

# **Influence of Team-Based Trust and Team Identification on Behavioral Loyalty: A Study of Soccer Fans**

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## Research Article

### Abstract

*Team trust is one of the most significant issues associated with satisfaction and loyalty, and it continues to be a fundamental variable for sports marketers. Research has demonstrated that team identification has a critical role on satisfaction and loyalty, yet findings have been limited regarding the importance of team-based trust for fans in soccer context. However, there is no other branch of sport that reflects the spirit of fan better than soccer (football). To fill this research gap, this study investigates relationships among team trust, team identification and loyalty. Therefore, the fact that the relationships between variables have not been analyzed before, point to the importance of the research. The data were collected in Turkey, using questionnaires, which were online self-administrated to fans of soccer teams in Turkey Football Super League. The data were collected using convenience sampling (n= 379). The questionnaire in the research included three scales, and demographic variables. The team trust scale was adapted from brand trust scale (Laroche et al., 2012). The team identification scale was adopted from Lee, Heere and Chung (2013). The seven-item team attitudinal loyalty scale was used to measure fans' loyalty level (Heere and Dickson, 2008). The result of the SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) revealed a significant relationship between team based trust and team identification ( $\beta = ,425$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ). The results show that there is no positive relationship between fans' team trust ( $\beta = ,086$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ) and behavioral loyalty was mediated by team identification. The study results also have significant managerial implications that extends theoretical framework of sports marketing by empirical results, it also offer a few implications for practice. Knowing the relationship between team' trust and team identification provides new perspectives for both academicians and practitioners as well.*

**Keywords:** Team trust, Team identity, Team loyalty, Sports marketing, Soccer fans

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## Takım Temelli Güven ve Takım Kimliğinin Davranış Sadakati Üzerine Etkisi: Futbol Taraftarları Çalışması

### Öz

*Takım güveni ve sadakat ilişkin en önemli konulardan biridir ve spor pazarlamacıları için temel bir değişken olmaya da devam etmektedir. Araştırmalar takım kimliğinin tatmin ve sadakat üzerinde kritik bir rolü olduğunu göstermiştir, ancak futbol bağlamında taraftarlar için takım temelli güvenin önemi ile ilgili bulgular sınırlıdır. Bu araştırma takım güveni, takım kimliği ve tatmin arasındaki ilişkileri incelemek için yapılmıştır. Bu nedenle, daha önce değişkenler arası ilişkilerin analiz edilmemiş olması, araştırmanın önemine işaret etmektedir. Veriler, Türkiye Futbol Süper Ligi'ndeki futbol takımı taraftarlarına çevrimiçi olarak uygulanmakta olan anketler kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Veriler kolayda örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak toplanmıştır (n= 379). Araştırma verileri, üç farklı ölçek ve demografik bilgilerden toplanmıştır. Takım güven ölçeği marka güven ölçeğinden uyarlanmıştır (Laroche ve diğerleri, 2012). Takım kimliği ölçeği Lee, Heere ve Chung (2013)'den alınmıştır. Taraftarların sadakat seviyesini ölçmek için yedi maddelik davranışsal takım sadakat ölçeği kullanılmıştır (Heere ve Dickson, 2008). YEM (Yapısal Eşitlik Modeli) sonucu ekip temelli güven ile takım kimliği arasında anlamlı bir ilişki ( $\beta= ,425$ ;  $p<0,01$ ) olduğu görülmüştür. Elde edilen sonuçlar, taraftarların takım güveni ile davranışsal sadakat arasında direkt bir pozitif bir ilişki olmadığını ( $\beta=,086$ ;  $p>0,05$ ), takım kimliğinin buna aracılık ettiğini göstermektedir. Çalışma sonuçları ayrıca, spor pazarlamasının teorik çerçevesini ampirik sonuçlarla genişleten önemli yönetimsel uygulamalara sahip olup, uygulama alanı için de birkaç sonuç sunmaktadır. Takımın güveni ve takım kimliği arasındaki ilişkiyi bilmek hem akademisyenlere hem de sektördeki uygulamacılara yeni ve farklı bakış açıları geliştirmelerine olanak sağlayacaktır.*

