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## THE INTERACTION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY AND PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN FOOTBALL

## INTERAKCIJA SOCIALNE IDENTITETE IN PERCEPCIJE DRUŽBENE PODPORE V NOGOMETU

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the interaction between the social support perceptions of the football players and their social identity. In the research, a descriptive research model based on the relational analysis technique, which is one of the quantitative research methods, was used. The study group of the research consists of 210 male football players. According to their level, 32 of the football players are professional, and 178 are amateur athletes. In the research, the perceived available support in sport questionnaire, and social identity questionnaire for sports were used as data collection tools. After applying the normality analysis in the data analysis, the data analysis process has started. Path analysis was used to test the hypotheses created in the research. In addition, moderator analysis was applied to evaluate the variables in the research in accordance with the research model. According to the results of the research model, emotional support and esteem support had a significant positive effect on social identity ( $\beta_2 = 0.01^*$  and  $\beta_2 = .009^*$ ), and informational and tangible support did not have a significant effect ( $\beta_2 = .524$  and  $\beta_2 = .475$ ). In conclusion, it was concluded that social support in sports has a significant effect on social identity ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Keywords:** social identity, social support, football

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### IZVLEČEK

Namen pričujoče študije je preučiti interakcijo med dojemanjem socialne podpore in socialne identitete nogometašev. V raziskavi je bil uporabljen deskriptivni raziskovalni model, ki temelji na tehniki relacijske analize, ki je ena izmed kvantitativnih raziskovalnih metod. Študijsko skupino raziskave sestavlja 210 nogometašev. Glede na njihov nivo ukvarjanja z nogometom je 32 nogometašev profesionalnih, 178 pa amaterskih športnikov. V raziskavi sta bila kot orodja za zbiranje podatkov uporabljena zaznana razpoložljiva podpora v športnem vprašalniku in vprašalnik socialne identitete za šport. Na začetku smo preverili normalnost porazdelitve podatke. Po uporabi analize normalnosti v analizi podatkov se je začel postopek analize podatkov. Uporabili smo moderatorsko analizo za vrednotenje spremenljivk skladno z raziskovalnim modelom. Glede na rezultate raziskovalnega modela je čustvena podpora in pomembno vplivala na družbeno identiteto ( $\beta_2 = 0,01^*$  in  $\beta_2 = ,009^*$ ), informacijska in oprijemljiva podpora pa ni imela pomembnega učinka ( $\beta_2 = .524$  in  $\beta_2 = .475$ ) na družbeno identiteto. Ugotovili smo, da socialna podpora v športu pomembno vpliva na družbeno identiteto ( $p < 0,01$ ).

**Ključne besede:** družbena identiteta, socialna podpora, nogomet

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## INTRODUCTION

Football teams, as a social group, correspond to a different social sphere. Because there is no other global phenomenon than football in the century we are living in. Therefore the main reason for this difference is the awareness of the group as a result of the intense interest in football. This awareness affects the behaviors of the athletes in the group (team) positively or negatively, and for this reason, the athletes often need social support. Social support is defined as the support, comfort, and help that a person acquires from others (Lox, Ginis, Gainforth & Petruzzello, 2019). Social support has attracted the attention of researchers, especially as it is a beneficial resource for overcoming certain health-related problems (Uchino, 2006). It is known that social support directly affects the performance and motivation of the athlete in sports, which not only keeps the body fit, but also keeps the person mentally fit (Sarason, Sarason & Pierce, 1990). Social support for the team in sports is expressed as the support that the athlete receives from people and people he or she considers worthy, such as family, friends, and fans, plus functions as emotional support for making an effort in sports (Scanlan, Russell, Beals & Scanlan, 2003). As a social realm, it is expected that the social support of the stakeholders in sports to the athlete will have a positive effect on the behaviors of the athletes. Because through social support, the athlete will increase both his performance and motivation by staying physically and mentally healthy; And adopting the social identity of the group to which he belongs. The concept of social identity was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the mid-1970s. This concept considers group membership not as an institutional or formal concept like most ongoing approaches, but as a psychological concept that includes togetherness, self, belonging, and focuses on the perceptual and cognitive foundations of group membership (Demirtaş, 2003). According to another statement, social identity is the individual's self-concept stemming from the social groups to which he is a member (Tajfel, 1974). It is possible to reach similar definitions in the related literature. (Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worchel, 1979; Ye, Zhu, Deng & Mu, 2019). Based on these definitions, social identity refers to aspects of a person defined in terms of group membership (Deaux, 1994). In other words, it is the individual's sense of who he is based on his group memberships (McLeod, 2019). When an individual identifies with a group, he incorporates this identification into his self, and this situation has a wide range of influence for the individual (Brown, 2000). Therefore, it is inevitable that sportive groups in which different behavior patterns are exhibited will affect individual behaviors. For this reason, the effect of the social group of the athlete, namely the team, on the identity of the athlete appears as a research area.

