Fan Tribes and Brand Titans: The Role of Social Identity in Building Brand Equity in Fenerbahce S.K. and Panathinaikos B.C. Fan Groups

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Basketball Fan Social Identity Brand Equity Social Identity Theory SIBE Model Received 19 October 2025 Revised 13 December 2025 Accepted 15 December 2025 **Article Classification:** Research Article	**Purpose** – This study aimed to measure the effect of the social identities of Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos basketball fan groups on their teams' brand value. **Design/methodology/approach** – For this purpose, a survey was administered to a total of 500 fans—250 from each club. The questionnaire employed the scale developed by Watkins (2014), which was derived by synthesizing scales used in previous studies. The scale was essentially constructed based on the SIBE model. The data obtained from the survey were transferred to IBM SPSS 25.0 for classification and analysis. Regression analysis was used to test the research hypotheses. **Results** – It was found that fans' support for their teams—both in the stands and through media channels—positively affects the clubs' recognition. **Discussion** – The analyses revealed that fans' social identities play an important role in creating brand value. It was concluded that fans attending games or supporting their teams in front of the TV positively influence the clubs' visibility and awareness.

1. Introduction

Although fandom has been defined in many ways from the past to the present, its foundation is 'to support'. Giving that support in the strongest way possible has been a major driving force for teams winning or losing contests. Today, fans have come to refer to their support for their teams not by the name of the team, but by the name they give themselves, creating a new identity for their groups and identifying that identity with their teams. In some cases, these identities created by fan groups have led them to be active not only in sporting competitions but also in social events. Individuals who are members of these groups, on the other hand, have begun to declare their social identity through their fan base as a result of the nature of expressing their social identity within the society to which they belong. The value that this identity and presence have for the teams has been widely measured and discussed in the literature by different groups. However, there are not many studies in the literature that examine the value that fan groups give to their teams from their own perspective.

When it comes to fandom, football is one of the sports that immediately comes to mind. Since there is so little research on indoor sports and fans of specific sports, the majority of studies in the literature focus on football fans. Since basketball is more popular in the United States than elsewhere, studies on basketball fans in the literature also focus on them. There are no studies on basketball teams in Europe. Moreover, all studies of basketball fans in the literature have focused on a single fan group. Fans of American football, baseball, and soccer have often been the focus of comparative studies. Therefore, it is important to compare basketball fan groups.

The present study aims to examine the impact of fan groups on the brand equity of clubs from the perspective of the fans themselves. The research is deemed necessary due to the prevailing focus in the literature on soccer fans and individual fan groups and the neglect of basketball fans in Europe and comparative fan group analyses. In order to address this research gap, the study employs a comparative approach to analyze two prominent basketball fan groups in Turkey and Greece (Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos). These groups are selected on the basis of their shared historical and cultural characteristics while being situated in different social contexts. The research under discussion measures the frequency and intensity of fans' support for their teams, the fan group with which they identify, and the value that this identity adds to the club brand. In this respect, the study aims to produce meaningful outputs not only for sports clubs and managers but also for academics interested in sports marketing, brand management, and social identity literature.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Brand Equity

For companies, brand equity is very important with a consumer and economic perspective. Yoo and Donthu (2001) provide an analysis of brand equity using a broad definition that entails attitudinal tendencies, brand awareness and brand assets. Brand equity is defined by Aaker (1991) as the accumulated positive feeling and intangible processes resulting in the mind of the consumers regarding brand name, symbol and other brand distinguishing elements. Similarly, Keller (1993) states that brand knowledge stands out as the difference it creates in consumer behavior.

Today, brand equity is a reflection of intangible assets of businesses beyond traditional financial assets (Doyle, 2008). When the market value of the 20 most successful companies worldwide is analyzed, it is seen that the tangible assets of these companies represent only 15% of their total market value. This situation shows that the power of businesses depends largely on their brand equity (Alkibay, 2005; Cop & Bekmezci, 2005).

Brand equity is an effective factor in consumer perceptions and in the development of long-term strategies by businesses. A strong brand equity provides an advantage to businesses in customer loyalty, price flexibility and market initiatives (Aaker, 1996). In particular, high brand equity makes it easier to consider customer feedback and develop innovations for customer needs when introducing new products and services to the market.

2.2. Brand Equity and Sports

The impact of technological advances and the media has turned sport into a social phenomenon as well as an enormous economic sector. According to Meenaghan and O'Sullivan (1999), it is more specific media and marketing activities that are the underlying factors behind this re-shaping of sports into a commercial entity. Due to the internationalization of sports organizations, clubs and athletes have begun being seen as brands.

