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# Examining the relationship between team identification levels of university students who are team supporters and their attitudes towards team sponsors and their perceptions of causality

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#### Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between team identification levels of university students who are team supporters and their attitudes towards team sponsors and their perceptions of causality. The method of the research is "Correlational Research" and according to the results of this research, the existing situations were determined and the relationship and prediction level between these situations were determined and interpreted. The population of the research consists of Kütahya Dumlupınar University students and Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University students, who are team supporters. 475 students randomly selected from the universe constitute the sample group. The findings of the research concluded that there is a significant relationship between the team identification levels of university students who are team supporters and their attitudes and causality perceptions towards their team 's sponsors. The results show that fans with higher levels of team identification show positive attitudes towards the sponsor company and, accordingly, their perception of causality towards the sponsor companies is also positive. As a result of this study, according to the findings, fans with high levels of identification are a more important target for sponsor companies. It is thought that this community may be more interested in the brands and products of sponsor companies. This research and its results show that the level of team identification will positively affect attitudes towards sponsor companies and perceptions of causality in sponsorship. In this regard, we hope that the results of this research can have a guiding and strategy-determining effect on sports clubs and sponsor companies that will make agreements on sports sponsorship. It is evaluated that fans with a high level of team identification can be determined as a more important target audience for companies, and if sponsorship activities are carried out in this direction, they will contribute to sponsorship success.

Keywords: Identification, Sponsorship, Sports

# Takım taraftarı olan üniversite öğrencilerinin, takım özdeşleşme düzeyleri ile takımlarının sponsorlarına yönelik tutum ve nedensellik algıları arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı takım taraftarı olan üniversite öğrencilerinin, takım özdeşleşme düzeyleri ile takımlarının sponsorlarına yönelik tutum ve nedensellik algıları arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesidir. Araştırmanın yöntemi "Korelasyonel Araştırma" olup, araştırmamızın sonuçlarına göre var olan durumlar tespit edilerek, bu durumlar arasındaki ilişki ve yordama düzeyi belirlenerek yorumlanmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini takım taraftarı olan Kütahya Dumlupınar ve Bilecik Şeyh Edebali Üniversitesi öğrencileri oluşturmaktadır. Evren içerisinden rasgele olarak seçilen 475 öğrenci ise örneklem gurubunu oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmanın bulgularında takım taraftarı üniversite öğrencilerinin, takım özdeşleşme düzeyleri ile takımlarının sponsorlarına yönelik tutum ve nedensellik algıları arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Sonuçlar takım özdeşleşme düzeyi daha yüksek olan taraftarların sponsor firmaya yönelik olumlu tutum gösterdiği ve buna bağlı olarak sponsor firmalara yönelik nedensellik algısının da olumlu olduğu şeklindedir. Çalışmamızın sonucunda, elde edilen bulgulara göre sponsor firmalar için özdeşleşme düzeyi yüksek olan taraftarlar daha önemli bir hedef niteliği taşımaktadır. Bu topluluğun sponsor firmaların marka ve ürünlerine daha fazla ilgi duyabileceği düşünülmektedir. Bu araştırma ve sonuçları, takım özdeşleşme düzeyinin, sponsor firmalara yönelik tutum ve sponsorluktaki nedensellik algılarını olumlu yönde etkileyeceğini göstermektedir. Sponsorluk faaliyetlerinin bu doğrultuda gerçekleştirilmesi halinde sponsorluk başarısına katkı sağlayacağı değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özdeşleşme, Sponsorluk, Spor

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# INTRODUCTION

One sports sponsorship, which is one of the sources of income of sports clubs, is an agreement between sports clubs and sponsors based on mutual benefit. One of the important target groups of sports sponsorship is university students. Determining the team identification levels and perspectives of university students is very important for the success of sponsorship activities (Amoako et al., 2012).

