



## PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS ON SOME CODES OF ETHICS IN TURKISH SPORT MEDIA

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### Abstract

**Purpose.** The purpose of this study was to examine public perceptions of the extent to which professional football players and Turkish sport media abide by the ethical codes.

**Methods.** This study was executed in 2008-2009 football season. The sample was consisted randomly selected 138 male professional football players. Their ages ranged from  $20 \leq (N=30)$ ,  $21-30 (N=53)$  and  $31 \geq (N= 55)$  years. Four items (gossip, honesty, encourage violence, private lives) related to ethical issues were used for measuring professional football players' perceptions of the ethical codes in Turkish Sports Media. The participants were rated the four research statements ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

In the statistical evaluation of the study, the following methods were used: the frequency of following the media (6-7 days per week, 3-5 days per week, 1-2 days per week and never), and the frequency of players', teams', coaches' and managers' appearing in the media (6-7 days per week, 3-5 days per week, 1-2 days per week and no coverage). These factors were analyzed in terms of frequency (f) and percentage (%). Perceptual differences between players were tested via one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in terms of 'media coverage' and via Kruskal Vallis Non Parametric test in terms of 'following media tools'.

**Results.** Professional football players perceived that the Turkish sports media does not abide by ethical codes. There were meaningful differences between the groups regarding the items of "Honesty" [ $F_{(2-135)} = 4.889$ ;  $p < .01$ ] as covered in the media. The analysis also indicates that "private life" scores of participants differentiate meaningfully regarding their status of "following media tools" ( $X^2(2) = 6.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Conclusions.** The most important finding of this study is that professional football players perceive that the Turkish sports media continually violates the ethical codes.

**Key words:** Ethics, Sport Media, Football Players.

### Introduction

The media plays a significant role in today's world. The most important being its effect on the general perception within a society (F.L.F. Lee, 2005; S. Hughes, M. Shank, 2005) and the provision of a public forum for debate about important social issues (P. Moy et al, 2003). The media's ability to function constructively in these roles is directly related with its acceptance of, and adherence to certain ethical codes. Therefore, all media workers are required to abide by the official ethical codes regardless of the country from which they report as governed by the members of various regional and international media associations. Similar lists of ethical codes are issued by the associations and are directed to specific fields of the media, such as sports. The members of these associations are requested to abide by these ethical codes. These ethical codes may include similar or different items. For example, cultural differences and the uncertainty of the ethical codes do not allow the formation of a guideline that can be wholly understood. For this reason, media employees must evaluate their professional practices within the framework of socially accepted ethical standards, the ethical codes that govern their professional study areas, as well as their own consciences. The issue of ethical reporting is further complicated by the fact that there is not a general consensus on the issue. As a result, journalists may implement different principles that can be

defended morally (W. Nichols et al, 2002). In journalism, as with other media, common ethical value manifests generally determine the written ethical codes. By agreeing on these standards, organizations provide a solid ethically foundation for the journalists. It is important to remember that ethical codes are not related only to journalists. They also apply to educators in the field of journalism, as well as to the society as a whole (W. Lo, et al 2005). However, according to M. Hardin (2005), while the list of ethical codes helps to explain ethical issues, determine preliminary and behavior standards and, is accepted as valuable for journalism, it cannot guarantee the ethical behaviors and cannot resolve ethical problems. For this reason, ethical codes remain a problematic area in journalism.

In the light of this generally weak image of journalism, as well as the daily violations of the media's ethical codes (T.K. Wulfemeyer, 1985), sports journalism is widely viewed, as the media discipline in which the majority of these ethical problems are experienced (M. Hardin, 2005<sup>a</sup>). Similar observations are noted Turkish sports media and sports journalism. The practice is widely tolerated since media outlets are conveying non-ethical news, especially by the sports clubs, coaches, managers and players (R. Uzun, 2004). Many of the ethical code violations are related to football, the most popular sport in Turkey. These infractions take their toil on football clubs, players,

coaches and club managers. Unfortunately, there is little effort made to either verify sources or confirm the accuracy of information about the players who are the source and subject of the news. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine public perceptions of the extent to which professional football players and Turkish sport media abide by the ethical codes.

### Research Hypotheses

Perceptions of football players for four items about the codes of ethics in Turkish sport media tools were showed some meaningful differences on statements according to the level of following the media tools; the level of appearing in the media tools and Turkish sports media continually violates the ethical codes.

### Method

In this study four statements which were based on Turkish Press Council Media Principles and literature, were used for data collection. The statements of this study were as follows:

1. Sports media makes the private lives of sport-related persons the subject of the news even though their private lives do not benefit the public.
2. Sports media makes news from incorrect or inaccurate information, and does not attach importance to honesty.
3. Sports media encourages violence.
4. Sports media provides a forum gossip.

