

Why do fans attend football games? Motivational factors in the Ethiopian Premier League, 2023-24 ¿Por qué do los aficionados asisten a los partidos de fútbol? Factores motivacionales en la Premier League etíope 2023-24

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Abstract. Why do fans attend soccer games: investigating motivating factors for attending Ethiopian Premier League soccer games in 2023/24 G.C. A co-relational study was conducted. Sixteen seven-point liker Amharic version questionnaires, known for their validity and reliability, were used from a sample of 524 participants selected through the available sampling method. Frequency, percentage, correlation, and multiple linear regression analyses (with a significance level of $P < 0.05$) were performed. There was a positive correlation between the fan motivation factors and game attendance: socialization ($r = 524, .669, p < .001$); performance $r = (524), .763, p < .001$; excitement $r = (524), .676, p < .001$; esteem $r = (524), .619, p < .001$; and diversion $r = (524), .630, p < .001$, respectively. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the five predictors collectively explained 69.3% of the variance in game attendance ($5, 523 = 237.287, p < .001$). Individual predictor analysis indicated that performance ($\beta = .631, t = 15.200, p < .001$), excitement ($\beta = .588, t = 12.660, p < .001$), and diversion ($\beta = .333, t = 7.749, p < .001$) have a positive impact on game attendance. On the other hand, socialization ($\beta = -.382, t = -4.836, p < .001$) and esteem ($\beta = -.222, t = -3.534, p < .001$) negatively affected game attendance. In conclusion, a notable positive correlation exists between fan motivation and game attendance, highlighting the importance of understanding fan motivation to increase attendance at sporting events.

Keywords: motivation, premier league, game attendance, factors, motivational factors

Resumen. Por qué los aficionados asisten a los partidos de fútbol: investigación de los factores motivadores para asistir a los partidos de fútbol de la Premier League etíope en la temporada 2023/24 Se realizó un estudio correlacional. Dieciséis cuestionarios de siete puntos de enlace en versión amárica, conocidos por validez y fiabilidad, de una muestra de 524 participantes seleccionados mediante el método de muestreo disponible. Análisis de frecuencia, porcentaje, correlación y regresión lineal múltiple (con un nivel de significancia de $P < 0,05$). Hubo una correlación positiva entre los factores de motivación de los aficionados y la asistencia a los partidos: socialización ($r = 524, .669, p < .001$); rendimiento $r = (524), .763, p < .001$; entusiasmo $r = (524), .676, p < .001$; autoestima $r = (524), .619, p < .001$; y diversión $r = (524), .630, p < .001$, respectivamente. Además, el análisis reveló que los cinco predictores explican colectivamente el 69,3% de la varianza en la asistencia al juego ($5, 523 = 237,287, p < ,001$). El análisis de predictores individuales indicó que el rendimiento ($\beta = ,631, t = 15,200, p < ,001$), la emoción ($\beta = ,588, t = 12,660, p < ,001$) y la diversión ($\beta = ,333, t = 7,749, p < ,001$) tienen un impacto positivo en la asistencia al juego. Por otro lado, la socialización ($\beta = -,382, t = -4,836, p < ,001$) y la autoestima ($\beta = -,222, t = -3,534, p < ,001$) afectan negativamente a la asistencia al juego. En conclusión, existe una correlación positiva notable entre la motivación de los fanáticos y la asistencia a los juegos, lo que resalta la importancia de comprender la motivación de los fanáticos para aumentar la asistencia a los eventos deportivos.

Palabras clave: motivación, liga premier, asistencia a los partidos, factores, factores motivacionales

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Introduction

Football is one of the most vital phenomena in terms of its attraction for hundreds of thousands of occasional spectators of every age and gender who come together in football stadiums around the globe every week to attend games (Mogajane, Slabbert, & Du Plessis, 2019). The popular claim that competitions need to be evenly balanced to attract fans and the uncertainty of outcome underpin the policy choices of many sport organizations (Wills, Addesa, & Tacon, 2023). Various sociological concepts, like Levinson's developmental theories, Bandura's social cognitive theory, and Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theories contribute to understanding fan motivation and commitment to attending football games (Stever, 2011). Additionally, the absence of fans during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the significance of fan participation in creating a vibrant atmos-

phere through chants and cheers, underscoring the impact of fan behavior on the game's sonic dimensions and broadcast quality (Finch et al., 2022).