Team identification is defined with expressions such as unshakable loyalty between the club and the fans, club identity that becomes a social identity at the same time, psychological attachment and the fans' standing by their team under all circumstances. It is understood that team identification is a phenomenon that goes beyond supporting a team and that the individual completes his/her identity with his/her team and sees it as a part of his/her self (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). However, fans who are identified with their teams cannot naturally be expected to have the same level of commitment, interest and support to their teams. This situation is expressed as the level of identification of the fans (Theodorakis et al., 2012). In a study, while expressing the identification levels of fans, they were classified into different categories. In the relevant study, this classification is expressed as temporary, local, loyal, fanatic and dysfunctional (Eskiler et al., 2011). Fans who are identified with their teams at a high level continue to support their teams regardless of sporting success or competition results. Some studies reveal that some fans' loyalty levels towards their teams increase even more if their teams receive negative results. They even think that they may not have supported their teams enough in case of bad results, and sometimes they even feel guilty about this. Because they are connected with a common emotional bond with their teams, which are a part of their identities (Zelyurt, 2017).

The sponsorship of sports activities, which encompass large fan bases that are emotionally attached to their teams, provides a unique opportunity for sponsoring companies to engage with a diverse audience. Innovations occur in the technological development process and the sports field also benefits from these innovations (Sarı & Akgül 2023). The appeal of sports is amplified by its capacity to attract a larger audience than any other activity, coupled with its accessibility. The loyalty demonstrated by these audiences towards sports and teams presents a valuable avenue for companies to connect with potential loyal consumers. This consumer loyalty attitude is regarded as a positive consumer behavior, offering a platform for companies to communicate with their target audiences through sports sponsorship and influence them in line with their objectives (Grecoet al., 2022). In order to achieve their goals such as brand awareness, product

promotions and sales figures with their advertising activities, companies can sponsor sports clubs, sports activities and athletes and have the opportunity to meet them directly with the target audience. Thanks to giving the right message at the right time and environment to the sports audience who are devoted to the sports branch, sports clubs and famous athletes at the level of admiration and whose readiness and perception are extremely high, companies can achieve all the gains they aim for and even create a relationship between the sponsor company and their teams among the masses with a high level of team identification. It may even be possible for them to establish a bond and admire the sponsor company (Yoshida et al., 2014). From past to present, the number of sports branches has increased and become widespread all over the world, thanks to mutually beneficial sports sponsorship agreements. However, championships, leagues and all other sports activities have developed rapidly in terms of quality and quantity. In addition, sponsorship agreements constitute the most important source of income for sports clubs and athletes today (Böyük, 2022).

When other studies in the literature are examined, it is seen that the views of university students on sports sponsorship have been examined. However, the effect of university students' team fan levels on their views on sports sponsorship has not been investigated. This study focuses on this gap in the literature. In light of the aforementioned information, the objective of this study is to ascertain whether there is a causal relationship between university students' attitudes towards the sponsoring companies that support the sports clubs they are supporters of, the students' sporting status, their level of identification with the sports club they are supporters of, and their perception of why the companies that sponsor the sports clubs they are supporters of are sponsored. The objective of this study is to ascertain an answer to the aforementioned question. It is hypothesized that the findings of this research may have a guiding and strategic impact on sports clubs and sponsor companies that enter into agreements regarding sports sponsorship. Fans with a high level of identification with their team can be identified as a target audience for companies, and if sponsorship activities are conducted in this direction, they can contribute to the success of sponsorship.

# **METHOD**

#### **Research group (population-sample)**

The population of the research consists of Kütahya Dumlupınar University Students, who are team supporters and Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University Students. As a result of the power analysis performed for the determination of the sample group, it was understood that a total of 382 students from two universities had sufficient representativeness with a 5% margin of error

and 95% confidence interval. In the light of these data, the sample group of the research consists of 475 volunteer students randomly selected from the universe (Faul et al., 2009).

#### Data collection tools

As measurement tools in this research; Three different scales were used in the 5-point Likert form. To measure the level of identification of fans with their favorite team, the Team Identification scale, developed by Deitz et al., in 2012 and adapted to Turkish population, validity and reliability studies were conducted by İşcan and Bozacı in 2020, was used. The scale is a one-dimensional scale consisting of 7 items. A high total score from the scale indicates that the fan's level of identification with the team they support is high. As a result of the reliability analysis conducted with the data we obtained, the reliability coefficient of the scale was determined as Cronbach alpha  $\alpha = 0.93$ .

