



An examination of the relationship between sports clubs' levels of corporate social responsibility and sports fans' levels of identification

Un análisis de la relación entre los niveles de responsabilidad social corporativa de los clubes deportivos y los niveles de identificación de los aficionados al deporte

Authors

Nedim Malkoç¹
Serdar Ceyhun²
Faik Orhun Tapşın³

1 University of Health Sciences,
Istanbul, Turkey
2 Bartın University, Turkey
3 Dicle University, Diyarbakır,
Turkey

Corresponding author: Serdar
Ceyhun, sceyhun@bartin.edu.tr

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Abstract

Introduction: The corporate social responsibility initiatives of sports clubs are considered a key factor that not only contributes to social good but also influences fans' perceptions of their clubs and their level of identification with them.

Objective: This study examined the relationship between sports clubs' levels of corporate social responsibility and sports fans' levels of identification with the club.

Methodology: The study employed a correlational survey model with a sample of 472 soccer fans aged 18 and older. Data were collected using an anonymously designed personal information form, the Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs, and the Sports Fan Identification Scale. Upon examining the participants' data, parametric tests were used in the analyses because the skewness and kurtosis values fell within the normal distribution range of ± 1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In the analysis, frequency and percentage values, descriptive statistics, the t-test, the ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation were used to examine the relationship between the scales.

Results: The study's findings revealed that participants' average levels of Corporate Social Responsibility toward Sports Clubs and identification with sports teams were above average.

Discussion: When the participants' data regarding the relationship between the scales were analysed, a positive, moderate, and statistically significant relationship was observed between the level of sports fan identification and the sub-dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility for Sports Clubs.

Conclusions: The study found that as participants' identification with sports teams increased, their corporate social responsibility toward sports clubs also increased.

Keywords

Fan identification; social responsibility in sports clubs; sports clubs; sports fans.

Resumen

Introducción: Las iniciativas de responsabilidad social corporativa (RSC) de los clubes deportivos son un factor clave que contribuye al bien social e influye en la percepción de los aficionados sobre sus clubes y en su nivel de identificación con ellos.

Objetivo: Examinar la relación entre los niveles de RSC de los clubes deportivos y los niveles de identificación de los aficionados al deporte.

Metodología: El estudio empleó un modelo de encuesta correlacional. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 472 aficionados al fútbol mayores de 18 años. Los datos se recogieron mediante un formulario personal anónimo, la Escala de Responsabilidad Social Corporativa para Clubes Deportivos y la Escala de Identificación de Aficionados al Deporte. Los valores de asimetría y curtosis confirmaron la normalidad de los datos ($\pm 1,5$) y se aplicaron pruebas paramétricas: frecuencias, porcentajes, estadísticas descriptivas, la prueba t, el ANOVA y la correlación de Pearson.

Resultados: Los niveles medios de RSC de los participantes hacia los clubes deportivos y su nivel de identificación con los equipos deportivos se situaron por encima de la media.

Discusión: Al analizar la relación entre las escalas, se observó una relación positiva, moderada y estadísticamente significativa entre el nivel de identificación de los aficionados al deporte y las subdimensiones de la RSC hacia los clubes deportivos.

Conclusiones: El estudio reveló que, a medida que aumentaba la identificación de los participantes con los equipos deportivos, aumentaba su RSC percibida hacia dichos equipos.

Palabras clave

Aficionados al deporte; clubes deportivos; identificación de los aficionados; responsabilidad social en los clubes deportivos.

Introduction

In recent years, the sports industry has emerged as a field that stands out not only for its focus on athletic performance and competition but also for its potential to generate social impact (Zhai et al., 2024). Sports clubs play a significant role in shaping and disseminating social values, thanks to their ability to reach broad audiences (Nagel et al., 2020). This situation has led to sports clubs being viewed not merely as organisations focused on athletic success, but as institutional actors with a sense of social responsibility (Walters & Tacon, 2010). In this context, the social responsibility initiatives of sports clubs are of strategic importance for both contributing to society and strengthening their relationships with stakeholders (Anşın & Acar Şentürk, 2020).

Corporate social responsibility is viewed as an approach that argues organisations must go beyond their economic objectives and also take their social and environmental responsibilities into account (Nikolova & Arsić, 2017). From the perspective of sports clubs, this approach takes concrete form through initiatives such as developing social projects targeting different segments of society, supporting disadvantaged groups, and raising social awareness (Rowe et al., 2019). Such activities enable evaluation of clubs not only based on their athletic achievements but also on their contributions to society (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Indeed, various studies have demonstrated that sports clubs' corporate social responsibility initiatives have a positive impact on club image, perceived trust, and stakeholder loyalty (Walters & Chadwick, 2009; Ullah et al., 2021; Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014).

