

The Investigation of Soccer Fans' Social Media Using Motivations*

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Abstract

Social media has become an indispensable part of the daily lives of most people who have come into contact with technology, and is one of the basic sources of communication and free expression. The popularity and number of social media users, which shape people's behavior and enable online socialization, is increasing day by day. This increase can be largely attributed to the increasing number of computers, tablets, and especially smartphones, as well as the decreasing age of users. From this point of view, the aim of this study is to determine the motives of fans of the teams of the Turkish Football Super League for using social media. In this framework, a total of 460 people who were selected from the population according to the principle of random sampling constitute the sample of the study. In the study, the "Personal Information Form" prepared by the researcher was used to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants, and the "Motivations of Fans to Follow Their Teams on Social Media Scale" was used to investigate the fans' motives for using social media. The descriptive statistics of the variables were conducted in the form of percentages (%), frequency, mean, and standard deviation using SPSS 25 package program for the analysis of the research. On the other hand, the t-test for independent samples and analysis of variance, which are parametric tests, were used to test the relationships between the variables. The result is that in the study of the motivations of fans to follow the accounts of the teams they support in social media, the gathering of information, sharing of information and the perception of being a fan are the most important. Therefore, it is recommended that clubs get to know their fan base and enrich the content of strongly preferred social media accounts according to the identified motivations to ensure the active participation of fans in this process.

Keywords: Communication, Fans, Social Media, Sport Club, Technology

Futbol Taraftarlarının Sosyal Medya Kullanım Motivasyonlarının İncelenmesi

Öz

Sosyal medya teknoloji ile tanışmış çoğu insanın günlük yaşamının vazgeçilmez bir parçası haline gelmiş haberleşme ve iletişim kurma özgülüğünün temel kaynaklarından bir tanesi olmuştur. Popülaritesi ve kullanıcı sayısı her geçen gün artan sosyal medya insanların davranışlarını şekillendiren, çevrimiçi sosyalliği mümkün kılan güçlü bir araçtır. Bu artışa büyük oranda bilgisayar, tablet ve özellikle akıllı telefonların sayıca artması ve kullanıcı yaşının günden güne düşmesinin neden olduğu söylenebilir. Buradan hareketle bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye Futbol Süper Lig'inde yer alan takımların taraftarlarının sosyal medya kullanım motivasyonlarının belirlenmesidir. Bu kapsamda evrenden kolayda örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilmiş toplamda 460 kişi araştırmanın örneklemini oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada katılımcıların demografik özelliklerini belirlemek amacıyla araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanan "Kişisel Bilgi Formu" ve taraftarların sosyal medya kullanım motivasyonlarını incelemek amacıyla "Taraftarların Sosyal Medya Üzerinden Takımlarını Takip Etme Motivasyonları Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın analizinde SPSS 25 paket programı kullanılarak değişkenlerin yüzde (%), frekans, ortalama ve standart sapma değerler açısından tanımlayıcı istatistikleri yapılmıştır. Diğer taraftan değişkenler arasındaki ilişkileri test etmek amacıyla parametrik testlerden bağımsız gruplar t testi ve varyans analizi testleri kullanılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, taraftarların destekledikleri takımın sosyal medya hesaplarını takip etme motivasyonlarına bakıldığında sırasıyla bilgi edinme, paylaşımında bulunma ve taraftarlık algısı gelmektedir. Bu yüzden kulüpler taraftar kitlesini tanıyıp, yoğun tercih edilen sosyal medya hesaplarının belirlenen motivasyonlar ile ilgili olarak içeriklerinin zenginleştirilip taraftarların sürece aktif katılımının sağlanması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İletişim Kurma, Sosyal Medya, Spor kulübü, Taraftar, Teknoloji.

