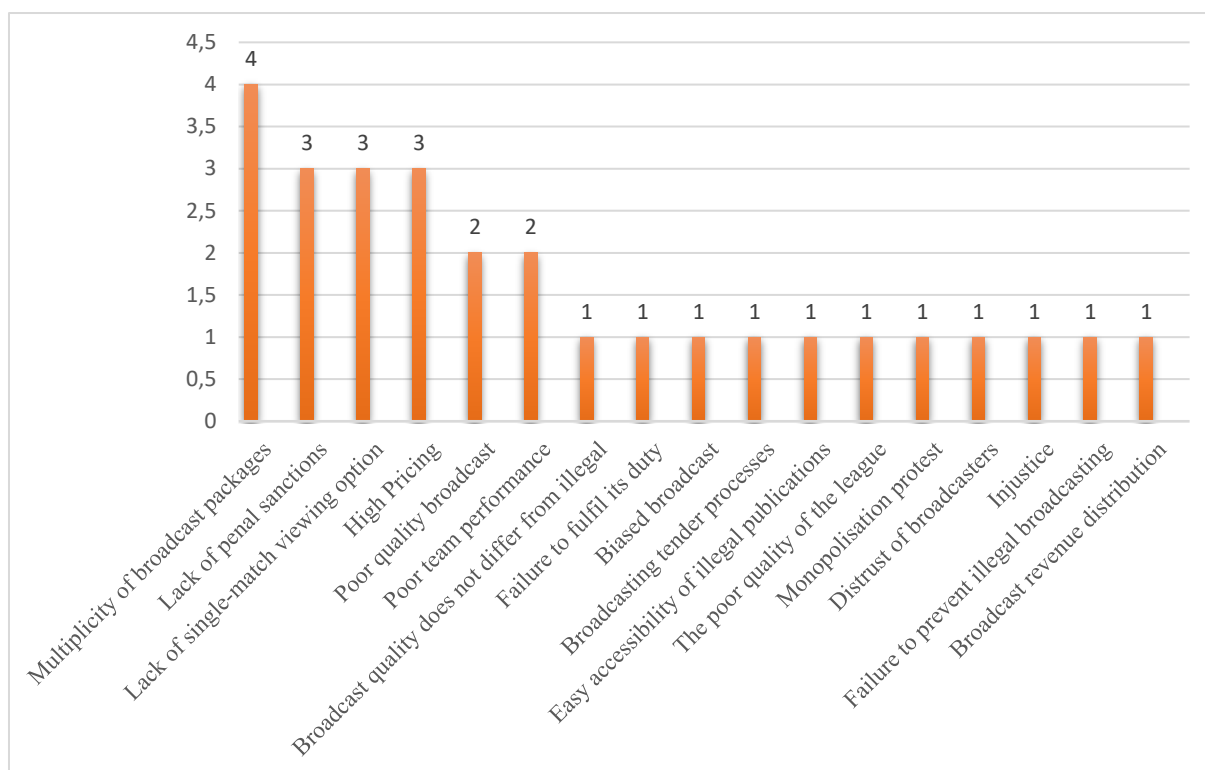
In addition to these factors, the fans also stated that the circle of friends and monopolization in broadcasting were the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts. P1 expressed his opinion that his circle of friends influenced him: *'To be honest, my friends who watch pirate broadcasts also affect me. We also see friends who watch pirated broadcasts. They say, 'Don't waste your money; you can watch it well here.'"* P4 explained that he was uncomfortable due to monopolization: *'Since I do not watch it all the time,...I do not want such competitions to be monopolized. I do not like that they are monopolized and force you to do something, like a revenue gate."*

The fans' reasons for watching pirated broadcasts were analyzed according to income distribution. Figure 1 gives the reasons for low-income fans to watch pirated broadcasts.



