



THE EFFECT OF FAN'S BRAND TRUST ON BRAND LOYALTY

Murat Palalı¹,

Yavuz Yıldız²ⁱ

¹Sport Coordinator,
İzmir Economy University,
Türkiye

²Associate Professor,
Faculty of Sport Sciences,
Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University,
Türkiye

Abstract:

The aim of this study is to analyze and evaluate the determination of trust and loyalty level of basketball fans to their team and to help form strategic sales plan considering the trust and loyalty level of fans to their team. The data from the survey are generated from 283 fans ranging in age from 13 to 71 (205 male, 78 female) who participate in basketball games. As a result of the structural equation modelling, it has been found that brand trust has a positive and strong effect on attitudinal loyalty and attitudinal loyalty has a positive and strong effect on behavioral loyalty. According to the research results, the increase in the brand trust of fans may cause an increase in brand loyalty and thus contributing to the achievement of both financial and marketing aims. The financial aims of sports teams may be listed as profitability, increasing the market share, leading the price, licensed product sales, matchday revenues, increasing concessions/catering and providing high-quality services. On the other hand, the marketing purposes may be listed as increasing recognition, fan/customer retention, gaining new fans, developing new products, strengthening the brand, and increasing the brand value. When considered in these terms, obtaining the trust of the fans has crucial importance.

Keywords: brand trust, brand loyalty, sport, basketball

1. Introduction

Becoming a brand has the utmost importance in the sports industry, as it is in different areas of industry, and for sports clubs, most of which have become their own businesses. For sports clubs, competition has a vital significance in and out of the field (Yıldız et al.,

ⁱ Correspondence: email yavuz.yildiz@alanya.edu.tr

2012). The development of the sports industry and the increase in the shareholders of its market share also increases the competition as well as attracted the attention of various sectors. Sports clubs work on forming marketing strategies related to their current and future situations against their closest competitors in this competitive environment. Obtaining fans in this increasingly competitive environment of the sports market has become even more difficult. However, this difficulty does only not occur in sports, the consumer expectation increases rapidly in all sectors in similar ways (Rein et al., 2007).

With the globalization of sports, sports clubs have transferred athletes from overseas countries provide to recognition of their clubs' brands as well as an increase in the number of their fans on a broad scale. Increasing the number of fans for a sports club will bring in more ticket revenue, as well as great benefits to reach more sponsors and achieve higher broadcast earnings (Mullin et al., 2000).

With the increasing appreciation of sports today, it is observed that not only individuals but also enterprises have increased their relations towards this area. When considered from this point of view, it is seen that the fact that studies carried out in the field of sports are very important and these researches increase day by day (Salman & Giray, 2010). For professional sports organizations, spectators constitute a significant factor in the direct and indirect revenues they provide (Mullin et al., 2000) as well as in their contributions to the improvement of the team's performance on the home field (Courneya & Carron, 1992; Pollard & Pollard, 2005). Thus, it is extremely important to identify the factors that affect the participation of individuals as a fan in the provided activity (Trenberth & Garland, 2007; Zhang et al., 1995). From an economic point of view, factors such as price, income status, presence and prices of substitute products, size of the market, importance in terms of the outcome of the match and uncertainty of the result affect the participation of fans in sports competitions (Simmons, 2006).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sports Fans

Although the terms sports spectators and sports fans are often used interchangeably, Wann (1997) states that the distinction between these two terms is important and according to the author, sports fans refer to the individuals who are interested in an athlete or a team whereas sports spectators refer to the individuals who watch or listen to a sports event (Günay & Tiryaki, 2003). A fan can be described as someone who perceives himself as a fan of a particular team or a sport in general (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). Sports fans are the most important audience that supports their clubs' activities economically and psychologically, buys the services of clubs for a certain price, goes to the matches of the team no matter if the team's game is home or away to avoid leaving their team alone despite many difficulties and creates a real qualitatively market (Genç, 1998).

2.2. Brand Trust in Sports

There are many definitions of brand trust. Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) state that the brand must have the necessary functions in order to create an environment that the consumer can trust with the brand. Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) defined brand trust as providing with the reliability levels required by the expectations of the consumers regarding the product they are interested in and for them to feel safe and the sufficient reliability formed because of this level of expectation provided about the product. Reliability is examined in a wide range from the quality of the product to meeting the expectations it offers to the consumer, to ensuring communication between the product and the consumer (Jon, 2005). In addition, it is stated that for the consumer, trust in the product is a must for the foundation of the brand (Crosby, 1990).

