

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Breaking Stereotypes: The Impact of Gender Equality and Sports Sponsorship on Purchase Intention Through Symbolic Consumption

Kalıpları Yıkma: Cinsiyet Eşitliği ve Spor Sponsorluğunun Sembolik Tüketim Aracılığıyla Satın Alma Niyetine Etkisi

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DOI : [10.63556/ankad.v10i1.345](https://doi.org/10.63556/ankad.v10i1.345)

Geliş/Received: 04/10/2025

Kabul/Accepted: 22/01/2025

Abstract

This study examines the mediating role of symbolic consumption in the relationship between consumers' gender equality perspectives and their purchase intention toward sports sponsorships. Data were collected from 482 participants through face-to-face and online surveys, and a structural regression model combining confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis was used to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings indicate that gender equality perspectives negatively influence symbolic consumption for both genders. While these perspectives do not directly affect purchase intention among women, they have a direct impact on men's purchase intention. Furthermore, for both genders, gender equality perspectives indirectly and negatively influence purchase intention through symbolic consumption. These results suggest that emphasizing gender equality in sponsorship activities can positively affect consumers' purchasing behavior by aligning sponsorship strategies with their values. Such socially oriented messages can help businesses build loyalty and strengthen their brand image. This research is among the first to explore gender equality, symbolic consumption, and purchase intention together in the context of sports sponsorship, offering original insights for both academics and practitioners.

Keywords: Gender equality, sports sponsorship, symbolic consumption, purchase intention, consumer behavior

Öz

Bu çalışma, tüketicilerin cinsiyet eşitliği perspektifleri ile spor sponsorluklarına yönelik satın alma niyetleri arasındaki ilişkide sembolik tüketimin aracılık rolünü incelemektedir. Veriler, 482 katılımcıdan yüz yüze ve çevrimiçi anketler yoluyla toplanmış ve önerilen hipotezleri test etmek için doğrulayıcı faktör analizi ve yol analizi birleştiren yapısal regresyon modeli kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, cinsiyet eşitliği perspektiflerinin her iki cinsiyet için de sembolik tüketimi olumsuz etkilediğini göstermektedir. Bu perspektifler kadınların satın alma niyetini doğrudan etkilemese de, erkeklerin satın alma niyetini doğrudan etkilemektedir. Ayrıca, her iki cinsiyet için de cinsiyet eşitliği perspektifleri, sembolik tüketim yoluyla satın alma niyetini dolaylı ve olumsuz olarak etkilemektedir. Bu sonuçlar, sponsorluk faaliyetlerinde cinsiyet eşitliğini vurgulamak, sponsorluk stratejilerini tüketicilerin değerleriyle uyumlu hale getirerek tüketicilerin satın alma davranışlarını olumlu yönde etkileyebileceğini göstermektedir. Bu tür sosyal odaklı mesajlar, işletmelerin sadakat oluşturmalarına ve marka imajını güçlendirmesine yardımcı olabilir. Bu araştırma, spor sponsorluğu bağlamında cinsiyet eşitliği, sembolik tüketim ve satın alma niyetini birlikte inceleyen ilk araştırmalardan biridir ve hem akademisyenler hem de uygulayıcılar için özgün içgörüler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, spor sponsorluğu, sembolik tüketim, satın alma niyeti, tüketici davranışı

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Önerilen Atıf/Suggestion Citation

Ok, Ş. & Altın, S., (2026). Breaking Stereotypes: The Impact of Gender Equality and Sports Sponsorship on Purchase Intention Through Symbolic Consumption, *Anadolu Kültürel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 10(1), 337-362.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship activities in the sport context represent an important area of research in the marketing literature and sponsorship can be defined as "an investment in cash or in kind in exchange for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with an activity" (Meenaghan, 1991).

Sponsorship has increasingly attracted attention in recent years as a way for businesses to establish a certain bond with consumers. Businesses consider sponsorship as a tool to fulfil their social responsibilities and thus try to create positive perceptions of the brand.