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Okul sporları, Disiplin cezası, Beden eğitimi öğretmeni, Sporcu-öğrenci, Fair play

### Introduction

Nowadays, where competition increases daily, the most significant strategic goal of businesses is to create brand loyalty. In the studies conducted in literature (Dick and Basu 1994; Ballester and Alemn 2001; Bloomer and Kasper 1995) it was established that brand loyalty has many benefits that directly affect the profitability of a business. Due this reason, the interdependence to be established between a brand and its customers is considered as the key to the business' success (Ballester andAleman 2001). Brand loyalty, which is addressed in various manners in many industries, is conceptualized as team loyalty in the sports industry. The ability to present the reasons behind establishing loyal customers has a vital importance in the economic sustainability of clubs in the sports industry (Dalakas and Melancon, 2012; Tapp, 2004; Yoshida et al., 2015). It has been established in the studies regarding sports management that the loyalty of sports fans are not limited to a single object concerning sports, but it is of a more complex structure that cannot be expressed in a simple manner.

The factors influencing the loyalty of sports fans have been considered as the sports, player, city, coach, athletic level and the fans' community with different dimensions in various studies (Heere and James, 2007; Mahony, Madrigal and Howard, 2000; Trail, Anderson and Fink, 2005; Kwon, Trail and Anderson, 2005; Katz and Heere, 2013; Tapp, 2004) in the relevant field from past to present. Tapp (2004) has stated that although customer satisfaction is the primary factor in establishing customer loyalty in many other industries, it would not certainly guarantee loyalty in the sports industry. In this respect, he has also stated that in contrast to the standard belief of football team fans (that fans

are loyal to their team in any circumstance), the behavioral, attitudinal variables affecting loyalty should be examined. To that end, in the sports industry, fans should be regarded as customers, sports clubs should be regarded as brands and similar to the customers in other industries, the interests and needs of fans should also be determined.

It can be said that, the psychological bond that fans establish with their teams constitutes the common ground of the team identity definitions provided by the studies on team identity (Funk and James 2001; Wann and Pierce 2003). Team identity is considered as the mainstay in social identity theory. Accordingly, in the studies conducted with regards to team identity (Phua 2012; Murrell and Dietz 1992), the social identity theory has been utilized. Tajfel (1981) has stated that an individual's team identity is an important part of their social identity and Phua (2012) accordingly stated that in addition to team identity being an indicator of social identity, it also concerns the establishment and maintenance of social bonds. Murrell and Dietz (1992), with the starting point of the social identity theory, provide that because fans consider the team they support as an extension of their sense of self, they feel a high level of loyalty towards these teams.

Team identification has been a subject to various discussions from past to present (e.g. Madrigal 2000; Gwinner and Swanson 2003; Lee and Kang 2015; Branscombe and Wann 1991; Heere and James 2007; Wann and Pierce, 2003; Kwon, Trail and James, 2007; Dalakas and Melancon, 2012) and accordingly, differences were detected in the focus points of the examination of levels of team identity. For example, the influence of team identification in attendance to the games has been examined in various studies. Wakefield and Sloan (1995); Hill and Green (2000) have set forth that fans with a higher level of team identification have a higher rate of attendance compared to other fans, even when their team is not having a good season. Moreover, Wakefield and Sloan (1995) has found that fans with a lower level of team identification forget the game shortly after the game while fans with a high level of team identification do not forget the games as easily. Sutton, McDonald, Milne and Cimperman (1997) also stated that fans with a high level of team loyalty spend much more money and time for game attendance, and in addition, they continue to discuss matters concerning their teams even in the absence of games.