Fans attend football games for various motivational reasons, as evidenced by research in different contexts. Studies have shown that fan engagement can be predicted by motivational dimensions related to personal and game-related factors, as well as points of attachment like organizational and sport identification (Stander, Van Zyl, & Motaung, 2016; Woo, Trail, Kwon, & Anderson, 2009). In the South African context, factors motivating fans to attend soccer matches include social interaction, skill display, escape, sharing in glory, enjoying drama, and entertaining artistry (Dubihlela, Dhurup, & Surujlal, 2009). In Iran, socialization, social pride, and family dimensions were identified as significant factors that attract spectators to football matches, with social pride being particularly impactful in enhancing spectator

attraction (Torkfar et al., 2011). A study in Albania identified entertainment, tradition, and group involvement as key factors influencing the attendance football fans (Bundo & Axhami, 2021). Moreover, a co-relational study in Finland pinpointed key motivational factors, such as passion, loyalty, and team identification, that significantly influence football fan attendance, highlighting a robust correlation between these motivations and active attendance (Dick & Kernick, 2016). Furthermore, a study by (Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004) found that excitement, esthetics, escape, and connections to the team and its environment accounted for a significant portion of the variance in attendance at soccer events.

Research on fan typologies has identified various categories such as active fans, consuming fans, event fans, corporate fans, and passive followers, (Schreyer & Torgler, 2021), enthusiasts, spectators, live fans, and virtual fans of football (Gargone, 2016), each exhibiting different levels of motivation and commitment and contributing differently to the game experience. Conversely, entertainment and socio-psychological motives include; price, marketing actions, soccer quality, and enjoyment of watching matches at a stadium (Mazzei, Moraes, Carlassara, & Jr, 2020). Social psychological factors like positive interdependence and team identification have been linked to higher attendance rates in educational settings and sporting events (McCord, 2020). Although team, identity, team loyalty, excitement, drama, sport knowledge, interest in the team, and bonding with family, (Darabi & Aghaei Shahri, 2020) showed a significant impact on game attendance. Understanding the diverse characteristics and behaviors of different fan types is essential for clubs to manage fan relations effectively, enhance the overall game-day experience, and enhance marketing strategies and the game -day vibe.

Among the numerous studies highlighted, the motives for game attendance include the desire for social experiences, entertainment, new experiences, and the opportunity to spend time with family and friends (Torregrosa & Cruz, 2009), group experiences, a sense of connectedness, socializing, and entertainment (Brzana, Nowak, & Nowak, 2016), economic, game attractiveness, demographic, and residual factors (Norman, 2022), self-identity, socialization, financial reasons, and escape play (Zorzou et al., 2014), and social interactions and creating brand communities among fans (Jiménez, Fernández, Moreno, & Torrente, 2023; Miranda, Barros Filho, da Silva, & de Queiroz Pedrosa, 2024; Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2007) play a significant role in attendance, emphasizing the need for clubs to reinforce these factors to increase fan engagement. Therefore, under-

standing spectator motives and aspects is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies to increase game attendance (Salman & Giray, 2012).

Although previous studies have provided valuable knowledge on why fans attend football games, it is important to note that all of them analyzed game attendance belonging to only one country or league (Bundo & Axhami, 2021; Stander et al., 2016). Therefore, the results were undoubtedly influenced by the geographical, cultural, historical, and social aspects of the countries observed (Pranjic, Modric, & Uljevic, 2022). Furthermore, most of these studies observed fixed tournaments in one-place sub-elite football competitions (i.e., world cup, national competition) leagues (Stander et al., 2016; Woo et al., 2009). To the best of our knowledge, no study has been presented in the current Ethiopian Premier League format (Stander et al., 2016;

Woo et al., 2009). In addition, only one study considered all the variables (Funk et al., 2004), which is practice with different league structures. Finally, all previous studies were exclusively related to tournament competitions (Bundo & Axhami, 2021; Stander et al., 2016), while studies investigating why fans attend soccer games across nations and league levels are scarce.