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Introduction

In today's world, where information and communication technologies are developing at a dizzying pace, new media concepts have emerged with the transformation and digitalization of traditional media, which have brought some innovations to human life in terms of communication (İspir et al., 2013; Şahin et al., 2018; Yankin, 2019). One of these innovations is social media, which is a new type of online media. Social media has become an indispensable part of the daily life of people around the world and one of the most fundamental sources of freedom of communication and understanding (Şimşek, 2018). Social media, whose popularity and number of users are increasing every day, is a powerful tool that shapes people's behavior and enables online sociality (Köksal and Özdemir, 2013). It can be said that this increase is largely due to the increasing number of computers, tablets, and especially smartphones, and that the age of users is decreasing day by day.

With the influence of new media technologies and easily accessible devices such as smartphones, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and blog sites have become an indispensable part of millions of people's lives (Dimofte et al., 2016). Social media is categorised as new media and, unlike traditional media, it is the main tool that enables two-way interaction and mutual communication among people from different cultures via the Internet (Şiyhan, 2019).

Kim et al. (2010) define the concept of social media as “virtual platforms where users can create and share content.” Thanks to its interactive structure and the opportunity to reach large masses, a simple content created by users turns into an important value in the digital world and becomes a tool that shapes human behavior (Köksal and Özdemir, 2013).

Social networks have radically changed the way people communicate and interact. People can now communicate and organize faster and easier than they ever expected. Castelles (2008) has tried to explain these changes with the concepts of “mass selfies” and “creative audiences,” and Jenkins with the concepts of “convergence” and “participatory culture.” From this perspective, new media shape behavior, strengthen loyalty, and encourage users to participate more actively (Ateşalp and Başlar, 2015). Some researchers have explained this in terms of the concepts of “inactive socialization” (Bakardjieva, 2003; Verschueren, 2005; Binark and Bayraktutan-Sütçü, 2007) and “virtual communities” (Rheingold, 2008; Robins, 1999; Castells, 2008; Feenberg and Bakardjieva, 2004). Bakardjieva (2003), who first formulated the concept of sedentary socialization, explained that it would draw attention to the fact that believers can learn social behaviors without establishing a concrete relationship. In other words, she confirmed that virtual interactions on the Internet are not disconnected from social life, but are based on human relationships (Haythornthwaite and Wellman,

2002). From this point of view, it would be correct to define the concept of communication as “social glue that holds the organization together” (Greenberg and Baron, 2000).

In today's rapidly advancing technology, a good management structure and an effective communication network are essential for institutions and organizations. The success of an organization depends on an efficient communication environment between its members (Gökçe, 2006).

Recently, most organizations in Turkey have given more importance to the concept of communication in order to plan a good career and acquire digital skills. They have seen social media as a gateway to their stakeholders and have specialized in this area. In this context, representatives of the sports world use social media tools extensively to communicate effectively with their fans or followers. Social media tools, which have become a very important tool in the public relations of sports clubs, in a way serve as a door through which clubs open themselves to the outside world. Social media platforms have become the most important medium for both corporate public relations and marketing public relations for clubs. The level and manner of social media visibility of teams operating in the Men's Football Super League category of the Turkish Football Federation, which is the subject of the study, and the motivations of fans of teams in this league to use social media were examined.

Materials and Methods

Research Model

The study is a descriptive survey model and a quantitative research method was used. Descriptive research is a research model commonly used in social sciences in which the results are generally presented by describing the relational dimension of existing situations, phenomena and events (Sönmez and Alacapınar, 2014). This study is a descriptive study conducted within the framework of the “Ethics Policy for Scientific Research and Publications in Higher Education” according to the approval of the Ethics Committee of Sivas Cumhuriyet University of Social Sciences and Humanities with the number 60263016- 050.06.04-E.459268 dated 06.02.2020.

Universe and Sample / Study Group

The population is the group consisting of all the people who participate in the research within the defined objectives. The sample is the group that is assumed to be able to represent the population and is selected according to certain objectives (Oyman and Başbozkurt, 2021). The population of this study consists of the fans who follow the official social media accounts of the teams competing in the Men's Football Super League of the Turkish Football Federation in the 2020-2021 season. The

random sampling method was used to determine the sample from the population. The random sampling method was used to reach 460 fans following these accounts.

