



Examination of Football Fans' Perception of Reputation and Happiness Levels

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Please cite this paper as follows: Metin, M. & Özoruc, S. (2025). Examination of football fans' perception of reputation and happiness levels. *International Journal of Recreation and Sport Science*, 9 (1),6-15. DOI:10.46463/ijrass.1563936

Article History

Received:
09.10.2024
Accepted:
09.12.2024
Available online:
13.01.2025



ABSTRACT

Ensuring the loyalty and sense of belonging of fans, who are among the most significant stakeholders of a team, is increasingly important for maintaining the team's reputation. In this context, the study was conducted to examine the spectator-based reputation and happiness levels of Kahramanmaraş Spor fans. The study utilized correlational research and causal-comparative methods. The Happiness Scale developed by Demirci and Ekşi (2018) and the Spectator-Based Sports Team Scale developed by Yavuz Eroğlu S. and Eroğlu E. (2020) were used as measurement tools. Descriptive statistics and normality test were used to analyze the data. "Anova", "Independent Sample t Test" and "Pearson correlation" analysis were used to analyze the data obtained. The study, in which a convenience sample was used, was conducted with 413 fans in 2022. A statistically significant difference was found between the total scores of the happiness scale and the spectator-based sports team reputation scale and the variables of age and marital status. While no significant difference was observed between the Happiness Scale scores and the education level variable, a significant difference was found between the total scores of the Spectator-Based Sports Team Reputation Scale and education level. In addition, it was concluded that there was a significant positive and weak relationship between the scores of happiness and spectator-based sports team scale perceptions. The findings suggest that commitment to sports teams and various aspects of these teams positively affect fans' happiness, though this effect is weak.

Keywords: Sport, football, fans, happiness, reputation

INTRODUCTION

Sport is a significant phenomenon that greatly influences the social, cultural and economic structures of societies (Metin, Eratlı & Şirin, 2022). Football is one of the most widespread and popular sports globally (Şirin, 2021). The popularity of football leads football clubs to be evaluated not only with their sporting performances but also with their fans (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2001). Fans are regarded as one of the most valuable assets of a football team and play a crucial role in shaping the

overall reputation of the club (Karpas, 2015, Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008).

The behaviour of football fans is one of the key factors that significantly influence the audience-based reputation of clubs. In this context, analyzing the happiness levels of the fans and their loyalty to the team can contribute to the overall reputation and brand value of the club.

The reputation of football clubs is shaped not only by their on-pitch success, but also by the relationships they cultivate with their fans (Davies, Chun, Da Silva, & Roper, 2003). The club-fan relationship directly impacts the social perception

and brand value of the club. In the reputation management literature, fan satisfaction and happiness are critical for the sustainable success of clubs (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015, Erdem & Koçak, 2016). While fan satisfaction increases the loyalty and commitment of fans to the club, negative fan behaviors can damage the reputation of the club.

The level of happiness of the fans and the strength of their ties with the club have a direct impact on the reputation of the club. Football fans assess their relationship with their clubs within the framework of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to the social identity theory, individuals feel that they belong to certain groups and take pride in the achievements and reputation of these groups. In this context, Kahramanmaraş Spor fans identify themselves with the accomplishments and reputation of the club.

Fan happiness can be defined as the satisfaction level of individuals with their relationship with the club (Gül & Gürbüz, 2018; Hoyer, Nicholson, & Brown, 2015). Happy fans tend to demonstrate greater loyalty to their clubs, which positively impacts the clubs' reputations. Moreover, fan happiness may also increase participation in the club's social responsibility projects (Walker & Kent, 2009).

Measuring the happiness levels of the fans of such a well-established club is of great importance for the reputation management strategies of the club. As a result of this importance, this study was conducted to examine the audience-based reputation and happiness levels of Kahramanmaraş Spor fans. Considering the importance of fan satisfaction and loyalty in the reputation management of football clubs, Kahramanmaraş Spor needs to strengthen its relations with its fans. In this context, it is suggested that the happiness levels of the fans and their loyalty to the club should be measured regularly and strategies should be developed in the light of these data.