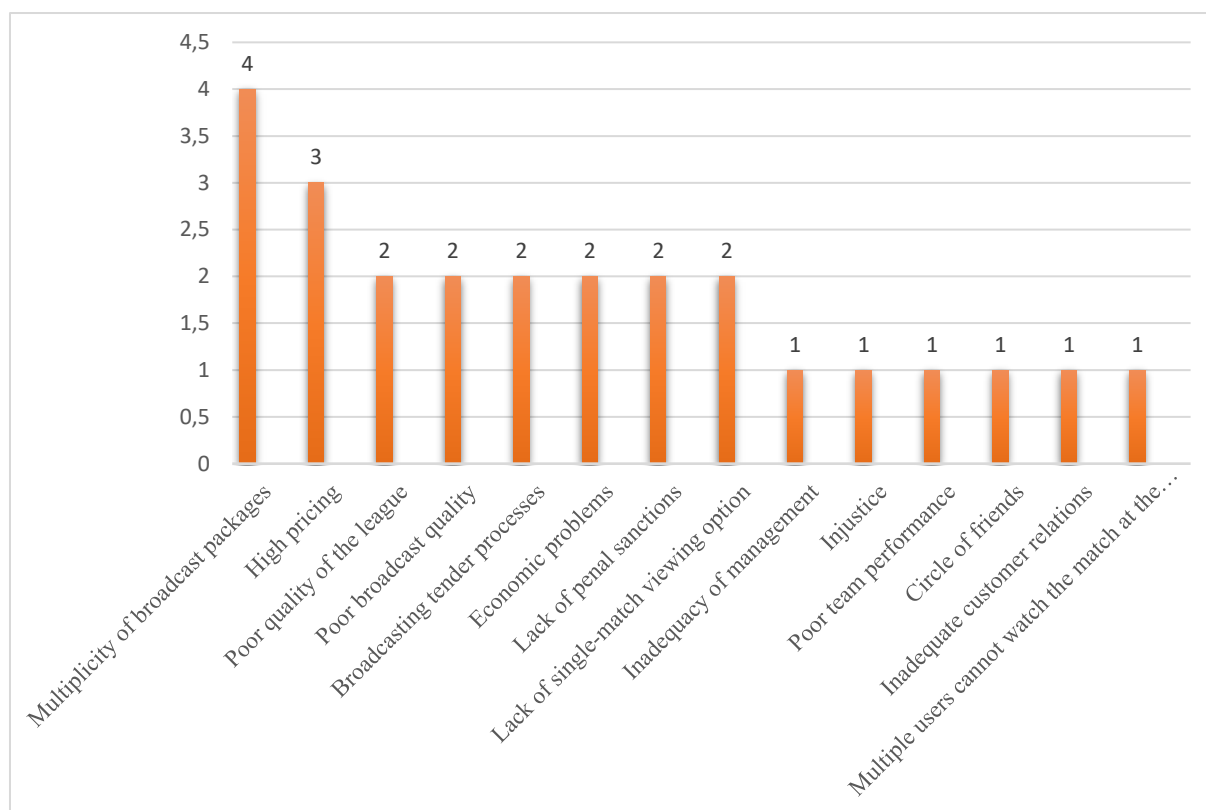
**Figure 1:** Opinions of low-income fans on the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts

When Figure 1 is analyzed, nine different opinions were obtained regarding the reasons low-income fans for watching pirated broadcasts. The most frequently expressed codes are high pricing, lack of penal sanctions, and multiplicity of broadcast packages. The distribution of middle-income fans' reasons for watching pirated broadcasts is given in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Opinions of middle-income fans on the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts

When Figure 2 is analyzed, 17 different opinions were obtained regarding why middle-income fans watch pirated broadcasts. The most frequently expressed codes are the multiplicity of broadcast packages, lack of penal sanctions, single-match viewing options, and high pricing. The distribution of high-income fans' reasons for watching pirated broadcasts is given in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Opinions of high-income fans on the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts

When Figure 3 is analyzed, 14 opinions were obtained regarding why high-income fans watch pirated broadcasts. The most frequently expressed codes are the multiplicity of broadcast packages and high pricing.

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to determine why football fans watch pirated broadcasts. The fans who participated in the study stated that the broadcasting organization's policies affected their piracy viewing. The prominent opinion in broadcasting organizations' policies is that the broadcast package prices are high ( $f=9$ ). Similar results were found when the studies on pirate broadcasting in the literature were analyzed. Although there are no scientific studies on piracy in sports, there are field researches conducted by media companies. Fans participating in these studies also stated that they prefer pirated broadcasts due to the high prices of sports channels (Dascal, 2021; Oddsmedia, 2023; Synamedia, 2020; YouGov, 2023). This high price perception of the fans may be due to the large number of competition broadcast packages. The research results also support this prediction. Most fans ( $f=11$ ) stated that they prefer pirated broadcasting due to the large number of broadcast packages. A fan in Türkiye subscribe to six different broadcasters to watch the Super League, European Cups, Argentina—Brazil, cup matches from Germany and Spain, European qualifying rounds, and the Portuguese League (AA, 2024). In Brazil, where 88 % of viewers watch pirated broadcasts, rights for major national and international sports, leagues, and events are distributed among at least 17 broadcasters and

platforms (Synamedia, 2020). The increase in the number of broadcasting packages also increases the fees to be paid by the fans. As of 6 September 2024, the monthly package payment of 6 different packages for a fan in Türkiye is 1,400 TL, which is 8% of the minimum wage. These rates are 3% in the UK and Germany (Beinsports, 2024; Tabi, 2024; S Sport, 2024; D Smart, 2024; Tivibu, 2024; Exxenspor, 2024; Goal, 2024; Skysports, 2024).