Based on Brand Finance's 2019 analysis, Real Madrid is the world's most valuable football club, at 1 billion 846 million euros (Goal, 2019). The brand value of sports clubs is shaped by a combination of many factors such as fan loyalty, club symbols, historical achievements and social identity. For example, Mohamed Salah, one of Liverpool's players, has helped the club become an important brand in Egypt. Similarly, Turkish athletes playing for international teams have increased the popularity of these teams in Turkey (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998).

2.3. Social Identity and Fan Groups

Social identity theory suggests that individuals define themselves through their group membership (Tajfel, 1982). In the context of sport, fans tend to see the achievements of the teams they support as their own achievements. In this context, social identity refers to individuals' sense of belonging and pride arising from group membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The significance of group membership and the subsequent prioritization of group interests influence the process by which individuals emphasize the collective group over their own interests (Oja et al., 2020). Especially supporting a team that has achieved success plays an important role in reinforcing individuals' social identities (Madran, 2012).

Fan groups have a critical importance in the formation and protection of the brand value of clubs. Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw (1999) categorized sports fans into five categories: casual fans, local fans, loyal fans, fanatical fans and dysfunctional fans. Their classification focuses on the source of motivation and the behavior of different

types of fans. Motivation can be temporary or permanent. For example, situational motivation is transitory and depends on time or space. Permanent motivation is probably due to the fact that a fan perceives the sport object as important for his/her self-concept.

H_{1a}: *Temporary Fenerbahçe Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Fenerbahçe's brand equity.*

H_{1b}: *Temporary Panathinaikos Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Panathinaikos brand equity.*

In addition, the source of motivation for transient and local fans is situational, whereas dedicated, fanatical and dysfunctional fans have enduring motivation. Differences in motivation can be attributed to varying levels of attachment to the sport object, which is manifested through sport-related behaviors. For these reasons, loyal, fanatical and dysfunctional fans exhibit different forms of attachment to the sport consumption target. This categorization provides an important framework for understanding fan groups' interactions with clubs and their level of loyalty.

H_{2a}: *Local Fenerbahçe Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Fenerbahçe's brand equity.*

H_{2b}: *Local Panathinaikos Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Panathinaikos brand equity.*

Recent research shows that fans' social identities significantly affect their behavior and interactions on social media platforms. In particular, fans have been found to reinforce their group membership through social media and strengthen their social identities by interacting with other fans. In this context, social identity stands out as a key factor shaping fans' motivations and behaviors in social media use (Ergiyen, 2023).

H_{3a}: *Devoted Fenerbahçe Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Fenerbahçe's brand equity.*

H_{3b}: *Devoted Panathinaikos Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Panathinaikos brand equity.*

Social identity refers to individuals' sense of belonging and pride arising from group membership. Sports fans tend to see the success of the teams they support as their own success. This situation causes fan groups to form a strong social identity and establish an emotional bond with the club. Especially supporting a team that has achieved success plays an important role in reinforcing individuals' social identities (Shatz, 2024).

H_{4a}: *Fanatical Fenerbahçe Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Fenerbahçe's brand equity.*

H_{4b}: *Fanatical Panathinaikos Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Panathinaikos brand equity.*

Social identity theory provides an important framework for understanding the behavior and interactions of sports fans. The emotional bonds that fans form with the teams they support have a wide range of effects from social media use to stadium experiences. Therefore, it is critical for sports clubs to understand the social identities of their fans and develop strategies accordingly to strengthen club-fan relationships.

H_{5a}: *Dysfunctional Fenerbahçe Fans' social identity has a significant impact on Fenerbahçe's brand equity.*

H_{5b}: *Dysfunctional Panathinaikos Fans' social identity has a significant impact Panathinaikos brand equity.*

