THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ONLINE SPORT CONSUMPTION MOTIVES AND POINTS OF ATTACHMENT OF THE PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM FANS*

Nurettin Göksu Çini[1][†] [ID], Ramazan Timuçin Gençer[2] [ID]
[1]Kırıkkale Üniversitesi, Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi, KIRIKKALE
[2]Ege Üniversitesi, Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi, İZMİR

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between online sports consumption motives and points of attachment of professional football team fans and to determine whether these factors differ according to demographic variables. The study population consisted of fans of professional football teams competing in the 2017-2018 Turkish football season. A total of 226 football fans (50 female and 176 male) participated in the study selected by convenience sampling method. Data were collected using a form consisting of the Motivation Scale for Sport Online Consumption (MSSOC), Points of Attachment Index (PAI), and demographic questions. Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation analyses, were conducted using SPSS 23.0. The results showed that the "team" sub-dimension ($\bar{X} = 6.03 \pm 1.31$) had the highest mean among points of attachment, and these attachment points varied significantly according to gender and age. Similarly, the "team support" sub-dimension ($\bar{X} = 5.43 \pm 1.48$) recorded the highest mean among online sports consumption motives, and these motives showed significant differences by gender but not by age. Moreover, low-level negative correlations were observed between certain points of attachment and some sub-dimensions of online sports consumption motives. However, a low-level positive correlation was found between the "team" sub-dimension of PAI and the "economic" sub-dimension of MSSOC.

Key Words: Online, consumption, points of attachment, football fans

PROFESYONEL FUTBOL TAKIMI TARAFTARLARININ ÇEVRİMİÇİ (ONLINE) SPOR TÜKETİM GÜDÜLERİ VE BAĞLILIK NOKTALARI ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

Öz: Bu çalışmanın amacı, profesyonel futbol takımı taraftarlarının çevrimiçi (online) spor tüketim güdüleri ile bağlılık noktaları arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek ve bu faktörlerin demografik değişkenlere göre farklılık gösterip göstermediğini belirlemektir. Çalışmanın evrenini 2017-2018 Türkiye futbol sezonunda mücadele eden profesyonel futbol takımlarının taraftarları oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmaya kolayda örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilen toplam 226 futbol taraftarı (50 kadın ve 176 erkek) katılmıştır. Veriler, Çevrimiçi Spor Tüketimi Motivasyon Ölçeği (ÇSTMÖ), Bağlılık Noktaları İndeksi (BNİ) ve demografik sorulardan oluşan bir anket formu kullanılarak toplanmıştır. İstatistiksel analizler, tanımlayıcı istatistikler, bağımsız örneklem t-testi, tek yönlü ANOVA ve Pearson korelasyon analizleri dahil olmak üzere SPSS 23.0 kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuçlar, "takım" alt boyutunun ($\bar{X} = 6.03 \pm 1.31$) bağlılık noktaları arasında en yüksek ortalamaya sahip olduğunu ve bu bağlılık noktalarının cinsiyet ile yaşa göre anlamlı şekilde değiştiğini göstermektedir. Benzer şekilde, "takım desteği" alt boyutu ($\bar{X} = 5.43 \pm 1.48$) çevrimiçi spor tüketim güdüleri arasında en yüksek ortalamayı kaydetmiş ve bu güdüler cinsiyete göre anlamlı farklılıklar gösterirken yaşa göre anlamlı farklılık göstermemiştir. Ayrıca, belirli bağlılık noktaları ile çevrimiçi spor tüketim güdülerinin bazı alt boyutları arasında düşük düzeyli negatif korelasyonlar gözlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte, BNİ "takım" alt boyutu ile ÇSTMÖ "ekonomik" alt boyutu arasında düşük düzeyde pozitif bir korelasyon bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çevrimiçi, tüketim, bağlılık noktaları, futbol taraftarları

INTRODUCTION

Sport has grown into a distinct industry, making substantial contributions to national economies in line with global development trends (Milano and Chelladurai, 2011). The sports industry encompasses a market in which individuals, businesses, and organizations engage in sports product-based activities (Mullin et al., 2014). Within this ecosystem, sports consumers are the most critical stakeholders (Woratschek et al., 2014). Rapid advancements in information and communication technologies have enabled the sports industry to integrate increasingly with the Internet. The demand for instant access to information and communication has increased the role of the Internet in daily life (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). Unlike traditional media, the Internet provides users with interactivity and satisfies diverse needs (Wright, 2002), making it a more dynamic tool. This transformation has significantly impacted sports marketing as one of the most prominent social phenomena. The progress of the Internet has made the concepts of sport and technology inseparable (Seo and Green, 2008).

