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Foreign ownership and local fans: Turkish football fans' perspective

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Abstract

Foreign investors have been very active in football clubs in many different countries. These clubs see significant benefits from foreign investment. However, in Turkey, this practice has not yet been implemented. Furthermore, there has been no general discussion about the applicability of this system in Turkish clubs, despite almost all Turkish football clubs being in a state of financial turmoil. To fill this void, this study aims to research the views of Turkish football fans regarding the possible sale of their club to a foreign investor. A total of 1172 football fans across Turkey completed a questionnaire form for the research. The distributions of fans' views were analyzed by forming crosstabs and using the chi-square test of independence. A total of 66.8% of Turkish fans who participated in the research are against the possible sale of their club to a foreign investor, while 33.2% of the fans support this situation. Additionally, 55.5% of the fans think they have adequate information about club ownership, whereas 44.5% of them think they do not have adequate information. Also, desire for financial return, sporting success, and corporate management were found as reasons to support foreign ownership while nationalism and a sense of belonging to a club were found as reasons to oppose foreign ownership. The study indicates that fans oppose or support the idea of foreign ownership for various reasons. The study describes these factors in the context of past studies and also presents the path for future research.

Keywords: Ownership, football club ownership, foreign ownership, Turkish fans

Introduction

Sports clubs are institutions established based on certain rules (laws, codes, regulations, contracts, etc.), whose members have certain forms of authority and responsibilities (president, board of directors, auditor, and members) and provide services to the community with either amateur or professional athletic branches (Genç, 1999). Usually, these clubs have facilities and equipment with which all age groups can participate in sports and aim for the training

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of high-performance athletes (Breuer et al., 2015). In this context, football clubs can be defined as organizations that are established under the statute of association and that aim to operate at the amateur or professional level of football without pursuing commercial ends.

Dramatic changes have occurred in football since the 1990s (Hamil et al., 2007). The playing field has thus become a metaphor for the competition between communities, cities, and nations (Chehabi, 2006). Football emerged not only socially, but also financially. When looking to the past, the significant revenues of clubs that operated under the statute of association were generally in the form of proceeds from match tickets and acquired from player transfers (Aydın, Turgut, & Bayırlı, 2007; Kelly, Lewis, & Mortimer, 2012). The fees paid to players and player transfers constituted the most significant expense item of clubs (Aglietta, Andreff, & Drut, 2010; Kelly et al., 2012). Since associations were unable to engage in operations for the pursuit of profit (Aydın et al., 2007), football clubs couldn't carry out commercial operations (Devecioğlu et al., 2012). However, even as the revenues coming from match tickets remained as the main source of revenue for many clubs (Morrow, 2003), many new sources of revenue such as commercial product sales, commercial partnerships, media revenues, sponsorship revenues, and advertising revenues began to emerge because of the fast and comprehensive commercialization of football (Aydın et al., 2007; Hamil & Chadwick, 2010; Harvey, Mangan, & Majumdar, 2005; Morrow, 2003). Clubs set out on the road to commercialization and corporatization to be able to conduct these commercial operations that they were unable to carry out under the statute of association and thus attain a share at the highest level of the increasing and diversifying revenues in the football industry while effectively managing the growing budgets that came along with these acquired revenues. Management structures of clubs experienced changes in relation to the changes that football and football clubs underwent in this process of commercialization, and different management models emerged. Within these practices, foreign ownership became one of the most significant practices implemented in many European countries in the past quarter century, particularly in countries where football occupies an important space, such as the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and France. However, in Turkey no club has been acquired or is set to be acquired by a foreign investor to date.

Turkey & foreign ownership of football clubs

The concept of ownership, according to the Turkish Language Association (2015), is defined as "the right to be able to use something possessed as desired within the framework of the law." Ownership is expressed in the first paragraph of article 683 of the Turkish Civil Code No. 4721 (2001) as "the authority to use, utilize, and dispose as desired within the limits of legal order over something in one's possession."

With reference to these definitions, the ownership of a football club can be expressed in the form of the right to keep a football club within legal limitations and to use and dispose of the power of management over the club. In other words, ownership of a football club indicates possession of the right to conduct formal and legal transactions with regard to the club. Pursuant to this definition, foreign ownership is a scenario in which the ownership of a club is assumed by an investor who is a citizen of another country. The foreign investor can be an individual, a family, or a corporate entity in this scenario.