Data Collection Tool

In the study, the “Personal Information Form” prepared by the researcher was used to identify the demographic characteristics and social media usage habits of the participants. The “Motivations of Fans to Follow Their Teams on Social Media” scale developed by Akkaya (2016) was used to determine the motivations of fans to follow their favorite team’s social media accounts.

Fans’ Motivations to Follow Their Teams on Social Media Scale

In determining the motivations of the participants who participated in the study to follow their teams on social media, the “Motivations of Fans to Follow Their Teams on Social Media Scale” developed by Akkaya (2016) was used. The scale consists of 6 sub-dimensions and a total of 28 items, including information seeking (items 2, 3, 4, 19), preference for club licensed products (items 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), communication (items 11, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22), sharing (items 12, 13, 14, 15, 20), fan perception (items 23, 24, 25, 26), and pastime (items 27, 28). The statements in the scale are rated with a 5-point Likert rating (“1=never agree”... “5=totally agree”). The values obtained from the scales were interpreted using mean and standard deviation.

Data Collection

The phases of research data collection are described under this heading. The work and procedures for data collection in the study were performed by the researcher. The 28-item scale began with questions about demographic characteristics and social media use. Since the scale is intended to be applied online (Google form), it was designed to be web-based and a link to the scale was created. The online questionnaire was shared on social media platforms between 04/27/2020 and 02/20/2021 and fans were asked to complete it. The prepared digital scale was applied online at different time points to 487 people who were randomly selected based on voluntariness. After the responses of the scales, 27 of them were excluded from the study because they did not have the required qualifications. The data obtained from a total of 460 participants were subjected to analysis and evaluation.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the study, descriptive statistics of the variables in terms of percentages (%), frequencies and means were obtained using the program IBM SPSS 25 Package. In order to determine the differences between the variables, normality tests were first performed for the variables. In this context, it was assumed that the data had a normal distribution, as the skewness and kurtosis values were between ± 1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Therefore, the t-test for independent groups was

used for pairwise comparisons and the One-Way Analysis of Variance test (ANOVA) was used for multiple comparisons.

Findings

This part of the study presents the results obtained from the statistical analysis of the data obtained. This section first provides frequencies and percentages related to the general structure of the participants and descriptive statistics related to the measurement instruments used in the study.

Table 1

Personal Information of The Fans Who Participated in The Research

Personal Information	Variable	N	%
Age	Under 20 years old	122	26.5
	21-40	277	60.2
	41 years and over	61	13.3
Gender	Female	76	16.5
	Male	384	83.5
Marital Status	Married	207	45.0
	Single	253	55.0
Education status	Secondary education or below	166	36.1
	University (2 years - 4 years)	250	54.3
	Graduate (Master's-PhD)	44	9.6
Employment	Public Personnel	192	41.7
	Private Sector	68	14.8
	Student	171	37.2
	Self-employment	29	6.3
General Total		460	100

Analysis of the personal characteristics of fans participating in the study in Table 1 shows that 60.2% of participants are between 21 and 40 years old, 83.5% are male, 55% are single, 54.3% have a university degree, and 41.7% are employed in the public sector.

Table 2

Social Media Follow-Up Patterns of The Fans Who Participated in The Research

Ways of Using Social Media	Variable	N	%
Device used	Computer	19	4.1
	Tablet	6	1.3
	Mobile Phone	428	93.0
	TV	7	1.6
Social media tools	Facebook	113	24.6
	Instagram	247	53.7
	Twitter	49	10.7
	YouTube	51	11.0
Social media usage patterns	Content Creator: (creating a custom page, sharing a video designed by him/her)	39	8.5
	Commenter: (Commenting, commenting, giving opinions on articles)	65	14.1
	Tracker: (Stores pictures, videos and music clips)	107	23.3

	Participants: (who like, subscribe and support the pages)	41	8.9
	Audience: (Following, watching and listening to the pages)	208	45.2
How long fans follow social media accounts	Less than 1 year	142	30.9
	1-2 Years	86	18.7
	3-4 Years	82	17.8
	5 Years and above	150	32.6
General Total		460	100

According to Table 2, it was found that 93% of the participating individuals use their cell phones for social media tools, 53.7% of them use the social media platform Instagram, and 45% of them adopt an attitude defined as “viewers” who follow, view, and listen to pages on social media. On the other hand, it has been determined that 32.6% of the fans have been following the social media accounts of their favorite team for 5 years and above.