Online marketing of sports and sports-related products has changed the basic dynamics of the commercial environment (Hur et al., 2011). Professional sports organizations have started to use the Internet more commonly to improve communication as clubs/teams have transformed into businesses and fans into consumers (Burk and Fahrner, 2020). Teams' websites serve as multifunctional platforms that display features that attract the attention of sports enthusiasts, such as match tickets, player and team information, and official merchandise (Scholl and Carlson, 2012). The reasons fans engage with these platforms include checking scores, purchasing tickets, exploring team merchandise, and connecting with other fans (Hur et al., 2007; Seo and Green, 2008). Consequently, sports marketers must consider fans' psychological needs and anticipate the factors that influence their online sports consumption behavior (Hur et al., 2007). This consideration emphasizes the importance of obtaining benefits from digital platforms to allow fans to meet their expectations and sustain engagement in a highly competitive market.

Football competitions are organizational products shaped by various social actors, including players, coaches, teams, and leagues (Woratschek et al., 2014). Among these actors, fans play a pivotal role as the primary consumers of products. Fans are particularly significant because of their long-term relationships with their favorite sports teams, which encompass social, emotional, and financial bonds (Lawrence et al., 2020). Their financial contributions to sports clubs are twofold: direct revenue, such as ticket and merchandise sales, and indirect revenue, including sponsorships, advertising, and broadcasting rights (Mason, 1999). The success of sports organizations depends heavily on their ability to attract and retain a dedicated fan base (Beccarini and Ferrand, 2006).

Individuals belong to a group that engages in the intangible and tangible aspects of football for a variety of reasons. Team identification, which describes the emotional connection fans form with their preferred teams, is defined as the degree of psychological attachment individuals have toward a sports team (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). Research has demonstrated that fans with varying levels of team identification exhibit diverse behaviors (Funk and James, 2001). These behaviors are often positive, such as attending games, supporting teams, and purchasing team merchandise (Lock et al., 2012; Trail et al., 2017). While early studies on identification (Wann and Branscombe, 1993) primarily focused on the team itself, Fink et al. (2002) highlighted that additional factors could influence fan behavior.

Points of attachment, which elucidate individuals' orientations toward various elements associated with their favorite teams, provide a framework for comprehending fans' consumption preferences (Trail et al., 2003). These points of attachment, including factors such as players, coaches, and communities, reflect the socio-psychological connections that influence fans' behavioral intentions (Kwon et al., 2005). From the perspective of fans, these dynamics are crucial for understanding the evolving motivations that drive consumption behavior. Fans with attachments to different aspects of their teams are likely to utilize online platforms related to their teams for diverse purposes. Building on this understanding, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between online sports consumption motives and the points of attachment of professional football team fans.

Online Sport Consumption
The uses and gratification theory developed several decades ago aims to explain media consumers' satisfaction and usage patterns by considering various factors, including self-identified needs, personal choices, internal and external influences, socialization, entertainment, status seeking, and information acquisition (Katz, 1973; Wimmer and Dominick, 2013). Early research focused on the functional aspects of media consumption, exploring the motivations, behaviors, and perspectives of audiences engaging with newspapers, magazines, and radio programs (Wimmer and Dominick, 2013). With advancements in communication and media technologies such as the Internet and social media, the scope of gratification theory has expanded to include these emerging platforms, with sports consumers becoming a significant area of focus (Clavio, 2008; Hardin et al., 2012). Unlike the motivations for attending live sporting events (Beccarini and Ferrand, 2006; Wakefield and Sloan, 1995), online sports consumption offers unique benefits such as sharing opinions, supporting a favorite team, escaping daily routines, and accessing sports-related information easily (Ha et al., 2013; Hardin et al., 2012; Ko et al., 2016).