Globalization allowed foreign investors to invest in the field of sport, and one of their main sources of investment is football club ownership. The purchase of Chelsea FC in England by Roman Abramovich, the purchase of Manchester United FC by the American Glazer family, and the purchase of FC Internazionale Milano in Italy by the Chinese Suning Commerce Group all constitute examples of foreign individual ownership, foreign family ownership, and foreign corporate ownership models, respectively. These takeovers brought fame and money for the owners, but also proved beneficial for the structure and economic condition of the clubs. For instance, a Pakistani-born American purchased the English Premier League football club Fulham FC and not only improved the economic condition of the club but also increased his own fame as he became the first man of Pakistani origin to purchase a Premier League club (Hassan, 2013).

The substantial commercialization of football as an industry in the world has also brought up the costs necessary to be able to maintain the lives of clubs. For example, the salaries paid to football players began to double and triple. This situation has pushed the clubs to seek out greater amounts of financing. This is why many clubs or their shareholders who realized that they wouldn't be able to make the necessary investments to attain high-cost players and compete with other rivals were in the position of having to sell most of their shares in the club to foreign investors (Wilson, Plumley, & Ramchandani, 2013). In other words, in order for clubs to be able to find the sources of financing they need, they have gone down the road of utilizing the high capital ventures of foreign ownership. That is why many clubs throughout Europe (i.e., in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Italy in most major leagues) are working under foreign ownership.

The Egyptian businessman Mohamed Al Fayed initiated foreign ownership as a first in the global world of football by purchasing Fulham FC in the United Kingdom in 1997. Six years after this, in 2003, Russian businessman Roman Abramovich purchased Chelsea FC, again in the United Kingdom. Following the success that Roman Abramovich demonstrated with Chelsea FC, Manchester United, Liverpool, Manchester City, Aston Villa, West Ham, Portsmouth, Sunderland, Fulham, and Derby became either wholly or partly controlled by rich individuals from outside the United Kingdom (Nauright & Ramfjord, 2010; Best, 2013), and by 2010, foreign investors owned half of all the Premier League clubs (Rohde & Breuer, 2017). In Italy, another big country for football, as can be seen with teams like FC Inter and AC Milan, the foreign ownership race began as well. The purchase of Paris Saint Germain FC by Nasser Al-Khelaifi and the purchase of Malaga CF by Qatar sheikh Abdullah Al-Thani constitute examples of the introduction of foreign ownership in France and Spain, respectively.

As mentioned before, foreign ownership has occurred with football clubs in many different countries that occupy a significant space in the world of football, such as the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Italy. These clubs have experienced significant benefits from the introduction of foreign ownership and provide for great capital venture both for their clubs and their countries.

Nonetheless, fans do not always welcome a change of ownership, especially when ownership is going to a foreigner. This is because professional football clubs originated from a variety of different forms of institutions such as schools, churches, and workplaces (Walters & Hamil, 2009). This criterion allows for the development of an emotional bond between fans and clubs. Therefore, when an outsider (a foreign owner in this case) enters the picture, people resist this change. For instance, Manchester United supporters from England protested against American ownership as this was perceived to be against Manchester United's British identity (Schoonderwoerd, 2011; Best, 2013).

Generally, the development and transformation that football and football clubs experience are subsequently reflected in Turkey. In other words, football in Turkey faces similar changes and transformations as football in other countries. Similar to many clubs around the world, it can be said that most Turkish football clubs are drowning in debt. There are large gaps between their total revenues and expenses, and they are struggling with large debt (TRT-SPOR, 2019). Most of them don't have enough money to pay for their operational costs. According to Tuğrul Akşar, a banker specializing in Turkish football economics, the total debts of Turkish football clubs have reached TL 14.5 billion (approximately €2 billion at the current rates) and continue to rise (Akşar, 2019).