One of the key concepts for understanding fan behaviour in sports is identification (Kılıç, 2020). Identification is defined as an individual's perception of themselves as part of a social group and their association of that group's successes and failures with their own self-concept (Altınışık, 2025). For sports fans, identification manifests as a strong sense of belonging to the club, as well as behaviours such as loyalty and support (Jung et al., 2012). It is well established that fans with a high level of identification develop a stronger psychological bond with their clubs and maintain their support behaviour more consistently (Wann, 2006; Porat, 2010; Wann & James, 2019). For this reason, identifying the factors that influence fan identification with sports clubs is important from both a theoretical and practical perspective.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides the principal theoretical framework for this study. As established in the social identity literature, individuals categorise themselves into social groups—including sports team affiliations—and integrate the identity of these groups into their own self-concept (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). When a sports club is perceived as a socially responsible institution, it becomes a source of positive social identity that fans are motivated to adopt (Smith & Stewart, 2007). Accordingly, SIT predicts that fans of clubs with high levels of CSR may exhibit deeper identification, because club membership offers a basis for positive self-esteem and social belonging (Wann, 2006; Inoue et al., 2011). The group-based nature of fan identity means that perceptions of a club's ethical behaviour, community contributions, and organisational legitimacy directly shape the quality of identification fans derive from their affiliation. Corporate social responsibility activities, therefore, function not merely as philanthropic outputs, but as identity-relevant signals that reinforce fans' sense of belonging to the club.

When evaluated within the framework of social identity theory, the corporate social responsibility activities of sports clubs contribute to fans perceiving their clubs not only as sports organisations but also as institutions that generate social value (Ma & Kaplanidou, 2021). This situation strengthens individuals' sense of identification with the club and increases their psychological attachment to it (Herold et al., 2023). However, the existing literature indicates that few studies examine the direct relationship between sports clubs' levels of corporate social responsibility and fan identification.

In this context, the study focuses on Sakaryaspor, a professional soccer club in the province of Sakarya, Turkey, that has a long-standing fan culture. Despite competing in the lower leagues of Turkish soccer for many years, Sakaryaspor has maintained its strong bond with its fans. Like many Turkish regional soccer clubs, Sakaryaspor also carries out various initiatives focused on youth development, local educational activities, and fan engagement. These studies can be linked to the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions of corporate social responsibility (Guevara Pérez et al., 2023; Fonseca et al., 2024). In this context, the aim was to examine the relationship between Sakaryaspor fans' perceptions of the club's corporate social responsibility activities and their level of identification with the team.

In recent years, as interest in corporate social responsibility initiatives among sports clubs has grown, research in this area has also gained momentum. Social responsibility projects carried out by sports clubs not only strengthen fans' loyalty to their teams but also enhance their awareness of social issues (Liu et al., 2019; Keleş & Adatepe, 2024). The level of identification fans have with their clubs plays a critical role in ensuring the clubs' sustainability by influencing their participation in club activities (Yoshida et al., 2015; Tekerek & Gençay, 2024).

Sports clubs' corporate social responsibility initiatives can help fans perceive their clubs as more meaningful and values-driven organizations. Sports marketers should invest in initiatives that build long-term psychological connections with fans through social media platforms, such as online loyalty programs, fan involvement in content creation, participatory campaigns, and storytelling that reinforces shared identity and values (Lianopoulos et al., 2025). To strengthen social bonds, as suggested by Maciel et al. (2026), short stories documenting athletes' training journeys, trips to championships or narratives rooted in their cultural heritage could be shared. This situation can lead to a stronger psychological bond between fans and the club and an increased sense of identification. This study examined the relationship between sports clubs' levels of social responsibility and sports fans' levels of identification. In this context, the study aims to examine the impact of fans' perceptions of their clubs' social responsibility activities on their levels of club identification. The study is expected to fill a gap in the literature on the relationship between social responsibility and fan behaviour in sports management and to contribute to the strategic management processes of sports clubs.

This study addresses the following research questions: (1) Do fans' levels of corporate social responsibility toward sports clubs and their levels of identification as sports fans differ significantly based on demographic variables (marital status, age, length of time as a fan, and whether they donate to the club)? (2) Is there a significant relationship between fans' levels of corporate social responsibility toward sports clubs and their levels of identification with sports teams?

Method

Research Model

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between sports clubs' levels of corporate social responsibility and sports fans' levels of identification. The study employed a correlational survey model. This model is described as a model designed to determine the degree of interdependence between two or more variables (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). The study was conducted among soccer fans. In this context, the relationship between sports clubs' levels of corporate social responsibility and sports fans' levels of identification was examined, and differences in the variables across participants' demographic characteristics were assessed.

The scales used in the study enable a multidimensional assessment of sports clubs' levels of corporate social responsibility and sports fans' levels of identification. In this context, the survey data reveal participants' perceptions of their clubs and their levels of identification with them, and they directly inform the relationship between levels of corporate social responsibility and identification among sports fans.