Researchers have investigated the factors that drive sports consumers to use team websites, and the relationship between their usage and real-life behaviors (Ha et al., 2013; Hur et al., 2007; Seo and Green, 2008). Identified motivators include convenience, interpersonal communication, escape, entertainment, team support, and technical knowledge (Hur et al., 2007; Seo and Green, 2008). For instance, individuals with a deeper understanding of sports teams are more likely to attend games (Fink et al., 2002). Similarly, knowledge of players' statistics and teams significantly affects game attendance and merchandise purchases (Fink et al., 2002). Fans also use team websites to access club statistics, schedules, and video content related to their favorite teams (Abdourazakou et al., 2013).

Moreover, online expressions serve as a potential motivation for fans, whereas social connections within online communities offer insights into their cultures (Palmer and Thompson, 2007). Ko et al. (2016) examined the motives behind online sports engagement in Korea, revealing that fans participate online in sharing emotions, seeking enjoyment, acquiring information, and fostering social interactions. Notably, researchers have found that online sports consumption creates distinct social interactions compared with offline settings. Additionally, demographic variables such as gender and age have been shown to influence sports consumers' motivational patterns (Brown et al., 2012; Park, 2014; Tang and Cooper, 2012; van Driel and Gantz, 2021). However, there remains a limited understanding of how motives for engaging with sports-related websites vary across demographic groups, and how these motives influence actual consumer behaviors.

Points of Attachment
The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM), developed by Funk and James (2001), provides a comprehensive framework to explain the psychological relationship between individuals and a sport, team, and/or athlete. This cognitive-based model integrates various theories and studies on fan behavior into a unified conceptual structure. It identifies four stages—awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance—that describe the evolving connections that individuals form with a specific sport or team. During the awareness stage, individuals recognize the existence of a team but maintain an uncertain or neutral attitude toward it. At the attraction stage, hedonic factors such as enjoyment or social-situational motivations, such as spending time with friends or family, drive the connection. In the attachment stage, the team or any other element of it acquires the status of being an individual's favorite, and the link becomes inherently significant. Finally, at the allegiance stage, the relationship becomes deeply integrated with the individual's self-concept, in which fans see themselves as part of the team. At this stage, the connection significantly influences affect, behavior, and cognition (Wann and James, 2018).

Although PCM often focuses on sports teams, individuals may also establish connections with other elements of the fan experience, such as players, coaches, or communities (Trail et al., 2003). Team identification, described as the psychological attachment to a team as outlined in the PCM process (Lock and Funk, 2016; Wann and Branscombe, 1993), is one of the most critical concepts for explaining fan behavior in sports (Heere and James, 2007). However, differentiating between identification constructs is essential, as terms like "fan," "spectator," "team," and "organization identification" are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature (Heere and James, 2007; Lock and Heere, 2017). The Points of Attachment Index (PAI) developed by Trail et al. (2003) further categorizes fans' connections to various aspects of sport, such as players, coaches, and communities, revealing multiple factors that influence their consumption decisions (Kwon et al., 2005). The PAI has been validated and tested across different cultures (Hallmann et al., 2016; Robinson and Trail, 2005; Robinson et al., 2004; Spinda et al., 2016), and studies have shown that demographic factors, such as gender, age, and education, can influence fans' motives and points of attachment (Demiray and Unutmaz, 2020; Gençer et al., 2012; Robinson and Trail, 2005). These findings underscore the importance of demographic characteristics for sports managers and marketers, enabling them to develop targeted strategies to address the unique behaviors and preferences of diverse fan groups (Robinson and Trail, 2005; Woo et al., 2009).

Considering that fans differ in their online sports consumption motives and points of attachment to various aspects of their teams, this study contributes to the literature by exploring these constructs. A literature review indicates a lack of prior studies examining the relationship between these two factors. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the relationship between online sports consumption motives and points of attachment of professional football team fans. Additionally, it aims to determine whether these factors vary based on the demographic variables. In line with the study's objectives, the following research questions were developed:

Do professional football team fans' online consumption motives differ based on demographic variables?
Do professional football team fans' points of attachment differ based on demographic variables?
Is there a relationship between professional football team fans' online sports consumption motives and points of attachment?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ethical Approvel
The Ege University Health Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee granted written permission to conduct this study. Decision Date: 27.07.2017; Meeting/Decision No: 6/17, Protocol No: 245-2017. We ensured voluntary participation in the research by clearly explaining its purpose and procedures to the fans. The collected data were kept strictly confidential and were used solely for research purposes.