According to the latest UEFA benchmarking report of 2018, the Turkish Super League reported a major hit with a loss of €263 million. Additionally, the three biggest football clubs of Turkey were amongst the 20 European clubs with the highest net debt. In this report, Fenerbahce was ranked sixth with €334 million, Besiktas had €183 million and was in fifteenth place, and Galatasaray took seventeenth place with €175 million net debt (UEFA, 2018). In this context, when considering the difficult economic situation in which many of the clubs in Turkey find themselves (Sönmez, 2019), it is thought that foreign investment in football club ownership as implemented in the important countries of the world of football will be an unavoidable topic to be discussed in the near future in Turkey.

Football clubs are generally established under the statute of association and continue their operations mostly under this statute in Turkey (Devecioğlu, 2004) instead of corporatization. According to Turkish Association Law (2004), associations cannot be sold to any individuals. Therefore, football clubs under the statute of association cannot be sold to any investors unless they incorporate. However, some Turkish clubs like Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray, and some others have been incorporated and floated in the stock market (Akyüz, 2005). These clubs can sell their shares to any individual, but within some limitations. Individual investors are not allowed to have more than a 49% stake in a Turkish football club, leaving 51% of these clubs under the control of the association due to their legislation.

Regarding these kinds of statutory regulations, foreign ownership has not yet been introduced in Turkey. Furthermore, despite almost all Turkish football clubs being in a state of financial turmoil, there is no discussion of whether this prospect will be implemented in Turkey. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to research the views of Turkish football fans regarding the possible sale of their club to a foreign investor. The study aimed to identify fans in detail who welcomed or resisted the idea of foreign investment in Turkish clubs. This investigation is twofold. The first goal is to find out if Turkish fans are in favor of selling their favorite Turkish club to a foreign investor. The second is to find out if Turkish fans have sufficient information regarding all aspects of foreign ownership. It is expected that the study will contribute to the literature with theoretical information that emerges regarding the topic and will lay the groundwork so that this subject may be discussed in academia or in the public opinion of Turkish football. This study is a pioneering study in the field as, to the best of our knowledge, no previous study has

addressed the current topic. In this context, the current study would provide a foundation for this important topic as foreign investment in a football club is an attractive venture for international investors.

Method

The population and sample of the research

The population of the research consists of all the football fans in Turkey. The research sample consists of 1172 football fans across Turkey. The convenience sampling method is used for the determination of the sample of the research. In the convenience sampling technique, the researcher tries to collect data from the easiest and most accessible subjects until the sample size needed for the research is reached (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). This technique is preferred because it is easier, cheaper, and faster than most other sampling techniques (Dörnyei, 2007).

Data collection

Data was collected both face-to-face and online. The final sample size was 379 football fans face-to-face and 793 fans online across Turkey. At the time of data collection, it was ensured that participants 1) consider themselves football fans, 2) have at least one favorite Turkish football team, and 3) have watched at least one game (live or on television) of their favorite team during the current season. The purpose of using these criteria was to select legitimate "football fans" for this study as defined by Crawford (2004).

A questionnaire was designed to acquire the data. The questionnaire was formed using both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers and was used as a data collection tool in the study. The purpose of including both types of questions was to understand the reasons behind the fans' views of foreign ownership proposals. There are various demographic variables in the first section of the questionnaire form; in the second section, there are categorical questions about the views of fans regarding the sale of football clubs to foreign investors. It is important to mention that the questionnaire was based upon three big clubs (i.e., Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe, and Galatasaray) and the Anatolian Clubs. The study follows these attributes as the football teams of Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe, and Galatasaray are based in Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey, and are known as the most successful sports clubs in Turkey. They have a great rivalry and are usually the main dominant contenders for the title of the Turkish Super League. Naturally, they have the most fans in Turkey. Apart from these three big clubs, the other teams in Turkey are called the "Anatolian Clubs," and almost all of them are based in different Anatolian cities. Consequently, because they have similar properties, these fans were bracketed together and gathered under the single category of the "Anatolian Clubs," apart from the fans of the big three clubs.

Data analysis

The cross-sectional screening method was used as the research method. This is one of the general screening methods that aims to describe the past or present state of the research topic without attempting to change or influence it (Karasar, 2008) and to take any photograph of the universe at any moment.

