

The Role of Empathy and Sympathy on Team Identification: The Determinants of Team-Based Approach

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Research Article

Abstract

Given the attitudes and schadenfreude towards competitors in today's sports fan behavior, it is critical for managers to understand fans in terms of empathy and sympathy phenomenon. Therefore, understanding the influence of empathy and sympathy on team or fan identification has been one of the most important determinants of sports marketing. The purpose of this study is to understand the role of empathy and sympathy on team identity and the relationship between them and to reveal the fact that how the demographics of the fans influence their level of fan and level of watching team matches. The current study involved a quantitative research methodology employing a questionnaire containing three parts. The first part of the questionnaire included scale (AMES- twelve items) relating empathy and sympathy, developed from Vossen et al. (2015). The scale of team identification (six items) in the second part was adapted from Gwinner and Swanson (2003). The last part was designed to collect demographic characteristics and fandom of respondents. A total of 300 university students enrolled at a large university in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey participated in the study. The data were collected with convenience sampling through a self-administrated questionnaire. The results of EFA (exploratory factor analysis) revealed three valid dimensions titled as sympathy, affective empathy, and cognitive empathy respectively. The results of the study add to the body of knowledge in team identification, and empathy and sympathy by providing several theoretical and practical implications. Future research should explore the relationship between schadenfreude and empathy, sympathy and team attachment for sport fans.

Keywords: Sports marketing, Team identification, Empathy, Sympathy, Fan behavior

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Empati ve Sempatinin Takım Kimliği Üzerindeki Rolü: Takım Temelli Yaklaşımın Belirleyicileri

Öz

Günümüzün taraftar davranışlarında rakiplere karşı tutumlar ve *schadenfreude* (kötü niyetli sevinç) göz önüne alındığında, yöneticilerin taraftarların empati ve sempati olgusu açısından anlamaları çok önemlidir. Bu nedenle, empati ve sempatinin takım ya da taraftar kimliği üzerindeki etkisini anlamak, spor pazarlamasının en önemli belirleyicilerinden biri olmuştur. Bu çalışmanın amacı, empati ve sempatinin takım kimliği üzerindeki rolünü ve aralarında olan ilişkiyi anlamak ve sporseverlerin demografik özelliklerinin taraftarlık seviyelerini ve takım maçlarını izleme düzeylerini nasıl etkilediğini ortaya koymaktır. Bu çalışma, üç bölümlü anket kullanılmak suretiyle nicel araştırma yöntemi ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Anketin ilk bölümü, Vossen ve ark. (2015) tarafından geliştirilen empati ve sempati ile ilgili ölçeği (AMES - on iki madde) içermektedir. İkinci bölümde, Gwinner ve Swanson (2003)'dan uyarlanan takım kimliği ölçeği (altı madde) oluşturmaktadır. Son bölüm ise, katılımcıların demografik özelliklerini ve taraftarlığını anlamak için tasarlanan bilgi toplama formundan oluşmaktadır. Çalışmaya, Orta Anadolu Bölgesi'ndeki büyük bir üniversiteye kayıtlı toplam 300 üniversite öğrencisi katılmıştır. Veriler, kolayda örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak katılımcılara verilen anketler aracılığıyla ile toplanmıştır. Açıklayıcı faktör analizi (EFA) sonuçları, sırasıyla sempati, duygusal empati ve bilişsel empati olarak adlandırılan üç geçerli boyuttan oluşan anlamlı sonuçları ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma sonuçları, empati ve sempatinin takım kimliğini anlamaya yönelik çeşitli teorik ve uygulamalı çıkarımlar açısından etkileri olduğunu göstermektedir. Gelecekteki araştırmalar, spor taraftarları için *schadenfreude*, empati, sempati ve takıma bağlılık arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Spor pazarlaması, Takım kimliği, Empati, Sempati, Taraftar davranışı

Introduction

Team identification is perhaps the most studied topic on sports marketing and sports consumer behavior. This phenomenon is associated with many variables. In many studies, it has been emphasized that team identity is influential on buying behavior and sport participation behavior. The level of identity of the fan has an influence on decision-making behavior. Studies on fan identity, both in terms of consumer behavior and in terms of levels of participation in sports, give the existing literature richness.