METHOD

This study was conducted to examine the spectator-based reputation and happiness levels of Kahramanmaraş Spor fans. Using convenience sampling, data were collected from 413 fans in 2022. Signatures were obtained from the families of the participants under the age of 18 in order to take part in our study as voluntary participants.

Data Collection Tools

Happiness Scale: In the scales we used in the study, the Happiness Scale was developed by Demirci and Ekşi (2018). The scale data were scored with a 5-point Likert-type rating. The scale consists of 6 items

and one factor. The factor loadings of the items in the scale ranged between .59 and .78. The results indicate that the Happiness Scale is a valid and reliable measurement tool that can be used to determine the happiness levels of fans. In the reliability analysis, the Cronbach's Alpha value was determined to be 0.86.

Spectator Based Sport Team Scale: The original form of the scale was developed by Wonseok et al. (2015). Consisting of 19 items and 6 factors, the Turkish validity and reliability of the scale was conducted by Yavuz Eroğlu and Eroğlu (2020). These factors are team performance, team tradition, social responsibility, spectator orientation, management quality and financial performance. Scale data were scored with a 7-point Likert-type rating. The internal consistency coefficient of Cronbach Alpha was determined as 0.91 by Yavuz Eroğlu and Eroğlu (2020). The high score obtained from the scale indicates that the scale is a valid and reliable measurement tool. In the analysis conducted to test the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha value was determined as 0.94.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the data obtained as a result of the scales applied in the research, $p < 5$ was taken as the significance level and SPSS 26.0 was used as the software program. The data were tested using various analytical techniques appropriate for the research questions. To assess whether the data followed a normal distribution, normality tests were performed by examining the Kurtosis and Skewness values. If these Skewness and Kurtosis values take a value between (+1,5) and (-1,5), it can be said that the data set shows a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The Independent t-test was used for pairwise comparisons, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test for multiple comparisons and Spearman correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between two variables.

RESULTS

It was concluded that 39% of the athletes participating in the study were 36-45 years old and 3.9% were 46 years old and above, 53.3% were single and 46.7% were married, 38.5% were working in the private sector and 0.7% were retired, 34.9% were high school graduates and 34.4% were university graduates, 49.9% played football for 11-15 years and 13.9% for 16 and above years.

Table 1. Normality and Reliability Test Results

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach Alpha
Happiness Scale	-,594	,089	0.86
Spectator Based Sport Team Scale	-,396	-,825	0.94

According to the analysis results in Table 1, the data set is normally distributed in terms of skewness and kurtosis and parametric tests were used in the analyses. The reliability test of the obtained data was performed and as

shown in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha (α) was found to be 0.86 for the Happiness Scale and 0.94 for the Spectator-Based Sports Team Scale. The results reveal that the scale is a 'highly reliable' measurement tool.

Table 2. ANOVA test Analysis Results of the Happiness Scale according to the age variable of the fans

Happiness Scale	Age	N	X	ss	df	F	p
Happiness Scale Total Score	18 years and under	20	4,28	0,825	4	9,922	0,00
	19-25 years old	102	3,49	0,951			
	26-35 years old	114	3,89	0,579			
	36-45 years	161	3,93	0,584			
	46 and above	16	3,44	0,887			

Table 3. ANOVA Test Analysis Results Regarding Spectator-Based Sports Team Scale According to Age Variable of Fans

