Television program format preferences and aggression of football fans

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Abstract

In this study, relations between television program format preferences of football fans and manifestation of aggressive behavior are examined. Data is collected with a sample of television football show viewers in Turkey. Results revealed fanship, aggression and format preferences during hours of football television program viewing are all interrelated. The significant preference of fan audiences for belligerent football shows among the other major types of football program formats available on Turkish television stations was found to be in correlation with aggression trait. Aggression was found to increase the hours of viewing. As a vicious circle, the hours of viewing the sports television programs further elevates fanship.

Keywords: audience research, football programs, format choice, aggression, fanship.

Introduction

Television is a suitable medium that combines show elements with informative content and further suggests that the mass consumption of televised sports have created a more complex feel and appetite for sports (Rinehart, 1994, p.28). Though Internet allows the rapid transmission of short sports news, television is still the leading media in the context of sports by offering the 'being there' experience to the audience.

Research on television viewing has gone beyond the limits of television viewing functions and lifestyle attributes and started to proliferate in 1980s with the work of Bantz (1982). Previous researches concentrated on general associations between individual motivations and viewing patterns of regularly scheduled, live and purely entertainment sports program types offered on television (Gantz & Wenner, 1995). The focus of this study is football television program audience, representing an essential segment of television viewers (Gantz et al., 2006).

The extent of the research presented in this study is Turkey, where football has been a commonly shared public concern throughout its history (Berument & Yucel, 2005). There is a settled structure in soccer industry, along with high number of football supporters. Sert (2000) explains that football has a strong association with the more general term sports as it turned out to be a lifestyle with the rapid emergence of football culture through televisualization of sports beginning from 1960s in Turkey. Thus, the national interest in football is as old as the history of the Turkish republic itself. By taking Turkish football audience as a case study, this study aims to explore the complex relationship between football television program format preferences,

aggression and fanship, since fan violence has been a common concern in countries where football fandom is dominant. The present study, thus, aims to assess the potential impact of football media consumption patterns on triggering aggressive behavior among fans.

In line with this aim, researchers spotted 51 football programs broadcasted on 21 television channels in Turkey. Football news programs, football entertainment programs and the rising amount of belligerent football programs are determined to be three major formats broadcasted on analog and digital Turkish televisions. Within the scope of this study, researchers assume that there are significant positive relationships between fanship, aggression and time spent for football show viewing, as well as football television program format choice.

Understanding the relation between television viewing, football fanship and aggression

Exploring the impact of personality traits on broadcasting media preferences is a rising trend in audience studies. A recent study of Mindset Media (Bulik, 2010), analyzing self-reported data from about 25,000 television viewers across more than 70 television programs, revealed that the increased likelihood that a group of individuals who watch a particular television program will tend to have one or more common personality traits. In the context of television program format preferences, Shim and Paul (2007) study revealed positive correlations between personality traits and choice of different television program genres. In parallel, Anderson and Bushman (2002) explain that individual factors sex, beliefs, attitudes, values, long-term goals and scripts compose an individual's readiness to aggress as cognitive, emotional and personal variables that interact with environmental and situational factors. Previous research explained also that higher levels of team identification relate to state verbal aggression towards opposition players and officials (Wann, Carlson & Schrader 1999, p.280), higher levels of anxiety (Wann, Schrader & Adamson 1998) and tendency to commit acts of violence as a result of the intense loyalty felt towards football teams (Wann, Culver, Akanda, Daglar, Divitiis & Smith, 2005). Especially in countries such as Turkey, where the football has a privileged position in national sports culture, football-related violence is not rare (e.g. BBC, 2000; Vanguard, 2012). Thus, examining the relationship between aggression and sports television program format preferences of individuals stands as a key area for investigation to evaluate personal dynamics of sports television viewers as audience.

One of the most studied interpretive communities is composed of fans. In sports literature, there are various explanations of the term, fanship. Anderson (1979) defines fanship as the conservative enthusiasm of an individual towards a particular interest. It is suggested that fanship is similar to social identity, in which an individual's self-concept is formed by her knowledge on the membership experience of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1978).