The SPEED model, as outlined in (Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2009), encompasses five motivating factors of game attendance: socialization, performance, excitement, esteem, and diversion. Socialization refers to the desire for social interaction and connections during sporting events. Performance motivation relates to interest in observing high-quality athletic performances and skills, which contribute to the enjoyment of the event. Excitement represents the thrill and adrenaline rush experienced during the game, which adds to the overall entertainment value. Esteem reflects the need for recognition and status associated with supporting a particular team or attending sporting events. Lastly, diversion signifies the desire to break from routine activities and pursue leisure and entertainment by attending sporting events (Funk et al., 2009). These factors collectively contribute to understanding the diverse motivations behind game attendance.

Therefore, it is crucial to recognize and address diverse motivational aspects to effectively enhance game attendance in the Ethiopian Premier League (EPL) competition in 2024. Socialization, performance, esteem, escape, and diversion (SPEED) were used as dependent variables, and game attendance was used as dependent variable (see fig. 1). The model investigates how much the dependent variable influences the independent variable.

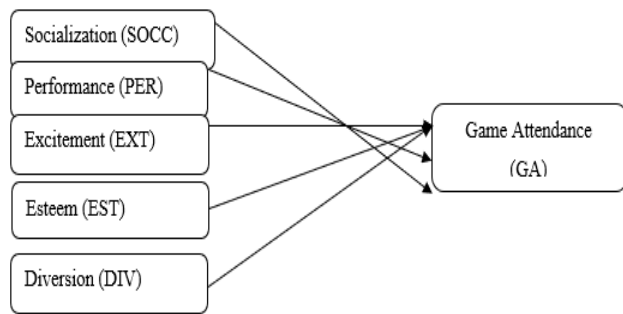


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Motivation Factors and Fan Game Attendance

The proposed model is represented as follows:

$$i.e., GA = \alpha + \beta_1 (SOCC) + \beta_2 (PER) + \beta_3 (EXT) + \beta_4 (EST) + \beta_5 (DIV) + EIT.$$

GA: Game attendance

α : constant

SOCC: Socialization

PER: Performance

EXT: Excitement

EST: Esteem

DIV: Division

EIT: is the residual error of the regression:

The value of β_1 , β_2 , β_3 , β_4 , and β_5 is coefficient showing a rate of change of SOCC, PER, EXT, EST, and DIV for GA.

This framework can be derived from various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and behavioral (Dey & Roberts, 2007), integrating psychological and non-psychological factors influencing behavioral (Fernandes & Krolukowska, 2023). Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive research on fan motivation specific to the Ethiopian football industry, highlighting the need for further exploration in this area. However, different theoretical and empirical studies have reported exclusive findings. The nature of the current format of the game, geographical influences, distinctive characteristics, and political unrest collectively underscore the need for additional research. For all the aforementioned reasons, further research is warranted to investigate why fans attend games, specifically in different contests for elite teams from multiple countries across different competition stages. Therefore, this study investigated the motivational factors that affect game attendance at the EPL. Specifically, answer the following specific research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between SPEED and game attendance among Ethiopian Premier League football fans?
2. How much SPEED can predict game attendance among Ethiopian Premier League football fans?
3. What are the potential motivational factors that can predict game attendance among Ethiopian Premier League football fans?

Methods and materials

Research Paradigm

This study was guided by the positivist paradigm, focusing on singular and identifiable truths and realities (Evans et al., 2021). It uses objectivity to provide answers that are both technical and neutral and can be generalized. Moreover, the study also followed a deductive approach, focusing on the available facts by employing psychometric tests to gather data. In addition, emphasis is placed on methodological coherence, which is "congruence" between epistemological and ontological viewpoints, theoretical position/perspective, methods and so on (Morse, 2020).