Participants

This study was conducted amongst Sakaryaspor supporters in the province of Sakarya, Turkey. The study population consists of Sakaryaspor supporters. As it is not possible to determine the exact number of a football club's supporters, the club's supporter base is not precisely known. A sampling method was employed for the research. Accordingly, in line with the study's objectives, individuals aged 18 and over who support Sakaryaspor were included in the sample. The sample comprised 472 participants. Care was taken to ensure demographic diversity amongst the participants; data on variables such as age, marital status, length of support and whether they had made donations to the club were collected from different groups.

Founded in 1965, Sakaryaspor is one of Turkey's oldest sports clubs, with a supporter base that has remained loyal across different competitive periods and league tiers. The club's institutional history and community embeddedness make it an appropriate setting for examining how fans perceive and respond

to their club's social responsibility activities. Because there is no official registry from which to enumerate the total number of active Sakaryaspor supporters, a finite sampling frame could not be constructed. For this reason, the study population consists of individuals aged 18 and older who actively follow Sakaryaspor and identify themselves as Sakaryaspor fans.

The fact that Sakaryaspor supporters maintain strong support despite the club having competed in the lower leagues for a long time, combined with the club's past sporting successes, was a key factor in selecting this sample. The data was collected via an online survey using Google Forms, which was shared in social media groups with a high concentration of Sakaryaspor supporters, and participants were invited to take part in the research voluntarily. IP restrictions were applied whilst the surveys were being completed to ensure data security and prevent duplicate responses. The research process was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles, and participants' personal information was kept confidential. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample group

	Variable	N	%
Marital status	Single	355	75.2
	Married	117	24.8
	Total	472	100
Age	18-21	157	33.3
	22-25	114	24.2
	26 and over	201	42.5
	Total	472	100
Length of time as a fan	1-4 years	148	31.4
	5-8 years	99	21.0
	9 years and over	225	47.6
	Total	472	100
Donation to the club	Yes	185	39.2
	No	287	60.8
	Total	472	100

An examination of Table 1 reveals that 75.2% of the study participants were single, while 24.8% were married. An analysis of the participants' ages revealed that 33.3% were between 18 and 21, 24.2% were between 22 and 25, and 42.5% were 26 years of age or older. Regarding the length of time as a fan, the study found that 31.4% of respondents had been fans for 1 to 4 years, 21.0% for 5 to 8 years, and 47.6% for 9 years or more. 39.2% of respondents answered "yes" to the question about donating to the club, while 60.8% answered "no."

Data Collection Process and Inclusion Criteria

The data collection process was carried out via social media platforms with a high concentration of Sakaryaspor supporters. Participants were informed of the research purpose, and data were collected voluntarily. In this context, individuals aged 18 and over were included in the study. Participants were included in the sample through a two-stage filtering process. In the first stage, individuals who answered 'yes' to the question 'Are you a Sakaryaspor supporter?' were included in the study; in the second stage, the question 'How often do you follow Sakaryaspor matches?' was asked; the aim was to determine the participants' level of support, and individuals who stated that they followed matches regularly were included in the sample. Using this method, only supporters with an active relationship with the club were included in the study, thereby strengthening the sample's suitability for the research objective. To increase participant diversity, individuals from different age groups, with varying lengths of support, and possessing different demographic characteristics were included in the study. An IP restriction was applied to ensure data security and prevent duplicate participation.

Personal Information Form

The personal information form was designed so that no personal details were requested from participants, and it contained no elements that could cause physical, social, or psychological harm. The form asked for details such as marital status, age, length of time as a fan, and donations to the club.

Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs (CSRS)

The scale was developed by Jung (2012) and adapted into Turkish by Sönmezoğlu et al. (2016). The scale consists of four sub-dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic and a total of 16 items. Participants rated these statements using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). According to the adaptation study by Sönmezoğlu et al. (2016), the internal consistency reliability coefficients were as follows: economic responsibility subscale (items 1, 2, and 3): .74; legal responsibility subscale (items 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8): .83; ethical responsibility subscale (items 9, 10, and 11): .89; philanthropic responsibility subscale (items 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16): .83; and overall scale: .88. Reliability coefficients obtained from the current study sample are presented in Table 3.

Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)

The scale, developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993), was also adapted into Turkish by Günay and Tiryaki (2003). The scale consists of 7 items and uses an 8-point Likert scale. Participants rated these statements using an 8-point Likert-type scale (1 = Not important, 8 = Very important). High scores indicate a high degree of internal consistency. The scale's Cronbach's Alpha value is reported as .87.

Data Analysis

Table 2. Information on the range of the scales used in the study

Scales	Skewness	Kurtosis
Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs (CSRS)	-1.096	1.310
Economic Responsibility	-.938	.446
Legal Responsibility	-1.034	.772
Ethical Responsibility	-.798	.176
Philanthropic Responsibility	-1.161	1.166
Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)	-.900	-.148

Table 2 examines the normal distributions of the data. The skewness and kurtosis values for the normal distribution were examined and found to fall within ± 1.5 . Since the data falls within this range, parametric tests were used. These values provide strong evidence that the data follow a normal distribution. Accordingly, it was deemed appropriate to use parametric tests in the comparative analyses to be conducted within the scope of the study's objectives (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The Independent Samples t-test was used for pairwise comparisons, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for comparisons among multiple groups. When significant differences were observed, the Scheffé test was used to identify the source of the difference. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between the scales.