To determine causal attribution perceptions towards the sponsor company, the causal perceptions towards sponsorship scale, developed by Rifon et al., in 2004 and adapted to Turkish population, validity and reliability studies were conducted by İşcan and Bozacı in 2020, was used. The scale consists of 7 items and 2 sub-dimensions: Self-interested reason perception and Altruistic reason perception. As a result of the reliability analysis conducted with the data we obtained, the reliability coefficient of the scale was determined as Cronbach alpha  $\alpha$ =0.87.

To measure their attitudes towards the sponsor company, the attitude scale towards the sponsor company, which was developed by Smith et al., in 2008 and adapted to Turkiye, validity and reliability studies were conducted by İşcan and Bozacı in 2020, was used. The scale is a one-dimensional scale consisting of 7 items. A high total score from the scale indicates a high positive attitude towards the sponsor company. As a result of the reliability analysis conducted with the data we obtained, the reliability coefficient of the scale was determined as Cronbach alpha  $\alpha = 0.95$ .

In addition, a demographic information form created by the researchers was applied to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants.

#### Data collection/processing method

In this study, which was conducted in accordance with the relevant ethical standards and approved by the relevant ethics committee, the participants were provided with general information prior to the administration of the scales. After all the volunteers were verbally informed prior to the study, their written informed consents were taken. The scales were applied on a voluntary basis, and the participants were given sufficient time to read and sign the

informed consent form. The researchers responded to the participants 'queries and provided them with the researchers' contact information, should they require further assistance. The administration of the scales took approximately 20 minutes per participant. The ethics permission to do this research was obtained with decision number 49 at the Kütahya Dumlupınar University Ethics Committee meeting on 26.12.2022 and carried out in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration of the World Medical Association.

#### Data analysis

In this study, the SPSS 20.0 software package was employed for the analysis of the data and an examination of its distribution. In the analysis of the data, percentage and frequency distributions were employed as descriptive statistics. Spearman's and Pearson correlation tests were employed to ascertain the interrelationships between variables, while a multiple regression test was utilized to determine the degree of prediction associated with variables that were identified as being related. The significance level of the findings obtained from the analyses was evaluated as p < 0.05. The research method employed was that of correlational research, whereby the existing situations are determined and the relationship between these situations is established. If a relationship between the variables is identified, the degree and prediction level of this relationship is determined and interpreted.

FINDINGS
Table 1. Frequency and percentage (%) values of demographic characteristics of volunteers

| Variables  | Groups                          | n   | %     |
|--|---------------------------------|-----|-------|
|  | Men                             | 117 | 24.6  |
| Gender   | Woman                           | 358 | 75.4  |
|  | Total                           | 475 | 100.0 |
|  | 20 years and under              | 242 | 50.9  |
| Age  | 21 between 25                   | 233 | 49.1  |
|  | Total                           | 475 | 100.0 |
|  | Kütahya Dumlupınar University   | 244 | 51.4  |
| University   | Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University | 231 | 48.6  |
|  | Total                           | 475 | 100.0 |
|  | Yes                             | 316 | 66.5  |
| Regular Exercise Status                            | No                              | 159 | 33.5  |
|  | Total                           | 475 | 100.0 |
|  | Football                        | 355 | 74.7  |
| In Which Toom Charte Durnel De Vey Cymnest A Team  | Basketball                      | 66  | 13.9  |
| In Which Team Sports Branch Do You Support A Team  | Volleyball                      | 54  | 11.4  |
|  | Total                           | 475 | 100.0 |
|  | Yes                             | 307 | 64.6  |
| Do You Know the Sponsors of Your Favorite Team     | No                              | 168 | 35.4  |
|  | Total                           | 475 | 100.0 |
|  | Yes                             | 335 | 70.5  |
| Do You Follow the Activities of Your Favorite Team | No                              | 140 | 29.5  |
|  | Total                           | 475 | 100.0 |

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| Variables           | Groups                      | n   | %     |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-------|
|                     | 11.500 TL and under         | 131 | 27.6  |
|                     | 11.501 TL between 15.500 TL | 74  | 15.6  |
| Family Income Level | 15.501 TL between 20.500 TL | 78  | 16.4  |
|                     | 20.501 TL and more          | 192 | 40.4  |
|                     | Total                       | 475 | 100.0 |

According to table; It is seen that 24.6% of the participants are women and 75.4% are men. 50.9% of the participants are 20 years old and under, and 49.1% are between the ages of 21-25. When we look at the universities where the participants are students, it is seen that 51.4% of them studied at Kütahya Dumlupınar University and 48.6% of them studied at Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University.