Research Model
We designed our study using a quantitative relational survey model. This model aims to identify the presence and/or degree of change by examining the relationships and levels between variables (Karasar, 2023).

Research Group
The study sample consisted of 226 professional football fans, including 50 female and 176 male, who were selected using convenience sampling during the 2017–2018 Turkish football season. Data were collected face-to-face in the provinces of Izmir and Ankara because of their accessibility and the voluntary nature of participation (Altunışık et al., 2010).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

		N	%
Age	≤ 21	67	29.6
	22 – 26	73	32.3
	≥ 27	86	38.1
Gender	Female	50	22.1
	Male	176	77.9
Education Status	High school graduate and below	56	24.8
	University Student	95	42.0
	University Graduate	75	33.2
Marital Status	Married	66	29.2
	Single	160	70.8
Frequency of Web Usage	Occasionally	72	31.9
	Frequently	154	68.1
Match Attendance	9 matches and fewer	165	73
	10 matches and more	61	27
		226	**100**

Table 1 shows that 67 fans (29.6%) were 21 years or younger, 73 fans (32.3%) were between 22 and 26 years old, and 86 fans (38.1%) were over 27 years old. Of the participants, 50 (22.1%) were female, and 176 (77.9%) were male. Concerning the education, 56 fans (24.8%) were high school graduates or lower, 95 fans (42.0%) were university students, and 75 fans (33.2%) were university graduates. Additionally, 66 fans (29.1%) were married, and 160 fans (70.8%) were single. In terms of web participation frequency, 72 fans (31.9%) visited their teams' websites 'occasionally,' while 154 fans (68.1%) visited 'frequently.' Furthermore, 165 fans (73%) attended nine or fewer matches, while 61 fans (27%) attended ten or more matches.

Data Collection Tools
The Motivation Scale for Sport Online Consumption (MSSOC): The Motivation Scale for Sport Online Consumption (MSSOC) was used to identify the online consumption motives of football fans. Developed by Seo and Green (2008) and adapted into Turkish by Çini and Gençer

(2018), the Turkish version of the scale consists of seven sub-dimensions and 18 items: entertainment, communication, fanship, team support, fan expression, economic, and technical knowledge. The statements were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

The Points of Attachment Index (PAI): The Points of Attachment Index (PAI) was developed by Trail et al. (2003) and later adapted to Turkish by Gençer et al. (2012) to identify football fans' points of attachment to their teams. The scale comprises 21 items organized into seven sub-dimensions: players, team, coach, community, sport, city, and level. Responses were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Personal Information Form: A form was prepared by the researchers to collect data on age, gender, educational status, marital status, frequency of web usage, and match attendance.

Data Analysis

 Data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0. Demographic information on MSSOC and PAI was first examined using descriptive statistics. A t-test was applied for the gender variable, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for the age variable. Additionally, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between online sports consumption motives and points of attachment.

FINDINGS

This section presents the conclusions drawn from the statistical analysis of the study data. Table 2 shows the average scores of fans who participated in the study across the MSSOC sub-dimensions.

Table 2. Mean Scores for the Sub-Dimensions of MSSOC

Sub-Dimensions	N	Mean	Sd.
Entertainment	226	4.20	1.35
Communication	226	4.75	1.47
Fanship	226	5.13	1.43
Team Support	226	**5.43**	1.48
Fan Expression	226	4.34	1.24
Economic	226	2.74	1.34
Technical Knowledge	226	**2.73**	1.17

An examination of the averages related to the MSSOC sub-dimensions (Table 2) revealed that football fans scored highest in the 'team support' sub-dimension ($\bar{X} = 5.43 \pm 1.48$), while the lowest average score was in the 'technical knowledge' sub-dimension ($\bar{X} = 2.73 \pm 1.17$).