2.4. Social Identity-Brand Equity (SIBE) Model

The SIBE (Social Identity-Based Brand Equity) Model combines social identity theory with customer-based brand equity and provides a framework that enables individuals who identify with a brand to strengthen their perceptions of that brand (Keller, 1993; Tajfel and Turner, 2004). The model predicts that certain market characteristics 'history and tradition, group experience, ritual and place' can be manipulated to increase social identification with a service brand. Social identification is the most prominent way in which one's emotional connection to a brand can be influenced by these market attributes (Underwood et al., 2001; Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). By identifying potential antecedents of social identification, the SIBE model provides brand managers with a starting point for developing strategies that lead to increased social identification with the service brand. The SIBE model also reveals the importance of brands establishing emotional bonds with consumers. Consumers' identification with brands is strengthened by factors such as brand attractiveness, prestige and distinctiveness. In this context, the ability of brands to provide social benefits and unforgettable experiences to consumers plays a critical role in increasing brand equity. This framework can be used to analyze fans' emotional bonds with clubs, especially in the context of professional sports clubs.
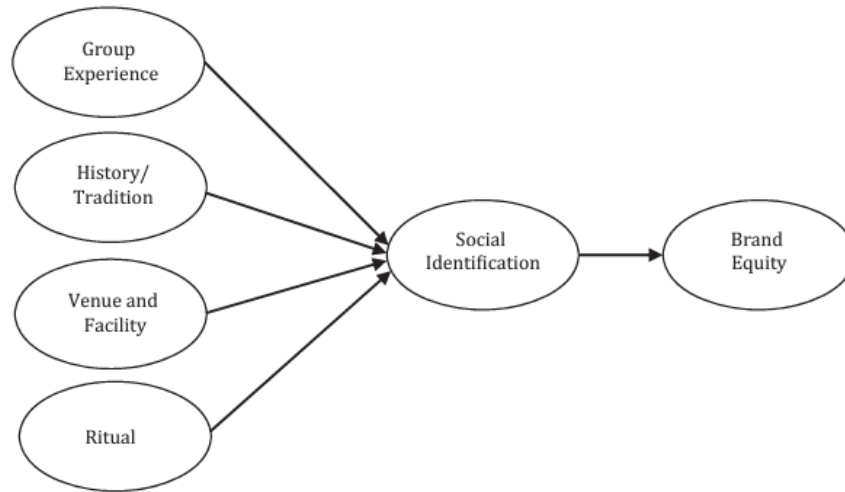
Figure 1. Original SIBE Model. Social Identity-Brand Equity Model for Service Branding

(Source: Watkins, B. A. (2014). Revisiting the Social Identity-Brand Equity Model: An Application to Professional Sports. Journal of Sport Management, 28(4), 471–480).

Recent research supports the applicability of the SIBE model in the context of sports clubs. For example, Zelyurt (2011) analyzed football fandom from the perspective of social identity theory and revealed the positive effects of fans' identification with the teams they support on the brand value of the clubs. Similarly, Oyman and Başbozkurt (2021) emphasized the contribution of social identity to brand equity by investigating the effect of fans' social identities on their social media behaviors and usage motivations.

Social identification is the knowledge that a person is a member of a group and the importance of the emotional bond acquired through group membership (Tajfel, 1982). In the SIBE model, Underwood et al. (2001) argue that social identification is the point at which consumers form an emotional bond with a brand. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), 'social identification enables an individual to envision and feel loyal to an organization or corporate culture, while giving credit to the psychological reality beyond membership in a community'. Social identification with a brand leads to the development of meaningful consumer-brand relationships (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

Social identification institutionalizes that a person is a member of a social group of individuals who share a common bond and declare themselves as members of the same social category (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Stets and Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1982). Identification is defined as the perception of integrity with an organization (Ahearne et al., 2005; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Tajfel (1982) lists three components necessary to achieve identification: (a) cognitive awareness of membership; (b) an evaluative component in which awareness is related to group values; and (c) an emotional investment in the awareness and evaluation of group activities. Ahearne et al. (2005) argue that consumers who are not actual members of an organization may be more likely to become members if they find the organization attractive and group membership has a positive impact on their social identity.

In the context of sport, fan identification is a concept used interchangeably with social identification (Underwood et al., 2001). Sutton et al. (1997) define fan identification as the commitment and involvement of sport consumers in the organization. For highly identified sports fans, being a team follower is an integral part of their social identity (Wann et.al., 2000) and Wann and Branscombe (1993) suggest that highly identified sports fans should be more willing to invest time and money in the team and attend as many sporting events as possible. In addition, Wann and Dolan (1994) emphasize that for highly identified fans, identification with one's team is a defining feature of self-concept, to the point where team success or failure affects self-esteem.

3. Methodology

Though fandom has been defined in various ways throughout history, its fundamental essence lies in the concept of "support." Providing unwavering support has long been a pivotal factor in determining the success or failure of teams in competitions. In contemporary times, fans often identify themselves not only by their team affiliation but also by the names of their dedicated fan groups, forging a unique identity closely

intertwined with their teams. These fan-generated identities frequently extend beyond the realm of sports, influencing participation in social events. Moreover, individuals aligning themselves with these groups often use their fan allegiance as a means of expressing their social identity within society. The significance of this fan identity and its impact on teams has been extensively explored in the current literature from various perspectives. However, there remains a noticeable gap in research regarding the specific value that fan groups attribute to their teams from their standpoint.