The value of a brand is that consumers can build a greater trust for any product than other companies and meet their expectations. Brand value is the gaining the loyalty and willingness to pay more of consumer, who has trust to the brand (Lassar, W; Mittal, B; Sharma, 1995). Due to the consumer trust created for any product, the value of the brand is increased. By means of increased trust, the consumer's loyalty to the brand and the growth of the brand can be achieved. Through this value, the brand can arrange the required price easily for the product and strategies against rivals can be determined. Also due to the obtained powerful brand value, promotional activities such as bonuses and pricing against other firms that are active in the market can be carried out more easily (Tapçı, 2006). Since the consumer displays a positive tendency towards buying the product (Lau & Lee, 1999), sympathy and loyalty emerge as a consequence of brand trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Garbarino and Johnson (1999) stated that there are significant correlations between brand trust, brand loyalty and brand satisfaction and these can help affect the purchase behavior in the future. In addition, Ha and Perks (2005) who study on brand satisfaction indicated that the levels of satisfaction are correlated to trust and can be positively affected. Behavioral loyalty level increases the market share; on the other hand, attitudinal loyalty allows the brand to carry out a substantial pricing. Additionally, brand trust affects the emergence of attitudinal loyalty (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Gurviez & Korchia, 2003; Kennedy et al., 2001).

As a competitive phenomenon, branding in sports can play an important role in separating a club from other rivals and other entertainment activities by affecting the preferences and perceptions of fan groups of the clubs. Thus, it is important to know how powerful acquisitions branding in sports have. Şahin (2011) reported that experience affect brand trust positively in terms of product purchase, that the sense of trust in relation between consumer and brand is achieved through brand experience, and that there are experiences and trust related to a particular brand in the basis of brand loyalty. In the study carried out by Yıldız et al. (2012), it was revealed that brand trust in football teams has a positive effect on attitudinal loyalty, and that repetitive positive brand experiences increase brand satisfaction, help consumers build loyalty related to brands and affect the improvement of this loyalty.

2.3. Brand Loyalty in Sports

Brand loyalty ensures that the main product is more stable even when performance declines (for example, the team has a lost season), creating opportunities for product extensions beyond the core product (Gladden & Funk, 2001). Brand loyalty is categorized as attitudinal and behavioral in two terms. Attitudinal loyalty is the emotional bond that a brand has. Behavioral loyalty is the loyalty status of buying a brand over and over again (Keller, 2003). The attitude dimension of fan loyalty includes the internal relationship of fans with their team and can indicate the distinction between fake loyalty and true loyalty. Fake loyalty characterizes a sports viewer who does not have a strong positive attitude but still watches games constantly (Backman & Crompton, 1991). As Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) point out, loyalty is behavioral or psychologically related and may not adequately explain the consumer alone. Therefore, in order to fully understand the concept of loyalty, it is necessary to add both the behavior and behavior dimensions when examining fan loyalty.

Attitudinal loyalty is defined by many researchers as emotional attachment or emotional loyalty (George & Stavros, 2013). The attitudinal dimension of fan loyalty can be explained by the psychological commitment of fans to a team. This commitment is generally defined as emotional or psychological attachment to a brand (Beatty & Kahle, 1988). Therefore, if the fans feel a deep internal loyalty to their teams and if their loyalty is resistant to criticism, they display a high level of psychological loyalty. If this group of fans adopt what occurs within the organization, they may have a strong loyalty towards the team. Whenever it comes down to it, loyal fans believe with all their hearts that they have formed the spirit of the team. As every season, a lot of loyal fans eagerly await the start of the season (Smith, 2008). Unlike attitudinal loyalty, behavioral loyalty focuses on fans' commitment to buying a brand over a long period of time. This loyalty focuses on what kind of brand benefit it will provide or what kind of team capital it will generate, and as a result ignores the actual behavior shown to the fan's team (George & Stavros, 2013).

Homburg and Giering (1999) reported that behavioral commitment represents past behaviors and behavioral intentions. Past behaviors consist of past purchasing behaviors and positive words about the past. By transferring the concept of loyalty to fan behavior, the following activities constitute the loyal behaviors of the past in the context of team sports. Examples include being a fan at the stadium for the club's matches, watching the club's games on tv, following the media related to the club, purchasing club products, wearing the colors or logo of the club of which he is a supporter, and trying to get non-fans of the club to join and support the fan club (Fink et al., 2002; Funk & Pastore, 2000; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Mahony et al., 2000; Shank & Beasley, 1998).