This study falls under the cross-sectional empirical category and is an applied correlation study. When focusing on the correlation analyses of five fan motivation factors as independent variables, the dependent variable is commitment to game attendance. All procedures followed ethical standards established by the research ethics review committee of Hawassa University's College of Natural and Computational Sciences and the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were treated anonymously. The inclusion criteria were as follows: fans who registered, could read and understand Amharic, volunteered, and attended an EPL game at the Dire Dewa International stadium.

Participants

The study involved a sample of 524 football fans from the Dire, Diwa international stadium, consisting of 450 (85.9%) male and 74 (14.1%) female participants. 178 (34%) were aged 18 to 25; 103 (19.7%) were aged 26 to 33; 155 (29.6%) were aged 34 to 40; 29 (5.5%) were aged 41 to 47; 36 were aged 48 to 55; and 23 were aged 55 to 61 (4.4%). Overall, the data revealed a clear demographic trend among football fans toward younger male participants.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of participants (N = 524 [100%]).

Gender	
Male	450 (85.9%)
Women	74 (14.1)
Age	
18-25	178 (34.0%)
26-33	103 (19.7%)
34-40	155 (29.6%)
41-47	29 (5.5%)
48-55	36 (6.9%)
55-61	23 (4.4%)

Data Collection

The short version of the socialization, performance, excitement, and diversion (SPEED) 10 fan motive items adopted from (Funk et al., 2004) and the fan commitment of game attendance three items (De Carvalho, de Carvalho, Sarmiento, & Scheerder, 2011) were used from [1] strongly

disagree to [7] strongly agree. The data were collected face-to-face from February 8 to 21, 2024, around their reserved hotel and stadium before their team game by the researcher. During data collection, all participants were informed about the benefits and drawbacks of participating in the study.

Table 2. Reliability and factorial analysis

	Items	a
SOCC	Chance to socialize with others	.91
	Opportunity to interact with other people	
PER	The gracefulness associated with the game	.806
	Natural elegance of the game	
EXT	I enjoy the excitement associated with games.	.954
	I find the games very exciting.	
EST	I feel like I have won when the team wins.	.896
	I feel a sense of accomplishment when the team wins.	
DIV	I can get away from the tension in my life	.99
	It provides me with a break from my daily routine.	
GA	I am a committed fan of the team.	.986
	I am a loyal supporter of the team	
	Win, lose, or draw: I am a loyal fan of the team.	

The researcher gathered input from five expert groups: instructors and statisticians; measurement experts, sports management professionals, and EPL fan association members. A pilot test was then conducted with 95 participants. The pilot test results show; the socialization subscale consisted of 2 items (a = .91), the performance subscale consisted of 2 items (a = .806), the excitement subscale consisted of 2 items (a = .954), the esteem subscale consisted of 2 items (a = .91), the diversion subscale consisted of 2 items (a = .91), and the game attendance commitment subscale consisted of 3 items (a = .91) met the standards of data analysis.

Statistics

The reliability and normality of the distributions were checked using the Cranach alpha and Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests. The result shows all reliable with ($\alpha > .806$) and normally distributed (K-S $p > 0.05$); therefore, later statistical analyses were adapted accordingly. Frequency, percentage, correlation, and regression analyses were performed. The associations were evaluated as follows: 0.1–0.3 small; > 0.3–0.5 moderate; > 0.5–0.7 large; > 0.7–0.9 extremely large; and > 0.9–1.0 perfect (Hopkins, Marshall, Batterham, & Hanin, 2009). All analyses were performed using Statistical (IBM SPSS, version 26), and the significance level was set to $p < 0.05$.

Results

Table 3 presents a person correlation examined the relationships between fan motivation factors and game attendance. There was a positive correlation between the fan motivation factors (SPEED) and game attendance socialization ($r = (524), .669, p < .001$); performance ($r = (524), .763, p$

$< .001$); excitement ($r = (524), .676, p < .001$); esteem ($r = (524), .619, p < .001$); and diversion ($r = (524), .630, p < .001$) respectively. Motivation related to speed increases, as does commitment to attending sporting events. Therefore, understanding fan motivation factors is crucial for predicting and devising strategies to improve fan attendance.