Football is one of the sports that instantly comes to mind when discussing fandom. The bulk of studies in the literature concentrate on football supporters, as there is not much information on indoor sports or fans of certain sports. Studies on basketball fans in the literature also concentrate on them since basketball is more popular in the US than it is worldwide. Research on European basketball teams is scarce. Furthermore, the majority of these particular studies focus on a particular fan base. Comparative studies of American football, baseball, and soccer fans have frequently been conducted. It is crucial to compare basketball fan bases as a result. For these reasons, this current research focuses on the fan groups of Fenerbahçe S.K. and Panathinaikos B.C. to explore the effect of fan groups on the brand equity of clubs.

Before the execution of the research, the mandatory permissions and approvals were obtained from the Çankaya University Research and Publication Ethics Committee, and the data were collected online.

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

Since the population of the study consists of fans of all Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos basketball clubs, the population and sampling frame cannot be determined. As a result, the judgment sampling approach was used to establish the size of the sample in the present study. The sample size for the study (n) was determined by the researcher to be 500 basketball fans, and to address the issue of sample representativeness, the study included an equal number of participants from each fan group.

Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos clubs have a good reputation in Europe. With their success and consistency, the teams have become the symbols of the EuroLeague. The teams Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos are well-known throughout Europe. The teams have come to represent the EuroLeague because of their success and consistency. One of the most important considerations in selecting these two teams was the fact that they both have devoted fan bases that influence the competition's result. The proximity of the two nations in terms of climate and culture also had an impact on the decision of these two fan clubs.

Data for this study were collected using a web survey. The questionnaires were translated into Turkish for Fenerbahçe fans and Greek for Panathinaikos fans. The questionnaires were transferred to Google Forms and formatted for use on the web using Google Forms. Through the 'Uni-FEB and Gate-13' fan groups on social media, composed of Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos fans, a connection was made with the fans to disseminate the application, and the link to the survey was distributed in the groups. When the targeted 250 questionnaires were collected, the application was closed.

3.2. Measures

The Social Identity-Brand Equity (SIBE) Model was developed by Underwood, Bond, and Baer (2001) to emphasize the importance of social identity in creating brand equity for service sector companies. They regard social identity as a means of creating an emotional bond between customers and service brands. This concept was extended by the researchers to professional sports. They proposed four primary characteristics of the sports market that can be used to increase social identification with a sports team: Group Experience, History and Tradition, Location, and Ritual. Following the SIBE approach, Watkins published a study in 2014 that revisits the approach. His research aims to put the Social Identity-Brand Equity (SIBE) paradigm to the test in the context of professional sports branding. According to the model, some elements such as group experience (community and salience), history and tradition, and venue influence fan identification, which in turn influences the customer-based brand equity of sports teams. He also developed a modified scale to measure salient group identity, which supported the research by highlighting the importance of group experience as an antecedent to fan identification. It underpinned the broader SIBE concept by further solidifying the link between fan identification and brand equity. The measurement consists of 5-point Likert items (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree). For this study, the researchers chose to collect data using the Watkins' Scale. In addition, a question was added to the scale to determine the level of satisfaction with the 'Sports Fan

Classification' proposed by Hunt (1999). Specifically, he claimed that there are five different types of sports fans: temporary, local, devoted, fanatical, and dysfunctional.
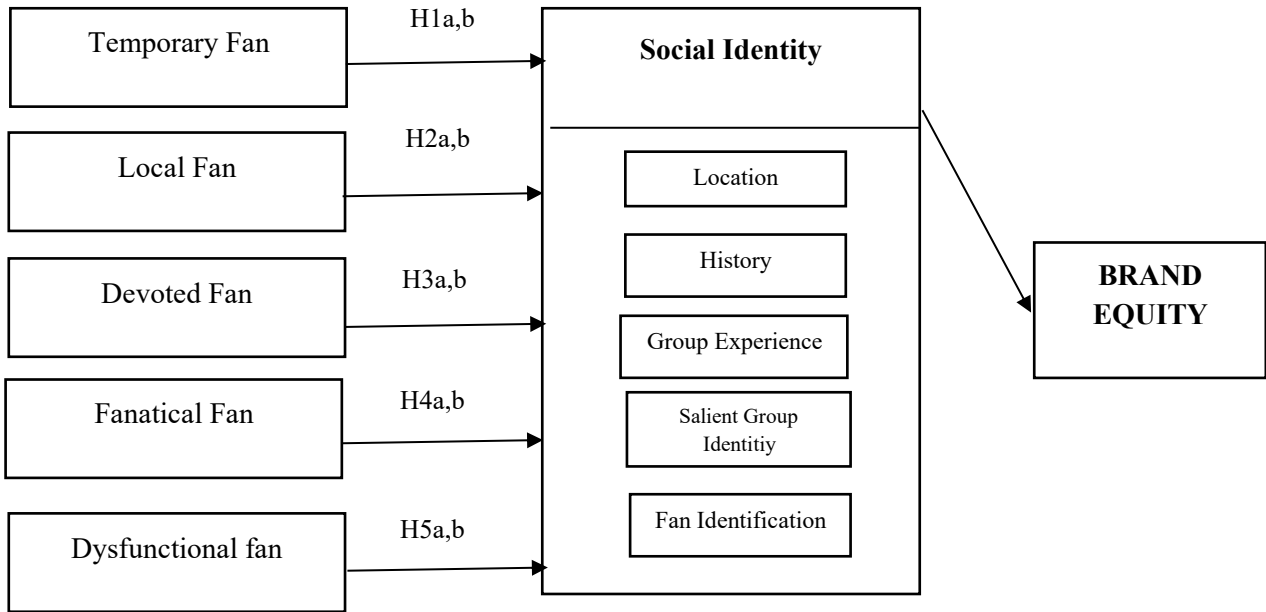