Reliability of the Study

Table 3. Reliability coefficients of the measurement instruments used in the study

Scales	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs (CSRS)	16	.94
Economic Responsibility	3	.82
Legal Responsibility	5	.87
Ethical Responsibility	3	.86
Philanthropic Responsibility	5	.89
Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)	7	.93

According to the data collected from the participants in the study, as shown in Table 3, the reliability coefficient of the Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs was found to be 0.94; for the Economic Responsibility subscale, it was 0.82; for the Legal Responsibility subscale, it was 0.87; and for the Ethical Responsibility subscale, it was 0.86; and 0.89 for the Philanthropic Responsibility subscale. When the reliability coefficient of the Sports Fan Identification Scale used in the study was examined, it was found to be 0.93. In conclusion, the reliability coefficients of the scales and subscales used in the study were high. It has been noted that a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of .70 or higher may be sufficient to ensure the reliability of test scores (Büyüköztürk, 2010). The results of this study are reliable.



Ethical Compliance of the Study

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at Dicle University via approval letter No. 1046657 dated December 3, 2025.

Results

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics regarding the participants' scale and subscale scores. Accordingly, the average total score on the Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs was 87.04 ± 19.03 . The mean scores for the scale's sub-dimensions are as follows: economic responsibility 16.22 ± 4.26 , legal responsibility 27.44 ± 6.44 , ethical responsibility 15.58 ± 4.29 , and philanthropic responsibility 27.78 ± 6.56 . The mean total score on the Sports Fan Identification Scale was 41.90 ± 13.45 .

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for participants' scale and subscale scores

	Number of questions	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs (CSRS)	16	472	87.04	19.03	16.00	112.00
Economic Responsibility	3	472	16.22	4.26	3.00	21.00
Legal Responsibility	5	472	27.44	6.44	5.00	35.00
Ethical Responsibility	3	472	15.58	4.29	3.00	21.00
Philanthropic Responsibility	5	472	27.78	6.56	5.00	35.00
Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)	7	472	41.90	13.45	7.00	56.00

*Significant differences, $p < .05$.

It is noteworthy that the average identification score among Sakaryaspor fans is 41.90 out of a maximum of 56 points. This result indicates that fans identify strongly with the club, in line with the profile of loyal fans targeted by the sampling process. These findings have important practical implications for sports administrators. It has been observed that clubs perceived as responsible actors in economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic terms forge stronger psychological bonds with their supporters. This situation supports the financial sustainability of clubs by increasing spectator participation and fan loyalty.

Table 5. Results of the t-test analysis of participants by marital status

Variable	Marital status	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs (CSRS)	Single	355	87.97	18.46	1.857	.06
	Married	117	84.21	20.48		
Economic Responsibility	Single	355	16.35	4.16	1.133	.25
	Married	117	15.83	4.54		
Legal Liability	Single	355	27.82	6.23	2.260	.02
	Married	117	26.28	6.93		
Ethical Responsibility	Single	355	15.71	4.23	1.129	.26
	Married	117	15.19	4.44		
Philanthropic Responsibility	Single	355	28.07	6.30	1.693	.09
	Married	117	26.89	7.22		
Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)	Single	355	43.10	12.44	3.062	.00
	Married	117	38.23	15.65		

*Significant differences, $p < .05$.

An examination of Table 5 reveals that, when analysing the relationship between participants' level of Corporate Social Responsibility for Sports Clubs and the marital status variable, no significant difference was observed between the average score of single participants (87.97) and that of married participants (84.21). When the relationship between the level of the 'economic responsibility' sub-dimension and the 'marital status' variable was examined, no significant difference was observed between the average score of single participants (16.35) and that of married participants (15.83). When the relationship between participants' level of legal responsibility and marital status was examined, the average score for single participants (27.82) was significantly higher than that for married participants (26.28). When the relationship between participants' ethical responsibility and marital status was examined, no significant difference was found between the average scores of single participants (15.71) and married participants (15.19). When the relationship between participants' level of philanthropic responsibility and marital

status was examined, no significant difference was found between the average scores of single participants (28.07) and married participants (26.89). When the relationship between participants' level of identification as sports fans and their marital status was examined, single participants (43.10) had a significantly higher average score than married participants (38.23).