The concept of trust is very important in defining brand trust. Trust is defined as the expectations of the parties to a transaction, accepting of such expectations and risks related to acting in accordance with such expectations (Deutsch, 1958). The concept of trust has been researched in detail in several studies in different areas (Kramer, 1999; Lewicki, McAllister and Bies, 1998). Research conducted in the field of organizational behavior, it is presented that trust is influenced by employee performance (Dirks and Skarlicki, 2009; Mayer and Davis, 1999); team performance (Hempel, Zhang and Tjosvold, 2009); organizational communication (Smith and Barclay, 1997); the team's contribution to its goals (Costa, Roe and Taillieu, 2001); coordination and cooperation (McAllister, 1995). Furthermore, the concept of trust, and brand trust in particular, has been subject to several researches in the marketing literature. In terms of brand trust, there are two main components: dependability and expertise. Dependability represents the brand trust that honestly provides quality performance. Expertise represents the perceived level of a

brand's experience and competence in the product/service category (Sung and Kim 2010). When the relevant literature is analyzed, it is generally suggested that trust is associated with beliefs such as competence and honesty (Coulter and Coulter, 2002).

The paradigm transformations in the marketing industry that put the consumer in the center, have established gaining the customers' trusts as the primary objective of businesses. In relevant researches (e.g. Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Lau and Lee, 1999), it was established that brand trust affects brand loyalty. Chaudhuri and Holbrook, (2001) define brand trust as the customers' trust in the brand's ability to carry out its stated functions. Although the brand affect is a more spontaneous process, brand trust is a very well thought and designed process (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). When taken into consideration such processes, although brand trust and brand effect have significant differences, brand trust is one of the important variables with significant influence on brand effect (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Halim, 2006; Sung and Kim, 2010).

In several studies concerning the sports sciences (i.e. Heere and James, 2007; Trail, et al., 2005; Kwon et al., 2005; Katz and Heere, 2013; Tapp, 2004), it is presented that supporter loyalty is affected by many interrelated factors. In addition, although the effects of trust between crew members (players, coaches, management) on team performance is examined in sports sciences literature (i.e. Moore and Stevenson, 1991; Mach, Dolan and Tzafirir, 2010), there are a limited number of studies focusing on the different relations between the diversified structure of the fans' team trust. In addition, there is no other branch of sport that reflects fan loyalty and team trust better than football. It can be observed that there are limited studies focusing on the relationship between the fans' behavioral loyalty and team trust in the current literature on the subject. In light of the provided information, the objective of this study is to analyze the various factors that influence the team loyalty of football fans in accordance with the methodological principles of SEM (structural equity modeling). In light of the foregoing, this study will primarily present hypothesis with reference to the literature and a theoretical frame for said hypothesis, afterwards, the validity and dependability of the measurement model utilized for research will be tested, and finally, the relationships within the structural model presented will be discovered. In this respect, the presented results will be discussed within the scope of the relevant literature.

#### *Hypothesis concerning the research model*

Mutual trust is an important quality of a successful social change between both persons and institutions. To that end, the key to organizations' success is the establishment of a trustworthy identity between several sharers (i.e. the coach, fans, and players) and the organization (Keh and Xie, 2009). The persons that identify with a dependable organization tend to display similar behaviors (Martínez and Del Bosque, 2013). Similarly, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) have provided that perceiving the firm's identity as dependable is very important in self-identifying with these firms. Ho, Kuo and Lin (2012) have presented that the social identity in a work place is related to the trust in said workplace. In establishing long-term close relationships, trust is one of the key

factors. In this respect, Keh and Xie (2009) have stated that customer trust positively affects customer identity. Moreover, similar to this study, Martínez and Del Bosque (2013) have also stated that the trust of the customers for the firm positively affects the customer identity. In accordance with the presented information, the first hypothesis of this study is formed as follows:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between team trust and team identification.