Figure 2. The Proposed Model

Cronbach's alpha analysis was used to examine the scale's reliability, and the analysis was performed first independently for the scale dimensions and then with a method that covered the entire scale. When the acquired coefficients are analyzed, it is established that the dimensions are very reliable both individually and collectively (0.983) (Table 1).

Table 1. Cronbach α Coefficients of the Scale

Scale	Dimensions	α Coefficients
Watkins (2014)	Location	0,872
	History	0,865
	Group Experience	0,906
	Salient Group Identity	0,887
	Fan Identification	0,972
	Brand Equity	0,975
	Total Reliability	**0,983**

EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) was performed on six primary dimensions to assess the validity of the scale and the compatibility of the items with one another. Before beginning the factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was applied to the data to determine the sample size's adequacy for the factor analysis. The KMO value was determined as 0.949 in this investigation. According to the KMO, it is possible to declare that the sample utilized for the research is fully adequate. Second, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity result was reviewed to determine the data's correlation. According to the results (x^2=23977,872; p=0,000) the correlation between the data was sufficient to proceed the factor analysis. To test the structural validity, Principal Components Analysis was applied, and Direct Oblimin Rotation was preferred in rotation based on the assumption that the sub-dimensions were related to the items. Factor loads less than 0.30 were omitted from the analysis. When the correlation table was evaluated, it was discovered that the relationships between the variables were statistically significant, and the items were consistent within themselves (p≤0,05). Furthermore, it was discovered that there is no multicollinearity problem in the data (1,04>0,0001).

When examining the total variance explanation levels of the items, this value was calculated to be 86.130. The validity of the measurement tool was considered high at 86%, and as a result of all the evaluations performed, it was determined that the validity of the scale was at a good level.

4. Data Analysis and Results

When the overall gender distribution of the fans is analyzed, it is discovered that 24.4% of them are female and 75.6% are male fans. In terms of gender distribution per team, 23.6% of Fenerbahce fans are female and 76.4% are male, 24.4% of Panathinaikos fans are female and 75.6% are male.

Table 2. Distribution of Fans by Gender

Team	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Fenerbahçe	**59**	**191**	250
	23,6%	76,4%	100,0%
Panathinaikos	**63**	**187**	250
	25,2%	74,8%	100,0%
Total	122	378	500
	24,4%	75,6%	100,0%

The age question was posed open-ended in the study, and the 'Sturges Rule' was used to calculate the number of classes and intervals. As a result, the ideal class range is calculated using the Sturges rule formula (Sturges, 1926). According to the calculations, the demographic composition of the age groups has been classified into 10 categories.

Table 3 shows the age ranges based on the derived data. According to this, 13% of the fans decided to be the youngest fan group between the ages of 16-20, while 2.4% were discovered to be the oldest fan group between the ages of 61 and 65. Both teams' supporters are largely (18.2%) young adults between the ages of 21 and 25.

Table 3. Distribution of Fans by Age Groups

Age Groups	n	%
16-20	65	13.0
21-25	91	18.2
26-30	78	15.6
31-35	75	15.0
36-40	73	14.6
41-45	45	9.0
46-50	7	1.4
51-55	16	3.2
56-60	38	7.6
61-65	12	2.4
Total	**500**	**100**

When the education levels of the two teams' fans are compared, 40.6% are university graduates, 22.8% are high school graduates, 19.8% are postgraduate graduates, and 16.8% are primary school graduates.

In the study, fans were asked to specify which class they fit into using Hunt's (1999) classification. According to the general classification, 39.6% of fans identify as 'Fanatic Fans', while 26.6% identify as 'Devoted Fans' and 9,6 % as 'Temporary Fans'.