Spectator Based Sport Team Scale	Age	N	X	ss	df	F	p
Team performance	18 years and under	20	3,78	2,049	4	4,102	0,00
	19-25 years old	102	3,02	1,681			
	26-35 years old	114	3,30	1,568			
	36-45 years	161	3,77	1,412			
	46 and above	16	3,33	1,408			
Team tradition	18 years and under	20	5,11	1,303	4	2,825	0,02
	19-25 years old	102	4,88	1,240			
	26-35 years old	114	4,78	1,166			
	36-45 years	161	5,14	,978			
	46 and above	16	4,43	1,613			
Social responsibility	18 years and under	20	3,75	1,996	4	3,325	0,01
	19-25 years old	102	3,80	1,411			
	26-35 years old	114	3,52	1,609			
	36-45 years	161	4,17	1,341			
	46 and above	16	3,78	1,591			
Audience orientation	18 years and under	20	4,90	1,015	4	6,292	0,00
	19-25 years old	102	3,89	1,123			
	26-35 years old	114	3,83	1,399			
	36-45 years	161	4,36	1,069			
	46 and above	16	4,04	1,480			
Management quality	18 years and under	20	3,71	1,971	4	8,984	0,00
	19-25 years old	102	3,02	1,792			
	26-35 years old	114	3,33	1,812			
	36-45 years	161	4,22	1,514			
	46 and above	16	3,58	1,561			
Financial Performance	18 years and under	20	3,71	1,658	4	1,386	0,23
	19-25 years old	102	3,02	1,802			
	26-35 years old	114	3,17	1,702			
	36-45 years	161	3,38	1,502			
	46 and above	16	2,87	1,720			
Spectator-based Sport Team Scale Total Score	18 years and under	20	4,14	1,508	4	5,033	0,00
	19-25 years old	102	3,62	1,198			
	26-35 years old	114	3,65	1,308			
	36-45 years	161	4,17	1,046			
	46 and above	16	3,68	1,362			

According to Table 3, no significant difference was found between the age variable of the fans and financial performance among the sub-dimensions of the spectator-based sports team scale ($p>0.05$). However, a significant difference was found between the other sub-dimensions of team performance, team tradition, social responsibility, spectator

orientation, management quality and total of spectator-based sports team scale ($p<0.05$). Looking at the rank averages, the averages of the fans in the 36-45 age group were higher than the averages of the fans in the other age groups. As the age of the fans increases, their loyalty to the team increases.

Table 4. Anova Test Analysis Results Regarding the Happiness Scale According to the Education Status Variable of the Fans

Happiness Scale	Education Status	N	X	ss	df	F	p
Happiness Scale	Literate	2	3,50	,000	5	1,493	0,191
	Primary School	28	3,87	,618			
	High School	144	3,88	,700			
	Associate Degree	76	3,62	,947			
	Bachelor Degree	142	3,80	,707			
	Postgraduate Degree	21	3,94	,573			

According to Table 4, no significance was found between the level of education and happiness perceptions of the fans ($p>0.05$). However, the happiness levels of the fans with

postgraduate degrees are higher than the fans with other education levels. We can say that the level of happiness increases as the level of education increases.

Table 5. Anova Test Analysis Results Regarding the Spectator-Based Sports Team Scale According to the Educational Status Variable of the Fans

Spectator Based Sport Team Scale	Education Status	N	X	ss	df	F	p
Team performance	Literate	2	2,33	,000	5	1,171	0,323
	Primary School	28	3,46	1,561			
	High School	144	3,50	1,627			
	Associate Degree	76	3,11	1,781			
	Bachelor Degree	142	3,59	1,468			
	Postgraduate Degree	21	3,30	1,251			
Team tradition	Literate	2	2,33	,000	5	7,556	0,00
	Primary School	28	4,63	1,218			
	High School	144	4,98	1,148			
	Associate Degree	76	4,48	1,457			
	Bachelor Degree	142	5,23	,852			
	Postgraduate Degree	21	5,22	,740			
Social responsibility	Literate	2	1,50	,000	5	5,476	0,00
	Primary School	28	3,97	1,258			
	High School	144	3,73	1,535			
	Associate Degree	76	3,35	1,539			
	Bachelor Degree	142	4,18	1,447			
	Postgraduate Degree	21	4,54	,827			
Audience orientation	Literate	2	2,66	,000	5	5,747	0,00
	Primary School	28	4,86	,590			
	High School	144	4,09	1,028			
	Associate Degree	76	3,74	1,435			
	Bachelor Degree	142	4,10	1,351			
	Postgraduate Degree	21	4,80	,573			