Events that are subject to sponsorship such as health, education, fairs, music and sports have recently attracted the attention of businesses as issues that consumers attach importance to. Businesses try to explain themselves to the society by financially supporting such activities that are important to the society, and in this way, they try to realise their corporate goals. At this point, sponsorship stands out as an important tool for businesses to realise their goals (Quester and Farrelly 1998).

The increasing importance and use of sponsorship requires an examination of how a successful sponsorship activity should be organised. Which factors should be included in a successful sponsorship activity, how to organise the influencing factors, which factors affect the perceptions of consumers and what are the dimensions that reveal these factors have become important issues that require examination. At this point, it is necessary to examine and evaluate how a sponsorship activity will affect consumer behaviour.

When the literature was analysed, various studies on sports sponsorship were found. These studies include research on sponsorship in football (Acak et al., 2010; Enginkaya, 2014), research on sponsorship in basketball (Alay et al., 2008; Akdağ, 2012; Tekin and Eskicioğlu, 2015), research on sponsorship in tennis (Nicholls and Roslow, 1999), research on brand and sponsorship (Çelik, 2016), research on organisation sponsorship (Roy and Cornwell, 2004), sponsorship awareness (Ko et al, 2008; Lee et al., 2011), research on sponsors and purchase intentions (Gwinner and Bennett, 2008; Hong, 2011; Temel and Şirin, 2017), research on sponsors and fans (Parker and Fink, 2010). However, when the related literature is examined, it is seen that studies on sports sponsorship and consumer behaviours (Koo et al., 2006; Akyıldız and Marangoz, 2008; Tükenmez, 2018) are limited.

When previous studies are examined, Hazari (2018) and Zardini Filho (2019) found that male consumers' purchase intentions towards sports sponsorship are higher than female consumers. This study supports the literature by presenting similar results. Grau and Zotos (2016) emphasize that gender stereotypes in advertisements shape consumer behavior. Our study extends this argument by revealing the negative impact of stereotypes on symbolic consumption.

While Ghasemi Siani et al. (2021) claim that there is no gender difference in the intentions of young consumers, this study shows that there are significant differences between male and female consumers. This contradiction can be explained by the factors of 'cultural context' and gender norms in Turkey and 'sport branch' e.g. football vs. tennis.

Existing studies have not systematically examined the negative effect of gender equality perception on symbolic consumption and its reflection on purchase intention. This research contributes to the literature with the finding that 'individuals with high gender equality have less need for symbolic values'.

This study brings innovation to the sports sponsorship literature in three significant ways. First, it is among the pioneering studies that empirically demonstrate the negative relationship between gender equality perspectives and symbolic consumption, offering robust evidence for this understudied link. Second, it highlights that the purchase intentions of male and female consumers are shaped through different mechanisms, with gender equality perspectives influencing men's intentions directly and women's intentions indirectly through symbolic consumption. Finally, the study provides culturally grounded recommendations for designing sponsorship strategies in contexts such as Turkey, where traditional gender roles remain prominent, thereby contributing practical insights for brands operating in similar socio-cultural environments.

In line with this information, the aim of this study is to determine the effect of the mediation levels of symbolic consumption on the relationship between consumers' levels of gender equality towards sports sponsorship activities and purchase intention and to offer various suggestions.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Gender refers to the social construction of attributes of women and men, such as roles, norms and relationships between groups of women and men (World Health Organisation (WHO)). There are many differences between women and men. While some of these differences stem from gender, a large part of them stem from social gender. Biological differences between men and women are called gender differences (Dökmen, 2014).

Another phenomenon that constitutes gender is gender roles. Each society imposes different roles and responsibilities on men and women. Gender roles are gender-related expectations that society defines and expects women and men to fulfil (Dökmen, 2014).

Getting rid of gender roles and stereotypes is the most fundamental step in ensuring gender equality. Gender equality means that women and men have equal chances and opportunities to access and control social, economic and political resources and that these rights are protected by law (WHO, 2011). Gender equality does not mean that the two sexes are biologically equal; what is in question is the equality of women and men in terms of human dignity and rights.