Table 3. ANOVA Results of the MSSOC by Age Groups

Sub-Dimensions	Age	N	Mean	Sd.	F	p	Differences
Entertainment	≤ 21	67	4.36	1.28	1.379	.254	---
	$22 - 26$	73	3.99	1.43			
	≥ 27	86	4.24	1.32			
Communication	≤ 21	67	5.06	1.44	2.508	.084	---
	$22 - 26$	73	4.51	1.59			
	≥ 27	86	4.71	1.35			
Fanship	≤ 21	67	5.22	1.29	.214	.808	---
	$22 - 26$	73	5.12	1.41			
	≥ 27	86	5.06	1.57			
Team Support	≤ 21	67	5.49	1.42	.089	.915	---
	$22 - 26$	73	5.44	1.41			
	≥ 27	86	5.38	1.59			
Fan Expression	≤ 21	67	4.43	1.17	.332	.718	**---**
	$22 - 26$	73	4.36	1.23			
	≥ 27	86	4.26	1.32			
Economic	≤ 21	67	2.47	.96	2.004	.137	---
	$22 - 26$	73	2.89	1.48			
	≥ 27	86	2.81	1.45			
Technical Knowledge	≤ 21	67	2.64	1.59	.640	.528	---
	$22 - 26$	73	2.85	1.38			
	≥ 27	86	2.69	1.16			

*p<0.05

An examination of the data from the football fans participating in the study regarding the MSSOC sub-dimensions revealed no statistically significant differences between the groups in any sub-dimension based on age (Table 3).

Table 4. T-test Results of MSSOC by Gender

Sub-Dimensions	Gender	N	Mean	Sd.	t	p
Entertainment	Female	50	4.44	1.30	1.466	.147
	Male	176	4.13	1.36		
Communication	Female	50	5.20	1.59	2.342	**.022**
	Male	176	4.62	1.41		
Fanship	Female	50	5.27	1.32	.851	.397
	Male	176	5.08	1.47		
Team Support	Female	50	5.82	1.08	2.126	**.035**
	Male	176	5.32	1.56		
Fan Expression	Female	50	4.60	1.04	1.882	.063
	Male	176	4.27	1.29		
Economic	Female	50	2.65	1.24	-.531	.597
	Male	176	2.76	1.38		
Technical Knowledge	Female	50	2.92	1.13	1.334	.186
	Male	176	2.68	1.18		

*p<0.05

An examination of the data from the football fans participating in the study regarding the MSSOC sub-dimensions revealed significant differences between the groups in the 'communication' (t = 2.342; p = .022) and 'team support' (t = 2.126; p = .035) sub-dimensions based on gender (Table 4). It was observed that female fans had higher mean scores in both the 'communication' ($\bar{X}$ = 5.20 ± 1.59) and 'team support' ($\bar{X}$ = 5.82 ± 1.08) sub-dimensions compared to male fans.

Table 5. Mean Scores for the Sub-Dimensions of PAI

Sub-Dimensions	N	Mean	Sd.
Players	226	**2.47**	1.20
Team	226	**6.03**	1.31
Coach	226	3.18	1.40
Community	226	5.08	1.30
Sport	226	5.14	1.45
City	226	5.36	1.26
Level	226	4.10	1.45

An analysis of the PAI sub-dimensions in Table 5 shows that football fans scored the highest in the 'team' sub-dimension ($\bar{X} = 6.03 \pm 1.31$) and the lowest in the 'players' sub-dimension ($\bar{X} = 2.47 \pm 1.20$).