The abundance of broadcast packages increases the total fee paid for the packages and causes monopolization in sports broadcasting. The reason for monopolization is that each broadcaster takes different leagues. Currently, only the Spanish and Italian leagues are broadcast by two broadcasters in Türkiye (AA, 2024). A similar situation has also been experienced in England. With the implementation starting in 2025-2026, an English fan who wants to watch the English league must watch the 14.30 matches on Saturdays on TNT and the other on Sky Sports (The Guardian, 2023). Due to this monopolization, fans have to buy the broadcast package whether they are happy with it or not, as there is no other alternative. In cases where customer satisfaction cannot be achieved, fans with no alternative may turn to pirate broadcasts. By preventing monopolization, a competitive environment can be created between broadcasters, and this competition can lead to strategies that will increase customer satisfaction. Considering that pricing is an essential element for fans, the pricing strategies broadcasters will implement to stand out in the competition can offer fans a choice, encouraging the transition from pirate broadcasting to legal broadcasting.

The large number of broadcast packages or low income can explain why prices are high for low-income fans. However, this situation can relate to the benefit-price balance for middle- and high-income fans. The benefit-price element defines the comparison between the service consumers receive and the price they pay (Zeithaml, 1988). If the consumer thinks that the price paid is higher than the quality received, dissatisfaction will occur (Varki & Colgate, 2001). However, this is not the case for all fans. Fans loyal to their team may buy their club's products to support their team and may not care about the quality of the products they buy. However, a balance between benefit and price may emerge for fans who are less loyal to their team. In their study, Halıcı and Yetim (2024) found that fanatic and hooligan fans use products at a high rate even though they do not have a high economic income. In contrast, classic and social fans, who have a lower commitment to the team, use products at a low rate despite their high income. They associated this situation with fans considering the balance between benefit and price. In this direction, middle- and high-income fans may have preferred pirated broadcasts because they thought the fees paid for legal broadcasts were higher than the service they would receive. When the reasons regarding middle and high-income fans were examined within the scope of the research (Figures 2 and 3), it was determined that there were negative opinions about the product. These fans stated that they watched pirated broadcasts for reasons such as the poor quality of the football league (f=3), poor legal broadcast quality (f=4), and poor team performance (f=5). Fans stated that the management of the federation in the broadcasting tender processes (f=3) and the inadequacy of the general management (f=1) also affected them. In addition, the fact that the fee paid by a fan who only wanted to watch his team was shared among other teams may have caused fans consider the benefit-price balance. In Synamedia's (2020) study, 69% of participants said they would consider reducing or completely stopping pirate viewing due to the economic impact of pirated content consumption on the club they

support. These results show that improving product quality is essential in switching to legal broadcasts for fans considering the benefit-price balance.

The research questions were used to determine whether the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts of fans with different income levels have changed. According to the analysis, although pricing stands out as an essential factor at all income levels, it was determined that the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts varied at middle and high-income levels. For example, it has been determined that the lack of single-match viewing options ( $f=11$ ) is an essential reason for these fans. This situation stems from broadcasters' marketing strategy. Broadcasters prefer to market their broadcast packages by dividing them into multiple packages. For example, the broadcaster that holds the broadcasting rights of the Super League markets all matches in the Super League separately, the matches of the team they support separately, and the matches outside the Super League. There is also a package that includes all sports branches. These packages can be charged monthly or annually (TOD, 2024). However, it is impossible for fans who do not follow the matches regularly and only want to follow the matches with high importance to purchase them once. This situation may cause fans to watch pirated broadcasts. In Europe and America, there are applications for single-game viewing options. For example, a fan can buy NBA games on a single-game basis and benefit from this opportunity while the game progresses (NBA, 2024a). In another example, UK broadcaster Sky Sports offers 12-hour packages, Spanish broadcaster ESPN offers 24-hour packages, and Italian broadcaster Sky offers single-game packages (Nowtv, 2024).