The distribution of the obtained data was determined firstly by forming frequency tables pursuant to various demographic variables. Distributions of fans' views on each question regarding the possible sale of their club to a foreign investor were analyzed by forming crosstabs. The chi-square independence test was used as a statistical method in the research because it aims to examine the relationship between categorical variables consisting of different categories (Karagöz, 2017). Also, the Yates correction for continuity was used for the calculation of the chi-square statistic of 2x2-sized crosstabs. Licensed IBM SPSS 23 packaged software was used to perform the statistical methods.

Results

The results of the study are depicted in this section in the forms of tables generated after data analysis.

Demographics (Table 1).

The table presented above shows the frequency and percentage values of gender, age, educational background, marital status, and supported team variables used in the research as demographic variables.

Table 1. Frequency table of demographic variables

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	845	72.1
Female	327	27.9
Age	Frequency	Percentage
Under 20 years of age	358	30.5
21–30 years of age	604	51.5
31–40 years of age	159	13.6
Over the age of 41	51	4.4
Educational background	Frequency	Percentage
High school	101	8.6
University	951	81.1
Postgraduate	120	10.3
Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Unmarried	943	80.5
Married	229	19.5
Supported team	Frequency	Percentage
Galatasaray	400	34.1
Fenerbahçe	275	23.5
Beşiktaş	175	14.9
Anatolian football clubs	322	27.5
Total	1172	100.0

Foreign ownership acceptance/rejection (Table 2–9).

Table 2. Frequency table for adequate information about foreign ownership and support of it

Do you have adequate information about foreign ownership?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	650	55.5
No	522	44.5
Do you support the sale of your club to a foreign investor?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	389	33.2
No	783	66.8

Table 2 shows that a slight majority of the fans think they have adequate information about foreign ownership, whereas a slight minority of them think they do not have adequate information. Moreover, two-thirds of the fans are against the possible sale of their club to a foreign investor, while one-third of them support it.

As highlighted in the table 3, the most rated reasons for supporting a possible sale were the financial return, sportive success, and better corporate management that foreign ownership offers clubs, respectively. On the other hand, nationalistic attitudes and the thought that the "club only belongs to fans and in the case of a possible sale, fans will lose their sense of belonging to the club" were the most rated reasons for not supporting foreign ownership.

Table 3. Frequency table relevant to the distribution of supporting-not supporting status according to reasons given

Supporting		Not supporting	
Reason	Frequency	Reason	Frequency
Financial return	134 (37.6%)	Nationalism	438 (72.3%)
Corporate management	94 (26.4%)	Sense of belonging to club	155 (25.6%)
Sportive success	122 (34.3%)	Other	13 (2.1%)
Other	6 (1.7%)		
Total	356 (100%)	Total	606 (100%)

Table 4. Crosstab relevant to the distribution of supporting-not supporting status according to gender

		Supporting status		Total	χ^2	p
		Yes	No			
Gender	Female	48 (14.7%)	279 (85.3%)	327 (100%)	68.941	0.000
	Male	341 (40.4%)	504 (59.6%)	845 (100%)		
Total		389 (33.2%)	783 (66.8%)	1172		

The table presents the results showing that male fans have more positive and supportive attitudes than female fans for the possible sale of their club to a foreign investor.

Table 5. Crosstab relevant to the distribution of supporting-not supporting status according to age groups

		Supporting status		Total	χ^2	p
		Yes	No			
Age groups	Under 20	90 (25.1%)	268 (74.9%)	358 (100%)	16.432	0.000
	21–30	215 (35.6%)	389 (64.4%)	604 (100%)		
	Over 31	84 (40.0%)	126 (60.0%)	210 (100%)		
Total		389 (33.2%)	783 (66.8%)	1172		

The table reveals that young fans have a more negative and faultfinding attitude than middle-aged and older fans toward the possible sale of their club.

Table 6. Crosstab relevant to distribution of supporting-not supporting status according to educational background

		Supporting status		Total	χ^2	p
		Yes	No			
Educational Background	High school	27 (26.7%)	74 (73.3%)	101 (100%)	5.094	0.078
	University	313 (32.9%)	638 (67.1%)	951 (100%)		
	Postgraduate	49 (40.8%)	71 (59.2%)	120 (100%)		
Total		389 (33.2%)	783 (66.8%)	1172		

As can be seen in Table 6, fans with a high level of education have a more positive and supportive attitude than fans with less education, although there is not a statistically significant difference.