Behavioral intentions come with planned stadium visits, planned product consumption and the above-mentioned activities. It is called all informal communication regarding the evaluation of goods or services between the consumer and others, which positively spreads word of mouth and especially advises others (E. W. Anderson, 1998). Cross-purchasing intentions seem especially important today for sports marketers, because most professional clubs now have brand growth strategies that (Jon, 2005) extend

their branded range of products and services beyond club products (Apostolopoulou, 2002).

Economic developments in the field of sports and consequently increasing the budgets of sports organizations and professional teams have led sports audiences to expect greater things from their own teams. It is thought that research into sports brands help clubs maintain loyalty and trust of their audiences, and at the same time the research will help them know fans' consumption behaviors, help clubs to survive, effectively advance the targeted strategy and help sports marketers develop different strategies to increase participation. The aim of this research is to determine the levels of brand trust and brand loyalty of basketball fans, correlation between them on and to be able to suggest that marketers can create strategic sales plans with regards to research results.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Study Group

The population of this research is the fans of a basketball team competing in the Turkish Basketball Super League. The sample of the research are 283 fans who come to watch this team's home competitions.

3.2. Data Collection Tools

In this research, the survey method was used from quantitative research methods. In the research, voluntary consent form was filled by the participants as well as demographic information form to define the demographics of the basketball fans, and the brand trust and brand loyalty scales. In the demographic information form, there are questions related to gender, age, education status, regular exercise status, total monthly income of household and the number of games watched in the last season.

In this study, in order to evaluate the brand trust of the basketball fans, Brand Trust Scale, developed by Chaudri and Hollbrok (2001), was used. The scale consists of four items. The Cronbach Alpha value was found .88 in the reliability analysis of the scale. The studies of Bauer, Stokburger – Sauer and Exler (2008), Mahony, Madrigal and Howard (2000), Fink, Trail and Anderson (2002) were used to evaluate the loyalty on the team. The scales were adopted to Turkish by Yıldız et al. (2012). Brand Loyalty Scale consists of two sub-scales which are attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. In the reliability analysis of the Brand Loyalty Scale adapted by Yıldız et al. (2012), the Cronbach Alpha value was found .89 for behavioral loyalty sub-scale and .88 for attitudinal loyalty sub-scale. As a result of the Confirmatory factor analysis which was carried out to test the validity, it was determined that Chi-square / df = 1.82, CFI = .97, GFI = .92, RMSEA = .72. The brand trust and brand loyalty scales were measured in five-point Likert type.

3.3. Data Collection

The questionnaire was applied two hours before the competitions and face-to-face based on voluntary participation after the purpose of the research was explained to the fans who came to watch the competition in the stadium where the competition was held.

3.4. Analysis of Data

To the analyze of the data, which was gathered from the participants, was used Lisrel 8.80 and SPSS 25.0 and statistical package program. Descriptive, reliability and validity analysis were conducted. In statistical analysis and interpretations of the data, $p \leq 0.05$ level of significance was considered. Structural equation modelling was used to determine the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty.

4. Results

The participants of the research are at least 13 and at most 71 years old and their mean age is calculated as 33.45 ± 11.53 . It is determined that 78 of the participants are female (%27.6) and 205 are male (%72.4). 168 of the fans (59.4) are found to be bachelor's degree graduates. In addition, it is observed that 176 of the fans (%62.2) regularly exercise. Therefore, 59 of the participants are interested in basketball (%20.8), 13 of the participants are interested in football (%4.6), four of the participants are interested in volleyball (%1.4), seven of the participants are interested in swimming (%2.5), 20 of the participants are interested in fitness (%7) and 74 of the participants are interested in other sports branches. When the income levels of the participants are considered, 82 (%29) of the participants have a total monthly income of 5001 TL and more as family income. 91 (%32.2) of the participants bet on the games whereas 190 (%67.1) of the participants do not bet on the games. The place where they bet is turf accountant for 39 (%42.8) participants. In addition, 52 (%57.1) of the participants reported to bet when they find the chance. The number of games watched in the stadium was found at least 1 and at most 40. The mean the number of games watched is 10.48 ± 6.91 .

In this part, the analyses carried out to determine the reliability and validity of the scales are presented. In Table 1, reliability and validity test results for Brand Trust Scale were presented.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Test Results for Brand Trust Scale

Brand Trust	Mean	Sd	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	Item-total correlation	Factor loadings
BT1	4.75	.56	.92	.81	.87	.86
BT2					.84	.83
BT3					.79	.77
BT4					.78	.76
KMO = .84	Barlett Chi-square = 878.45, p= .00					

According to the findings presented in Table 1, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of Brand Trust Scale is .92. In line with Cronbach Alpha coefficient, the scale is considered as reliable in case the value of coefficient is 0.70 and above (Alpar, 2003; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Obtaining item total correlations of scales that are more than 0.25 (Büyüköztürk, 2017) is accepted as another criterion of reliability. Item total correlation coefficients of Brand Trust Scale ranges between 0.78-0.87. Therefore, it can be stated considering these findings, the scale is a reliable measurement tool.