When the teams are distributed according to fan categories, it is clear that the fan classes of the two teams are fairly close to each. For example, 38.4% of Fenerbahçe fans are fanatical, while 27.6% are devoted, 40.8% of Panathinaikos fans are fanatical and 25.6% are devoted (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of Teams by Sports Fan Classification

Team	Sports Fan Classification					Total
	Temporary Fan	Local Fan	Devoted Fan	Fanatical Fan	Dysfunctional Fan	
Fenerbahçe	**22**	**31**	**69**	**96**	**32**	250
	8,8%	12,4%	27,6%	38,4%	%12,8	100%
Panathinaikos	**26**	**32**	**64**	**102**	**26**	250
	10,4%	12,8%	25,6%	40,8%	10,4	100%
Total	**48**	**63**	**133**	**198**	**58**	500
	9,6%	12,6%	26,6%	39,6%	11,6	100%

Fans' levels of commitment to their teams are classified into three main categories as low, medium, and high. Referring to these categories, 57% of fans have a high devotion to their clubs, while just 14.2% have a poor commitment. On the other hand, when the loyalty levels of the fans are evaluated on a team basis, 58.8% of Fenerbahçe fans state that they have a high commitment to their team, while 56.8% of Panathinaikos fans are at a high level of commitment. Again, very close to each other, it was determined as 14.8% in Fenerbahce and 13.6% in Panathinaikos among the fans with low commitment to the teams (Table 7).

Table 5. Distribution of Fans' Loyalty Levels by Teams

Team	Loyalty Levels			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Fenerbahçe	**37**	**66**	**147**	**250**
	14,8%	26,4%	58.8%	100%
Panathinaikos	**34**	**74**	**142**	**250**
	13,6%	29,6%	56.8%	100%
Total	**71**	**140**	**289**	**500**
	14,2%	28%	57.8%	100%

The European Basketball League currently features two Greek and two Turkish clubs. While Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos fans in their respective nations frequently occupy the whole capacity of the stands designated for them, this circumstance does not occur in other European countries. Another key reason contributing to this circumstance is that EuroLeague games are held on weekdays. Given that the majority of fans have job responsibilities, the significance of this aspect becomes even more.

Table 6 presents the study's regression model results. In the first hypothesis, the impact of Fenerbahçe fans' social identities on Fenerbahçe's brand equity was investigated using the temporary fan classification. The impact of social identities of temporary Fenerbahçe fans on Fenerbahçe's brand equity was found to be statistically significant, and hypothesis H_{1a} was accepted (F=279,495 p=0,000). Furthermore, the R-value (0.600) indicates a positive linear relationship between the variables.

Accordingly, the brand equity of Fenerbahçe increases by 0.36 units (R^2=0.359) when the social identity of temporary fans of FB increases by one unit. In other words, it is calculated that 36% of the change in Fenerbahçe's brand equity can be explained by the social identities of temporary FB fans.

For Panathinaikos fans, the hypothesis H_{1b} examined the impact of temporary fans' social identities on the team's brand equity. The results show that the relationship between the variables was statistically significant (F= 309,160 p=0,000), just like H_{1a}. The variables have a positive linear relationship (R=0.619), and the determination coefficient (R^2=0,383) indicates that the brand value of the temporary Panathinaikos fans increases by 0.38 units for every unit increase in social identity.

Table 6. Results of the Regression Model

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	B	SE	t	p	R^2
Temporary FB Fan	(Constant)	3,239	,074	43,646	,000**	0,359*
	FB Brand Equity	,361	,022	16,718		
Temporary Panat. Fan	(Constant)	2,586	,107	24,275	,000**	0,383*
	Panat. Brand Equity	,527	,030	17,583		
Local FB Fan	(Constant)	3,185	,092	34,562	,000**	0,278*
	FB Brand Equity	,379	,027	13,863		
Local Panat Fan	(Constant)	2,693	,093	28,934	,000**	0,422*
	Panat. Brand Equity	,490	,026	19,070		
Devoted FB Fan	(Constant)	3,240	,084	8,796	,000**	0,303*
	FB Brand Equity	,358	,024	4,727		
Devoted Panat Fan	(Constant)	2,286	,104	22,029	,000**	0,469*
	Panat. Brand Equity	,600	,029	20,970		
Fanatical FB Fan	(Constant)	2,976	,092	32,422	,000**	0,346*
	FB Brand Equity	,432	,027	16,232		
Fanatical Panat Fan	(Constant)	2,757	,078	35,557	,000**	0,498*
	Panat. Brand Equity	,477	,021	22,25		
Dysfunctional FB Fan	(Constant)	3,492	,104	33,505	,000**	0,144*
	FB Brand Equity	,267	,029	9,161		
Dysfunctional Panat Fan	(Constant)	2,840	,127	22,399	,000**	0,244*
	Panat. Brand Equity	,426	,034	12,668		

* **DW values** of the hypothesis are between **1,418** and **2,02**.