Management quality	Literate	2	1,00	,000	5	6,196	0,00
	Primary School	28	4,58	1,156			
	High School	144	3,52	1,716			
	Associate Degree	76	3,11	1,850			
	Bachelor Degree	142	3,70	1,804			
	Postgraduate Degree	21	4,79	,799			
Financial Performance	Literate	2	1,33	,471	5	2,445	0,03
	Primary School	28	3,91	1,642			
	High School	144	3,24	1,575			
	Associate Degree	76	2,84	1,867			
	Bachelor Degree	142	3,29	1,577			
	Postgraduate Degree	21	3,36	1,666			
Spectator-based Sport Team Scale Total Score	Literate	2	1,84	,074	5	4,859	0,00
	Primary School	28	4,22	1,093			
	High School	144	3,84	1,200			
	Associate Degree	76	3,43	1,369			
	Bachelor Degree	142	4,03	1,166			
	Postgraduate Degree	21	4,35	,634			

According to Table 5, no significant difference was found between the educational status variable of the fans and team performance among the sub-dimensions of the spectator-based sports team scale ($p>0.05$). However, a significant difference was found between the other sub-dimensions of team tradition, social responsibility, spectator orientation, management quality, financial performance

and total of spectator-based sports team scale ($p<0.05$). When the rank averages are analyzed, the mean scores of the fans with postgraduate degrees on the spectator-based sports team scale are higher than those of the fans with other education levels. We can say that as the level of education increases, the level of commitment to the team increases.

Table 6. Independent Sample t Test Analysis Results Regarding the Happiness Scale According to the Marital Status Variable of the Fans

Happiness Scale	Marital Status	N	X	ss	df	F	p
Happiness Scale Total Score	Single	220	3,72	,848	4	31,957	0,01
	Married	193	3,91	,594			

According to Table 6, a significant difference was found between the marital status variable and happiness perceptions of

the fans ($p<0.05$). As a result of the analyses, it was determined that married fans had higher happiness levels than single fans.

Table 7. Independent Sample t Test Analysis Results Regarding the Spectator-Based Sports Team Scale According to the Marital Status Variable of the Fans

Spectator Based Sport Team Scale	Marital Status	N	X	ss	df	F	p
Team performance	Single	220	3,28	1,708	4	24,534	0,03
	Married	193	3,62	1,410			
Team tradition	Single	220	4,85	1,244	4	3,001	0,06
	Married	193	5,06	1,032			
Social responsibility	Single	220	3,77	1,573	4	6,089	0,18
	Married	193	3,97	1,404			
Audience orientation	Single	220	4,05	1,225	4	,740	0,30
	Married	193	4,18	1,229			

Management quality	Single	220	3,29	1,813	4	18,475	0,00
	Married	193	4,02	1,614			
Financial Performance	Single	220	3,03	1,813	4	2,123	0,00
	Married	193	3,45	1,614			
Spectator Based Sport Team Scale Total Score	Single	220	3,72	1,813	4	11,766	0,00
	Married	193	4,05	1,614			

According to Table 7, no significant difference was found between the marital status variable of the fans and team tradition, social responsibility and spectator orientation among the sub-dimensions of the spectator-based sports team scale ($p > 0.05$). However, a significant difference was found between the

other sub-dimensions of team performance, management quality, financial performance and total of spectator-based sports team scale ($p < 0.05$). When the rank averages are analyzed, the average of the spectator-based sports team scale of married fans is higher than single fans.

Table 8. Correlation Analysis Between Happiness Scale and Spectator-Based Sport Team Scale

	H . S	SBST.S	Team performance	Team tradition	Social responsibility	Audience orientation	Management quality	Financial Performance
H.S	r	1	,366**	,283**	,348**	,324**	,350**	,306**
	p		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
SBST.S	r		1	,850**	,721**	,886**	,722**	,920**
	p			,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
Team performance	r			1	,582**	,706**	,523**	,753**
	p				,000	,000	,000	,000
Team tradition	r				1	,622**	,359**	,561**
	p					,000	,000	,000
Social responsibility	r					1	,589**	,780**
	p						,000	,000
Audience orientation	r						1	,680**
	p							,000
Management quality	r							1
	p							,000

H.S: Happiness Scale, SBST.S: Spectator Based Sport Team Scale

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine whether there is a significant relationship between happiness and spectator-based sports team scale and its sub-dimensions. As a result of the analysis, there is a significant positive and weak relationship between the scores of happiness and spectator-based sports team scale perceptions (Pearson $R = 0,366^{**}$; $p = 0,00 < 0,01$).