Table 6. Results of the ANOVA analysis for participants by age

Variable	Age	n	Mean	SD	F	p
Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs (CSRS)	18-21	157	86.03	19.46	.361	.69
	22-25	114	87.90	19.44		
	26 and over	201	87.33	18.51		
Economic Responsibility	18-21	157	16.00	4.33	.525	.59
	22-25	114	16.12	4.30		
	26 and over	201	16.45	4.19		
Legal Liability	18-21	157	27.14	6.61	.393	.67
	22-25	114	27.85	6.42		
	26 and over	201	27.44	6.34		
Ethical Responsibility	18-21	157	15.59	4.20	.651	.52
	22-25	114	15.94	4.17		
	26 and over	201	15.37	4.42		
Philanthropic Responsibility	18-21	157	27.28	6.85	.686	.50
	22-25	114	27.98	6.29		
	26 and over	201	28.06	6.48		
Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)	18-21	157	41.71	13.14	1.439	.23
	22-25	114	43.68	11.31		
	26 and over	201	41.02	14.72		

When the relationship between participants' level of Corporate Social Responsibility for Sports Clubs and the age variable was examined using an ANOVA test, as shown in Table 6, no significant difference was found in the mean scores between those aged 18–21 (86.03), those aged 22–25 (87.90), and those aged 26 and over (87.33). When the relationship between participants' level of economic responsibility and the age variable was examined using an ANOVA test, no significant difference was found in terms of the mean scores between those aged 18–21 (16.00), those aged 22–25 (16.12) and those aged 26 and over (16.45).

When the relationship between participants' level of legal responsibility and the age variable was examined using an ANOVA test, no significant difference was found in terms of the mean scores between those aged 18–21 (27.14), those aged 22–25 (27.85), and those aged 26 and over (27.44). When the relationship between the 'Ethical Responsibility' sub-dimension and the age variable was examined using an ANOVA test, no significant difference was found in the mean scores between those aged 18–21 (15.59), those aged 22–25 (15.94) and those aged 26 and over (15.37). When the relationship between the 'Philanthropic Responsibility' sub-dimension and the age variable was examined using an ANOVA test, no significant difference was found in the mean scores between those aged 18–21 (27.28), those aged 22–25 (27.98), and those aged 26 and over (28.06). When the relationship between participants' level of identification as sports fans and the age variable was examined using an ANOVA test, the mean score for those aged 18–21 (41.71), the mean score for those aged 22–25 (43.68), and the mean score for those aged 26 and over (41.02), no significant differences were found between them.

Table 7. Results of the ANOVA analysis for participants according to the variable 'length of time as a fan'

Variable	Length of fandom	n	Mean	SD	F	p	The Source of the Difference
Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs (CSRS)	1-4 years ^a	148	79.94	23.87	16.065	.00	a<b,c
	5-8 years ^b	99	89.48	14.72			
	9 years and over ^c	225	90.63	15.62			
Economic Responsibility	1-4 years ^a	148	14.49	5.09	19.977	.00	a<b,c
	5-8 years ^b	99	16.59	3.44			
	9 years and over ^c	225	17.20	3.59			
Legal Liability	1-4 years ^a	148	25.15	7.93	14.385	.00	a<b,c
	5-8 years ^b	99	28.42	5.43			
	9 years and over ^c	225	28.52	5.29			
Ethical Responsibility	1-4 years ^a	148	14.52	5.12	7.128	.00	a<c
	5-8 years ^b	99	15.74	3.53			



Philanthropic Responsibility	9 years and over ^c	225	16.20	3.86	10.592	.00	a<b,c
	1-4 years ^a	148	25.77	8.20			
	5-8 years ^b	99	28.71	5.26			
Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)	9 years and over ^c	225	28.70	5.50	27.516	.00	a<b,c
	1-4 years ^a	148	35.47	15.06			
	5-8 years ^b	99	45.42	10.70			
	9 years and over ^c	225	44.57	11.90			

When the relationship between participants' level of Corporate Social Responsibility for Sports Clubs and their length of time as fans was examined using an ANOVA test in Table 7, the average score for those with 1–4 years of fandom (79.94) was found to be significantly lower than that of those with 5–8 years (89.48) and 9 years or more (90.63). When the relationship between participants' level of economic responsibility and their length of time as fans was examined using an ANOVA test, the mean score for those who had been fans for 1–4 years (14.49) was found to be significantly lower than that of those who had been fans for 5–8 years (16.59) and 9 years or more (17.20). When the relationship between participants' level of legal responsibility and their length of time as fans was examined using an ANOVA test, the mean score for those with 1–4 years of fandom (25.15) was found to be significantly lower than that of those with 5–8 years (28.42) and 9 years or more (28.52). When the relationship between participants' level of ethical responsibility and their length of time as fans was examined using an ANOVA, the mean score for those with 1–4 years of fandom (14.52) was significantly lower than that for those with 9 years or more (16.20). When the relationship between participants' level of philanthropic responsibility and their length of time as fans was examined using an ANOVA test, the mean score for those who had been fans for 1–4 years (25.77) was found to be significantly lower than that of those who had been fans for 5–8 years (28.71) and 9 years or more (28.70). When the relationship between participants' level of identification as sports fans and the duration of their fandom was examined using an ANOVA test, the mean score for those with 1–4 years of fandom (35.47) was found to be significantly lower than that of those with 5–8 years (45.42) and 9 years or more (44.57).