Table 3

Attitudes of The Participating Fans towards The Official Social Media Accounts of Their Favorite Team

Sub-dimensions	\bar{X}	S.d.	Kurtosis	Skewness	Cronbach Alpha
Club Licensed Product Preference Tendency	2.72	1.19	-.956	.125	.973
Perception of Fanhood	3.27	1.37	-1.093	-.435	
Engaging in Communication	2.72	1.20	-.921	.189	
Sharing	3.39	1.29	-.803	-.589	
Information Acquisition	3.49	1.27	-.685	-.693	
Passing Time	2.55	1.29	-1.028	.350	

Table 3 shows the average of the attitudes of the fans who participated in the research towards their favorite team’s accounts on social media. It can be seen that the highest average values are found in the sub-dimensions of Information Acquisition, Sharing and Perception of Fanhood. The last dimension is the Passing Time.

Table 4

Comparison of the Attitudes of the Fans to Follow the Social Media Accounts of Their Favorite Team According to Their Gender

Sub-dimensions	Gender	\bar{X}	S.d.	t value	p value
Club Licensed Product Preference Tendency	Female	2.74	1.13	.119	.906
	Male	2.73	1.21		
Perception of Fanhood	Female	3.16	1.33	-.844	.399
	Male	3.30	1.38		
Engaging in Communication	Female	2.74	1.17	.113	.910
	Male	2.72	1.22		
Sharing	Female	3.26	1.35	-.984	.326
	Male	3.42	1.29		
Information Acquisition	Female	3.35	1.38	-.063	.289
	Male	3.52	1.26		
Passing Time	Female	2.38	1.29	-.303	.193
	Male	2.59	1.30		

Female= 76, Male=384, Total=460

The results of the independent samples t-test in Table 4 show that there is no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) in the sub-dimensions of liking Club Licensed Product Preference Tendency, Perception of Fanhood, Engaging in Communication, Sharing, Information Acquisition, and Passing Time in the attitudes of fans who participated in the study toward their favorite team's social media accounts by gender.

Table 5

Comparison of Social Media Attitudes of the Fans Participating in the Study According to the Duration of Following the Social Media Accounts of Their Favorite Team

Sub-dimensions	Follow-up Time	\bar{X}	S.d.	F value	p value
Club Licensed Product Preference Tendency	^a Less than 1 year	2.26	1.11	16.478	.000 a<c,d
	^b 1-2 years	2.59	1.09		
	^c 3-4 years	3.27	1.04		
	^d 5 years and above	2.96	1.24		
Perception of Fanhood	^a Less than 1 year	2.58	1.33	24.924	.000 a<b,c,d
	^b 1-2 years	3.18	1.31		
	^c 3-4 years	3.86	1.06		
	^d 5 years and above	3.68	1.31		
Engaging in Communication	^a Less than 1 year	2.33	1.12	14.774	.000 a<c,d
	^b 1-2 years	2.47	1.16		
	^c 3-4 years	3.28	1.11		
	^d 5 years and above	2.93	1.21		
Sharing	^a Less than 1 year	2.71	1.31	26.850	.000 a<b,c,d
	^b 1-2 years	3.33	1.31		
	^c 3-4 years	4.02	0.93		
	^d 5 years and above	3.73	1.16		
Information Acquisition	^a Less than 1 year	2.69	1.28	34.195	.000 a<b,c,d
	^b 1-2 years	3.65	1.15		
	^c 3-4 years	3.98	0.89		
	^d 5 years and above	3.89	1.16		
Passing Time	^a Less than 1 year	2.24	1.26	8.606	.000 a<c,d
	^b 1-2 years	2.40	1.28		
	^c 3-4 years	3.10	1.26		
	^d 5 years and above	2.65	1.27		

Less than 1 year=142, 1-2 years=86, 3-4 years=82, 5 5 years and above =150, Total= 460

According to the results of the Anova test in Table 5, a statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimension “Club Licensed Product Preference Tendency” depending on the duration of following the social media accounts of the team of which they are fans ($F=16.487$; $p < .000$). As a result of the comparisons made to determine from which groups this difference emanates, the group with less than 1 year shows a negative relationship compared to the groups with 3-4 years and 5 years and more. When the arithmetic means of the groups of 3-4 years and 5 years and above are examined, it is found that they are higher than those of the group of less than 1 year.