Table 6. ANOVA Results of the PAI by Age Groups

Sub-Dimensions	Age	N	Mean	Sd.	F	p	Differences
Players	≤ 21	67	2.56	1.28	.542	.582	---
	$22 - 26$	73	2.36	1.21			
	≥ 27	86	2.51	1.14			
Team	≤ 21	67	6.18	.89	.880	.416	---
	$22 - 26$	73	5.98	1.28			
	≥ 27	86	5.96	1.16			
Coach	≤ 21	67	3.11	1.34	.442	.643	---
	$22 - 26$	73	3.11	1.37			
	≥ 27	86	3.29	1.46			
Community	≤ 21	67	5.16	1.20	.739	.479	---
	$22 - 26$	73	4.92	1.29			
	≥ 27	86	5.15	1.40			
Sport	≤ 21	67	5.47	1.26	3.194	.043	**1>3***
	$22 - 26$	73	5.14	1.47			
	≥ 27	86	4.87	1.54			
City	≤ 21	67	5.46	1.20	1.065	.346	---
	$22 - 26$	73	5.19	1.35			
	≥ 27	86	5.45	1.23			
Level	≤ 21	67	4.04	1.39	.101	.904	---
	$22 - 26$	73	4.16	1.47			
	≥ 27	86	4.11	1.48			

*p<0.05

An examination of the data from the football fans participating in the study regarding the PAI sub-dimensions revealed a statistically significant difference in the 'sport' sub-dimension based on age (F = 3.194; p = .043) (Table 6). A post-hoc Scheffe test was conducted to identify the differences between the age groups. The results indicated that fans aged 21 and younger ($\bar{X} = 5.47 \pm 1.26$) had higher mean scores in the 'sport' sub-dimension than fans aged 27 and older ($\bar{X} = 4.87 \pm 1.54$).

Table 7. T-test Results of PAI by Gender

Sub-Dimensions	Gender	N	Mean	Sd.	t	p
Players	Female	50	2.77	1.25	1.903	.061
	Male	176	2.39	1.18		
Team	Female	50	5.73	1.26	-2.029	**.046**
	Male	176	6.12	1.08		
Coach	Female	50	3.11	1.37	-.443	.659
	Male	176	3.20	1.41		
Community	Female	50	4.97	1.16	-.751	.454
	Male	176	5.11	1.34		
Sport	Female	50	4.93	1.45	-1.132	.261
	Male	176	5.20	1.45		
City	Female	50	5.34	1.31	-.178	.859
	Male	176	5.38	1.25		
Level	Female	50	4.10	1.20	-.026	.979
	Male	176	4.11	1.51		

*p<0.05

An examination of the data from the football fans participating in the study regarding the PAI sub-dimensions (Table 7) revealed a statistically significant difference in the 'team' sub-dimension based on gender (t = -2.029; p = .046). Male fans ($\bar{X}$ = 6.12 ± 1.08) had higher mean scores compared to female fans ($\bar{X}$ = 5.73 ± 1.26).

Table 8. Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis Between MSSOC and PAI

Sub-Dimensions	Entertainment	Communication	Fanship	Team Support	Fan Expression	Economic	Technical Knowledge
Players	.071	.019	.015	-.042	-.009	-.053	.070
Team	**-.135***	-.078	-.093	-.031	-.077	**.133***	.030
Coach	-.003	.018	.030	.026	.022	-.005	.032
Community	-.040	-.068	-.029	-.022	-.054	-.020	-.019
Sport	-.034	-.066	**-.135***	-.034	**-.145***	-.009	-.028
City	-.021	**-.131***	-.007	.002	-.0134	.018	.060
Level	-.015	-.053	.041	-.021	-.102	-.054	-.021

**p<.01, * p<.05

Pearson correlation analysis for MSSOC and PAI revealed a low negative correlation between the 'team' sub-dimension of PAI and the 'entertainment' sub-dimension of MSSOC, as well as a low positive correlation with its 'economic' sub-dimension. Additionally, a low negative correlation was observed between the 'sport' sub-dimension of PAI and the 'fanship' and 'fan expression' sub-dimensions of MSSOC. A similar low negative correlation was found between the 'city' sub-dimension of PAI and the 'communication' sub-dimension of MSSOC (Table 8).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between online sports consumption motives and points of attachment of professional football team fans. The findings revealed that the "team support" sub-dimension ($\bar{X}$ = 5.43 ± 1.48) emerged as the most prominent factor driving online sports consumption motives, while the "team" sub-dimension ($\bar{X}$ = 6.03 ± 1.31) dominated the points of attachment. Although various factors influence fans' consumption motives, psychological motives related to team support are prominent (Seo and Green, 2008). The "team support" motive is defined as the desire to show support for a favorite team through team websites (Seo and Green, 2008) or to express allegiance to a specific team (Hardin et al., 2012).