Various psychological mechanisms and theories can be proposed to explain the findings of the study. First of all, the positive effect of symbolic consumption on purchase intention in female consumers can be considered in the context of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to this theory, individuals tend to strengthen their identities by identifying themselves with certain social groups. The consumption of symbolic products within the scope of sports sponsorship by female consumers can be interpreted as a result of their desire to identify themselves with a strong and independent female image.

In addition, Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982) provides an important framework for explaining these findings. This theory emphasizes that consumers tend to prefer brand images that they find congruent with themselves. Women's preference for products sponsored by gender equality activities due to their symbolic value can be explained by the fact that these products are congruent with their self-perception.

Symbolic Consumption Theory (Levy, 1959) suggests that products are not only functional but also carry social and psychological meanings. The high intention of female consumers to purchase products within the scope of sports sponsorship can be associated with the fact that these products meet psychological needs such as social status, self-confidence and social acceptance. It can be thought that women feel the need to express their social identities through symbolic products with sports themes, especially in today's society where traditional gender roles are questioned.

Since the main purpose of the study is to examine the effect of gender equality perception on purchase intention through symbolic consumption, Sirgy's (1982) Self-Congruity Theory provides the most appropriate theoretical framework in this context. The reasons for this are:

Direct Relationship: The theory explains how the fit between consumers' brand image and self-perception affects purchasing behavior – which is exactly what explains the “symbolic consumption → purchase intention” phase of the study.

Gender Connection: The fact that female consumers find sponsored products that emphasize gender equality “compatible with their modern, egalitarian self-perceptions” is consistent with the theory's main argument.

Emphasis on Symbolic Value: The theory focuses on the role of products' symbolic, not functional, meanings in consumption decisions – which is perfectly consistent with the study's emphasis on “symbolic consumption.”

"The positive effect of symbolic consumption on purchase intention among female consumers is consistent with the Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982). Accordingly, sponsored products that support gender equality gain symbolic value by aligning with the 'autonomous, empowered self-perception' of

female consumers, and this alignment increases purchase intention." This approach supports the quantitative findings of the study with qualitative depth.

These psychological mechanisms help us understand the motivations underlying the symbolic consumption behaviors of female consumers by placing the findings of the study on a theoretical basis. Empirical testing of these theoretical frameworks in future studies will further strengthen the validity of the findings.

2.1. Concept of gender equality in marketing

Historically, men and women have engaged in work based on physical characteristics, with men performing outdoor tasks utilizing speed and strength, while women focused on home and family responsibilities (Harrison and Lynch, 2005). This division has fostered gender stereotypes, associating masculine traits with dominance and power, and feminine traits with emotionality and vulnerability (Grau and Zotos, 2016). Marketing scholars have explored the portrayal of genders, particularly in advertising, highlighting the social consequences of these stereotypes, which can lead to societal expectations of superiority and limited opportunities, particularly in women's sports (Grau and Zotos, 2016; Eagly and Sczesny, 2019).

Recent years have seen steady growth in women's sports, leading to improved media coverage and increased interest from corporate sponsors (Petty and Pope, 2018). A study indicated that 66% of people have shown interest in women's sports, with 84% among sports fans (Nielsen Sports, 2018). As global interest in women's sports rises, sponsorship becomes crucial (Casey et al., 2019).

Since the 1980s, brands have increasingly leveraged sports sponsorship to stand out in a crowded advertising space (Morgan, 2019). Global spending on sports sponsorship has risen by an average of 4% annually since 2014, projected to increase by 6% from 2020 to 2024. Despite this growth, sponsorship revenue for women's sports remains disproportionate compared to men's, largely due to limited media attention, which negatively impacts the ability of women's sports to attract sponsors (Lough and Greenhalgh, 2019). Sports sponsorship models have been reshaped by the pandemic and have become tools that reach consumer perception through digital interaction and fan identity (Bogina et al., 2022). This transformation supports the idea that gender equality-focused sponsorships may have an increased impact on consumer attitudes and purchase intent.