When the spectator-based sports team scale levels of the fans were analyzed according to the sub-dimensions; a weak relationship was found for team performance, team tradition, social responsibility, spectator orientation, management quality and financial performance sub-dimensions (Pearson $R = 0,283^{**}$ - $0,348^{**}$ - $0,324^{**}$ - $0,350^{**}$ - $0,306^{**}$ - $0,223^{**}$; $p = 0,00 < 0,01$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It was determined that there were significant differences between the age variable and happiness levels of Kahramanmaraş Spor fans. It was observed that there were significant differences between the age groups, especially between the fans aged 18 and under and the fans aged 46 and over ($p < 0.05$). Analysis of the rank averages revealed that the happiness levels of fans aged 18 and under were higher, while the happiness levels of fans aged 46 and over significantly decreased. These findings reveal that there is a decrease in the happiness levels of the fans with increasing age. This situation can be explained by the increase in the responsibilities of individuals as they get older, the increase in anxiety levels and the effect of the cost of living. Similarly, Erdem and Koçak (2016) stated that changes in individuals' living conditions and increasing responsibilities may cause a decrease in happiness levels as age increases. Çakmak et al. (2022) suggest that young fans express their loyalty and support for their clubs more enthusiastically and this increases their happiness levels. Karpas (2015) states that older individuals are under more economic pressure than younger fans and this situation negatively affects their general life satisfaction and happiness levels. In addition, unfulfilled nostalgic expectations of fans in this age group regarding past club achievements may also decrease their happiness levels.

The relationships between the age variable of Kahramanmaraş Spor fans and the sub-dimensions of the spectator-based sports team scale were analyzed. Significant differences were found between the age variable of the fans and team performance, team tradition, social responsibility, spectator orientation, management quality and the total of the spectator-based sports team scale ($p < 0.05$). Looking at the rank averages, it was determined that the averages of the fans in the 36-45 age group were higher than the other age groups. These findings show that as the age increases, the loyalty of the fans to the team increases. It is recommended that the club should increase the satisfaction and loyalty of all fan groups by developing strategies (Fan Club and Community Formation, Football Schools and Academies, Training and Seminars, Special Events and Meetings, Social Responsibility Projects, Transportation and Comfort Improvements, E-Sports Events and Tournaments, etc.) for different age groups.

The finding of significant differences between age groups in the sub-dimension of team performance indicates that the importance that fans attach to team performance increases as age increases.

Madrigal (1995) stated that older fans follow the performance of their teams more closely and consider this performance as an important indicator of their loyalty to the club.

Team tradition is related to the historical achievements and cultural heritage of the club. It was observed that the importance given to team tradition by the fans in the 36-45 age group was particularly high. This shows that older fans value the historical achievements and cultural heritage of the club more. Gladden and Funk (2001) emphasise that commitment to the history and traditions of clubs creates a strong bond between fans and this bond is stronger especially for middle-aged and older fans.

Significant differences were also found between age groups in the social responsibility sub-dimension. This finding indicates that as age increases, fans' interest in the social responsibility projects of the club increases. Walker and Kent (2009) stated that older fans follow the contributions of their clubs to the society and social responsibility projects more closely and give more importance to these projects.

The finding of significant differences between age groups in the spectator orientation sub-dimension shows that older fans attach more importance to the attitudes and services of their clubs towards their fans. Matsuoka, Chelladurai and Harada (2003) state that older fans are more satisfied with the services and activities of their clubs towards the fans and this satisfaction increases their loyalty to the club.

The finding of significant differences between age groups in the management quality sub-dimension indicates that older fans attach more importance to the management quality of their clubs. This finding is supported by Yoshida, Heere, and Gordon (2015). The researchers stated that older fans follow the management performance of their clubs more closely and that this performance significantly affects their loyalty to the club. These findings suggest that as age increases, fans' loyalty to the team increases. It is recommended that the club should develop strategies for different age groups to increase the satisfaction and loyalty of all fan groups.