The lack of single-match viewing options may cause fans to prefer legal broadcasts for some packages and pirated broadcasts for others. Another factor that triggers the use of pirated and legal broadcasts is the inability of more than one user to watch the broadcast simultaneously. Some of the fans who participated in the research ( $f=2$ ) stated that this situation leads to the use of pirated broadcasts. Examples of multiple users being able to watch simultaneously are primarily seen in brands that offer film and series content. For example, Netflix (2024) allows watching up to 4 participants in the same house. Especially for price-sensitive individuals, this option may contribute to the sharing of costs, allowing legal broadcasts to be preferred. For example, the NBA offers viewers a viewing package for up to 3 users (NBA, 2024b).

State policies are one of the subcategories in which the fans' opinions are collected. Some fans who expressed their opinions in this category said they had used legal broadcasts before. However, the people around them had easy access to pirated broadcasts ( $f=2$ ), and they were taken for 'suckers' because the people who used pirated broadcasts were not punished ( $f=9$ ). Although Article 163, paragraph 2 of the Turkish Penal Code stipulates that those who watch pirated broadcasts shall be imprisoned for six months to two years or a judicial fine, there are problems in implementing the penalties. This situation may have caused viewers who already follow legal broadcasts to turn to piracy. Synamedia (2020) reported that 84% of survey participants who watched pirated sports broadcasts stated that they would consider reducing or stopping piracy if there were legal and social consequences such as broadcast interruptions, fines, or arrests (Dascal, 2021).



The fact that illegal broadcasts are not prevented ( $f=2$ ) was also stated among the factors that push fans to watch pirated broadcasts. Blocking access to illegal sites related to pirate broadcasting was given to the TFF with the regulation made by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 2022. TFF started to fight against illegal broadcasts faster by issuing the 'Instruction on Prevention of Illegal Football Broadcasts.' For example, 866 websites were blocked between 4-21 February 2022 (Sözcü, 2022). However, 73% of fans stated that it takes less than thirty minutes to find a new source for illegal sports broadcasting (Synamedia, 2020).

Although this step taken by the TFF to block pirate broadcasting may not create a permanent solution, it may be necessary regarding psychological effects. In particular, since blocking pirated broadcasts during the competition means that the enjoyment of the competition is constantly interrupted, these fans may prefer legal remedies. Although there is no scientific evidence on how piracy blocking affects fan behavior, Danaher et al. (2024) conducted a study for viewers in the film and TV series sector. Within the scope of the study, it was determined that when 19 major piracy sites in the U.K. were blocked in 2013, the affected users increased their visits to paid legal streaming sites by 8%. When 53 sites were blocked in 2014, the affected users made 7% to 12% more visits to paid legal streaming sites. Similar processes were analyzed in India and Brazil, and as a result of the analysis, an 8.1% increase was observed in India, and a 5.2% increase was observed in Brazil. Especially for fans who have switched from legal to pirated broadcasts due to the lack of blocking of piracy, such blocking could reignite the popularity of legal broadcasts. According to Ampereanalysis' Sports Consumer data (2023), nearly a quarter (26%) of sports fans who follow Serie A in Italy said they would be willing to pay to watch live Serie A broadcasts, even if the current broadcasters did not subscribe to Sky or DAZN.

## CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATION

As a result, it has been determined that the reasons fans watch pirated broadcasts vary according to income and are not only based on pricing. Although blocking piracy sites and imposing personal penalties are factors that will help reduce piracy's popularity, it is necessary to strengthen the attractiveness of legal broadcasts for permanent solutions. It can be said that reducing the number of packages needed to watch sports matches, increasing competition among broadcasters, introducing single-match viewing options, increasing the quality of broadcasting, and increasing the quality of the product offered by increasing the brand value of the league will contribute to the permanent solution of this problem.

Within the scope of this study, a research group was formed according to income distribution to determine why football fans watch pirated broadcasts. However, in future studies, it may be essential to form groups according to age and frequency of watching matches to obtain more detailed and comprehensive results. In addition, in this study, the justifications of the fans were analyzed through a single typology. Considering that different fan typologies may exhibit different behaviors and attitudes, future studies can be conducted by considering these different typologies.

This study collected fans' reasons for watching pirated broadcasts with an unstructured interview form. In future studies, semi-structured interview forms can be applied using the subcategories and codes that emerged in this study. In addition, questions can be added about which of the reasons for watching pirated broadcasts is more dominant or which reason can be switched to legal broadcasts if it is met. Designing quantitative research using the subcategories and codes obtained from individual interviews with 12 researchers may contribute to the problem's solution.

Only individuals who are football supporters participated in this study. However, considering that similar problems are also experienced in basketball, research can be planned to reveal the justifications of individuals who watch basketball matches with pirated broadcasting. Thus, a more holistic analysis can be made by comparing the justifications of football and basketball fans.

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