The theme of empathy has been subject of research in many fields of social sciences such as psychology, sociology, business administration, and management. Studies on empathy and sympathy can also be found in the field of sports psychology. Most of the studies carried out in the field of sports has been dealt with on the basis of the athlete (Sezen-Balcikanli and Sezen, 2017), the coach and the athlete-coach relationship (Lorimer, 2013). The number of works showing the level of empathy and sympathy for the fans is extremely limited. Some of these limited studies are related to hatred (*schadenfreude*) and attitude towards rivals and these studies also provide inferences about empathy and sympathy from the opposite side.

Team identity is, in a sense, associated with empathy and sympathy. Especially in the literature, *schadenfreude* seems to have been studied in recent years, which can be characterized as hatred towards opponent. A good understanding of the *schadenfreude* concept, which can be considered as "inversely related" with empathy and sympathy, depends in part on the work to be done on empathy and sympathy. UEFA and FIFA's Fair

Play Practices (Sezen-Balcikanli, 2009), the efforts to prevent racism, in one aspect, is related the development of the level of empathy and sympathy of the fans. In this respect, understanding the level of empathy and sympathy of the fans will be important to identify differences at a team level. Considering these differences, perhaps the implementation of customized strategies will likely become possible. Despite the importance of empathy and sympathy level for soccer teams' fans, there has been lack of empirical research on the relationship between team identification and empathy and sympathy in the context of sports marketing. The purpose of this study is to determine empathy and sympathy constructs related to soccer fans and to investigate relationships between the constructs and team identification. Additionally, it is aimed to contribute to the literature and the field, in this work which is designed from the view that there is a relationship between team identity and empathy and sympathy. As noted above, although there are many studies on many dependent variables interacting with team identity (e.g., buying licensed products, re-purchasing, positive attitudes toward sponsor brands), the number of studies revealing the relationship between team identity and empathy and sympathy is extremely limited in the literature. In a similar way, it will be an important contribution to show how empathy and sympathy differ according to their level of fan. In this respect, the study has the potential to fill gap in the literature. In this respect, the aim of this study is to establish relations between team identity, empathy, and sympathy; and to reveal the fact that these events affect the level of fan, team fan (such as Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray, Beşiktaş, and Eskişehirspor), demographic characteristics and levels of attendance.

Theoretical Framework

Empathy and Sympathy

Along with many definitions of empathy in the literature, it can be said that most of the definitions have inherent similarities. Arnold and Boggs (1999) described empathy as "the ability of a person to perceive and understand another person's emotions accurately" (p. 110). Empathy is another-oriented affective response (Hoffman, 2001; Stanger, Kavussanu and Ring, 2017). The "other" in the sports field can be an opponent player, opponent team, or the opponents fan. In the modern context, there are three main perspectives on empathy: cognitive, affective (Eisenberg and Strayer, 1987) and the multidimensional approach (Park et al., 2016). A cognitive approach is to assess empathy as knowing how someone else feels (Hoffman, 1984). According to affective approach, empathy can be defined as feeling someone else's feeling. This approach emphasizes persuasion on consumer behavior. Davis (1980) describes the multidimensional approach as a combination of cognitive and affective approaches (Park et al., 2016). Empathy has been associated with promoting social behavior and promoting charity motivation (Verhaert and Van den Poel, 2011).

Empathy should not be confused with sympathy. Sympathy involves sadness of another person and pity, while empathy is related to the process of feeling and understanding (Grover, 2005; van Servellen, 1997). The degree of empathic participation varies depending on the relationship between individuals and the amount of power

(Grover, 2005). It has been observed that researchers have been made about empathy and sympathy in the field of sports. For example, Sezen-Balcikanli and Sezen (2017) have dealt with the relationship between futsal players' empathy and foul, yellow and red cards. In addition, Park et al. (2016) revealed in their study of Special Olympics that high empathy is an influence on strong voluntary intentions. Bartsch et al. (2016) reported that participants following television spots on Paralympics empathized at different levels, empathy had an influence on audience interest, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

It is possible to say that empathy has great potential in the sport in terms of fan behavior. Empathy can reduce aggression in a sport by taking into account the rights and well-being of others during competition and be helping to carry out logic (Stanger, Kavussanu, and Ring, 2017). In this respect, it can also be characterized as an important value for fair play. It has been reported that dispositional empathy is negatively associated with anti-social behavior (Kavussanu, Stanger and Boardley, 2013; Stanger, Kavussanu and Ring, 2017). Individuals in high empathy groups were found to be less likely to be aggressive to their opponents (Stanger, Kavussanu and Ring, 2017). In other words, it can be said that those with low empathy levels are more aggressive towards the opponent. The degree of empathic participation varies depending on the relationship between individuals and the amount of power (Grover, 2005). When it is considered in the context of sports, empathy, and compassion are more developed between some team fans (e.g., the relationship between Eskişehirspor and Kasimpasa's fans), but this may not always be the case for the major opponent (e.g., Eskişehir and Karşıyaka or Göztepe).