To determine the scale reliability, AVE value must be greater than .50 (J. C. Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) and factor loads must be greater than .50. According to the values in Table 1, the scale is a valid measurement tool. To check the structural validity of the scale and to calculate the sufficiency of sample size exploratory factor analysis was used. As a result of the analysis, the KMO value of the scale was found 0.84, it was deduced that this value is positively fit in order to conduct the factor analysis of the scale (Büyüköztürk, 2017). The result of Bartlett's sphericity test conducted to measure if the data are in multi-variable normal distribution was found as $\chi^2=878,45$ $p=0.000$, and this result is accepted as highly significant. After determining that the data are fit for the factor analysis, principal components analysis and varimax rotation method was used; therefore, the factor structure constituting the scale was explained. Next, the consistency of the emerged factors with the pre-determined theoretical structure was evaluated.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Analysis Results of Brand Loyalty Scale

Brand loyalty	Mean	Sd	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	Item-total correlation	Factor loadings
Behavioral loyalty						
BL1	4.22	.87	.87	.54	.71	.51
BL2					.76	.69
BL3					.70	.69
BL4					.73	.80
BL5					.59	.77
BL6					.65	.81
Attitudinal loyalty						
AL1	4.66	.59	.85	.11	.71	.75
AL2					.74	.67
AL3					.56	.83
AL4					.58	.61
AL5					.74	.81
Total	4.44	.67	.90	.65		
KMO = .88	Barlett Chi-square = 1860.619, p= .00					

For behavioral loyalty, the predicted variance percentage by each factor is 54.30%, and for attitudinal loyalty, it is 11.50%; in addition, 65.80% of the total variance is predicted by the two factors.

Structural equation modelling was used to determine the effects of brand trust and brand loyalty. The findings of structural equation model can be seen in Figure 1. When the fit indices of the model are analyzed, Chi-square value was calculated as 175.14 (84), RMSEA = .04, CFI = .95, GFI = .90, NNFI = .94. These values indicate that the model has acceptable fit indices (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003).