Table 3. Relationship between Fan Motivation Factors and Game Attendance

	Correlations					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
SOCC	1					
PER	.799**	1				
EXT	.834**	.628**	1			
EST	.914**	.755**	.772**	1		
DIV	.777**	.708**	.546**	.782**	1	
GA	.669**	.763**	.676**	.619**	.630**	1

** The correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Regression Model Results for Predictors 'of Game Attendance

Model Summary					
Model	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	Error Est.	P
1	.834 ^a	.696	.693	1.184	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), SOCC, PER, EXT, EST, and DIV

Table 4 presents the regression model used to determine the cumulative effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. To determine how much SPEED can predict game attendance among EPL football fans, a multiple regression analysis was used. The result shows that 69.3% of variance in game attendance commitment can be accounted for by five predictors, $F(5, 523) = 237.287, p < .001$.

Table 5. ANOVA was used for regression analysis.

ANOVA ^a						
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	P	
1	Regression	1664.290	5	332.858	237.287	.000 ^b
	Residual	726.632	518	1.403		
	Total	2390.922	523			

a. Dependent Variable: FGAC

b. Predictors: (Constant); SOCC, PER, EXT, EST, and DIV

Note: SS= sum of squares; MS= mean of squares.

Table 5 presents the ANOVA results for the regression to check the joint significance of the results ($F=237.287, P < 0.01$).

Table 6. Individual Effect in Coefficient Regression Analysis

	Model		
	Adj. R ² = 0.693		
	B	T	P
Socialization	-.382	-4.836	.001**
Performance	.631	15.200	.001**
Excitement	.588	12.660	.001**
Esteem	-.222	-3.534	.001**
Diversion	.333	7.749	.001**

a. Dependent Variable: commitment

Note: Adj. R²=Adjusted r square, β = Beta Coefficient, and P = significance level

Table 6 presents the regression coefficient to determine the direction and effect of the single variables on the dependent variable. Looking at a single contribution of the predictors, the result shows that performance ($\beta = .631$, $t = 15.200$, $p < .001$); excitement ($\beta = .588$, $t = 12.660$, $p < .001$); and diversion ($\beta = .333$, $t = 7.749$, $p < .001$) positively predict commitment. Furthermore, results also revealed that those who were committed to game attendance were also more likely to report socialization ($\beta = -.382$, $t = -4.836$, $p < .001$) and esteem ($\beta = -.222$, $t = -3.534$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

This study investigated how motivational factors affect game attendance at the EPL. Although earlier studies on fan attendance in football games were limited, primarily focusing on fixed-tournament competitions and geographical, cultural, historical, and social aspects, they have not explicitly addressed how much attendance affects different leagues. There was a positive correlation between fan motivation factors (SPEED) and game attendance. There is a large correlation between socialization and game attendance ($r = (524), .669$, $p < .001$); an extremely strong correlation between performance and game attendance ($r = (524), .763$, $p < .001$); a strong correlation between excitement and game attendance ($r = (524), .676$, $p < .001$); a strong correlation between esteem and game attendance ($r = (524), .619$, $p < .001$); and a strong correlation between diversion and game attendance ($r = (524), .630$, $p < .001$), respectively. This suggests that as motivation related to SPEED increases, so does the desire to attend games. Clubs, event organizers, and marketers may benefit from game attendance. Although studies by (Choi, Martin, Park, & Yoh, 2009; Funk et al., 2009; Wann, Martin, Grieve, & Gardner, 2008), found, that motivations like fantasy, diversion, and arousal positively influenced game engagement. Our findings collectively emphasize the complex interplay among motives, social connections, and game attendance. Similarly, (Funk et al., 2009; Norman, 2022) revealed, a significant association between fan motivation factors and game attendance. In addition, these studies highlight the importance of recognizing the different reasons why fans attend games, whether for excitement, esteem, or diversion.