Sympathy is a sacrosanct response that most often comes with feelings of compassion or worry (Losoya and Eisenberg, 2001). Sympathy emerges as a reaction to the misfortunes of others (Weiner, 1995). This aspect of sympathy is closely related to being a fan. The level of reaction to the misfortune experienced by the opponent team arises as sympathy. Sympathy is common in soccer. From time to time, fans seem to have empathized about the luck that other opponent teams have experienced. When the situation is assessed in terms of the greatest or the major opponent, a situation arises at the sympathetic level against the opponent team. In general, sympathy appears stronger when the disadvantages of others are considered illegitimate (Montada & Schneider, 1989). This separates sympathy from empathy. Although fans are thought to be subjective, it is observed that in the case of a victory in a clearly unjustified way, the supporters are not quite happy with it. This can be evaluated as a sign of sympathy.

Team Identification

Identification is one of the basic principles of the socialization process and expresses the acceptance of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the object (e.g., team, player) that one integrates with himself (Yun-Tsan, 2017). Identification has become a major issue in many areas of social science such as sociology and psychology. According to the theory of social identity, identity represents an active process (Yun-Tsan, 2017).

The team identification – social psychological health model (TI-SPHM; Wann, 2006b) was designed to explain the psychological impact of gaining connections to others via sport

fandom. According to this model, individuals can gain both enduring connections and temporary connections via their sport team identification. Team identification is defined as the level of psychological attachment felt by a sports fan toward his or her favorite team (Kim and Kim, 2009; Wann et al., 2001). From the definition of team identification, the concept of social identity is gained because team identification is a manifestation of social identity (Kim & Kim, 2009). With this membership, fans become members of a team because they believe a team's success or failure to be their own success or failure (Kim and Kim, 2009). Team identification has come to be defined as the degree to which an individual feels psychologically linked to a team (Hirt et al., 1992; Wann and Schrader, 1997; Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 2001) and used interchangeably to describe an individual's connection with a player of that team (Wann, 1997).

Sports consumers are classified in many perspectives. Fans can be classified not only by their behavior but also by their discourse and emotion – motivation and belief – (Stewart et al., 2003). Some fans are passionate and obsessed, while others are casual (Kahle et al., 1996). Some fans, on the other hand, can identify themselves with the team, while others identify themselves with the league or players. Some fans integrate their personal lives with the colors and jerseys of the team, while others live in a more introverted manner (Stewart et al., 2003). All of these factors refer to one's level of identification with the team. The level of identification of fans with their personal identities may influence the behavior of sports consumption.

One of the important determinants of sports consumption behavior is team identification or commitment (Luellen and Wann, 2010; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Team identity is also based on the theory of social identity, as it is in loyalty to a group or a community. Wann (2006a) addresses the issue from a broad perspective and defines the team identity as an associative psychological connection of the individual. Trail et al. (2000) defined identification as "an orientation of the self in regard to other objects, including a person or group that results in feelings or sentiments of close attachment". Fans tend not only to the team itself but also to other aspects of the experience (Trail et al., 2000). Funk et al. (2001) noted that in organizations such as the World Cup or the NBA, team identification may be the case, or involvement may be directed to a specific player. There are also studies that demonstrate the relationship between team identification and motivation and loyalty (Yun-Tsan, 2017) as well as licensed product buying behavior, purchasing intention and re-buying behavior (Funk et al., 2001; Robinson and Trail, 2005). Gwinner and Swanson (2003) indicate that when sports fans perceive a link with the team, they form a team identity. Sutton et al. (1997) found that fans with strong team identities showed positive behaviors in purchasing items bearing the identity of a team or brand, watching matches at the stadium or in the media, supporting the team even when the team failed. According to many researchers, team identity is a fan's personal commitment and emotion for a sporting organization, including their mental and behavioral identity (Sutton et al., 1997; Yun-Tsan, 2017).