When the participants' regular exercise status is considered, it is seen that 66.5% answered yes and 33.5% answered no. When the participants were asked which branch of sports their favorite team was primarily involved in, the answer was Football with a rate of 74.7%, Basketball with a rate of 13.9% and Volleyball with a rate of 11.4%.

Participants: Do you know the sponsors of their favorite team? When asked the question, it is seen that 64.6% answered yes and 35.4% answered no. Participants were asked: Do you follow the activities of their favorite team? When asked the question, it is seen that 70.5% answered yes and 29.5% answered no. When the family income level of the participants is examined, it is seen that there is a proportional density between students with an income of 11.500 TL and below and students with an income of 20.501 TL and above.

Table 2. Relationship between demographic characteristics of participants and team identity level

| Variables  | Team Ide                  | entity Level |
|--|---------------------------|--------------|
| Gender   | $r_{\rm s}$               | 0.175        |
| Gender   | p                         | 0.000*       |
| Age  | $\mathbf{r}_{\mathrm{s}}$ | 0.093        |
| Agt  | p                         | 0.043*       |
| University   | $r_{\rm s}$               | -0.160       |
| Oniversity   | p                         | 0.000*       |
| Regular Exercise Status                              | $r_{\rm s}$               | -0.138       |
| Regulal Exercise Status                              | p                         | 0.003*       |
| In Which Team Sports Branch Do You Support A Team    | $r_{\rm s}$               | -0.094       |
| in which Team Sports Branch Do Tou Support A Team    | p                         | 0.040*       |
| Do You Know the Sponsors of Your Favorite Team       | $r_{\rm s}$               | -0.487       |
| Do fou know the sponsors of four ravortie feath      | p                         | 0.000*       |
| Do You Follow the Activities of Your Favorite Team   | $r_{\rm s}$               | -0.540       |
| Do Tou Pollow the Activities of Tour Pavorite Tealif | p                         | 0.000*       |
| Family Income Level                                  | $r_{\rm s}$               | -0.053       |
| Family Income Level                                  | p                         | 0.248        |

<sup>\*=</sup>P<0.05

According to table; Demographic characteristics of the participants and their team identification level were correlated at a significance level of p<0.05 by applying Spearman's rho correlation test. There was a low level of correlation between the participants 'gender and their team identification level, a low level with their age, a low level with the university they studied at, and a low level with their regular sports activities. It has been observed that there is a significant relationship at the level of the sports branch of the team they support, at a low level with the sports branch of their favorite team, at a medium level with knowing the sponsors of the teams they support, and at a medium level with the status of following the activities of the teams they support. However, no significant relationship was found between family income level and team identification level.

Table 3. The relationship between the demographic characteristics of the participants and the level of perception of why the companies sponsoring their teams sponsor their teams

| Variables   | Perception of Why Sponsor<br>Companies Are Sponsors |        |
|---|---|--------|
| Gender  | $r_s$   | 0.114  |
| Gender  | p   | 0.013* |
| A co  | $r_{\rm s}$   | 0.090  |
| Age   | p   | 0.051  |
| Thirmaitre  | $\mathbf{r}_{\mathrm{s}}$                           | -0.224 |
| University  | p   | 0.000* |
| Danilar Francisc Status                               | $r_{\rm s}$   | -0.108 |
| Regular Exercise Status                               | p   | 0.018* |
| In Which Trans Coarts Brown by Van Connect A Trans    | $r_{\rm s}$   | -0.036 |
| In Which Team Sports Branch Do You Support A Team     | p   | 0.429  |
| D. V. V. 4. C   | $r_{\rm s}$   | -0.312 |
| Do You Know the Sponsors of Your Favorite Team        | p   | 0.000* |
| De Verr Fellers the Asticities of Verr Ferresite Team | $r_{\rm s}$   | -0.329 |
| Do You Follow the Activities of Your Favorite Team    | p   | 0.000* |
| Esmila Inseria I suel                                 | $r_{\rm s}$   | -0.035 |
| Family Income Level                                   | p   | 0.445  |

<sup>\*=</sup>P<0.05

According to table; The demographic characteristics of the participants and the level of perception of the sponsor companies about why they sponsor were correlated according to the significance level of p < 0.05 by applying Spearman 's rho correlation test. It has been observed that it has a low significant relationship with their ability to do sports, a medium level with knowing the sponsors of their favorite teams, and a medium level with their status of following the activities of their favorite teams. However, no significant relationship was found between their age, the sports branch of the teams they support, their family income level, and the level of perception of the sponsor companies about why they sponsor.