Table 7. Crosstab relevant to the distribution of supporting-not supporting status according to marital status

		Supporting status		Total	χ^2	p
		Yes	No			
Marital status	Unmarried	299 (31.7%)	644 (68.3%)	327 (100%)	4.456	0.035
	Married	90 (39.3%)	139 (60.7%)	845 (100%)		
Total		389 (33.2%)	783 (66.8%)	1172		

Table 7 illustrates that married fans are more positive and supportive than unmarried fans about the possible sale of their club.

Table 8. Crosstab relevant to the distribution of supporting-not supporting status according to the club supported

		Supporting status		Total	χ^2	p
		Yes	No			
Clubs	Galatasaray	143 (35.8%)	257 (64.2%)	400 (100%)	5.831	0.120
	Fenerbahçe	76 (27.6%)	199 (72.4%)	275 (100%)		
	Beşiktaş	56 (32%)	119 (68%)	175 (100%)		
	Anatolian Football Clubs	114 (35.4%)	208 (64.6%)	322 (100%)		
Total		389 (33.2%)	783 (66.8%)	1172		

The results in Table 8 highlight that the observed differences according to supported club are not statistically significant. Still, it is observed that the fans most opposed to a possible sale are Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş fans, while the fans of Galatasaray and the Anatolian Clubs lead the way in support of foreign ownership.

Table 9. Frequency table relevant to preferred country

If your club were to be sold to a foreign investor, which country would you prefer?	Frequency	Percentage
Azerbaijan	163	13.9%
Saudi Arabia	133	11.4%
Qatar	98	8.4%
Spain	91	7.8%
Germany	89	7.6%
England	72	6.1%

According to these findings, Azerbaijan is the most preferred country. Even though Azerbaijan is not a country with great sportive successes in football, it could be that fans prefer Azerbaijan as they view Azerbaijan as being closer to their own country and are thus acting out of nationalism. It could also be that many prefer Saudi Arabia and Qatar in second and third place after Azerbaijan because they believe the investors of these two countries could provide financial returns to the club through the monetary power they have. Finally, Spain, Germany, and England are ranked in fourth, fifth, and sixth place, respectively. It can be suggested that the cause of this situation is that these countries have achieved success in football and have succeeded in terms of the corporate management of their clubs.

Adequate information regarding foreign ownership (Table 10–11)

Table 10. Crosstab relevant to the distribution of supporting status pursuant to having adequate information

		Supporting status		Total	$\chi 2$	p
		Yes	No			
Adequate Information	Yes	280 (72%)	370 (47.3%)	650	63.322	0.000
	No	109 (28%)	413 (52.7%)	522		
Total		389 (100%)	783 (100%)	1172		

It is apparent from this table that the majority of fans who are against the possible sale of their club do not have adequate information about foreign ownership, while the majority of fans who support it have adequate information and thus support foreign ownership consciously.

Table 11. Crosstab relevant to the distribution of having adequate information according to gender

		Adequate information		Total	$\chi 2$	p
		Yes	No			
Gender	Female	99 (30.3%)	228 (69.7%)	327 (100%)	115.054	0.000
	Male	551 (65.2%)	294 (34.8%)	845 (100%)		
Total		650 (55.5%)	522 (44.5%)	1172		