Empathy-Sympathy and Team Identity

One of the concepts that must be considered when considering "the relationship between empathy and sympathy and team identity" is "Schadenfreude". Schadenfreude increases as a function of identification within the group when the opponent team is the subject, while it is less likely to increase when it is a non-opponent team (Hoogland et al., 2015). The in-group identity is associated with the schadenfreude in the reaction when the opponent loses. According to previous research, there was a significant relationship between identity, sports fans, and schadenfreude. Similarly, the relationship between sympathy and identity and schadenfreude within the group is negative and statistically significant. The affective lives of those who have high fan identity direct their empathy and sympathy; this directs the reactions they give to the situation of violence and suffering, against their opponents (Hoogland et al., 2015). In other words, empathy or sympathy for the opponents can be considered as a part of the identity of the fan.

Method*Sample*

The main mass of this study was the students who are studying in the one of the big universities in Central Anatolia of Turkey. The survey data were collected with convenience sampling method, from those who voluntarily agreed to participate in the survey. The average completion time of the survey was 15-20 minutes. Surveys were conducted during the period from October 2014 to January 2015. During this time period, a total of 298 questionnaires were obtained that were usable and could be analyzed.

Measures

The question form consists of four parts. The first part consists of twelve items that will help to reveal the levels of empathy and sympathy of the participants. In the first part of this study, scale of 'Adolescent Measure of Empathy and Sympathy (AMES)' was adopted, developed by Vossen et al. (2015). In terms of internal consistence, Vossen et al. (2015) found satisfactory results for each factor (cognitive empathy alpha = .86, affective empathy alpha = .75, and sympathy alpha = .76). In our study, the internal reliability of the empathy and sympathy scale was found to be satisfactory (0.72), as indicated by Nunnally (1978). As reported in Table 2, the Cronbach's alphas and factor loading were above the acceptance level of 0.60 and 0.50, respectively (except the factor loading for item of "I get upset if a friend gets upset", 0.46). In the second part, team identification was tried to be expressed by six items, which were adapted from Dalakas and Melancon (2012), Gwinner and Swanson (2003) and Wann and Branscombe (1993). Dalakas and Melancon (2012) reported the construct validity (CV) of for fan identification as 0.91. In line with result of Dalakas and Melancon (2012), Gwinner and Swanson (2003) reported very satisfactory value for identification (0.90) Besides, in the Wann, and Branscombe's (1993) study, the Cronbach's alpha for scale of team identification was within the recommended standards of 0.70 or higher (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). In our study, in line with the alpha regarding identification scales, we found very satisfactory alpha value (0.89), supporting

the reliability of the measurement. The values of factor loading were also within acceptance levels (0.50 or more; See Table 2). In the final part, questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants, participation in matches, watching the match and their clubs being a fan were included.

Results

The vast majority of the participants in this study were men. Although the age range of participants was relatively close, the highest participation was in the age group of 23 and over. Most participants were 4th-grade students with 3001 – 4000 TL (800 – 1000 \$) income. The highest participation in this study was achieved by students who are studied in the faculties.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	f	%		f	%
Gender			Class		
Male	244	81.3	Prep	7	2.3
Female	54	18.1	1	46	15.3
Age			2	59	19.7
19	52	17.5	3	67	22.3
20	47	15.8	4	93	31.0
21	58	19.5	Other	28	9.3
22	57	19.2	Monthly income		
23 and >	83	27.9	1000 TL and <	29	9.7
Academic Unit			1001- 2000 TL	50	16.7
Faculty	253	84.3	2001-3000 TL	65	21.7
Collage	31	10.3	3001-4000 TL	78	26.0
Other	16	5.4	4001-5000 TL	27	9.0
Matches watching at the stadium			5001 TL and >	51	17.0
None	175	58.5	Games watching on TV		
3 <	61	20.3	None	30	10.0
4-7	29	9.7	3 <	36	12.0
8-12	12	4.0	4-7	50	16.7
13>	23	7.7	8-12	31	10.3
Matches watching away game			13>	153	51.0
None	224	74.7	Fandom of team		
3 <	52	17.3	Galatasaray	110	36.7
4-7	10	3.3	Fenerbahçe	91	30.3
8-12	3	1.0	Beşiktaş	54	18.0
13>	11	3.7	Eskişehirspor	24	8.0
			Other	21	7.0