There are many studies on social support and social identity in sports. (Babiss & Gangwisch, 2009; Campo, Mackie & Sanchez, 2019; Hagiwara, Iwatsuki, Isogai, Van Raalte & Brewer, 2017; Hardin, Genovese & Yu, 2009; Jacobson, 1979; Kang, Jeon, Kwon & Park, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2019; Rees, Hardy & Freeman, 2007; Underwood, Bond & Baer, 2001). These studies are mostly on the relationship between social support in sports and stress, depression, self-esteem, and performance. Social identity studies in sports are on topics such as group cohesion, interpretation of the social identity of the fans in terms of athletes, and creating a social identity with a sports brand. The difference of the current study from other studies is that the perception of social support obtained regarding the team to which the athlete belongs is the subject of interaction with the social identity that affects the individual's self-formation. The aim of this study is to evaluate the effect of the social support perception of the football players on the social identity of the football player.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Model**

This research, which aims to examine the interaction of the social support perceptions of football players on social identity, is a descriptive research based on the relational analysis technique. This type of research is defined as screening models that aim to determine the degree and direction of the relationship between two or more variables (Karasar, 2012: 82).

### **Participants**

The study group of this research consists of a total of 210 football players. According to their level, 32 of the athletes are professional and 178 are amateur athletes. According to their positions, 25 of the participants are goalkeepers, 62 defenders, 74 midfielders and 49 strikers.. In terms of the age of the athletes, 113 are 16-19 years old, 61 are 20-23 years old, and 36 are 24 years old and older. During the data collection, all participants gave their informed consent for inclusion before completing the scales. In this study, the "random sampling" methods, was used.

## **Data Analysis**

The first way followed in the data analysis process in the research is to perform the normality analysis for the data. The normality of the data was evaluated according to the assumption that skewness and kurtosis values take values between +2 and -2 (George & Mallery, 2010). Path analysis method was used to test the hypotheses created in the research, and moderator analysis was used to evaluate the effect of research variables on the research model. Statistical analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 23 program (SPSS Inc. Chicago. II. USA). P-value was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## **Data Collection Tools**

### **The Perceived Available Support in Sport Questionnaire**

The perceived available support scale was developed by Coffee, Freeman and Allen (2017) and adapted to Turkish by Şenel, Yıldız and Ulaş (2019). The scale is intended to evaluate the social support of the athletes from the team. The scale has a total of four sub-dimensions. Emotional, esteem, tangible, and informational support.

### **Social Identity Questionnaire for Sport**

The social identity questionnaire for sport was developed by Bruner and Benson (2018) and adapted to Turkish by Türkay, Yetim and Sezer (2018). The scale is intended to evaluate the social identity affecting the individual's Self in the team in sports. The scale was found to be suitable for single-factor and three-factor structures as a result of the adaptation study.