Team identification is used as one of the most important variables in expressing the fans' behavior. Underwood et al. (2001) have stated that the fans who feel that their identities are closer to the team tend to feel like a part of the team within the process. Park et al., (2008) have provided that in establishing fans' loyalty, sports clubs should focus on the sense of self which is directly connected to the concept of team identity. In relevance to said information, Heere and James (2007) have set forth that the sense of belonging towards a team has effects on the social identity. Bodet and Bernache-Assollant (2011) has stated that the sports marketers should focus on team identification in order to establish team loyalty. In the sports sciences literature, several studies were conducted setting forth that team identification is related to team loyalty. Sutton et al., (1997) have stated that as the fans' level of team identification increases, the time and money they spend for attending the games also increase significantly. Furthermore, Madrigal (2000) has detected that there is a relationship between team identification and the tendency to shop from the team sponsors. Funk and James (2001) have set forth that team identification is related to the process of displaying loyal supporter behavior. Wakefield and Sloan (1995), Hill and Green, (2000) and Matsuoka et al. (2003) have provide that as team identification increases, the attendance to the games also increases. In accordance with these results, the second hypothesis of this study was formed as follows:

H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between team identification and team loyalty.

Keh and Xie (2009) stated that trust is the most important element of success in an organization. Spekman (1988) also stated that trust is the, cornerstone "of the long-term, consumer-business relationship. Trust also affects loyalty by affecting the consumer's perception of compliance with business values (Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner, 1998). Again, Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner (1998), this situation, the consumer's perception of similarity between the values of the enterprise, the loyalty of the enterprise may be due to increased loyalty. Establishing long-term loyalty-based relationships with consumers is the main goal of all marketing activities. Regarding this, Reichheld and Schefter (2000) pointed out the relationship between consumer confidence and loyalty by stating that trust was the first and most important structure on the road to customer loyalty. In accordance with this information, the third hypothesis of this research was formed as follows:

H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between team trust and team loyalty.

## Method

### *Sample*

The number of stadium entrance cards (*Passolig*) surpassed 4.5 million and the fans of the “three major teams” (Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş) have more than half of the ‘Passolig’ cards (<https://www.passolig.com.tr>) by 2019. Additionally, more than 5 million fans watched the matches at the stadiums in Turkey (<https://www.internethaber.com>). Within the scope of this study, a total of 379 fans of any team within the Turkish Football Super League were reached with the convenience sampling method by way of personal interviews. Additionally, the survey form was presented to the participants through Google Drive forms on the online platform. For the collection of the data, the study was announced in the social media accounts of fans and comprehensive information regarding the study was provided to the participants. IP restrictions to the online forms were established in an effort to prevent one person filling out more than one survey form. Additionally, it was requested that individuals who are not fans of any team of the Turkish Football Super League do not participate in the study. Similar to the attendance to football games, the study sample group majority consists of fans that are male (77.6%) and in the age range of 18-25 (56.1%).

### *Measurement Tools*

For the team identification levels of the fans participating in the study, the four-item measure that developed by Lee, Heere and Chung (2013) was utilized. For team trust, the measurement developed by Laroche et al. (2012), for brand trust was utilized after revising the terms to fit football teams. In addition, the 7-item team loyalty measure scale developed by Heere and Dickson (2008) was utilized. For the purpose of establishing the measurement equivalence, all items used within the scope of this study were firstly translated into Turkish by two expert academicians on the subject, and then were translated back to English and thus, any potential language issues were averted (Hambleton and Kanjee, 1993). For the purpose of monitoring the clarity of the expressions used in the survey forms, a pilot study was conducted with 30 fans (football fans of Turkish Football Super League in Eskisehir) from the sample group of the study and the final version of the survey form was prepared by making the necessary revisions in accordance with the feedback received from the pilot study (Babbie, 1998).

## Findings

Hair et al. (2006) has defined the SEM as the research procedure that sets forth the multiplied relationships between different structures. In literature, research procedure is tested with the two-phased approach consisting of measurement and structural phases. While the relationship between variables and structures are primarily being confirmed within the scope of the measurement model, the causality is being tested within the scope of structural model. In this study, which aims at exploring the causality between different structures, it has been established that utilizing the SEM procedure would be appropriate. In light of the given information, the research model was tested with the two-phased

approach consisting of measurement and structure models, within the scope of the SEM application by means of the SPSS Amos 20 program.