Marketers are utilizing women's sporting events to promote products where women are key decision-makers, such as in financial services and healthcare (Hazari, 2018). Sponsors recognize both the strategic benefits of supporting women's sports and their social responsibility towards promoting gender equality and diversity (Lough and Irwin, 2001; Morgan, 2019). Recent work on brand architecture shows that consumers evaluate brands differently when they are associated with men's versus women's sport properties, with women's sport often conveying stronger value- and identity-based meanings (Doyle et al., 2025). This supports our argument that gender-equality-focused sponsorships enhance symbolic consumption processes.

2.2. Sports sponsorship and purchase intention

Intention is defined as a learned predisposition to respond consistently and positively to a specific object (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Speed and Thompson (2000) suggest that sports sponsorship can enhance value and alter consumer intentions toward the sponsoring brand, potentially offering a competitive advantage (Zardini Filho, 2017). Mason (2005) emphasizes that understanding how consumer intentions form and change is essential for effective sponsorship, highlighting the strong influence of intentions on consumer behavior and the role of sponsorships in shaping these intentions.

Understanding the impact of sports sponsorships on consumer intentions is vital for successful sponsorship initiatives. Negative information about a sponsor can lead to adverse intentions toward that sponsor and diminish purchase intentions for their products (Kuzma et al., 2003).

Mumcu et al. (2016) assert that there is a connection between consumers' intentions and behaviors regarding a product or service. According to Kim et al. (2011), consumer intention is a crucial determinant of behavioral intentions. For instance, positive intentions towards a sponsor can increase the likelihood of purchasing their products (Mumcu et al., 2016).

The study found that corporate social responsibility linked sponsorship had the strongest positive impact and the weakest negative impact on the attitude and purchase intention of home team supporters and the attitude of rival team supporters (Mohammadi et al., 2024).

Purchase intention is recognized as an indicator of sponsorship effectiveness. While sponsor awareness plays a significant role in consumers' purchasing decisions, it alone cannot determine purchase intention; positive intentions toward the sponsor are also necessary (Ko et al., 2008).

2.3. The relationship between gender equality, sports sponsorship and purchase intention

According to Kim et al. (2015), gender is a common method for segmenting consumers, with notable differences between men and women in terms of values and intentions (Bucic et al., 2012). Gender segmentation provides a unique perspective for analyzing the effects of sports sponsorships. Stüber (2014) argued that specific products are perceived as masculine or feminine, suggesting that the alignment of sponsorship with gender perceptions can positively influence advertising effectiveness and increase purchase intentions (Torgler and Valev, 2010).

Sponsorship is defined as the support provided to enhance a brand's image through in-kind or cash aid (Tek, 2005), with sports sponsorship being the most prevalent form. This type of sponsorship is viewed as an investment in athletes, teams, or events to access the commercial potential of sports properties (Fahy et al., 2004). There are three main types of sports sponsorship: personal athlete sponsorship, team sponsorship, and organizational sponsorship. The primary objective of sponsorships is often to foster a positive intention toward the sponsor (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Fahy et al., 2004). According to Farrelly et al. (2006), consumers' intentions towards the sponsoring brand are essential for assessing marketing effectiveness.

Research by Zucco et al. (2015) indicates that sponsorship can influence brand intention, particularly when consumers perceive a good fit between the sponsored property and the brand. Speed and Thompson (2000) noted that sponsors perceived as sincere and altruistic receive better consumer responses, while purely commercial motivations tend to elicit less favorable reactions (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984).

Symbolic consumption refers to the purchase and use of products based on their symbolic value. These products are understood and interpreted within society, indicating that all products carry symbolic meanings (Sirgy, 1982). Media tools significantly influence symbolic consumption, as they reflect consumers' identities through various indicators in advertisements. Gender roles in media often reinforce stereotypes by depicting male and female behaviors in idealized ways (Goffman, 2020).

In symbolic consumption, products serve to reflect the consumer's identity, enhance their social existence, and express their status or role (Odabaşı, 1999). The concept of gender highlights the distinctions between sex and gender, emphasizing the societal expectations that restrict the activities of men and women. These expectations create pressure, shaping individual behaviors (Dökmen, 2009). In line with our conceptualization of symbolic consumption, Rincón et al., (2023) show that symbolic consumption significantly strengthens brand loyalty in the sports industry, suggesting that fans use brands to express identity and social belonging.