## **Research Hypotheses**

**H<sup>1</sup>**= Emotional support has a positive significant effect on social identity ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**H<sup>2</sup>**= Esteem support has a positive significant effect on social identity ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**H<sup>3</sup>**= Informational support has a positive significant effect on social support ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**H<sup>4</sup>**= Tangible support has a positive significant effect on social support ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for research data.

	Scales and Sub-dimensions	n	x	Std.	skewness	kurtosis
<b>Social Identity Questionnaire for Sport</b>	Social identity	210	4.469	.502	-.662	-.556
	Ingroup ties	210	4.305	.780	-.884	-.215
	Cognitive centrality	210	4.418	.619	-.964	.303
	Ingroup affect	210	4.684	.519	-1.586	1.708
<b>The Perceived Available Support in Sport Questionnaire</b>	Social support	210	3.482	.542	-.747	-.597
	Emotional support	210	3.502	.583	-1.056	.388
	Esteem support	210	3.487	.606	-.931	-.230
	Informational support	210	3.431	.649	-1.063	.487
	Tangible support	210	3.506	.579	-.949	-.002

According to Table 1, the descriptive statistical values for the study were included. As a result of the skewness and kurtosis values to receive +2 and -2 values, it has been concluded that the data shows normal distribution.

Table 2. Validity and reliability values for research data collection tools.

Scales	X <sup>2</sup> /Df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	IFI	Cronbach Alpha
Social Identity	3.391	.080	.940	.941	.942	.824
Social Support	3.162	.080	.851	.904	.905	.944

The values obtained from Table 2 show that the data collection tools used in the study are valid and reliable.

Table 3. Research path analysis results.

Research Model	$\beta 1$	$\beta 2$	S.E	CR	P
Model 1.Social Identity<--- Emotional Support	.266	.309	.080	3.317	<b>.001*</b>
Model 2.Social Identity<--- Esteem Support	.217	.262	.083	2.601	<b>.009*</b>
Model 3.Social Identity<--- Informationa Support	.044	.057	.069	.637	.524
Model 4. <b>Social Identity</b> <--- Tangible Support	.038	.044	.475	.635	.475

According to Table 3, it has been found that emotional and esteem support, which are the sub-dimensions of social support, have a positive significant effect on social identity ( $\beta 2 = 0.01 *$  and  $\beta 2 = .009 *$ ), yet informational and tangible support did not have a significant effect ( $\beta 2 = .524$  and  $\beta 2 = .475$ ).

Table 4. Moderator analysis results of research variables.

Variable	Hypotheses	Mediator variable	Measurement Model	$\beta 1$	$\beta 2$	S.E	CR	P
<b>Status</b>	<b>Amateur</b>	Social identity <---Social Support		.526	.566	.058	9.110	<b>.001*</b>
	<b>Professional</b>	Social identity <---Social Support		.730	.845	.082	8.893	<b>.001*</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>16-19 years</b>	Social identity <---Social Support		.504	.572	.068	7.372	<b>.001*</b>
	<b>20-23 years</b>	Social identity <---Social Support		.567	.579	.103	5.514	<b>.001*</b>
	<b>24 years and older</b>	Social identity <---Social Support		.717	.763	.102	7.048	<b>.001*</b>
<b>Position</b>	<b>Goalkeeper</b>	Social identity <---Social Support		.732	.706	.151	4.844	<b>.001*</b>
	<b>Defence</b>	Social identity <---Social Support		.675	.768	.072	9.380	<b>.001*</b>
	<b>Midfield</b>	Social identity <---Social Support		.369	.382	.104	3.555	<b>.001*</b>
	<b>Forward</b>	<b>Social identity &lt;---Social Support</b>		.586	.664	.095	6.174	<b>.001*</b>

According to the results of the moderator analysis in which the research variables were evaluated as stated in Table 4, it was concluded that social support was a positive and significant predictor of social identity within the variables of status, age, and position ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Table 5. Hypothesis test result showing the effect of social support on social identity.