** $p<.05$

Another issue to be investigated in regression analyses is whether there is an autocorrelation problem in the model. The study used the *DW* statistic, which is the most commonly used statistic to determine autocorrelation. The minimum *DW* value determined in the models was calculated to be 1.418 and the maximum value was calculated to be 2.02, and based on these values, it was determined that there was no autocorrelation problem in the models for all hypotheses.

The second set of hypotheses in the study sought to uncover the impact of local fans' social identities on team brand equity. In hypothesis H_{2a}, this impact was analyzed for Fenerbahçe fans and the hypothesis was accepted (F= 192,193 p=0,000).

The social identities of local Fenerbahçe fans have a 27% ($R^2 = 0,278$) influence on Fenerbahçe's brand equity, as shown by the regression values. Based on this point, it can be said that the impact of the social identities of local Fenerbahçe fans on brand equity is weak.

The impact of local fans' social identity on brand equity was measured for Panathinaikos fans in hypothesis H_{2b}, and it is discovered that fans have a statistically significant impact on brand equity (F= 363.675 p=0.000).

As with hypothesis H_{2a}, similar results were obtained for Panathinaikos fans. It can be said that 42% of the change in the brand equity of Panathinaikos can be explained by the social identities of the local Panathinaikos fans ($R^2 = 0,422$). When the impact of the social identities of local Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos fans on the brand is evaluated, the impact of Panathinaikos fans is about 11% higher than that of Fenerbahçe fans. The fact that the Panathinaikos basketball team has a more successful history in the EuroLeague than the Fenerbahçe is significant in this context. Željko Obradovic, the coach of the Panathinaikos basketball team, who achieved great success with the team in the EuroLeague, played an important role in the formation of the basketball culture among Panathinaikos fans. When coach Obradovic took over the Fenerbahçe basketball team, a fan culture began to develop at Fenerbahçe as well.

Following temporary and local fans, the third hypothesis group of the study examined the impact of loyal fans' social identities on the brand equity of their teams. For both teams, the impact of devoted fans' social identities on their teams' brand equity was found to be statistically significant (Table 6).

It is established that 46% (R^2=0,469) of the devoted Panathinaikos fans' social identities have an impact on the team's brand equity. At this point, it can be concluded that devoted Panathinaikos fans' social identities have a greater impact on the team's brand equity than Fenerbahçe fans (R^2= 0,346).

In the study's fourth hypothesis group, the impact of fanatics' social identities on brand equity was examined. It was discovered that both Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos fans' social identities had a statistically significant impact on brand equity (Table 6). The determination coefficients reveal that for both Panathinaikos and Fenerbahçe fans, the social identities of the fanatical fans have an impact on 30% of changes in brand equity ($R^2 = 0,303$). The brand equity of the fanatical Panathinaikos fans is significantly influenced by their social identities (R^2= 0,498).

In practically all team sports nowadays, fans are extremely important. The games held in front of empty stands during the COVID-19 epidemic provide the clearest illustration of how important fans are to teams and the audience. It is obvious that both viewing pleasure and viewership of TV have declined drastically. The mood produced by devoted fans in stadiums is without a doubt the factor contributing the most to this reduction. The competitions are more exciting and passionate because of the unique atmosphere generated by these fans in the stadiums. The passion of these fan groups transfers the emotions in the stadiums to the audience watching the games on TV. Perhaps the most important lesson the pandemic has taught sports fans and club managers in all industries is that sports competitions lose much of their appeal without fans.

The last hypothesis group of the study examined the impact of the social identities of the so-called dysfunctional fans on the brand equity of their teams. Comparing the group of dysfunctional fans with other fan groups, it was found that their impact is small. It was found that the impact of the social identities of the dysfunctional Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos fans on the brand equity of their teams is statistically significant (Table 6).

The social identities of dysfunctional Fenerbahçe fans account for 14% of changes in the team's brand equity ($R^2 = 0,144$), whereas the social identities of dysfunctional Panathinaikos fans account for 24% of changes in the team's brand equity ($R^2 = 0,244$).

It becomes clear by examining the correlation values that all of the hypotheses have a positive linear relationship between the variables (Table 7). As a result, it can be claimed that the brand value of the teams rise together with the social identities of each of the fan groups. In other words, the social identities of fans enhance the brand value of clubs.