Table 8. T-test analysis results for participants based on the "donation to the club" variable

Variable	Donation to the club	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs (CSRS)	Yes	185	94.91	12.72	8.426	.00
	No	287	81.96	20.65		
Economic Responsibility	Yes	185	18.09	3.02	8.889	.00
	No	287	15.01	4.50		
Legal Liability	Yes	185	30.33	4.48	9.128	.00
	No	287	25.58	6.82		
Ethical Responsibility	Yes	185	16.08	4.06	2.046	.04
	No	287	15.26	4.40		
Philanthropic Responsibility	Yes	185	30.39	4.55	8.002	.00
	No	287	26.10	7.09		
Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)	Yes	185	50.34	7.62	14.173	.00
	No	287	36.45	13.60		

An examination of Table 8 reveals that when the relationship between participants' level of Corporate Social Responsibility for Sports Clubs and the variable "donations to the club" is analysed, the average score of those who answered "yes" (94.91) was significantly higher than that of those who answered "no" (81.96). When the relationship between participants' level of economic responsibility and donations to the club was examined, the average score for those who answered "yes" (18.09) was significantly higher than that for those who answered "no" (15.01). When the relationship between participants' level of legal responsibility and donations to the club was examined, the average score for those who answered "yes" (30.33) was significantly higher than that for those who answered "no" (25.58). When the relationship between participants' ethical responsibility and donations to the club was examined, the average score for those who answered "yes" (16.08) was significantly higher than that for those who answered "no" (15.26). When the relationship between participants' level of philanthropic responsibility and donations to the club was examined, the average score for those who answered "yes" (30.39) was significantly higher than that for those who answered "no" (26.10). When examining the relationship between participants' level of identification as sports fans and donations to the club, the average

score for those who answered “yes” (50.34) was significantly higher than that for those who answered “no” (36.45).

Table 9. Results of the correlation analysis examining the relationship between participants' levels of corporate social responsibility toward sports clubs and their scores on the Sports Fan Identification Scale

	Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports (CSRS)	Economic Responsibility	Legal Liability	Ethical Responsibility	Philanthropic Responsibility	Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)
CSRS	1	.861** .000 472	.938** .000 472	.774** .000 472	.915** .000 472	.644** .000 472
Economic Responsibility	.861** .000 472	1	.791** .000 472	.580** .000 472	.692** .000 472	.600** .000 472
Legal Liability	.938** .000 472	.791** .000 472	1	.617** .000 472	.821** .000 472	.639** .000 472
Ethical Responsibility	.774** .000 472	.580** .000 472	.617** .000 472	1	.609** .000 472	.377** .000 472
Philanthropic Responsibility	.915** .000 472	.692** .000 472	.821** .000 472	.609** .000 472	1	.605** .000 472
Sports Fan Identification Scale (SFIS)	.644** .000 472	.600** .000 472	.639** .000 472	.377** .000 472	.605** .000 472	1

A low correlation between 0.000 and 0.300, a moderate correlation between 0.301 and 0.700, and a strong correlation between 0.701 and 1.00

Table 9 shows a moderate positive correlation (.644**; $p < 0.05$) between participants' level of sports fan identification and the level of corporate social responsibility for sports clubs, a moderate positive correlation (.600**; $p < 0.05$) with economic responsibility, a moderate positive correlation with the Legal Responsibility subscale (.639**; $p < 0.05$), a positive and moderate relationship with the Ethical Responsibility sub-dimension (.377**; $p < 0.05$), and a positive and moderate relationship with the Philanthropic Responsibility sub-dimension (.605**; $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The study examined the relationship between Sakaryaspor fans' levels of corporate social responsibility and their identification with the team. According to the findings, a significant and positive relationship was observed between corporate social responsibility and its sub-dimensions and fan identification. Furthermore, an examination of the scales used in the study revealed that it is highly reliable. This indicates that the data obtained is valid and reliable.

The present findings should be understood in the context of Sakaryaspor's institutional profile. Many regional soccer clubs in Turkey are involved in various community-oriented activities, such as youth sports academies, partnerships with local municipalities, charity matches, and fan engagement programs. All of these activities align with the philanthropic, ethical, legal, and economic dimensions of corporate social responsibility as measured in this study (Guevara Pérez et al., 2023; Fonseca et al., 2024). A systematic review of Sakaryaspor's unique corporate social responsibility portfolio is beyond the scope of this study. This is considered one of the study's limitations, as noted below. In future research, specific corporate social responsibility initiatives should be directly documented and coded in order to more clearly demonstrate the link between corporate actions and the outcomes achieved by fans. In addition, these initiatives should be linked to fans' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (Rowe et al., 2019; Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013).