**Participants.** This study was executed in 2008-2009 football season. The sample consisted of 138 (approximately 30% of the players in Turkish Football Super League) male professional football players from 10 different TFSL teams in Turkey. Their ages ranged from  $20 \leq (N=30)$ ,  $21-30 (N=53)$  and  $31 \geq (N= 55)$  years. The participants of this study were randomly selected.

**Measures.** The sixteen Media Principles recognized by the Turkish Press Council were examined, and a literature survey on media ethics was undertaken. From this work, various issues were determined and discussed with experts ( $N = 7$ ) in this field. Following this, based on recommendations from the experts, four items (gossip, honesty, encourage violence, private lives) related to ethical issues were deemed to be sufficient in measuring professional football players' perceptions of the ethical codes in Turkish Sports Media. The participants were rated the four research statements ranging from 1 (indicating never) to 5 (indicating always).

**Analyses.** In the statistical evaluation of the study, the following methods were used: the frequency of following the media (6-7 days per week, 3-5 days per week, 1-2 days per week and never), and the frequency of players', teams', coaches' and managers' appearing in the media (6-7 days per week, 3-5 days per week, 1-2 days per week and no coverage). These factors were analyzed in terms of frequency (f) and percentage (%). Perceptual differences between players were tested via one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in terms of 'media coverage' and via

Kruskal Vallis Non Parametric test in terms of 'following media tools'. SPSS 16.0 pocket statistical program was used for statistical analysis.

### Results

**Descriptive Statistics.** As for following sports media tools; 77 players (55.8%) follow the media for 6-7 days per week, 47 players (34.1%) follow the media for 3-5 days per week and 14 players follow the media (10.1%) for 1-2 days per week. Of the subjects themselves, their teams, coaches and their managers, any of them become the subject of news in sport media on 3-5 days per week (46%), 6-7 days per week (30%) and 1-2 days per week (24%) respectively.

According to Table 1, the football players generally marked "frequently" and "always" regarding their perceptions about the violation of the above ethical codes by Turkish sports media. When the total of the "frequently" and "always" choices were evaluated; the lowest percentage value (76.0%) was seen in the item of stimulating violence, the highest percentage level (84.7%) was in the item of private life; the lowest average value ( $\bar{X} = 3.92$ ) again was observed in the item of stimulating violence whereas the highest average value ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ) was seen in the item of gossip news. According to the results of table 2, there were meaningful differences between the groups regarding the items of "Honesty" [ $F_{(2-135)} = 4.889$ ;  $p < .01$ ] as covered in the media. According to the results of the post hoc multiple comparison test, a meaningful difference was found between the points of those appearing in the media on "6-7 days" per week ( $\bar{X} = 4.23$ ), for "3-5 days" per week ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ) and on "1-2 days" per week ( $\bar{X} = 3.74$ ) for the item of "Honesty". It was determined that the participants who appeared in the media more ("6-7 days" per week and "3-5 days" per week) scored higher than those who appear less in media (1-2 days).

Table 3 indicates that "private life" scores of participants differentiate meaningfully regarding their status of "following media tools" ( $X^2 (2) = 6.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This finding shows that the duration of following media has different effects in the aspect of "Private Life".

### Discussion and Conclusion

The most important aspect of this study is that it is based on the perceptions of professional football players who themselves often appear in the media as the subject and source of the news and follow sports media as reader/audience. The most important finding of this study is that professional football players perceive that the Turkish sports media continually violates the ethical codes ( $\bar{X} = 4.05$ ). According to the perceptions of professional football players, treating gossip as factual news is the most often violated ethical code by the Turkish sports media ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ). The most important factor of the coverage of gossip news on the Turkish sport media is that clubs and football players whose numbers of fans are high, appear more



frequently in the sports media. Media employees who cannot find adequate news about these clubs and football players attempt to remedy this shortfall by using gossip as news. As a result the ethical code is violated. The private lives of people who appear in the public eye are always of interest. The objective of the media in making news about these people is to increase the interest in their media tools. However, in the news made regarding these people, it should not be forgotten that the confidentiality of a person's private life should always be respected. Football players whose private lives become the subject of the news believe that this ethical code is severely violated ( $\bar{X} = 4.08$ ). Furthermore, football players who follow sport media more (6-7 days per week and 3-5 days per week) and those who follow less (1-2 days per week) perceive that the ethical code of private life was continually violated. This stems from the fact that football players, who have the opportunity to follow the news closely on sports media, can evaluate the current situation better.