On the other hand, all dependent variables have a 69.3% variance, whereas the remaining 39.7 % were not depicted in this study. This suggests that the factors included in the analysis were able to account for a large portion of the variations observed in the data; however, other variables were still present that were not addressed. Further research is necessary to explore these additional factors and their impact on the outcomes of the study. Additionally, this highlights the complexity of the topic and the need for a more com-

prehensive approach in future investigations. This level of variance suggests that strong underlying factors influence the outcomes measured in this study. The high percentage of variance explained suggests that the model is a good fit for the data and provides valuable insights into the relationships between variables. This study is also in line with the studies of (Bundo & Axhami, 2021; Stander et al., 2016), even though the degree, level of the league nature of participants, and fixture of the event vary. Funk et al. found that the SPEED scale could explain 30% of the variance in the frequency of game attendance and 75% of the variance in team commitment (Funk et al., 2009). Further research is necessary to explore these additional factors and their impact on the outcome of the study. Additionally, this highlights the complexity of the topic and the need for a more comprehensive approach in future investigations.

What are the potential motivational factors that can predict game attendance among Ethiopian Premier League football fans? Looking at a single contribution of the predictors, the results show that performance ($\beta = .631$, $t = 15.200$, $p < .001$); excitement ($\beta = .588$, $t = 12.660$, $p < .001$); and diversion ($\beta = .333$, $t = 7.749$, $p < .001$) positively predict commitment. These factors indicate that fans are more likely to attend games when they believe the team will perform well, when they are excited about the game, and when they see it as a form of entertainment or escape from their daily routine. This finding was similar to findings in studies of sports psychology, sociology, and marketing (Choi et al., 2009; Funk et al., 2009; Norman, 2022) that found evident performance, excitement, and diversion, suggesting that the strength of this variable can increase game attendance. On the other hand, the results for socialization and esteem also revealed that those who were committed to game attendance were also more likely to report socialization ($\beta = -.382$, $t = -4.836$, $p < .001$) and esteem ($\beta = -.222$, $t = -3.534$, $p < .001$) by a single set of factors, with some affecting it negatively. This finding was inconsistent with the studies reported by sports psychology, sociology, and marketing studies (Choi et al., 2009; Funk et al., 2009; Norman, 2022; Yoshida, Sato, & Doyle, 2023), whose findings were positively correlated with game attendance. Unlikely, these results were found because of inconvenient current politics, league format, game times, economy, the movement of gangsters, and a lack of transportation options to get to the games. Teams must address these barriers to increase attendance. Additionally, efforts to improve socialization and esteem among fans can further enhance their commitment to attending games and supporting their favorite teams.

This study investigated how motivational factors affect game attendance at the EPL. A limitation of this study, we highlight the inability to generalize the results to the entire Ethiopian population because of the lack of a representative sample. Further investigations in the Ethiopian context must

be conducted to determine the existence or not of differences in the perception of the motivational factors of game attendance according to the region of the country, with the use of the SPEED dimension and also other factors already conceptualized in the literature (e.g., 14 sport motive factors). Studies in other contexts have found new associations with branding and can be used as an example (Doyle, Kunkel, Su, Biscaia, & Baker, 2023). Another limitation pertains to the lack of analysis of the inter-relationship between motivation factors and their impact on game attendance. However, long-term studies may be needed to confirm its effect, especially when adding additional variables. This study shows a positive correlation and suggests that SPEED can have a large to extremely large correlation with game attendance. Clubs, event organizers, sociologists, and marketers may benefit from this fact. Future studies may explore including more variables that reflect the current format and trends. Our findings provide conclusive evidence that this phenomenon is associated with game attendance.

Conclusion

This study investigated how motivational factors affect game attendance at the EPL. The main results were that (i) there was a positive to extremely large association between SPEED and game attendance, and (ii) SPEED had a 69.3% variance in game attendance. (iii) Looking at a single contribution of the predictors, performance, excitement, and diversion can be positively predicted, whereas socialization and esteem can have an inverse effect on game attendance. Understanding these influences can help football clubs tailor their marketing strategies to better attract and involve fans in games, ultimately leading to increased attendance and revenue.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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