As a result of the comparisons made to determine which groups are responsible for the difference ($F=24.924$; $p < .000$) in the sub-dimension “Perception of Fanhood” according to the duration of following the social media accounts of their favorite team, the group of less than 1 year shows a negative difference compared to the groups of 1-2 years, 3-4 years and 5 years and above.

When examining the arithmetic means to understand for which group the difference exists, we find that the values of the groups 1-2 years, 3-4 years and 5 years and above are higher.

As a result of the comparisons made to determine from which groups the difference ($F=14.774$; $p < 0.000$) in the sub-dimension “Engaging in Communication” according to the length of time fans follow the social media accounts of their favorite team; the group of less than 1 year shows a negative difference compared to the groups of 3-4 years and 5 years and above. When the arithmetic means are examined to understand which group is responsible for the difference, it is clear that the values of the groups of 3-4 years and 5 years and above are higher than those of the group of less than 1 year.

As a result of the comparisons made to determine from which groups the difference ($F=26.850$; $p < 0.000$) in the subdimension “Sharing” comes from, the group with less than 1 year has a negative difference compared to the groups with 1-2 years, 3-4 years and 5 years and above. When examining the arithmetic means to understand which group is responsible for the difference, we find that the values of the 1-2 years, 3-4 years, and 5 years and above groups are higher than the values of the less than 1 year group.

As a result of the comparison performed to determine between which groups the difference ($F=34.195$; $p < 0.000$) occurs in the subdimension “Information Acquisition”, the group of less than 1 year shows a negative difference compared to the groups of 1-2 years, 3-4 years, 5 years and above. When the arithmetic means are examined to understand which group is responsible for the difference, it is found that the values of the groups 1-2 years, 3-4 years, 5 years and above are higher than the values of the group with less than 1 year.

As a result of the comparisons made to determine from which groups the difference ($F=8.606$; $p < 0.000$) in the “sub-dimension “Passing Time”, the group of less than 1 year showed a statistically negative difference compared to the groups of 3-4 years and 5 years and above. When examining the arithmetic means to understand which group is responsible for the difference, we find that the arithmetic means of the groups of 3-4 years and 5 years and above are higher than the values of the group of less than 1 year.

Discussion and Conclusion, Recommendations

If we look at the factors in the scale applied in the study to show the attitudes and motivations of fans in the use of social media, it is seen that one of the attitudes of fans who follow their teams is the factor of inclination to prefer products licensed by the club. This factor expresses the marketing concept that has become very important for the clubs. The fact that the sports industry has made great

progress and reached huge budgets in recent years has led to the development of the concept of sports marketing, and licensed products have become a regular source of income for clubs. In terms of fans, it can be said that they follow social media to access their teams' licensed products and to be informed about promotions, campaigns, product and ticket sales (Seo and Green, 2008). As for the factor of fan perception, it can be said that people feel a sense of belonging to the club of which they are fans and show their loyalty by behaving like fans (Hur et al., 2007; Clavio and Walsh, 2013; Annamalai et al., 2021). As for the communication factor, fans' communication and interaction with their teams has improved thanks to social media (Stavros et al., 2014). We can say that fans follow social media accounts to communicate with the teams and athletes they sympathize with, and to get updated information about the club, other industries and fans. If we look at the sharing factor, we can say that fans prefer the social media accounts to access their teams' match and training pictures, to see and contribute to the comments, and to access match summaries. If we look at the information gathering factor, we can say that fans prefer to get information about news about their club, transfers, official statements and activities and events organized by the club. If we look at the factor of passing time, we can say that fans follow the social media accounts of their favorite team to pass time and entertain themselves.