During the season, 58.5% (175 people) of the participants did not watch the game in the stadium; 74.7% (224 people) did not watch away games, 10.0% (30 people) did not watch the games on TV. The number of games the participants watched as an away game or at the stadium was less than three. On the contrary, the platform where the most matches were on TV by participants and 51% of the participants watched more than 13

matches on TV. Finally, 36.7% of the participants were Galatasaray fans, 30.0% were Fenerbahçe fans, 18.0% were fans of Beşiktaş, 8% were Eskişehirspor fans and 7.0% were fans of other teams.

Factor Analysis

The KMO and Barlett test was used to perform factor analysis on sympathy and empathy scale items, and the results were found to be in accordance with the factor analysis (KMO= 0.76; BTS= 646.986; $p < 0.001$). As a result of the analysis, the first factor was sympathy, the second factor was affective (emotional) empathy and the third factor was cognitive empathy. The three factors account for 55.72% of the total variance. The reliability coefficients for team identification, three dimensions and total scale of empathy and sympathy indicated satisfactory coefficients as described by Nunnally (1978). The overall reliability of scale items was found to be .72. The descriptive results indicated that the mean scores of the items of sympathy were higher than scores of cognitive empathy and affective empathy.

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Empathy and Sympathy Items

	Std. Loads	Mean	SD	Alpha
Sympathy				0.70
I feel sorry for someone who is treated unfairly.	0.64	4.29	0.83	
I feel concerned for other people who are sick.	0.74	4.16	0.84	
I am concerned for animals that are hurt.	0.63	4.14	0.89	
I feel sorry for a friend who feels sad.	0.77	3.91	0.93	
Affective (Emotional) Empathy				0.64
When a friend is scared, I feel afraid.	0.73	2.58	1.14	
When my friend is sad, I become sad too.	0.46	3.56	1.03	
When a friend is angry, I feel angry too.	0.71	3.04	1.07	
When people around me are nervous, I become nervous too.	0.71	3.38	1.19	
Cognitive Empathy				0.63
I can often understand how people are feeling even before they tell me.	0.82	3.81	0.82	
I can tell when someone acts happy, when they actually are not.	0.64	3.69	0.96	
I can easily tell how others are feeling	0.78	3.56	0.89	

Reliability of the total scales: 0.72

Eigen values (respectively): 3.10; 31.81; 1.17

% of the variances (respectively): 28.20; 16.40; 10.67

*M: Mean; *SD: Standard Deviation

The KMO and Barlett test was used to perform factor analysis on team identity scale expressions, and the results were found to be in accordance with the factor analysis (KMO= 0.88; BTS= 81053.301; $p < 0.001$). Table 3 shows results for loadings, means, standard deviation and alpha for team identity scale. The result of EFA indicated unidimensional construct for team identification and accounts for 65.52% of the total variance in this single factor. The reliability of the scale items was calculated as 0.89.

Table 3. Team Identity (TID) Factor Analysis

Team Identity (TID)	Loads	M*	SD*	Alpha
When someone criticizes my team's game, I get defensive and uncomfortable.	0.85	3.25	1.28	.89
I care about the thoughts of others that I am fan of team.	0.65	3.12	1.27	
When I talk about team that I support, I prefer to say "we" rather than "they".	0.73	3.94	1.20	
The success of the team is my success too.	0.84	3.23	1.33	
When someone praises my team, I feel happy as if they praised me.	0.89	3.25	1.26	
When a journalist or commentator criticized my team, I feel like they have criticized me.	0.84	2.81	1.32	

Eigenvalues (respectively): 3.93 % of the variances (respectively): 65.52,
 *M: Mean; *SD: Standard Deviation

Clustering Analysis

Empathy, sympathy scale, and team identification scales were used to analyze the common characteristics of the data. Then, clustering analysis was performed to identify participants with similar characteristics (Table 4). With regard to empathy, sympathy, and team identity (TID), the participants were divided into three groups, designated high, middle, and low in these groups.