### Measurement model

Within the scope of the study, confirmatory factor analysis was applied through the Amos 22v program, which consists of the 3 structures that takes place in the study (i.e. Team identification (4-items). Team trusts (3-items) and Team loyalty (7-items). With the fit indexes achieved as a result of the analysis conducted, the accuracy of the measurement model was presented ( $X^2= 218.308$   $p=0.000$ .  $X^2/df=3.119$ .  $GFI=0.927$ .  $CFI = 0.948$ .  $TLI = 0.933$ .  $IFI =0.949$ .  $RMSEA =0.076$ ). These values satisfied the criteria established by Bagozzi and Li (1988), Browne and Cudeck (1999), and Hu and Bentler (1999).

**Table 1.** Dimensions of team trust, team identification and loyalty

Structures	Factor Loads
<i>Team Trust (AVE: .655). (Cronbach's alpha: .841). (CR: .850)</i>	
My team satisfies most of my expectations.	.844
I trust my team.	.864
My team does not disappoint me.	.712
<i>Team Identification (AVE: .529). (Cronbach's alpha: .778). (CR: .817)</i>	
I see myself as a good supporter of my team.	.676
People around me know me as a good supporter of my team.	.758
I like wearing clothes that carry my team's colors.	.658
I follow my team on the media on a regular basis.	.807
<i>Team Loyalty (AVE: .537). (Cronbach's alpha: .864). (CR: .889)</i>	
I will continue to support my team even if there are no star players in my team.	.704
Even if my close friends support other teams, I will not change my team.	.615
Even if my family does not want me to support this team, I will continue to support my team.	.628
Even if my team plays badly, I will continue to be a supporter of this team.	.731
Nothing will lessen my devotion to this team.	.751
It is hard to change my opinions of my team.	.808
The team that I support is important to me.	.861
<i>Fit values: (<math>X^2= 218.308</math> <math>p=0.000</math>, <math>X^2/SD =3.119</math>, <math>GFI=0.927</math>, <math>CFI = 0.948</math>, <math>TLI = 0.933</math>, <math>IFI =0.949</math>, <math>RMSEA =0.076</math>).</i>	

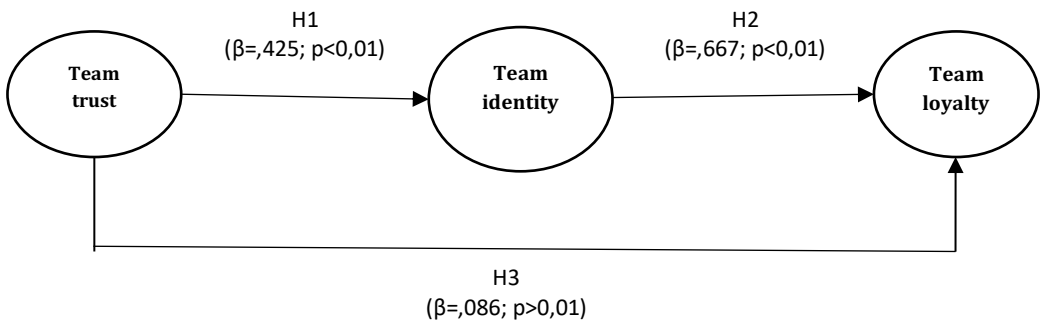
### Findings regarding the validity and dependability of the measurement tools

For the purposes of setting forth the level of validity and the reliability of the structures examined within the scope of the study, several validity and reliability analysis recommended in literature were utilized. In this respect, to determine the discriminant validity of the measurement model, the AVE values of all of the structures were calculated. Fornell and Larcker (1981) state that all of the values should be 0.5 and above. It is seen from the results of the conducted analysis that all values are above 0.5. Stimson,

Carmines and Zeller (1978) have stated that all items taken within the scope of the study being 0.6 and above would confirm the relationship of the statements with the relevant structures. It is established that the factor load of all of the statements within the study are above 0.6. For the external validity of the measurement model, the relationship of all the structures with another were analyzed and it was determined that all structures have meaningful relationships with each other yet none of the said relationships are above 0.85. Malhotra and Peterson (2006) have stated that in order to establish the reliability of the structures, their Cronbach's alpha indexes must be 0.6 and above. In this respect, as a result of the analysis conducted, it was established that the Cronbach's alpha indexes of all the structures are indeed above 0.6. Accordingly, as a result of the analysis conducted and the values obtained within the scope of the study, it can be stated that the research model is a valid and reliable model and that a structural model can be established in this sense.