According to the findings in Table 11, while the majority of male fans have adequate information about foreign ownership, the majority of female fans do not.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to research the views of Turkish football fans regarding the possible sale of their favored football club to a foreign investor. The study aimed to identify fans in detail who welcome or resist the idea of foreign investment in Turkish football clubs. In this context, one of the primary findings of the study indicates that Turkish football fans hold negative views of foreign ownership in football and are against such an implementation. It can be seen through the example of other countries that both positive and negative reactions to foreign ownership have occurred. For example, the purchase of Manchester United FC by American investor Malcom Glazer in 2005 in England was met with an overwhelmingly negative response by fans. Despite the club winning the championship that season, a majority of the fans protested against Glazer when he came to the stadium. Moreover, some fans took it a step further and even established a new club with the name "Football Club of United Manchester." The new club played its matches in the league with around 3,000 spectators (Nauright & Ramfjord, 2010; Schoonderwoerd, 2011). This was not the only case in this regard, as SV Austria Salzburg supporters also created their own team in 2005. Furthermore, similar situations have occurred in Croatia, Romania, Poland, and Israel (Cocieru, Delia, & Katz, 2019). In the purchase of Aston Villa FC in 2006 in England by another American investor, Randy Lerner, the exact opposite of the Glazer example occurred (Coombs & Osborne, 2012), as fans welcomed the new owner very warmly. Lerner was met like a hero in the stadium by the club's fans, who thought that he would be able to get better players and modernize the club's facilities (Nauright & Ramfjord, 2010). Members of academia have described this phenomenon by explaining that a football club represents a cultural symbol to fans that saves individuals from alienation and arouses the collective identity of the individuals of its local community (Bi, 2015).

The findings of the study show that male fans approach the possible sale of their favored club more positively and supportively than female fans. It is thought that different levels of knowledge regarding club ownership among males and females may have an effect in this instance. In other words, male fans probably have more knowledge about football and their clubs. Therefore, they are more aware of the possible gains their clubs could experience following

foreign investment. This phenomenon can also be connected with the strongest gender stereotype that females are more emotional than men (Brescoll, 2016; Shields, 2002). This stereotype has been discussed in various professions (i.e., regarding female athletes (Hasaan & Kerem, 2017), office workers (Bauer, 2015)) and cultures (i.e., Turkish females (Kutlu & Akbulut, 2018); Asian females (Chong et al., 2006)). In this vein, we can claim that females may have dismissed the idea of foreign ownership because they are more attached to their club's national identity.

Another finding of the research can be seen in the supporting-not supporting status of foreign ownership among different age groups. The rate of opposition to foreign ownership was higher for the under 20 (74.9%) and 21–30 (64.4%) age groups, which can be referred to as the younger age groups, than the other age groups (60.0%), which can be evaluated as middle-aged and elderly. This result reveals that younger fans oppose the sale of their club to a foreign investor more than middle-aged and elderly fans. This difference may be due to the middle-aged and elderly fans having more knowledge about any subject and acting according to this information while making a decision on any topic, while the younger fans have less knowledge and act with more emotion. With reference to this hypothesis, it can be said of this finding related to age and the aforementioned finding that the idea that "those who don't have sufficient knowledge about foreign ownership generally have negative views and those fans with sufficient knowledge mostly support it" is consistent.

The results of the study also reveal that the fans from all the clubs in question opposed the sale of their club to a foreign investor. The findings of the study in question are consistent with the findings of this study, and it is seen that those satisfied with the management style of their club were opposed to the sale of their club to a foreign investor and that those who were unsatisfied with the management style of their club supported the club's sale to a foreign investor. The reason behind Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş fans' satisfaction is the clubs' management style. This is an important finding that shows when fans are happy with the management style of their club, they become more loyal to the club.

The results of the study show that fans would most support their club being sold to a foreign investor from Azerbaijan. Saudi Arabia and Qatar follow Azerbaijan, respectively. It is important to mention that Azerbaijan is considered a strong ally of Turkey, and the two are often considered one nation of two states (Soltanov, 2016). Therefore, it can be claimed that a large majority of the fans who oppose foreign ownership are acting with feelings of nationalism as a reason for their opposition and only want Turkish managers to direct their clubs. In this context, it is thought that the reason Azerbaijan is fans' first preferred choice should their club be sold to a foreign investor despite not being a country with great success in football is that Turkish fans are acting with emotions of patriotism and see Azerbaijan as being closer to themselves. As was reported in the findings of the study, the reasons for supporting foreign ownership were a financial return for the club, sportive success, and a desire for better corporate management. It can be said in this respect that the reason Saudi Arabia and Qatar ranked second and third on the list of preferences is because they would provide a financial return thanks to the monetary strength the investors of these two countries have. Spain, Germany, and England take fourth, fifth, and sixth places, respectively. It is thought that the effects of these countries having experienced sportive success in football and their clubs being seen as successful in terms of corporate management come into play here. This is in line with past studies, as Edensor and Millington (2008) mention that Manchester City FC fans welcome foreign ownership in the case of a city as it has the potential to bring in lots of money that can help with achieving success. Furthermore, Crystal Palace football club fans welcomed the American owner's takeover because the club was about to be liquidated (BBC, 2010). In another case, Liverpool fans threatened club management with a financial boycott and welcomed new American owners (Williams, 2012).