The results indicated that there was no significant difference between single and married participants in total score or the sub-dimensions of economic, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility regarding fan perceptions of sports clubs' levels of corporate social responsibility, as measured by the marital status variable. The literature indicates that fans' perceptions of clubs' corporate social responsibility are related to the nature and visibility of the social responsibility activities carried out by the clubs (Walker & Kent, 2009; Inoue et al., 2011). In this study, no significant differences were found across the economic, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility dimensions. The sports management literature indicates that different fan groups evaluate the economic sustainability of sports clubs, their adherence to ethical principles, and their voluntary contributions to the community in similar ways (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Walters & Chadwick, 2009). In contrast, a significant difference favoured single participants in the legal accountability sub-dimension. Legal accountability refers to sports clubs' compliance with legal regulations and their governance structures, and is associated with fans' perception of trust in the club (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016). The literature indicates that fans' evaluations of clubs may vary depending on demographic variables (Karatopak, 2019; Beccarini & Ferrand, 2006). According to the results on sports fan identification, single participants showed a higher level of identification than married participants. Fan identification is defined as an individual's perception of themselves as part of the club and the formation of a psychological bond with it (Wann & Branscombe, 1993); it is noted that this structure plays a significant role in individuals' attitudes and behaviour toward the club (Günay & Tiryaki, 2003). It is also noted that corporate social responsibility activities can strengthen the bond between fans and the club and influence the level of identification (Ötcan, 2025).

Based on the age variable, no significant differences were found among age groups regarding the levels of corporate social responsibility of sports clubs, as measured by the sub-dimensions of economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility. The literature indicates that there are negative and statistically significant correlations at a low level between age and the sub-dimensions of perceptions of corporate social responsibility; it is noted that as age increases, there is a decrease in perceptions of legal and ethical responsibility in particular (Keleş & Adatepe, 2024). Indeed, Wisse et al. (2018) note that older adults may rate these activities more negatively due to a perceived mismatch between their own values and organisations' corporate social responsibility activities. Similarly, a study by Gupta and Singh (2017) also found a negative relationship between age and perceptions of corporate social responsibility. Although this study did not find any significant differences in the sub-dimensions of corporate social responsibility, it can be concluded that age has a significant impact on perceptions of corporate social responsibility. The study concluded that there was no statistically significant difference in identification levels among sports fans across age groups. The fact that symbolic elements of a club—such as its players, management, and colours—are adopted through soccer, and that fan-based identification occurs with minimal cognitive effort, explains why young people are drawn to soccer and how they can easily shape their identity development during this process (Zelyurt, 2019). Studies designed to measure sports fan identification also emphasise that the primary determinants of identification are psychological attachment and the level of sports consumption, rather than demographic variables such as age (Kural & Özbek, 2023). Similarly, models aimed at explaining fan behaviour also note that a strong, consistent psychological bond with the club lies at the heart of identification (Wann et al., 2011).

Based on the length of fandom variable, statistically significant differences were found in participants' total scores on the Corporate Social Responsibility Scale for Sports Clubs as well as in the sub-dimensions of economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility. An examination of the source of the difference revealed that participants with 1–4 years of fandom had significantly lower mean scores than those with 5–8 years or 9 years or more. In the ethical responsibility sub-dimension, a significant difference was found between participants with 1–4 years of fandom and those with 9 or more years. Fandom length is considered an important variable that explains the developmental trajectory of an individual's relationship with a sports club, with this process producing changes in levels of affective commitment and behavioural participation over time (Biscaia et al., 2016; Salam, 2015). In this context, as length of fandom increases, greater exposure to club activities and more intensive interaction with the club may lead to diversification in assessments of the club's various areas of responsibility (Pradhan et al., 2019; Smith & Stewart, 2007). It is stated that elements such as the financial structures, legal practices, and community contribution activities of sports clubs are more readily followed and evaluated by indi-

viduals who have long-term interaction with the club (Breuer et al., 2017; Doherty et al., 2014). Accordingly, it is observed that as the length of fandom increases, perceptions of corporate social responsibility toward sports clubs diverge, and this finding is consistent with approaches explaining the fan–club relationship in the sports consumer behaviour literature (Didi, 2018; Walker & Kent, 2009; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). Significant differences were also found in Sports Fan Identification Scale scores by length of fandom, with participants with 1–4 years of fandom exhibiting lower identification levels than those with 5–8 years or 9 years or more. It is stated that fan identification is a process that develops over time, and that as the depth of the relationship individuals establish with the club grows, identification levels increase accordingly (Arroba et al., 2021; Dalakas & Phillips Melancon, 2012; Harasta, 2021). Sports consumer behaviour research indicates that long-term fandom strengthens individuals' sense of belonging to the club, which is reflected in their level of identification (Kural & Özbek, 2023; Gray & Wert-Gray, 2012). Accordingly, it can be said that as the length of fandom increases, the level of sports fan identification also rises, exhibiting a structure that develops over time.