Consistent with previous research, our findings underscore the importance of team support as a key driver of online sports consumption. Hardin et al. (2012) identified a direct effect of team support on online media consumption, whereas Sung et al. (2017) demonstrated that team support was the strongest motivator for Korean students' use of online media. Similarly, Park and Dittmore (2014) found a significant relationship between team support and social media consumption. In terms of attachment, emotional ties to the team were found to be a defining characteristic for all individuals, whether fans or spectators, who consume sporting products and services (Funk and James, 2001; Wann and James, 2018). Our study supports this finding, showing that attachment to the team sub-dimension is the most significant factor. Similar findings were reported by Kwon et al. (2005), who found that the team attachment sub-dimension significantly predicted conative loyalty and attendance behavior. Hallmann et al. (2016) also identified team attachment as one of the most influential factors explaining overall attachment, similarly Gençer et al. (2012) highlighted the team sub-dimension as the most prominent attachment point among football spectators. These findings highlight the critical importance of the team as a central factor in both online sports consumption motives and points of attachment, emphasizing the need for careful evaluation by fans and sports organizations.

An analysis of the sub-dimensions of online sports consumption motives revealed no significant differences based on age. This finding suggests that fans in different age groups share similar motives for online sports consumption. The relatively young average age of the participants, combined with the widespread use of online platforms across various segments of society, may explain this consistency. Similarly, Park (2014) found that the motivations of football team spectators for online sports consumption did not vary significantly by age group. However, other studies reported contrasting results. Abdourazakou et al. (2020) reported that younger fans are more inclined to post on social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram, during live matches. Brown et al. (2012) found that younger participants consumed more sports media content than their older counterparts and were more likely to engage in activities such as fantasy sports driven by motives such as entertainment, enjoyment, and surveillance. Similarly, van Driel and Gantz (2021) observed that older participants consumed less sports content on television or online than younger participants.

The significant difference observed in the "sport" sub-dimension of points of attachment based on age can be attributed to the varying levels of fandom among the sample groups, who are fans of professional football teams. The stronger commitment to football among fans aged 21 and under compared to those aged 27 and older can be explained by their higher level of fandom. Demiray and Unutmaz (2020) reported statistically significant differences in all sub-dimensions according to age group. Spectators aged 18–25 years exhibited higher levels in the sub-dimensions of coach, community, sport, and sport level than older age groups. Conversely, the same study found that spectators aged 36 years and older demonstrated high means in the sub-dimensions of players and teams. Robinson et al. (2004) identified a relationship between age and points of attachment among golf spectators attending professional tours. Additionally, Salman (2016) found age-related differences in players sub-dimension of attachment. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that younger fans display greater loyalty to various team elements than older fans.

The study revealed significant gender-based differences in online sports consumption motives, specifically in the sub-dimensions of "communication" and "team support." Female fans demonstrated higher average scores in both dimensions, indicating distinct gender-related perspectives on online sports consumption. Supporting these findings, Tang and Cooper (2012) reported significant differences between male and female in sports-viewing habits and general

media use. Similarly, Cooper and Southall (2010) found that male participants were more likely than female participants to consume online wrestling content to gain knowledge about sports. Contrary to our findings, Abdourazakou et al. (2020) found no significant gender difference in social media use during live matches. Their study found that both male and female season ticketholders used social media platforms equally to share match updates and fulfill the needs for social interaction, opinion expression, and information sharing. Similarly, Park (2014) observed no significant gender differences in motivation and social media consumption among sports fans. These contrasting results highlight the complexity of gender as a variable in online sports consumption motives, emphasizing the need for further research to understand these dynamics better.