As a result of the clustering analysis, the cognitive and affective (emotional) empathy of more than 50% of the participants was moderate. In terms of sympathy, the higher group was more than 50%. The rates of participants who feel high TID was 34%, those who have medium team identity was 45% and those who have low team identity was 21%.

Table 4. Empathy, Sympathy, and TID Cluster Analysis

		n	%
CogEmp	High	85	28.3
	Middle	165	55.0
	Low	50	16.7
AffEmp	High	82	27.3
	Middle	179	59.7
	Low	39	13.0
Semp	High	151	50.3
	Middle	139	46.3
	Low	10	3.3
TID	High	102	34.0
	Middle	135	45.0
	Low	63	21.0

Variables that affect Team Identification (TID)

Table 5 was the regression model that shows the effect of variables on team identification. Block 1 showed 2% influence of cognitive empathy on team identity. Affective (emotional) empathy and sympathy factor have no effect on Team ID. In addition to the

Block 2 model, participants' gender, income, and academics were also included. It was found significant in this model ($F = 3.477$, $p = .002$, $Adj = R^2 = .048$).

The gender and academics situation added to the Block 1 model had a significant effect. In the final model, in addition to team identity, empathy and sympathy factors, gender, income, academics, participants' watching match situations were added.

In the final model, affective empathy ($\beta = .151$, $p = .001$), income ($\beta = -.109$, $p = .012$), watching game at the stadium ($\beta = .167$, $p = .003$), and watching game on TV ($\beta = -.541$, $p = .000$) were significant predictors. These variables have a 47.5% effect on TID. Other variables have no significant effect on TID.

Table 5. Variables that Affect Team Identification

Predictor variable	β	p	R	R2	Adj. R2	F	df	p
Block 1			.183	.033	.024	3.390	3	.018
CogEmp	.025	.671						
AffEmp	.202	.002						
Semp	-.104	.116						
Block 2			.259	.067	.048	3.477	6	.002
CogEmp	.026	.656						
AffEmp	.203	.001						
Semp	-.092	.166						
Gender	-.109	.042						
Income	-.053	.364						
Academics	-.126	.028						
Final Model			.701	.492	.475	30.986	9	.000
CogEmp	.033	.463						
AffEmp	.154	.001						
Semp	-.031	.523						
Gender	.078	.091						
Income	-.109	.012						
Academics	.060	.169						
Watching game at the stadium	.151	.010						
Watching away game	.167	.003						
Watching on TV	.541	.000						

Relation between team identification and demographic variables

Multiple Correspondence Analysis, which was conducted to see the similarity between participants' team identity, empathy and sympathy levels, and watching soccer matches, appears in figure 1. Two dimensions were determined by the analysis result. The first dimension explains 32.60% of the relationship between the variables and the second dimension explains 23.4%. In addition, Cronbach's alpha of two dimensions was found to be .64.

As a result of the correspondence analysis, participants with high team identity were Eskişehirspor fans and watched 7-8 games at the stadium; Besiktas and Fenerbahçe fans' team identity were medium; sympathy and affective (emotional) empathy was high, and cognitive empathy was medium. In addition, Besiktas fans in this group watched less than 3 away games at the stadiums and watched 7-8 games on TV; while Fenerbahçe fans did

not watch any away games at the stadiums and watch 13 or more games on TV. As for Galatasaray fans, affective (emotional), cognitive and sympathy a level were middle, together with team identity, they did not watch any matches at the stadium and away games, and they watch 3 or fewer matches on TV. The Multiple Correspondence Analysis, which showed the participants' team identity, sympathy and empathy levels, and relationships among the demographic variables, appears in figure 2. Two dimensions were determined by the analysis result. The first dimension explains 22.23% of the relationship between the variables, the second dimension 20.10%, and the total 42.40%. In addition, Cronbach's alpha of two dimensions was found as a .54.