Based on the club donation variable, a significant difference was found in participants' perceptions of corporate social responsibility toward sports clubs. Participants who made donations had higher means on both the overall scale score and all sub-dimensions—economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility. Corporate social responsibility activities not only generate positive attitudes in individuals but also lay the groundwork for supportive behaviour (Jones Christensen et al., 2014; Aguinis et al., 2024; Aguilera et al., 2007). It is noted that fans' perceptions of clubs' transparency, accountability, and financial structures affect their level of trust in the club, and that this trust is reflected in supportive behaviour (Fu & Potimu, 2025). It is stated that the social responsibility projects, community contribution activities, and ethical stance of sports clubs are decisive in fans' evaluations of the club, and that such activities influence fan loyalty and supportive behaviour (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Godfrey, 2009; Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013). Regarding the level of sports fan identification, a significant difference was found based on donation behaviour. In this study, participants who made donations were found to have higher identification levels. It is stated that fans who exhibit high levels of identification tend to allocate more time, effort, and financial resources toward the club (Karatopak, 2019). Furthermore, identification is said to lead fans to see the club as part of their own identity, thereby strengthening supportive behaviour (Adekola & Bolanle, 2025; Melnick & Wann, 2011). The results of this study suggest that club donation behaviour is an important variable in terms of the level of sports fan identification.

The correlation analysis revealed a positive, significant relationship between corporate social responsibility in sports clubs and sports fan identification. Examining the sub-dimensions, moderate, positive, and significant relationships were found between economic responsibility, legal responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility and sports fan identification. In contrast, a moderate, positive, and significant relationship was found with ethical responsibility. The literature states that the corporate social responsibility activities of sports clubs affect fans' perceptions and evaluations of the club, and that this effect strengthens the bond fans form with the club (Melovic et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019). Furthermore, corporate social responsibility practices are said to contribute to fans perceiving the club as a value-generating, socially responsible institution, thereby supporting team integration (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). In sum, it is observed that there is a significant and positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and sports fan identification, and that this relationship is consistent with the sports consumer behaviour literature.

Conclusions

Based on marital status, no significant differences were found in the sub-dimensions of corporate social responsibility among sports clubs—economic, ethical, and philanthropic. In contrast, a significant difference in favour of single participants was found in the legal responsibility sub-dimension. Additionally, sports fan identification was higher among single participants. Accordingly, it is recommended that club communication and outreach activities be developed targeting different marital status groups. No significant differences were found in the corporate social responsibility sub-dimensions or in the level of sports fan identification across age groups. Based on this finding, it can be said that corporate social responsibility perceptions and fan identification should be treated independently of the age variable.



Based on the length-of-fandom variable, significant differences were found in the total score of the corporate social responsibility scale and all sub-dimensions, as well as in the level of sports fan identification. Accordingly, it is recommended that activities to increase interaction with the club be developed for individuals with shorter fandoms. A significant difference was found in perceptions of corporate social responsibility and the level of sports fan identification, based on club donation behaviour. For this reason, it is recommended that social responsibility activities aimed at strengthening fans' support for the club be enhanced. A positive and significant relationship was found between corporate social responsibility and its sub-dimensions and sports fan identification. Accordingly, clubs with higher perceived levels of corporate social responsibility tend to have fans with stronger identification levels.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite these contributions, the present study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample was drawn exclusively from Sakaryaspor supporters in a single province, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to other clubs, leagues, and cultural contexts. Second, a convenience sampling strategy was employed via social media platforms, which may limit the sample's representativeness. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences; the observed associations between corporate social responsibility perceptions and fan identification levels do not establish the direction of effect. Fourth, as both scales were administered simultaneously within a single survey, common method variance may have influenced the observed correlations. Finally, the sample exhibited notable demographic clustering: 75.2% of participants were single, and 33.3% were aged 18-21. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal and multi-club designs, cross-cultural comparisons, and structural equation modelling to examine the mediating and moderating mechanisms underlying the CSR-fan identification relationship. In addition, data was collected only from males for the gender variable in the demographic information form. This situation has prevented an analysis of potential gender differences regarding perceptions of corporate social responsibility or fan identity. Given that the reviewer noted the potential importance of gender as an explanatory variable, and that existing literature suggests gender may moderate fan identification and CSR perceptions (Keleş & Adatepe, 2024), future research should incorporate gender as a standard demographic variable alongside the variables examined here.

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Author Affiliations

Nedim Malkoç¹, Serdar Ceyhun², Faik Orhun Tapşın³

¹ University of Health Sciences, Hamidiye Faculty of Life Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey.

² Bartın University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Bartın, Turkey.

³ Dicle University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Diyarbakır, Turkey.

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Authors and translators' details:

Nedim Malkoç	nedim.malkok@sbu.edu.tr	Author
Serdar Ceyhun	sceyhun@bartin.edu.tr	Author
Faik Orhun Tapşın	tpsnorhun@gmail.com	Author