Table 4. The relationship between demographic characteristics of participants and their attitude level towards sponsor companies

| Variables  | Attitude Towards Sponsor<br>Companies |        |
|--|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Gender   | $r_{\rm s}$                           | 0.112  |
| Gender   | p                                     | 0.015* |
| A  | $r_{\rm s}$                           | 0.099  |
| Age  | p                                     | 0.031* |
| Linivagaite  | $r_{\rm s}$                           | -0.129 |
| University   | p                                     | 0.005* |
| Danilar Francisco Chatra                           | $r_{\rm s}$                           | -0.116 |
| Regular Exercise Status                            | p                                     | 0.011* |
| L. Which Toom Counts Down to De Vou Counts A Toom  | $r_{\rm s}$                           | -0.022 |
| In Which Team Sports Branch Do You Support A Team  | p                                     | 0.628  |
| D. V. V. V the Common of V Formite Team            | $r_{\rm s}$                           | -0.333 |
| Do You Know the Sponsors of Your Favorite Team     | p                                     | 0.000* |
| Da Van Fallandha Astinitias of Van Fannita Tasan   | $r_{\rm s}$                           | -0.375 |
| Do You Follow the Activities of Your Favorite Team | p                                     | 0.000* |
| Family Income I and                                | $r_{\rm s}$                           | 0.039  |
| Family Income Level                                | p                                     | 0.399  |

<sup>\*=</sup>P<0.05

According to table; Demographic characteristics of the participants and their level of attitude towards the sponsor companies were correlated at a significance level of p<0.05 by applying Spearman's rho correlation test. The relationship between the gender of the participants and the level of attitude towards the sponsor companies was found to be low, their age to a low level, the university they studied at to a low level, and regular sports to a low level. It has been observed that there is a low significant relationship with their ability to do so, a medium level relationship with knowing the sponsors of their favorite teams, and a medium level significant relationship with their status of following the activities of their favorite teams. However, no significant relationship was found between the sports branch of the teams they support, their family income level, and their attitude towards sponsor companies.

Table 5. The relationship between team identity level, perception of why sponsor companies are sponsored, and attitude level towards sponsor companies

|                            | Team Identity Level | Perception of Why Sponsor<br>Companies Are Sponsors |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---|
| <b>Team Identity Level</b> |                     |   |
| Perception of Why Sponsor  | r = 0.593           |   |
| Companies Are Sponsors     | p = 0.000*          |   |
| Attitude Towards Sponsor   | r = 0.630           | r = 0.686   |
| Companies                  | p = 0.000*          | p = 0.000*  |

<sup>\*=</sup>P<0.05

The relationship between the team identification level, the perception of why the sponsor companies sponsor and the level of attitude towards the sponsor companies were correlated with each other according to the significance level of p < 0.05 by applying the Pearson correlation test, and all parameters were found to have a moderate relationship with each other.

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive level of the team identification level total score on other variables, and it was seen that the team identification level explained the total score of the sponsor companies 'perception of why they sponsor by 35% ( $R^2 = 0.351$ ;  $F(1,473)=256.140 \beta=0.593$ ; p<0.05 Y=13.606+0.486\*X).

The percentage of team identification level total score explaining the attitude level total score towards sponsor companies was found to be 40% ( $R^2 = 0.396$ ; F(1,473)=318.678  $\beta=0.630$ ; p<0.05 Y=8.730+0.586\*X).