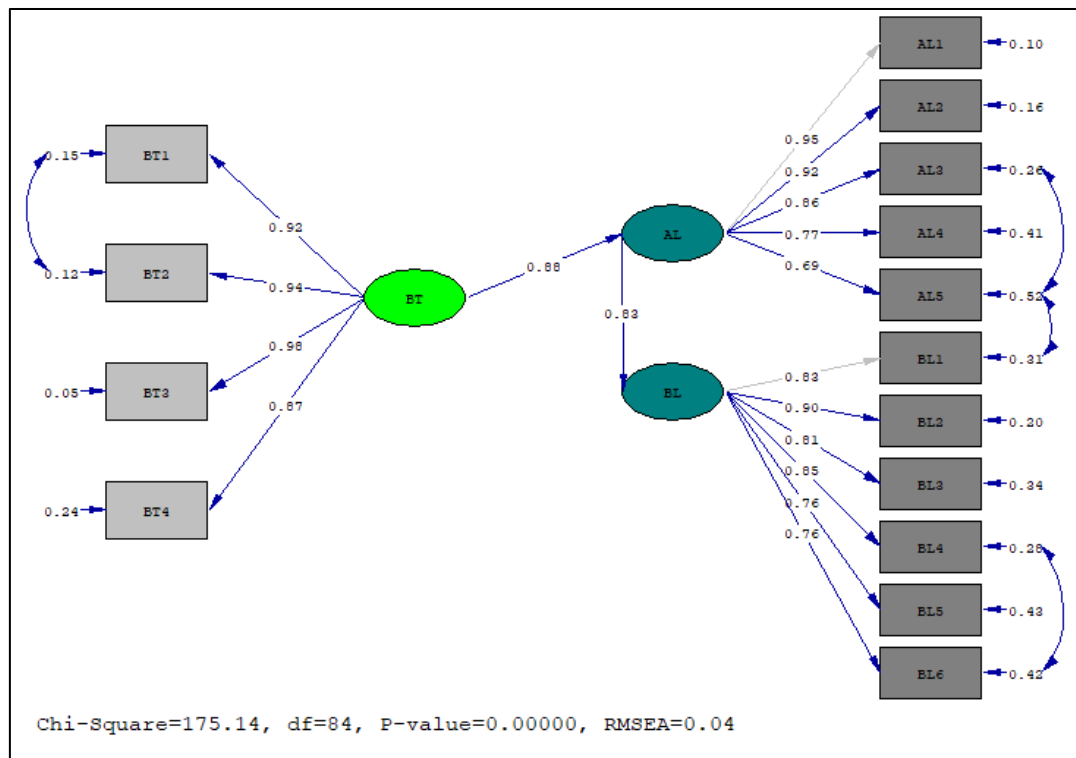


Figure 1: Structural Equation Modelling Results

When the research model is analyzed, the brand trust of the basketball fans has a significant effect on behavioral loyalty through the mediating role of attitudinal loyalty. The effect of brand trust on attitudinal loyalty was determined as $\gamma = .88$ ($t = 17.50$, $R^2 = .78$), the effect of attitudinal loyalty on behavioral loyalty was determined as $\beta = .83$ ($t = 16.20$, $R^2 = .69$). These findings are shown that the increase in the brand trust of the basketball fans also increases their brand loyalty.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the research results, increasing the brand trust of the fans also increases their brand loyalty; therefore, it can contribute to the achievement of sports clubs' both financial aims and marketing aims. The financial aims of sports clubs can be listed as profitability, increasing market share, sales of licensed products, matchday revenues, increasing incomes of concessions/catering and providing high quality services. On the other hand, marketing aims can be listed as increasing recognition, fan/customer retention, gaining new markets, developing new products, strengthening the brand and increasing brand value. When considered in these terms, establishing the fan trust has a critical importance. Similar to the research findings, Tsiotsou (2013) stated that there is an important role of the sport consumers' involvement, self-expression, trust and attachment with a sport team in building loyal relationships.

Gaining fans is becoming harder in the sport market where competitiveness is gradually increasing (Rein et al., 2007). This situation not only occurs in sports market, but also occurs in all trading sectors due to the consumer needs and demands. The

changes in market expectations also affect the states of sports products in the market. Currently, fans have different expectations in order to go to the games. The situation that the fans do not have anything better to do or that the fans should be so dedicated that narrow seats or rude employees of the stadium will not bother them. If a sports product does not meet the market demands of such, it faces the threat of leaving its status to another sports product (Rein et al., 2007; Yıldız, 2017).

Berry (2000), who analyzed the consumer trust as another point of view, reported that this concept plays an important role in their study on the increase in brand trust of consumers which was associated with service sector. This allows firms that have a solid place in their current market to have a better image in the minds of the consumer. Thus, it is stated that the difficulties that leave a question mark in the mind of the consumers before they make a price assessment will be decreased (Berry, 2000). Marketing establishes a bond between the consumer and the firm. It is stated by Hiscock (2003), that by this means brand trust is being engrained more in the consumer. When powerful firms are considered, it is reported that they provide with a stronger relation between the firm and the consumer by bonding emotionally with their customer portfolio (Berry, 2000). Vieira and Sousa (2020) found with a conceptual model that brand attachment, brand commitment, brand trust and brand satisfaction influence brand loyalty. This finding indicates that brand attachment, brand commitment and brand satisfaction must be planned meticulously in the sports market plans when fan loyalty is being constitute.

6. Recommendations

According to Tsiotsou (2013), using a customer relationship management (CRM) system is essential when continuing the team fan base. The CRM system, which has the access to the records of ticket sales and fan club data, can be used in order to be in touch with the fans base regularly. This can positively affect the involvement and attachment level with the team, improve the trust in the team and result in a loyal relationship. On the other hand, Pan & Phua (2020) emphasize that sponsors may provide with a connection in the forming of brand trust and loyalty in sports clubs, and the performance of the team has the key effect in this. In the future research, concepts such as customer relations management, team performance and the effect of sponsors on the emergence of brand trust and loyalty can be analyzed.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all basketball fans who participated in this study for willingly sharing their experiences and opinions. The data of Murat Palalı's Master thesis was used in this paper.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Murat Palalı graduated with master's degree in Sport Management program at the Manisa Celal Bayar University. He was a basketball player before master education. After then he took basketball coach certificate and worked different basketball teams. Now he is working as sport coordinator at the İzmir Economy University.

Yavuz Yıldız obtained a university degree with honors in Sport Management. He worked in Youth and Sports Directorate in İzmir and graduated master's degree. He completed his PhD in 2010. He worked as research assistant, assistant professor, and associate professor at Manisa Celal Bayar University until 2021. He is working at Department of Recreation, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University. His main research focuses on sport management, especially sport marketing and sport consumption.

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