When it was investigated whether there was a difference in the motives for using social media according to the gender of the participants, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference in the motives for preferring club-licensed products, perception of fandom, communication, sharing, information gathering, and time (Table 4). In a similar study by Çelik (2019), no significant difference was found between gender and motives for using social media. This result shows similar characteristics as the study.

Participants' social media motivations were examined according to the length of time they followed the social media accounts of the team they supported. A statistically significant difference was found in the dimensions of tendency to prefer Club Licensed Product Preference Tendency, Perception of Fanhood, Engaging in Communication, Sharing, Information Acquisition, and Passing Time spent (Table 5). It was found that the scores of fans who followed their team's social media accounts for 3 years or more were significantly higher than the scores of fans who followed their team's social media accounts for less than 1 year in the subdimensions of tendency to prefer club-licensed products, communication, and time spent. In this regard, fans who have followed the social media accounts of the team they support for 3 years or longer assign more importance to the tendency to prefer club-licensed products, communication, and time spent following social media accounts. In the dimensions of fan community perception, sharing, and information gathering, a statistically significant difference was found between fans who have followed their team's social media accounts

for 1 year or longer and fans who have followed their team's social media accounts for less than 1 year. Fans who have followed the social media accounts of the team they support for 1 year or longer were found to place more value on the attitudes of fan awareness, sharing, and information gathering than fans who follow the accounts for less than 1 year. In examining the literature, Akkaya (2016) found in his study that fans' tendency to prefer products licenced by clubs increases with the length of time they have followed the social media accounts of the team they support. Another finding from the same study is that a strong emotional bond develops between fans who follow their teams on social media accounts and the team they support, creating the perception of fandom. It can be inferred that fans who are emotionally connected and have a high sense of fandom are more likely to support their teams on social media. In a similar study, Karakaya (2019) concluded that the motivation of fans who follow their teams' social media accounts to prefer club-licensed products is higher than fans who do not follow the social media accounts. In another study by Çelik (2019), a significant difference was found in fans' attitudes towards news and information, fandom and interaction depending on how long they followed their teams. He found that there was no significant difference in attitudes toward advertising and entertainment. Therefore, based on our current study, it can be said that fans who have been following their team's social media accounts for less than 1 year rate all motivations for following less highly, while the group of fans who have been following for 3-4 years have the highest scores on all attitudes.

From the perspective of sport clubs, Facebook is more than just an additional channel for broadcasting content. The Facebook platform allows fans to engage with the club and share their sentiments with other fans and with others in their own network. Our findings show that specific content strategies are required for improving the volume and valence of sport fan engagement such as likes, comments, shares, and net positivity.

Recommendations

- Invitations, sweepstakes, promotions, contests, surveys, social responsibility and fan soccer activities can be used to increase fan interest in licensed products and game tickets. It will be beneficial for the club to include fan columns and receive feedback.
- It is suggested that the content of social media accounts should be aligned with fans' expectations.
- Teams in the Turkish Men's Football Super League are guided in their activities through their social media accounts if they know their fans well and have information by creating a profile of them.
- The club should effectively present its content on all types of social media accounts, especially in today's technological conditions.

- Sports clubs should specialize to closely follow technological developments, and social media activities should be conducted by social media experts.
- Clubs should be able to increase product and service quality and maximize fan satisfaction, monitor market prices, and always introduce new products.
- Studies on fans' use of social media can also be conducted for fans of different teams and different industries.
- In the studies to be conducted on fans, more fans should be reached by contacting sports clubs, and more detailed studies should be conducted.
- Studies should be conducted on sports clubs and fans that are exemplary in terms of social media use, and their social media use can be compared by identifying the differences.

Ethics Committee Permission Information

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Declaration of Contribution Rates of Researchers

The first author contributed 60% and the second author contributed 40% in the stages of the research.

Statement of Conflict

The author/authors do not have a conflict statement regarding the research.

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