Interestingly, the results of the study indicate that that majority of fans are not sure how exactly foreign ownership works. These findings show that fans with insufficient knowledge regarding the benefits or detriments of foreign ownership generally hold prejudiced views and are against its implementation. Thus it can be assumed that negativity regarding foreign ownership is more about a social issue (i.e., nationalism) than business or economics. It can be seen that fans with sufficient knowledge about foreign ownership mostly support it. Past studies have identified that fans often reject foreign ownership because of sociological issues. For instance, Manchester United supporters from England considered the American takeover as a shame to their English identity (Brown, 2007). It is important to mention here that fans have protested to save their national identity regardless of foreign or local ownership. For instance, Croatian fans protested against the President of the Republic of Croatia, the late Franjo Tuđman, for the name change imposed on their football club (Vrcan, 2002).

When looking at whether both genders possess sufficient knowledge on the topic of club ownership, it can be seen that a majority of the male fans in the study had sufficient knowledge regarding club ownership, whereas a majority of female fans did not. In this respect, it can be said that the high opposition rate of female fans for the

possible sale of their club to a foreign investor could originate from their inadequate information about club ownership. On the other hand, the rate of support increases in male fans, the majority of whom have adequate information about how ownership works. These findings relating to gender confirm the study's finding that those who have insufficient knowledge regarding the foreign ownership scenario are opposed in a prejudiced manner. This finding is in line with past studies: Whelehan (2000) suggests that women's progression into sports that are male dominated (i.e., football) has been a very slow and difficult process because organized sport was created to bolster a sagging ideology of "men's natural superiority" over women (Crawford & Gosling, 2004).

It is thought that the findings of this study will make important contributions to the literature on how fans view the foreign ownership of football clubs. The current study highlights that fans oppose the idea of foreign ownership for their favorite clubs. Even with the current economic difficulties, fans are happy with the current situation of their club. Nationalism is a major obstacle for fans in favor of a foreign owner. Furthermore, the results revealed that fans, both those who support and do not support the idea, are not well informed regarding the details of foreign ownership. With the findings of the revelation of the current views of Turkish fans about foreign ownership of football clubs, it was expected that this study would lay important groundwork for new and comprehensive studies to be conducted so that the positive and negative aspects of foreign ownership can be revealed. These future studies will contribute to the ability to effectively conduct discussions that will likely emerge in the near future regarding the applicability of foreign ownership in Turkey. In light of the scientific studies to be conducted, more accurate analyses could be conducted with regard to the potential benefits and detriments of foreign ownership, and a more accurate decision could be made on whether or not to support its implementation.

Limitation and future research

It is acknowledged that the current study is of an initial level and provides a future prospect for new research. The current study adopted a statistical tool suited for a pioneer study. However, future research could adopt better tools to get more precise results. Also, the current study adopted a questionnaire that was suitable for the demographic nature of the study. However, in the future, studies could be established with a better understanding in the context of the questionnaire and results.

Also, although the study attempted to present multiple comparative analysis, it is not possible to cover all aspects in a single study. For instance, the current study is based on clubs in Istanbul and the Anatolian football clubs, whose fans have different backgrounds, experiences, and behaviors. The general background of Istanbul with its massive tourism, wealth, and openness to some western social values and behaviors could generate a different reality compared to other geographical regions of Turkey that are more conservative. This leads to the possibility of a separate comparative research study concerning the differences between teams from Istanbul and Anatolia.

Ethics approval and informed consent

Ethical approval for this study was obtained via the Ethics Committee of Institute of Research & Advanced Studies, Multan, Pakistan (Approval no: SC-RA- 010120).

Competing interests

There is potential conflict of interest for any of the authors to declare.

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