Gwenllian-Jones (2002) draws a distinction between fans and "ordinary" audiences by asserting "fans are viewers who do not merely watch television programs, but also write fan fictions and cultural criticism, produce fan art, scratch videos, websites and so on" (p. 175). While this assertion applies to fans in general, this study specifically focuses on the relationship between football fanship and sports television program format preferences since fanship is considered as a relevant construct in the context of television program viewing. Grossberg (1992) argues that sensibility differentiates fans from general viewers that fans respond to shows of those they are fan of with more affect than the general audience. In their study, comparing television sports fans with fans of other programming genres, Gantz et al. (2006) found out that sports fans are more likely to strongly endorse feeling of excitement as they tune in to watch since they care about the outcomes of plays and discussions. Study of Peterson and Raney (2008)

revealed that unfolding nature of suspense is a strong predictor of mediated sports enjoyment. Covering the literature, this study has four sub questions under two main research questions. How the 'extent of football television program viewing' and 'football show format choice' are explained by two different constructs; 'fanship' as an extension of interest in football and 'aggression' as a personality trait.

Method
Data collection procedure and participants
The data for this study was collected by an online survey with a sample of television football show viewers in Turkey. The survey instrument was pilot tested before the actual fieldwork. Participants were recruited for the study via an e-mail containing a summary of the study's goals and the URL for the online questionnaire. The sample is chosen judgmentally based on their extent of football program viewing. A total of 180 respondents participated with the survey. Following the removal of multiple submissions, submissions with missing data, and minors, the final sample included 150 respondents actively viewing television football shows. Hence this homogenous sample of viewers gives important cues about the main problematic of the current study.[1]

Profiling has always been a significant component of audience studies. It has been questioned why people watch television or certain type of programs on television. Wenner (1998) states that demographic characteristics of sports audience play a significant role on how much sports television programs they are exposed to. According to Wenner (1998) gender is a significant demographic characteristic since women tend to watch sports less on television. Cooper and Tang (2009) underline the fact that age influence media usage and demographic characteristics are related to overall television viewing motivations of individuals. The findings of the study shows that majority of participants are male (90%) within an age range of 18 to 61 and average of 25.7 years. Since the participants are selected all among viewers, no significant difference was found between different ages and sexes about their extent of football show viewing. The sample highly supports their teams through consumption of licensed products (μ= 4.01)[2], 15.3 % of participants have combined tickets for football matches and 10% have club membership.

Internet penetration rate in Turkey reached 47.2% by 2012 (TUIK, 2013) and the IPSOS KMG Report (2009) on Internet use in Turkey revealed that 58.5% of Internet users prefer reading news online on a daily basis. Findings reveal television is still one of the primary media of news source with its dominant business models and practices in Turkey. The results specifically show Internet is the most effective medium (μ= 5.53) and television (μ= 4.29) is the second in terms of respondents' preferences in reaching news about both on football and other issues. Findings about viewing football games point out to be mostly watched on the television (μ= 4.77). All participants watch football shows via television and they have certain preferences on formats. The decision of what to watch on television is generally taken by the participants themselves freely (μ= 3.91), not by the other members of the household. Participants of the research watch also 3.04 hours of television per day while they spend 3.42 hours per week watching football shows.

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[1] Considering the complexity of the constructs studies, including aggression and fanship, the results must further be probed by qualitative research as conducting in depth interviews.
[2] The scaled questions were measured by 1-6 points Likert scale, that 1 = definitely disagree.

Measures and Results

This study utilized a cross-sectional design comprising several self-report measures. The structured online questionnaire contained 28-itemed aggression scale as personality trait (Buss and Perry, 1992; Evren, Çınar, Güleç, Çelik & Evren, 2011) and 11-itemed fanship scale (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). The aggression scale was translated into Turkish, reliability-tested and was found compatible with the original version (Buss and Perry, 1992) by Evren et al. (2011). In this study, reliability analyses have revealed Cronbach's alpha score of .907 for both aggression (μ= 3, 19) and fanship scales (μ= 4, 10).

All analyses were performed using the SPSS 21.0 statistical program. Separate regression analyses were carried out to explain relationship between fanship, aggression, preferred football show formats and hours of football program viewing. Pearson correlations, regression coefficients and F-statistics are reported in Table 1 & 2.

Table 1: Television Football Program Viewing (N=150)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	df	F	Adj. R^2	B	SE	t	Sig
Fanship	Football news show format	149	4,221	,021	,186	,090	2,054	,042
Fanship	Football belligerent show format	149	3,788	,018	,204	,105	1,946	,054
Belligerent football show format	Aggression	149	12,579	,073	,154	,043	3,547	,001
Hours of sports television program viewing	Fanship	149	20,398	,115	,105	,023	4,516	,000
Aggression	Fanship	149	8.072	,052	,228	,113	2,841	,005

Note: All items above were rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). The number of hours audience spends for football show viewing was questioned via ratio scale.