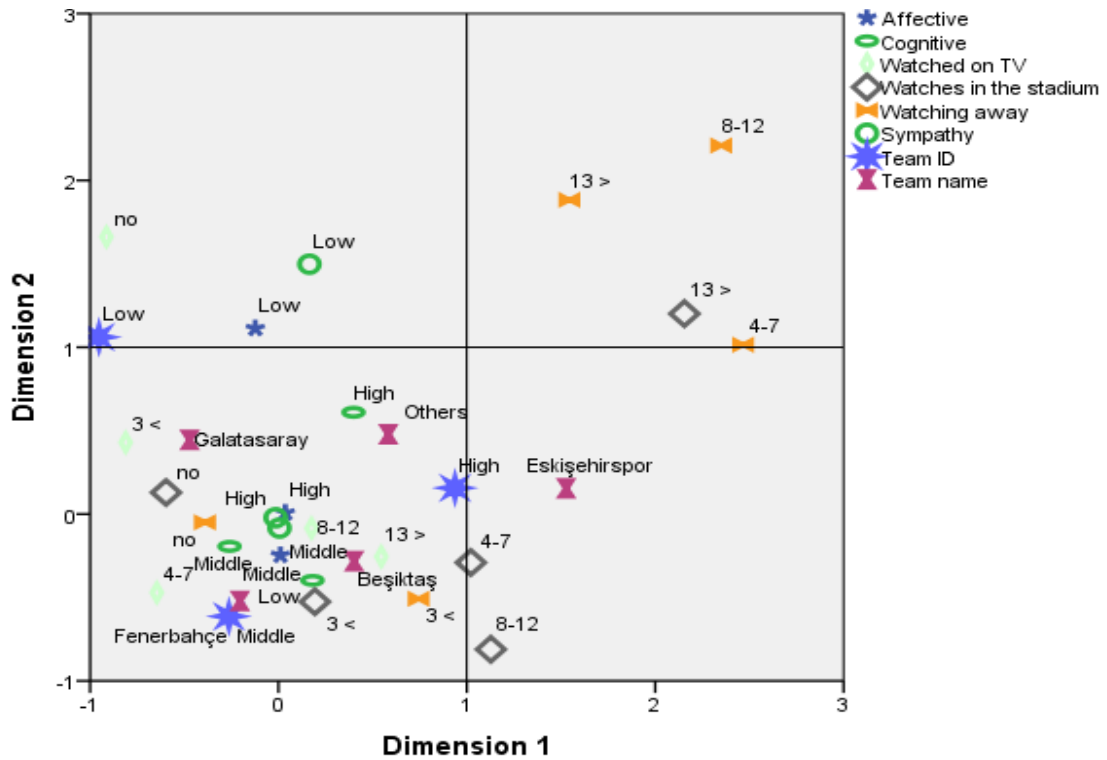


Figure 1. Relationships among empathy, sympathy, team identification, away game watching and major teams

Participants with higher team identity had higher affective (emotional) empathy and lower cognitive empathy when their relationships between team identity, empathy and sympathy level, and demographic characteristics were assessed by the correspondence analysis. The 2nd block is composed of male and faculty students with an income of \$ 939 to \$ 1251 at 20 years of age. Those who have low team identity consist of participants from all kinds of income brackets. The 3rd block is between 21 and 22 years old. Participants who are in prep class, who study in college or other educational institutions, who are 19 years old, and who have \$312 or less income, have no relation to team identity, empathy, and sympathy features.