An analysis of the points of attachment based on the gender variable revealed that male fans exhibited higher levels of loyalty in the "team" sub-dimension than female fans and a statistically significant difference in terms of gender. Gençer (2015) found no statistically significant gender differences in a study of professional football team spectators but observed that the male spectators' team subscale stood out among points of attachment. Demiray and Unutmaz (2020) reported no gender differences in team and level, whereas statistically significant differences were found in the sub-dimensions of players, coach, community, and sport. Similarly, Tokmak and Aksoy (2016) demonstrated significant gender differences, with males displaying stronger attachment to the players, team, and sport sub-dimensions. In contrast, Robinson and Trail (2005) found that female spectators exhibited higher levels of attachment in the player sub-dimension, whereas male spectators had greater attachment in the sport sub-dimension. These findings collectively highlight that male and female fans differ in their evaluations of attachment points toward their teams, underscoring the significance of gender as a variable for understanding points of attachment.

Correlation analysis between the points of attachment of professional football team fans and their online sports consumption motives revealed several low-level relationships. The "team" sub-dimension of the PAI exhibited a low negative correlation with the "entertainment" sub-dimension and a low positive correlation with the "economic" sub-dimension of the MSSOC. Additionally, a low negative correlation was found between the PAI "sport" sub-dimension and the MSSOC "fanship" and "fan expression" sub-dimensions, as well as between the PAI "city" and MSSOC "communication" sub-dimensions. Overall, these results suggest a weak relationship between online sports consumption motives and points of attachment. The varying levels of identification and behavioral patterns among participants may explain the lack of a significant relationship between the two scales. Previous research has emphasized that team identification, defined at different levels, influences a wide range of behaviors, including competition attendance, team support, and merchandise purchases (Funk and James, 2001; Lock et al., 2012; Trail et al., 2017). Moreover, such behaviors extend to online and media consumption (Hur et al., 2007; Seo and Green, 2008). In this context, studies exploring variations in fans' identification levels can uncover additional factors that influence these relationships. Furthermore, considering the unique characteristics of football and fan culture, individuals' tendencies to attend live sports events and engage in ritual behaviors such as socializing with other fans may provide additional insights (Fazal-E-Hasan, 2021; Wann and James, 2018).

In contrast to our findings, Sung et al. (2017) reported that the relationship between online sports consumers' motivation and purchase behavior showed that Korean students' online consumption leads to higher levels of merchandising and match attendance. Similarly, Park (2014) identified a mediating effect of team identification on the relationship between social

media consumption and behavioral intentions. Additionally, studies investigating the relationship between spectator motives and points of attachment have found stronger associations than those found in our study. For instance, Robinson and Trail (2005) demonstrated a common variance exceeding 70% between motives and points of attachment, whereas Robinson et al. (2004) reported a significant relationship with a large explained variance. Gençer et al. (2011) also found a significant relationship between motives and points of attachment among basketball spectators. Given these findings, further research is recommended to explore the relationship between fans' online sports consumption motives and their points of attachment, particularly focusing on the role of fan identification and its influence on different consumption behaviors.

The findings of this study indicate that no significant high-level relationship exists between fans' online sports consumption motives and their points of attachment. However, demographic variables, such as gender and age, were found to have a differentiating effect on these motives and points of attachment. These results suggest that the determinants of sports consumption behavior and loyalty vary across demographic groups. For instance, male and female fans, or fans from different age groups, may express distinct motives and points of attachment to sports content. Based on these findings, sports content providers and marketers should develop tailored strategies that account for the demographic differences within their target audience. Understanding how factors such as gender and age influence online sports consumption motives is essential for fostering fan loyalty and delivering a more personalized and engaging user experience. Future research could delve deeper into these demographic differences and explore other potential factors that may shape online sports consumption behaviors and points of attachment. Such efforts would provide further insights into the complexities of fan behavior and support the development of more effective marketing and engagement strategies.

This study had several limitations that may affect the generalizability of the findings. First, this study's restriction to fans in specific cities limits its ability to explore potential regional differences in online sports consumption motives and points of attachment. Additionally, focusing exclusively on football fans does not provide insights into the motives and loyalties of fans of other sports, which may exhibit significant differences. Furthermore, the disproportionate representation of male fans in the sample compared with female fans may restrict the reliability of cross-gender comparisons. To address these limitations, future research should employ a larger and more diverse sample. Including participants from various cities and regions, ensuring a gender-balanced participant group, and incorporating fans of different sports would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, extending similar studies to other popular sports such as basketball and volleyball would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the motives and points of attachment among sports fans across different disciplines.

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