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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## SPECTATORS' PARTICIPATION DECISIONS IN THE BASKETBALL MATCHES

### *Abstract*

Understanding the motives of spectators to participate in a basketball match is important for increasing the number of spectators. Main purpose of this study was to analyze the selected variables that affect on spectators' participation in basketball matches. Supporters of two Turkish professional basketball teams formed the sample of the study ( $n = 259$ ). Spectators' Participation Decision Scale was used to assess the factors that make participants decide to attend a match. Descriptive and Factorial MANOVA analyses were used in data analysis process and the analyses were conducted by IBM SPSS 22 package program. MANOVA results showed that there is a significant difference between attending type and factors ( $F(1, 212) = 2.83, p < .05$ ), and two main effects were found between attending type variable and socialization opportunity ( $F(2, 215) = 7.19, p < .008$ ). Results indicated that taking part in basketball organizations with friends is the most preferred attending type and spectators like to be with their friends in basketball matches. As a conclusion; in order to attract more spectators to the basketball venues, basketball managers should organize basketball venues in terms of spectators' needs.

**Keywords:** Basketball, spectators, participation decision

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the first Olympics in 776 BC, spectating sports events have been a long tradition (Trail and James, 2001). With the evolution of travel possibilities, watching sport events became more popular day by day (Zauhar, 2004). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern sports have begun and increased the number of spectators who participated in sport events (Andreff et al., 2006). Nowadays, sport spectating has become one of the most important forms of spending spare time in contemporary society (Gençer et al., 2011). Wide range of options are included in order to attract people to spend their spare time in sports events (Andreff et al., 2006). Increased leisure time choices make spectator-based sports disciplines more popular and more valuable (Gençer et al., 2011).

Sports spectators buy tickets, join matches, and follow star players or favorite teams. Hence reinforcement of them encourages sport industry. Without sport spectators, core of the game has no meaning (Dhurup, 2010). Mullin et al. (2007) expressed that interest of spectators takes attention of the sponsors, plus grade of this interest and support have an effect on media contracts and coverage. Understanding the spectators' reasons of spending time and money for a specific sports game is important as well as clarifying the main factor engaging the spectator to the event itself (Robinson et al., 2004). In sports industry, knowing and understanding why spectators participate specific sport game and how they decide to attend seem very important to take into consider.

There are some factors that affect spectators' participation decision. One of them is positive attitude toward sport events which are mostly related with intention to participate and consume sport event (Cunningham and Kwon, 2003). Another important factor is convenience, which affects a sport event attendance decisions in terms of time, traffic, schedule of the game, etc. (Ferreira and Armstrong, 2004; Zhang et al., 1995). Lastly, group affiliation which is mostly related with nature of spectator participation (Wann et al., 2008). Being a part of a group and spend time with the group increase participation motivation of spectators and force them to decide attending a sport event (Melnick, 1993; Pan et al., 1997).

The relations between sport spectators and participation decision were deeply examined on studies. For example, Trail et al. (2005) analyzed the effects of confirmation or disconfirmation of the spectators' expectancies about the game on the mood of the spectators. For ensuring participation retention, Zhang et al. (2003) checked the correlations among expenditure, sociodemographics and participation of the women's basketball spectators.

Douvis (2008) studied on non-participation reasons of Greek students to the professional basketball matches and recently Falls and Natke (2014) searched for relations between participation and ticket price in their panel study. In Turkish context, Gençer and Aycan (2008) studied on 267 soccer spectators in order to comprehend effects and reasons of participation decisions of Turkish spectators. Similarly, Aycan et al. (2009) searched on 181 specific soccer spectators. Aycan and his colleagues cared about relationship between team identification and participation decision of soccer spectators.

After professional soccer, professional basketball is the second most popular sport in Turkey (Aycan et al., 2009). Basketball has the biggest team sport success in international area. For instance with their former name “Efes Pilsen” brought Turkey’s first European Cup in team sports which is called FIBA Korać Cup in 1996. With this success, broadcasting and sponsorship incomes have increased since the last decade. Even basketball clubs are stronger today, attendance of basketball spectators into the matches is still less than expected (Gençer et al., 2011). Match attendance ratio of TBF BEKO Basketball League in 2011-2012 season is 2,056 while it is 10,181 in TFF Spor Toto Soccer Super League (Haber 3; Milliyet).

Even though basketball had the biggest success in international level and is the second most popular sport in Turkey, there are very few studies related with effects of participation decision of Turkish basketball spectators (Gençer et al., 2011). For this reason, aim of this study was to analyze the selected variables that may have an effect on spectators’ participation decision in a basketball match.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

Participants of this study were 259 (63 female and 196 male) basketball spectators who attended matches of two professional Turkish basketball teams located in Ankara city. All participants voluntarily accepted to attend this study. Age range of participants were 14-60 years ( $M=29.84$ ).