The relationship between education level and happiness is a frequently discussed topic in the literature. Many studies show that higher levels of education are generally associated with higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Education can increase individuals' opportunities to find a job, raise their income level and create social capital, which can increase overall life satisfaction (Frey & Stutzer, 2002). However, the

lack of a significant relationship between education level and happiness in this study may reflect the effects of different cultural and social contexts. The effect of education level on happiness may depend on many factors such as the economic situation of the country where the individual lives, the quality of the education system, the status of the labour market and social support networks (Veenhoven, 2008). The lack of effect of education on happiness is shaped by many factors such as cultural norms, social class differences, social ties, personal values and psychological states as well as the level of education of the individual. It can be said that education may not be the key to happiness for every individual, and that a number of social and cultural factors other than education also play a major role in happiness.

Research has shown that individuals with higher levels of education generally show more commitment to sports teams. It is stated that the increase in the commitment of educated individuals to sports teams may be due to the fact that these individuals have more knowledge about sports and team culture and can establish a stronger bond with the team (Koca & Aşçı, 2011). In addition, increasing the level of education may increase individuals' trust in sports teams by making them more aware of issues such as social responsibility and management quality. This may positively affect their commitment to the team (Ayдын & Uğurlu, 2019).

A significant positive and weak relationship was found between happiness and spectator-based sport team scale perceptions. This finding shows that fans' commitment to their sports teams has a positive effect on their happiness levels, but this effect is weak. When the sub-dimensions of the spectator-based sport team scale were analyzed, weak positive relationships were found between team performance, team tradition, social responsibility, spectator orientation, management quality and financial performance and happiness. These findings suggest that various aspects of sport teams have a positive effect on fans' happiness levels, but this effect is relatively weak. Wann (2006) states that sports fans' commitment to their teams has positive effects on overall happiness and life satisfaction. Zhao, Zhao, and Sun (2024) concluded that emotional satisfaction strongly mediates the relationship between team quality and fan loyalty, and fans take pride and pleasure in their team's achievements. Participation in sport events and commitment to sport teams can strengthen individuals' social ties, increase their sense of belonging, and contribute to overall life satisfaction (Wann, 2006; Kim, Lee, & Kang, 2012; Shakina, Gasparetto & Barajas, 2020; Romero-Jara,

Solanellas, Munoz & Lopez-Carril, 2023). However, the findings of this study suggest that the impact of commitment to sport teams and various aspects of teams (e.g., team tradition, social responsibility) on fans' happiness is limited. This suggests that many other factors (e.g., personal relationships, health status, economic status) may also play an important role in influencing individuals' happiness (Diener et al., 1999).

In conclusion, this study reveals that commitment to sports teams and various aspects of these teams have a positive effect on fans' happiness, but this effect is weak.

FUTURE STUDIES

It shows that sports clubs need to develop more comprehensive strategies to increase the happiness of their fans. These strategies should include not only sporting success but also social responsibility projects, management quality and financial performance. Strategies such as social media interaction, fan club and community formation, digital content production, special products and discounts for young people, family events, football schools and academies, training and seminars, special events and meetings, transport and comfort improvements, E-Sports events and tournaments, nostalgic content and events, etc. can be developed. Each of these strategies aims to increase the loyalty and satisfaction of the team's fans of all age groups. In order to generalize the research findings, it is recommended to replicate and extend future research by using a large sample of different sports teams with different historical backgrounds, performances, and financial status. It is suggested that sports team managers should focus on the spectators in order to create and maintain reputation, thus increasing the sense of identity among fans.

Author Contributions

S.Ö: data collection. M.M: data analysis and original draft preparation. M.M: review and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The research was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki after obtaining approval from Osmaniye Korkut Ata University Social Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board on 24.01.2024 (Decision number: 2024/1/9).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study.

Data Availability Statement

Datasets are available through the corresponding author upon reason-able request.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the football fans who provided data for this study by participating in the questionnaires or interviews and the Kahramanmaraşspor Supporters' Association for helping to share the questionnaires or communicating with the fans.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors unequivocally assert that this research was undertaken while devoid of any commercial or financial affiliations that might be perceived as potential conflicts of interest.

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