### Structural model

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model was created and tested. As a result of the analysis conducted, it was established that the model has acceptable goodness-of-fit index values ( $X^2= 236.407$   $p= 0.000$ ,  $X^2/df= 3.426$ ,  $GFI= 0.920$ ,  $CFI= 0.942$ ,  $TLI= 0.923$ ,  $IFI= 0.942$ ,  $RMSEA= 0.070$ ). All the statistics in SEM are within the acceptance ranges, indicating a good of fit to the data (Bagozzi and Li, 1988; Browne and Cudeck, 1999; Hu and Bentler, 1999).



**Figure 1.** Structural model

### Hypothesis Tests

As a result of the hypothesis tests conducted, the two hypothesis set forth within the scope of the study were accepted ( $p<0,01$ ). These results indicated hypothesis acceptance of H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>. In this respect, it is established that there is a positive and important relationship between the team trust and the team identification of football fans. In addition to this, it is also established as a result of the analysis conducted that there is a positive and important relationship between the team identification and team loyalty of



the fans. In addition, the third hypothesis was rejected. According to this, football team supporters did not have a significant effect on team loyalty (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Results of structural model and hypotheses

Analyze	R-Coefficient	T-Value	Result
H1 Team identification<--- Team Trust	.425	6.21	Accepted**
H2 Team Loyalty <--- Team Identity	.667	4.30	Accepted**
H3 Team Loyalty<--- Team Trust	,086	1,76	Rejected

## Discussion and Conclusion

The results of CFA revealed validity and reliability for scales of team trust, team identification and loyalty. Trust is an inseparable part of team work and requires tasks that include a high level of interdependency between the members. This interdependency can create a synergy of cooperation and interaction between the team members (Fiore, Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001). When the subject is assessed in this scope, the world of sports presents several examples of both teams that can work well together and teams that cannot. It is not hard to imagine the high pressure put on professional sports teams, especially when the big amounts of money and resources provided for such teams are considered. Because sports teams contain a nature and clear performance results of their own, the scope of these professional sports provide a perfect opportunity to analyze such factors.

In addition to testing the relationship between team trust and team identification, this study seeks to determine the role of team identification on behavioral loyalty of soccer fans. In this respect, our study was formed primarily to discover the relationship between the football fans' trust in their teams and their team identification and loyalty. Liu et al. (2011) has indicated that brand trust is an important intermediary variable in the customer behavior before and after the purchase of the product and that it provides for loyalty in the long term. This exposes the importance of trust in terms of the most important goal of sports marketers which is to create team loyalty. The result of the SEM revealed a significant relationship between team based trust and team identification. As expected, there are also significant relationships between team identification and behavioral loyalty. The results obtained through this study are of the supportive quality of these relationships. This result is in line with the prior research suggesting that identification level of fans provides an important indicator for behavioral loyalty. Trust was especially important for the consumers of sports team. We discuss implications for theory and practice. However, there is no direct relationship between team trust and behavioral loyalty. Findings indicated that team identification appears to play an important mediating role in loyalty behavior of soccer fans. The indirect relationship between trust and loyalty is in line with the finding that brand trust is an important intermediary variable on customer behavior (Liao et al., 2011).