### **Design of the Study**

Causal-comparative design was used in this study. Data collectors were informed about how to apply the surveys before application of the surveys. Despite efforts of

controlling extraneous variables by asking demographic questions, there might be still another factor that influence the causality. This is a limitation of the study.

### **Instruments**

In this study, there were two types of instruments. One of them was the instrument which was about demographic information of participants. There were eight demographic questions examining gender, age, marital status, education status, occupation, average monthly income, match attending type, and match attending frequency of the participants. The other instrument was Spectators' Participation Decision Scale (SPDS) which was developed by Gençer and Aycan (2008). It was a 5 point likert scale. Gençer and Aycan (2008) calculated validity and reliability of SPDS. They found the Cronbach's alpha values of the factors as; physical environment .91, rival team .92, favorite team .85, convenience of the organization .82, attraction of the match .76, socialization opportunity .72; respectively. According to study results of Gençer and Aycan (2008), SPDS is a valid and reliable instrument and it can be used in Turkish context.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Permission of the managements of two teams were held to use their spectators as participants in the study. Before application of the study; approval of METU Human Subjects Ethics Committee was held. Data were collected before the beginning of the matches and only one selected match of each teams.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted on 259 surveys of participants. Nunnally (1978) defined that required sample size for a quantitative (survey) study was 10 for 1 item. Hence sample size in this study must be at least  $24 \times 10 = 240$ . As result, sample size for this research was appropriate and satisfactory.

In addition to demographic analyses, for investigating the causalities; Factorial MANOVA analyses were conducted. IBM SPSS 22.0 package program was used to conduct statistical analyses in this study. Significance level of this study was determined as  $p < .05$ . There are six dependent variables (factors). When checking the main effects of variables (tests of between subjects), it was adjusted as  $.05/6=.008$ .

## RESULTS

Mean age of the participants is  $M = 29.84$ . Number of male (75.68 %) participants in this study were dominantly more than female (24.32 %) participants. 37.07 % of the participants were married while 62.93 % of them were single. Most of the spectators were graduated from a university or a college (61.78 %) and there were very few participants who were graduated from secondary school (2.32 %). Analyzing the occupations of the spectators; most of them were students (41.31 %) meanwhile housewives (1.16 %) were rare. Most of the spectators' income were less than 1000 tl (31.07 %). Mainly; participants declared that they participate matches with their friend(s) (63.71 %) and they follow matches once in a week (33.98 %). Detailed information are given in the tables below.

**Table 1:** Demographic profile of the participants

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	63	24.32
Male	196	75.68
Total	259	100.00
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	96	37.07
Single	163	62.93
Total	259	100.00
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Secondary School	6	2.32
High School	52	20.08
University / College	160	61.78
Graduate	40	15.44
Total	259	100.00
<b>Job</b>		
Student	107	41.31
Self-Employment	33	12.74
Official	45	17.37
Retired	14	5.41
Workman	15	5.79
Housewife	3	1.16
Unemployed	8	3.09
Other	32	12.36
Total	257	99.23
<b>Average Monthly Income</b>		
1000 TL or Less	81	31.27
1001 - 2000 TL	47	18.15
2001 - 3000 TL	35	13.51
3001 - 4000 TL	32	12.36
Total	235	90.73

**Table 2:** Frequency of match attending variables

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Match Attending Types</b>		
Alone	20	7.72
With Family	72	27.80
With Friend(s)	165	63.71
Missing	2	0.77
Total	257	99.23
<b>Match Attending Ratios</b>		
Once in a Week	88	33.98
Twice in a Month	62	23.94
Once in a Month	73	28.19
Other	36	13.90
Total	259	100.00

According to findings; socialization opportunity scores of the participants had the biggest mean value ( $M = 3.63$ ). Convenience of the organization ( $M = 3.61$ ) and physical environment ( $M = 3.58$ ) were the other factors which have high mean scores whereas rival team factor had the least mean value ( $M = 2.80$ ).

**Table 3:** Descriptive statistics of the sub-factors

	N	Missing	Mean	SD
Physical Environment	243	16	3.58	.74
Rival Team	246	13	2.80	.96
Favorite Team	252	7	3.50	1.00
Convenience of the Organization	254	5	3.61	.70
Attraction of the Match	248	11	3.41	.88
Socialization Opportunity	249	10	3.63	.92

Before conducting MANOVA, assumptions were checked. Normality was analyzed with skewness & kurtosis and outliers. Results showed that normality assumption was met. Homogeneity of variances assumption was checked via box's M test and levene's test. It was concluded that homogeneity of variances was met ( $p > .05$ ).

Factorial MANOVA results demonstrated that there is a multivariate significant difference between marital status and factors ( $F(1, 212) = 3.70, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10$ ). When the main effects of results are checked, there is no main effect between factors and marital status ( $p > .008$ ).