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to examine the relationship between team identification levels of university students who are team supporters and their attitudes towards team sponsors and their perceptions of causality. Asthe demographic characteristics of the participants of this study are examined, it is seen that 24.6% are women and 75.4% are men. Similarly, in a study conducted on team identification specific to the football branch, 7.5% of the participants were women and 92.5% were men (Baş, 2008). In another study, other sports branches were also considered, and the results were found to be 38% women and 62% men in volleyball team support, and 22% women and 78% men in basketball team support (Acet, 1997). Also, it is thought that women are less willing to participate in this study because they are not as active as men in team retention. It is seen that 50.9% of the participants are 20 years old and under, and 49.1% are between the ages of 21-25. Since this study was limited to university students, the values obtained can be considered a reasonable result. When we look at the universities where the participants are students, it is seen that 51.4% of them studied at Dumlupinar University and 48.6% of them studied at Bilecik University. It is thought that this detected proportional closeness will contribute to the more homogeneous results of this study. When the participants 'regular exercise status is considered, it is seen that 66.5% answered yes and 33.5% answered no. It is thought that this result is due to the fact that some of the participating students are students of the Faculty of Sports Sciences and school team athletes.

When the participants were asked which branch of sports their favorite team was primarily involved in, the answer was Football with a rate of 74.7%, Basketball with a rate of

13.9% and Volleyball with a rate of 11.4%. Similarly, in a study conducted by Akkoç and Üzümün in 2022, 78.8% of the participants stated that they were fans of the team in Football, 11.3% in Volleyball and 9.8% in Basketball (Akkoç & Üzüm, 2022). These results are generally parallel to the level of interest in team sports branches in Turkiye. Participants: Do you know the sponsors of their favorite team? When asked the question, it is seen that 64.6% answered yes and 35.4% answered no. In a study conducted on university students, 23% of the students agreed and 57% strongly agreed with the statement "I know the company that sponsors my team" (Bayrak, 2020). Based on these results, it can be concluded that university student team supporters closely follow the companies that sponsor their teams. Participants were asked: Do you follow the activities of their favorite team? When asked the question, it is seen that 70.5% answered yes and 29.5% answered no. In a study conducted by Annamalai et al., it was found that fans who identified with their team participated in their team 's activities at a higher level (Annamalai et al., 2021).

According to Güllü and Güçlü, there is a close relationship between the level of fans following the activities of their teams and the level of fan identification. It is stated that fans with a high level of identification follow their team 's activities more closely (Güllü & Güçlü, 2006). This result shows that the identification levels of the students participating in current study are high.

When we look at the family income level of the participants, it is seen that there is a proportional density between students with an income of 11.500 TL and below and students with an income of 20.501 TL and above. This means that there is a serious difference between the family income levels of the students.

When the demographic characteristics of the participants are associated with the level of team identification, it can be seen that there is a low level of correlation between the participants' gender and their team identification level, a low level with their age, a low level with the university they study at, a low level with their regular sports activities, a low level with the sports branch of their favorite team, a low level with the sponsors of the teams they support. It has been observed that there is a medium level significant relationship with their knowledge and a moderate level significant relationship with their status of following the activities of the teams they support. However, no significant relationship was found between family income level and team identification level.

When the demographic characteristics of the participants are correlated with the perception level of the sponsor companies about why they sponsor, the relationship between the gender of the participants and the level of perception of why the sponsor companies sponsor them is low, the university they study at is low level, their regular sports activities are low, the level of knowing the sponsors of the teams they support is low. It was observed that it had a moderately significant relationship with their ability to follow the activities of their favorite teams. However, no significant relationship was found between their age, the sports branch of the teams they support, their family income level, and the level of perception of the sponsor companies about why they sponsor.

When the demographic characteristics of the participants are associated with the level of attitude towards the sponsor companies, the relationship between the participants' gender and their attitude towards the sponsor companies is low, their age is low, the university they study at is low, their regular sports activities are low, their knowledge of the sponsors of their teams is moderate. It was observed that it had a moderately significant relationship with their ability to follow the activities of their favorite teams. However, no significant relationship was found between the sports branch of the teams they support, their family income level, and their attitude towards sponsor companies.

When looking at the relationship between the team identification level, the perception of why sponsor companies sponsor and the level of attitude towards sponsor companies, it was seen that all parameters had a moderate relationship with each other. The thing to note here is that all variables are in a positive and significant relationship with each other. In other words, as a result of the increase in team identification levels of students, their perceptions of why sponsor companies sponsor them and their attitudes towards sponsor companies also increase positively. This situation provides guidance for institutions and organizations that are considering including sponsorship activities in corporate public relations and marketing projects. In this regard, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive level of the relationship determined in terms of the identity level total score on other variables.