Moreover, the finding of current study is in line with the view that brand trust is one of the most important factors in the development of consumer loyalty (Gommans et al., 2001; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2001; Elliott and Yannopoulou, 2007). In the marketing literature, even though it has been analyzed through different perspectives, the concept of trust was evaluated to be a cognitive variable in the studies conducted (e.g., Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu, 2007). Brand trust is one of the most important factors in developing consumer loyalty (Gommans et al., 2001; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Elliott and Yannopoulou, 2007). Brands with high level of consumer loyalty and effect are related to brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). The consumers' beliefs in the brand being dependable, consistent, competent, responsible, beneficial, just and honest are important factors that increase brand trust (Altman and Taylor, 1973; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). To that end, the consumers have expectations in terms of the foreseeability, or in other words satisfaction of the consistency, competence and performance of the products bought (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). With reference to this, although in many other industries customer satisfaction is seen as the most important parameter in creating customer loyalty, in the sports industry, satisfaction does not with certainty guarantee loyalty. In this respect, in contrast to the standard belief of football team fans (i.e. the belief that fans are loyal to their team in any circumstance), the variables affecting loyalty should be examined with different approaches (Tapp, 2004). In our study, relationship of team trust with team identification was established, yet its relationship with team loyalty was not examined. However, within the scope of the research, the relationship between team identification and team loyalty, which has been set previously revealed in many studies (e.g., Sutton et al., 1997; Madrigal, 2000; Funk and James, 2001), was determined in the research model.

When the subject is evaluated within this scope, this study sheds light to future studies concerning the analysis of the relationship between team trust and loyalty. The studies conducted have provided that a strong consumer-brand relationship is considerably important in creating brand loyalty (e.g., Aggarwal, 2004; Keller, 2012). In terms of relational marketing, trust is accepted to be an important factor in the success of marketing attempts. For example, Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) have defined trust as a feature of the relationship quality. Similarly, it has also been set forth that brand trust is an important part of the perception of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985) and that it is an important variable in the communication between the parties (Mohr and Nevin, 1990). Sung and Kim (2010) have stated that team identification is also one of the important variables which influence team trust. The good relationships that are developed would also bring trust with them. In line with the presented information and the results of our study, developing strong supporter and club relations would provide sport marketers with significant advantages in creating supporter loyalty.

Brand trust can also be defined as the desire to trust a brand based on beliefs, regardless of the uncertainties and risks (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) have set forth that brand trust significantly and positively affect team identity. In accordance, Tapp (2004) has stated

that in the sports industry, fans should be regarded as customers and sports clubs should be regarded as brands. When considering the subject in such scope, it has been empirically proven by our study that in football teams, which are considered as brands, team trust positively, affects team identity. Although there are several studies focusing on the relationship between team identification and loyalty in the related literature (e.g., Wakefield and Sloan, 1995; Sutton et al., 1997) studies discovering the relationship of team trust with said structures is very limited. Overall, the results obtained from this study will have significant contributions to the still developing literature. Through analyzing the data obtained in this study, it has been established that football fans' loyalty is related to their team identities and team trust. The results obtained provide sports marketers with important points in terms of the importance of team trust.

The study results also have significant managerial implications. Some practical insights can be drawn from this research. This study extends theoretical framework of sports marketing by empirical results (relationships among trust, identification and loyalty), it also offer a few implications for practice. Knowing the relationship between team trust and team identification provides new perspectives for both academicians and practitioners. As a theoretical contribution, the study presented a novel approach to investigate relationship team trust, team identification and team loyalty. In line with existing literature, the results of this study support the literature regarding fan behavior. Findings clearly revealed that team identity have a mediation effect. From a managerial perspective, the study demonstrates that analyzing these variables can reveal meaningful and managerially valuable insights from football fan behavior. Therefore, the results reveal important implications for sport marketing managers and policy makers for sport management.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

All studies contain limitations in accordance with their study models and processes. The study has some limitations in terms of scope and method, and small size sample. These limitations bring with them certain suggestions for future studies. The samples of our study were created through one of the nonprobability sampling methods, the convenience sampling method, in this respect, stronger results may be obtained through studies that are conducted by way of utilizing probability sampling methods. This study was conducted with regards to football fans, and more diversified results may be obtained through studies regarding different sports branches. For the purposes of our study, the views of the Turkish football fans were utilized, to that end, similar studies conducted with more intercultural samples will contribute to the analysis of the differences team trust display between cultures. In terms of literature, different models analyzing the relationship of team trust with different structures may be tested.

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