Findings of multivariate test between gender and factors showed significant difference ( $F(1, 212) = 2.53, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$ ). On the other hand there is no significant main effect between gender and factors.

There is not any significant multivariate difference ( $p < .05$ ) and main effect ( $p < .008$ ) between educational status and factors. The same results were gathered for job variable as well.

When looking at the income variable, significant multivariate difference between income and factors was found ( $F(1, 212) = 1.56, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$ ). But no significant main effect was observed ( $p < .008$ ).

There is a significant difference between attending type and factors ( $F(1, 212) = 2.83, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$ ). Also there is a significant main effect between attending type and socialization opportunities ( $F(2, 215) = 7.19, p < .008, \eta^2 = .06$ ). Bonferroni post hoc results showed that spectators attending matches with their friends or their family consider the match venues as socialization opportunities more than spectators attending alone ( $p < .05$ ).

Lastly, results indicated that there is no significant multivariate difference between attending ratio and factors ( $p < .05$ ), however there is a significant main effect between attending ratio and convenience of the organization ( $F(3, 216) = 4.75, p < .008, \eta^2 = .06$ ). Bonferroni post hoc results indicated that spectators attending matches once a month give importance to convenience of organization more than spectators attending matches twice a month and once a week ( $p < .05$ ).

## **DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION**

Purpose of this study was to evaluate the factors that lead basketball spectators to attend a match. Even though basketball has big success and media interest, number of spectators attending match venues is not enough (Gençer et al., 2011). Effect of gender differences, especially insufficient women attendance, could be one of the reasons.

Similar with the previous studies (Gençer and Aycan, 2008; Kahle et al., 2001; Pan et al., 1997; Salman and Giray, 2010); our results displayed that the number of female spectators is less than male spectators. For example; Farrell et al. (2011) studied on 12 women attending basketball match venues. They used focus group interview method in order to comprehend women's sport spectatorship and searched for marketing activities to attract them. They concluded that men influence participation decisions of women. As a result, women participation seems necessary and basketball teams need to reorganize their marketing activities.

Attending basketball venues as single or married seems important for factors of this study. MANOVA results indicated that marital status of spectators had an overall effect on factors, but there is no main effect. Similar findings were found on study of Gençer and Aycan (2008) who obtained significant main effect between physical environment and marital status. Using t-test between physical environment and marital status, and having soccer spectator for participants might be the reason of this main effect.

One of the factors of this study was monthly income of spectators. Multivariate results defined that income had a significant effect on factors. Some researchers found significant main effect on income variable (Pan et al., 1997), however in our study, there was no significant main effect. This contradict result could be the reason of having different samples of participants.

Meanwhile, some variables of this study such as job and educational status had no multivariate or univariate effects on selected factors ( $p > .05$ ). In literature, different results were available. For instance, Zhang et al. (1995) studied on 861 NBA spectators and found that job and education status are related with participation decision. Different results may be stemmed from different assessment tool or sample size.

Zhang et al. (2003) emphasized on the importance of sociodemographics and lifestyle of basketball spectators on their consumption. They inferred that WNBA team managers should take into account sociodemographic attributes in their promotional activities to get attraction and retainment of the spectators. Our results are on the same way with the results of Zhang et al. (2003). Similar conclusions may be valuable for Turkish basketball managers when considering results of this study.



Taking part in basketball organizations with friends is the most preferred attending type of this study. Result defined that spectators like to be with their friends in basketball matches. In line with this result, McMillan and Chavis (1986) expressed that sport spectators' sense of community emotion has a major role for creating and developing a sport spectator community. They also believed that before participating an activity, the spectator has to feel this sense of community with other spectators. This must be the reason why basketball spectators in this study gave the most importance to socialization opportunities.

Convenience of the organization which has sub-factors such as match day, ticket price and forecast on the match day is the second most effective factor for participation decision of basketball spectators based on findings of this research. Finding is similar with study of Zhang et al. (1995) who found that convenience of the organization and schedule had substantial impact on participating basketball venues. Moreover, convenience of the organization has important role for attracting spectators to sport events in Turkish context (Aycan et al., 2009; Gençer and Aycan, 2008). Although favorite team and attraction of the match variables have less importance in this study, Trail et al. (2005) found that confirmation or disconfirmation of expectancies about level of game and outcome affect mood of the spectators. Mood of the spectator affects conative loyalty (Trail et al., 2005). These findings are indicator for the importance of favorite team and attraction of the match variables. Findings may also guide sport managers to retain spectators and create spectator loyalty.

Future studies are needed in order to comprehend effects of participation decision on different sports and participants. Furthermore; a specific sport context might be examined in longitudinal studies in terms of different time and physical environment.

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