According to the perceptions of professional football players, the ethical code of honesty, which is seen as the basis for the ethical codes in general, is frequently violated by Turkish sports media ( $\bar{X} = 4.07$ ). Furthermore, it is considerably meaningful that football players whose team's or own life is frequently subjected to news (6-7 days per week and 3-5 per week days) find sports media to have more issues in the ethical code of honesty. This finding corresponds to the general conviction of the public that "falsified and sensational news" concerning football is fabricated in order for the Turkish sports media to increase interest and market share in media. In fact, it would not be wrong to state that the commercialization of the media is the reason for the perception that these four ethical codes are violated so frequently due. The public is aware that news is often made as the attempt of sports media outlets to attract more interest and to increase its sales or ratings. The findings of the study correspond to a statement by Mr. K. Bapçum (2004), one of the Turkey most important sports media journalists. He said "with the commercialization of the media, sensation has got ahead of accurate and high-quality reporting in the sport media, too". While the media is being commercialized, the emerging media culture has started to accept the sport, particularly football, as a commercial tool and abandoned its social and cultural importance (R. Boyle, R. Haynes, 2002). Therefore, sports have begun to be seen as purely a commercial commodity which attracts the interest of the customer and increases the consumption. Thus, economic policies drive the need to increase sales and advertisement incomes for the media outlets (J. Horne, 2005). When journalism studies are examined, variables related to commercialization such as news organization ownership, news room influences,

competition, subjects and sources, advertisers, audience, and organization size (R. Coleman, 2006) all affected the ethical decisions of media employees.

The ethical code which was believed as to be violated the least in this study was the idea that sport media encourages violence ( $\bar{X} = 3.92$ ). These perceptions of the football players are very interesting since the sports media is often the first element blamed by the coaches, club managers, football circles, even politicians and the general society for inciting violence.

Some events experienced after the 1990's with the media and sports media contribute to the beliefs and perceptions of the football players about the fact that Turkish sport media frequently violates the ethical codes. The first and the most important reason is the increase in the number of media tools and the circulation/rating concerns caused by the competition between them. That is, commercial concerns stimulate owners of media tools to earn more and the employees ignore the ethical codes in order to maintain their positions. The second reason is that the football circles, those people who are interested in professional football, want the commercialization of the sport as much as the media. It is in their interest for the game to remain popular. Therefore, they are complicit in maintaining the unethical news and methods of the media. For similar commercial concerns, professional football and football circles shift be the focus of interest to sensational news serve to ensure that professional football retains a high position in the minds of the public. As with other media outlets around the world, the task of sports media in Turkey should be to inform, educate, entertain and provide the formation of a healthy society through the news it delivers. Its goal should be to be increase the popularity of sports in general and contribute to its spread in society (A. Girgin, 2000; TGNA, 2005: 53). It can be said that the realization of these tasks and the benefits of the media for society is directly proportional to its adherence to the ethical codes. In conclusion, this study has shown that professional football players perceive that Turkish sports media frequently violates ethical codes. This result supports the determinations of the Commission Report of Research Violence in Sport of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA, 2005: 54) and Uzun's (2004) opinions; "reasons such as preventing promotion of some responsible journalists who do not make sensational news due to commercial concerns, the presence of many journalists who are not concerned about the validity of the information and research, and the inconsistency of the news and comments, some sport reporters behaving like they are the friends of the club inadequacy of the sports knowledge and culture are seen as the most criticized issues and the obstacles to behaving in accordance with ethical codes".

**Table 1.** Ethical Codes Perceptions of Football Players in Relation to Turkish Sports Media

Ethical Codes		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Mean	SD
Private life	F	-	3	18	83	34	4.08	.68



	%	-	2.2	13.0	60.1	24.6		
<b>Honesty</b>	F	1	3	19	77	38	4.07	.75
	%	0.7	2.2	13.8	55.8	27.5		
<b>Stimulate/Encourage Violence</b>	F	-	4	29	79	26	3.92	.72
	%	-	2.9	21.0	57.2	18.8		
<b>Gossip</b>	F	-	1	24	65	48	4.16	.73
	%	-	0.7	17.4	47.1	34.8		

**Table 2.** ANOVA Results According to Coverage in Media

Ethical Codes	6-7 days per week (n=39)		3-5 days per week (n=64)		1-2 days per week (n=35)		Mean Diff* (ANOVA)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<b>Private life</b>	4.17	.64	4.03	.69	4.03	.71	4.889*
<b>Honesty /Truthfulness</b>	4.23	.63	4.16	.72	3.74	.85	3.095*
<b>Stimulate/Encourage Violence</b>	3.87	.92	4.03	.62	3.77	.60	
<b>Gossip</b>	4.18	.72	4.20	.69	4.06	.80	

\* F-Values from ANOVA

\* Significant at the 0.05 level

**Table 3.** Kruskal Vallis Test Results According to Following of Media Tools

Ethical Codes	6-7 days per week (n=77)		3-5 days per week (n=47)		1-2 days per week (n=14)		X <sup>2</sup>
	MR	df	MR	df	MR	df	
<b>Private life</b>	74.47	2	67.65	2	48.39	2	6.78*
<b>Honesty /Truthfulness</b>	69.16	2	71.48	2	64.71	2	
<b>Stimulate/ Encourage Violence</b>	71.85	2	65.82	2	68.93	2	
<b>Gossip</b>	73.65	2	64.16	2	64.61	2	

\* Significant at the 0.05 level

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