This study shows that fanship, aggression and format preferences during hours of football television program viewing are all interrelated. Aggression triggered by fanship is significantly related with the belligerent and football entertainment program format preferences. On the other hand, only belligerent format significantly raises the aggressiveness that in turn predicts more hours of sports television program viewing. As a vicious circle, the hours of viewing the sports television programs further elevates fanship. Findings are, thus, in line with the argument that fans respond to television programs with more affect (Grossberg, 1992).

Table 2: Correlation matrix (N=150)

	Fanship	Football news program format	Football belligerent program format	Aggression	Hours of sports television program viewing
Fanship	1				
Football news program format	,167[*]	1			
Football belligerent program format	,158[*]	-,038	1		
Aggression	,228[**]	,014	,281[**]	1	
Hours of sports television program viewing	,348[**]	,116	,168[*]	,174[*]	1

Higgins et al. (2012) define "belligerent broadcasting" as a style that offers content with intense expressions of anger. Belligerent broadcasting is relevant within the context of sports television shows, that offer talk-show content including aggressive and intense discussions before and after the football matches, confronting representatives of rival teams or covering football related scandals. As opposed to football entertainment and football news shows, belligerent football shows are mostly marked with the high tension felt between hosts through expressions of belligerence, filled with "loud and angry voices" (Brownstein, 1995). In this context, the findings of the current study both shed a light to modes of football television show viewing and augment to the literature of audience reception studies about television content fostering aggressive behavior.

Conclusion and discussion

Communication scholars examine continuously changing television program formats within the rapidly evolving media environment and the role of audiences in shaping the most attractive forms. Predicting audience behaviors are substantial also for media professionals as television is still the most widely viewed screen worldwide (The Nielsen Company, 2010). For instance, television viewing is the most commonly reported activity in the U.S., taking up just over half of all leisure time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Similarly, in Australia, people spend about half of their free time watching television, and across several countries in Europe, television takes up about 40 percent of people's leisure time (European Commission, 2003). Watching television is also reported to be the major leisure activity in surveyed OECD countries, including Turkey (OECD, 2009).

The extent of this study is Turkey, where the overall population exceeds 76 million (TUIK, 2014) and countrywide football fanship in total is estimated to be 92% (MarketingTurkiye, 2012). This study, focusing on a niche area through specific assumptions augments to the previous discussions by not only adding up the television viewing in terms of a geographical trend, but also as a case study contributing the global studies of football fanship and television consumption.

Existing literature sheds light on general TV viewing dynamics. Past research that explored the aggression in television content (Glascock, 2013) and viewer aggression from various point of views (e.g. Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Rubin, Haridakis & Eyal, 2009; Haridakis & Rubin, 2009) indicate, aggressive human behavior is always related with the selection of aggressive media content. On the same path, findings of the current study offer football fan-specific insights on relations between television consumption patterns and aggression of fans. These insights imply that sports fanship represents an important avenue for behavioral media studies to explore how level of attachments impact on television consumption patterns and how television consumption patterns trigger aggression that potentially is manifested as violence.

Hence the results of this study call for further questions. Gender differentiations in such area of research would also make a significant research question in the context of fandom as previous research proved that media content may have varying effects on men and women (Gantz & Wenner, 1995; Oliver, 2000; Zillmann & Bryant, 1984, 1986; Zillmann, Hezel, & Medoff, 1980). A majority of previous research focused on gender portrayals through media coverage (e.g. Stern & Mastro, 2009; Hardin, Simpson, Whiteside & Garris, 2007; Huffman, Tuggle & Rosengard, 2004). A comparative exploration of patterns of television consumption and audience aggression among male and female football fans would potentially be linked to the analysis of media coverage from gender equity perspective, to find out if television program format preferences are shaped by approaches to different gender categories and whether the effect of the media content on the audience is actually a consequence of gender-biased content.

Leisure activities via media are 'experiential in nature' (Madrigal, 2006, p.267) and are largely shaped by media content, media formats and information technologies (Altheide, 1997). Considering the vicious circle of relationships presented in the findings of the current study, the consequences of belligerent format reception in more interactive new media environments during leisure times by fans are also potential area of research. The changing process of viewing via complementary basis of these new media, that are personalized to the individual as sources of football related content and viewing experiences in a broader and virtually-connected arena must further be probed. Such probation is necessary to reveal how new media formats shape fan behavior patterns, which also involves media consumption.

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