As a result of the analysis, it was seen that the total score of the team identification level explained the total score of the sponsor companies' perception of why they sponsored themselves by 35%. In a study conducted by Shapiro et al., on the analysis of multiple spectator consumption behaviors, team identification and future behavioral intentions, it was determined that the level of team identification of the fans positively affects their perception of the reason

for the sponsorship, together with their positive attitude towards sponsors (Shapiro et al., 2013). In the research conducted by Duman et al. the level of team commitment and their perceptions of the environments that support their teams materially and morally were examined, and it was found that fans with a high level of commitment increased their demands for the products of the companies that are brand sponsors of the team products at the same rate compared to those with a lower level of commitment, and they had a positive opinion about the causality of the support activity (Duman et al., 2015). Similarly, in current study, it can be said that the perception of why sponsor companies sponsor is related to the level of team identification and increases in direct proportion.

In this study, the percentage of team identification level total score explaining the attitude level total score towards sponsor companies was determined to be 40%. In a study comparing consumer perception about sponsorship and advertising, it was observed that fans with high levels of identification developed positive attitudes towards the sponsor (Meenaghan, 2001). In another study, it was determined that depending on team identification, fans have feelings such as love, respect, trust and loyalty towards their teams, as well as similar feelings towards the companies that sponsor their teams, and that fans have more positive attitudes towards sponsor companies than companies that do not engage in sponsorship activities (Madrigal, 2000). The results of current study are consistent with the literature, and it can be said that there is a significant interaction and relationship between the level of team identification and the level of attitude towards sponsor companies.

The results of current study are parallel to the results of other studies in the literature, and in the light of all this information, fans with a higher level of team identification show positive attitudes towards the sponsor company and, accordingly, the perception of causality towards the sponsor companies is also positive. For this reason, fans with high levels of identification are a more important target for sponsor companies. It is thought that this community may be more interested in the brands and products of sponsor companies. This research and its results show that the level of team identification will positively affect attitudes towards sponsor companies and perceptions of causality in sponsorship. In this regard, it is hoped that the results of current research can have a guiding and strategy-determining effect on sports clubs and sponsor companies that will make agreements on sports sponsorship. It is evaluated that fans with a high level of team identification can be determined as a more important target audience for companies, and if sponsorship activities are carried out in this direction, they will contribute to sponsorship success. It is recommended that this study be analysed according to whether the

sponsoring companies are domestic or foreign. Alternatively, it could be analysed according to whether the attitudes of the students result in a difference in terms of their faculties. This research is limited to university students who are fans of volleyball, basketball, football and handball teams.

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| KATKI ORANI<br>CONTRIBUTION RATE                         | AÇIKLAMA<br>EXPLANATION   | KATKIDA BULUNANLAR CONTRIBUTORS                         |
|--|---|---|
| Fikir ve Kavramsal Örgü<br>Idea or Notion                | Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak Form the research hypothesis or idea         | Hüseyin Mete GÜNDOĞDU<br>Betül ALTINOK<br>Çetin ÖZDİLEK |
| Tasarım<br>Design  | Yöntem ve araştırma desenini tasarlamak<br>To design the method and research design.      | Hüseyin Mete GÜNDOĞDU<br>Betül ALTINOK<br>Çetin ÖZDİLEK |
| Literatür Tarama<br>Literature Review                    | Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak<br>Review the literature required for the study   | Hüseyin Mete GÜNDOĞDU<br>Betül ALTINOK<br>Çetin ÖZDİLEK |
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| Tartışma ve Yorum Discussion and Commentary              | Elde edilen bulguların değerlendirilmesi  Evaluation of the obtained finding              | Hüseyin Mete GÜNDOĞDU<br>Betül ALTINOK<br>Çetin ÖZDİLEK |

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Researchers do not have any personal or financial conflicts of interest with other people and institutions related to the research.

#### Etik Kurul Beyanı/ Statement of Ethics Committee

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This research was conducted with the decision of Kütahya Dumlupınar University Ethics Committee dated 26.12.2022 and numbered 166003.



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