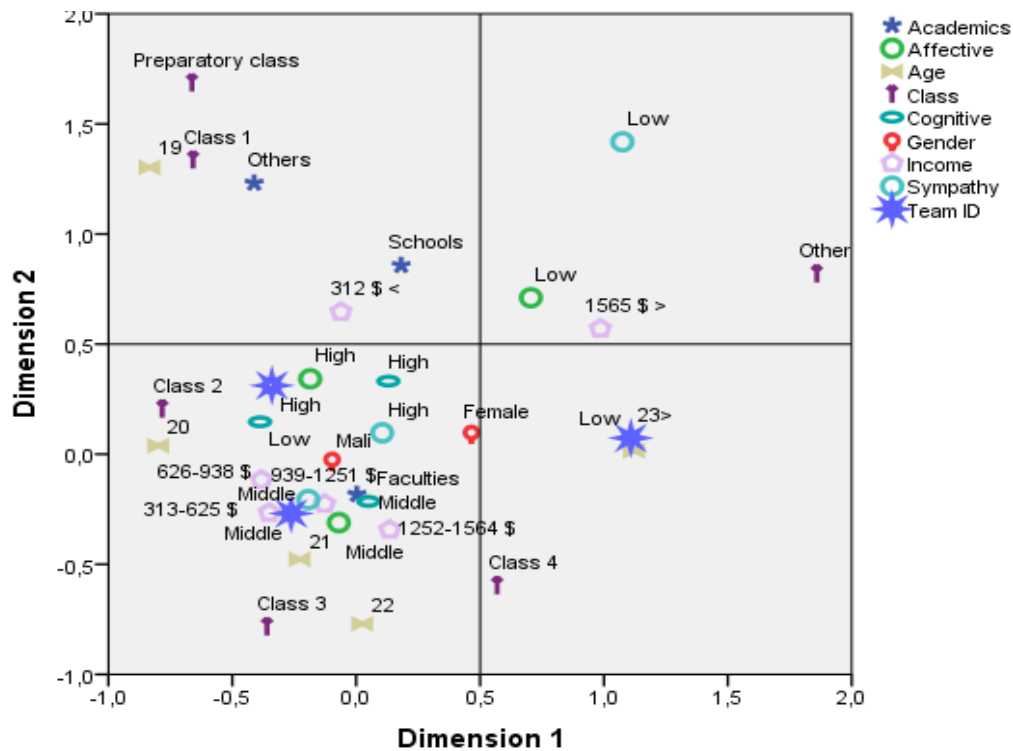


Figure 2. Relationships among empathy, sympathy, team identification and demographics

Discussion and Conclusion

Soccer (football) is one of the most famous and having millions fans sport branch that is interwoven into the very core and fabric of Turkish society. The pervasiveness of soccer in our everyday lives has never been more evident. The purpose of this study was to examine the empathy, sympathy, team identification from a perspective of soccer fans in Turkey, and to reveal relationship and differences among variables. In line with previous research, results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed three dimensions that were valid and reliable for empathy – sympathy. These dimensions were cognitive, affective (emotional) empathy and sympathy. The team identification represents unidimensional structure. According to the results of regression analysis, there was a low level and significant relationship between empathy-sympathy dimensions and team identity. In this relationship, affective empathy as sub-dimension had a significant effect on team identity whereas cognitive empathy and sympathy had no significant effect.

According to the evaluation of team identity levels, the fans having medium team identity level had also a moderate level of empathy and sympathy. Additionally, the level of cognitive empathy was also high for those with high team identities. As expected, the results indicated that team identity for women was low, whereas it was high for men. Team identification was high for Beşiktaş, Eskişehirspor, and was moderate for Fenerbahçe, takes into account types of team fandom in Turkey. Taking into account of team fandom in Turkey, our results suggest that team identification was high for Beşiktaş, Eskişehirspor, and was moderate for Fenerbahçe.

This study extends the theoretical knowledge of empathy and sympathy, and team identification by examining attitudes among soccer fans and their perceptions. Because this research applied valid and reliable scales, it represents one of the relationship analyses of the impact of empathy and sympathy on the team identification. The results offer an additional explanation for how fans feel or not about empathy and sympathy and suggest approaches to develop an education program regarding empathy, sympathy, ethics, and fair-play. Just as Sezen-Balcikanli and Sezen (2017) underlined that giving empathy training to individuals is important in terms of earning values and fair play. Based on studies (Kalliopuska and Tiitinen, 1991), which show that empathy skills can be developed in children through some empathy development programs conducted, it is also important to note that such training for fan groups may result in significant changes in the view on opponent team fans. In this way, perhaps, a sports culture-based team fans will eventually emerge.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the results of the research contribute to the literature at different levels, a few limitations of the current investigation warrant mention. First, the current research only examined empathy and sympathy, and team identification regarding particular sports branch, it did not examine other sports branch identification (e.g., basketball, volleyball), so the findings presented relate only to soccer (football) and they cannot be generalized to other fans or sports branches. So, further research should apply to the fan by examining teams from other sports (e.g., tennis, basketball, volleyball). Second important limitation of this research was the method of sampling, sample size, and sampling area. This study was applied only in one middle size city of Turkey. In order for the study to be generalized to the country, other major cities need to be included in the future research. The third limitation concerns the research scope and possible relationships. Given that some studies indicate relationship between team identification, Schadenfreude and empathy, and sympathy, future researchers need to replicate the current studies with large sample group, different branches, and countries in terms of revealing cultural perception. And finally, future researchers may want to integrate new dimensions (e.g., team attachment, loyalty) to develop a new model. It appears that many factors may be related to empathy, sympathy and team identification, including Schadenfreude and importance of winning in different soccer leagues.

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