When the two teams' respective EuroLeague histories are compared, it becomes clear that Panathinaikos has a more extensive track record. The era when basketball popularity in Turkey surged was during the 2001 European Basketball Championship, which took place there under the theme of '12 Giant Men.' Greek fan groups contribute more to their teams' brand values than Turkish fan groups, given the longer history of this era in Greece. It takes time for fan cultures to develop at sports venues. The transition from football fans to basketball fans started the process in Turkey, namely with the Fenerbahçe Basketball Team.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides important results by analyzing the brand equity of Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos basketball clubs through the social identities of fan groups. The findings show that fans' social identities significantly impact the clubs' brand equity. In particular, the high loyalty of loyal and fanatical fan groups to the teams strengthens the brand perception of these clubs and contributes to their success both on and off the field. This situation demonstrates that clubs should consider the role of fan groups in their brand strategies.

Loyal and fanatical fans not only express their loyalty to the teams but also increase the teams' popularity and commercial value. In addition, temporary and local fans have a statistically significant positive effect on brand equity. However, the impact of dysfunctional fans is quite limited. This suggests that clubs should get to know their fan groups more closely and better assess the role of social identities on brand equity.

The impact of fans is not limited to the support they provide to the team during the match. The atmosphere created by the fans makes its impact felt in a wide range from the performance of the team athletes to social media interactions. For example, the enthusiastic atmosphere created by fanatical fans increases the motivation of the athletes on the field, while at the same time creating a dynamism that increases the brand value of the team. This effect is also reflected in off-field elements; product design, advertising campaigns and social media strategies are shaped according to the demands of fans.

In terms of brand value, it is clear that fans create not only an economic but also an emotional impact. For example, some teams that won championships in the EuroLeague had to close their basketball branches because they did not have strong fan support. This situation emphasizes the indispensable role of fans in the life of the club and reveals the importance of adopting a fan-oriented approach in the strategies of clubs.

Clubs should invest in fan relationship management to better understand the characteristics of their fan groups and develop strategies to cater to them. Special membership programs, engagement-oriented social media campaigns and exclusive events for loyal and fanatical fan groups can be developed. In addition, strategies should be developed to make ad hoc and local fan groups more engaged.

Given the influence of fans on social media, clubs need to strengthen their presence on these platforms. Competitions and interactive campaigns that encourage fans to generate positive content about the team can make significant contributions to digital brand equity. In addition, strategies that meet the expectations of fans can be implemented by taking their feedback into account in product design and advertising campaigns.

Clubs need to strengthen their emotional bonds with fans to sustain their long-term success. In this context, awareness-raising programs can be organized to create harmony between fan groups and transform dysfunctional fans into positive contributors. In addition, social responsibility projects and activities that will increase the relationship between fans and the club should be prioritized. In addition, language and culture-specific campaigns can be organized on digital platforms to attract international fan groups and increase global awareness. This strategy will allow clubs to increase their brand value not only locally but also globally.

This study allows brands to approach fan groups in a more informed way. By revealing the impact of fan groups' social identities on brand equity, it guides clubs to develop differentiated strategies for each fan group. In particular, more effective marketing campaigns and experience-oriented events can be designed for groups such as loyal and fanatical fans.

The results of the study provide important guidance for clubs to strengthen their brand strategies. The positive effects of social identities on brand equity require clubs to re-evaluate their on and off-field strategies. In this context, the importance of innovative steps such as product designs, sponsorship agreements and social media campaigns that will increase the emotional bonds of fans with clubs is emphasized.

Given the power of social media in the digital age, this study also provides a guide for clubs to optimize their social media strategies. Campaigns tailored to fans' social identities allow clubs to establish a stronger presence on digital platforms and build deeper connections with fans. This plays a critical role in increasing digital brand equity. In addition, it also sheds light on the globalization processes of clubs. Social identity-based approaches not only strengthen local fan loyalty but also provide an important tool to attract international fan bases. Especially digital campaigns that appeal to different cultures and language-oriented content can provide a competitive advantage in the global market.

The study fills the gap in the literature on the relationship between social identity theory and brand equity and offers an in-depth perspective in this field. By examining the effects of social identities on different fan groups in detail and demonstrating the applicability of social identity theory in different fields, it will make a theoretical contribution to the literature and can form an important basis for future research. In addition, examining the behaviors of different fan groups contributes to the literature not only from a sports perspective but also from a consumer behavior perspective. In addition, brand managers and marketing experts can use the findings of this study to develop concrete strategies.

Finally, the comparison of two clubs with different cultures, such as Fenerbahçe and Panathinaikos, provides important contributions to the literature in local and international dimensions. This may serve as a basis for future studies on the brand equity of sports clubs in different geographies.

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