Hypotheses	Measurement Model	$\beta 1$	$\beta 2$	S.E	CR	P
<b>Main Hypotheses</b>						
	Social identity <---Social Support	.560	.605	.051	10.974	.000*

As stated in Table 5, it was accepted accordingly to the obtained result that social support, which is one of the hypotheses created in the research, has a positive and significant effect on social identity ( $\beta 2 = .605$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

In this study, it was aimed to examine the effect of the perception of the available social support of the football players for the team on social identity. According to the results obtained, it was observed that emotional support and esteem support, which are the sub-dimensions of social support, have a positive significant effect on social identity. Informational and tangible support did not have a significant impact (Table 3). According to these results, the tested hypotheses, H1 and H2 were accepted, H3 and H4 were not accepted. Sözen (1991) in a study she made; stated that social identity is explanatory of the experiences of the individual, social events, and social phenomena arising from these relations. Therefore, it can be thought that social identity may occur more via the processes that express a value such as emotional and esteem support rather than tangible support. Again, the positive correlation between emotion and social identity was supported in a series of empirical studies (Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012; Gordijin, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus & Dumont, 2006). Social identity also suggests that a good way to tackle loneliness and support mental health is by building, restoring, and sustaining social identities through meaningful group-based connections (Haslam et al., 2022).

According to another result, it has been determined that the status of both groups has a positive effect on social support and social identity perceptions of individuals who do sports at amateur and professional levels. Regardless of which age group, the relationship between social support and social identification levels of athletes are significant. Finally, the positions of the athletes in the field are also significant in the relationship between social support and social identity levels (Table 4). This result can be interpreted in the form of the group process and experience in the field of sports with similar manifestations on group members. In team sports, it is known

that the group has an impact on individual performance and the character revealed in the field (Bruner, Dunlop & Beauchamp, 2014). Therefore, group features rather than personal characteristics are thought to be determinants of the athlete's behavior.

When the research results are generally evaluated, it is seen that social support on the team has a positive significant effect on the social identity of the athletes (Table 5). It is possible to reach similar results when the relevant literature is examined. For example, Bruner et al., (2020) has reached similar results. In yet another study, Anderson, Wozencroft and Bedini (2008) concluded that social support is a significant predictor of participation in sports and that outputs such as in-group interaction, goal realization, and role modeling were obtained, thus indirectly explaining the effect of social support on social identity. Cranmer and Michael Sollitto (2015) in their study, where they examined the relationship between satisfaction in participating in sports and social support, have concluded that social support has a positive effect on participation in sports and the level of satisfaction obtained from sports. Bruner et al., (2021), in their other study, have found a linear positive and significant relationship between the social support perceptions of the athletes and their social identities. This situation can be explained by the impact on which the social support they perceived on their teams on the collective self-concept formed within the group. Similarly, it can be stated that social support in different groups produces positive outcomes for the group members in various ways too (McLean, Gaul & Penco, 2022). Contrary to the current study, there are also studies in which social identity is a significant predictor of social support. According to the results obtained from (Guan & So 2016; Ntontis, Drury, Amlot, Rubin, Williams, & Saavedra, 2021) studies, it was found that social identity has a highly positive and significant effect on social support. As a result of the data obtained, it can be stated that social identity and social support are in mutual interaction within a group.

### **Limitations of the study**

This research was limited to 210 male football players and data collection tools used in the study.

### **CONCLUSION**

As a result; it can be stated that social support in sports is a positive and meaningful predictor of social identity, according to the results of the study. Being a member of a sports team takes



place over time. This situation begins with group belonging and interaction and continues with the support of group members. This support forms certain changes in the attitudes and behaviors of the athletes in the team, and thus brings a social identity to the athletes. To better understand its interaction with social support, which is considered a substantial component of social identity, it is recommended to apply to teams and different branches.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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