Societal statuses assigned to men and women dictate expected behaviors and roles, leading to differences that reinforce stereotypes. Shifts in societal perceptions of gender are crucial for transforming traditional roles and stereotypes, making sponsorship activities and media communication vital for influencing societal perspectives.

Sports sponsorship is an effective marketing strategy that enables brands to establish emotional bonds with their target audiences and positively influence consumer perceptions. However, consumers' intentions towards these activities are affected by socio-cultural factors such as gender equality perceptions and symbolic consumption. In particular, consumers' sensitivity to gender equality and symbolic consumption behaviours play an important role in determining the effectiveness of brands' sponsorship strategies. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the effect of consumers' gender equality levels on consumers' purchase intentions towards sports sponsorship activities and the mediating role of symbolic consumption in this relationship.

In the research, based on the theoretical framework, an answer to the question ‘Does symbolic consumption mediate the relationship between gender equality levels and purchase intention?’ was sought. A model was created based on this research question and the model is given in Figure 1 below. Answers to 8 hypotheses were sought in the model. These hypotheses are:

H₁: The level of gender equality in women has an effect on symbolic consumption.

It is known that gender perceptions directly shape individuals' consumption preferences and their relationships with brands (Eisend, 2019). Vigneron and Johnson (1999), while examining prestige-oriented consumption behaviours, emphasise that consumers prefer products not only for their functional characteristics but also because they carry social status, identity formation, and symbolic meanings. The rise in women's perception of gender equality facilitates their embracing symbolic aspects more by changing their consumption tendencies. It is observed that women who are sensitive to gender equality prioritise symbolic values in their purchasing preferences (Grohmann, 2009). Women consumers' consumption of symbolic products within the scope of sports sponsorship can be associated with their desire to identify with an image of a strong and independent woman (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

H₂: The level of gender equality among men has an effect on symbolic consumption.

Male consumers' perceptions of gender equality may also influence their symbolic consumption behaviour. Men's perspective on gender roles shapes their brand preferences (Holt, 1995). Men with egalitarian views tend to reinforce their social identities through symbolic consumption by gravitating towards brands that reflect these values (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Therefore, it is predicted that men's perceptions of gender equality will influence symbolic consumption.

H₃: Symbolic consumption in women influences purchase intention.

In symbolic consumption, products serve the purpose of reflecting the consumer's identity, strengthening their social presence, and expressing their status (Odabaşı, 1999). For female consumers, the symbolic values offered by brands are an important factor influencing purchase intention (Sirgy et al., 2000). In particular, symbolic messages consistent with gender equality increase women's purchase intention towards the brand (Eisend, 2010).

H₄: The level of gender equality among women has a direct effect on purchase intention.

As social norms evolve and inclusivity comes to the fore, consumers' interest in ethical, gender-neutral products is increasing (Mogre, Yeboah & Yeboah, 2024). Women's sensitivity to gender equality can directly influence their purchase intention towards products (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016). While men's needs-based approach to shopping regulates unplanned purchasing behaviour, women make outcome-based choices (Erdem, 2022). Therefore, it is predicted that women's perception of gender equality will have a direct effect on purchase intention.

H₅: Gender equality among women indirectly affects purchase intention through symbolic consumption.

Sponsors are aware of the strategic advantages of supporting women's sports, as well as their social responsibility to promote gender equality and diversity (Lough & Irwin, 2001). Women consumers' perception of gender equality may influence purchase intention through the symbolic values offered by the brand. In particular, purchase intention increases when symbolic consumption aligns the brand's values with the consumer's identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

H₆: Symbolic consumption among men has an effect on purchase intention.

Consumers purchase products and services with symbolic meanings in order to reflect their self and personality to their environment. For example, an individual who desires a sporty identity may purchase a gym membership, sports equipment, or competition tickets. Although women are more prone to symbolic consumption, male consumers also shape their purchasing behaviour through symbolic consumption (Dittmar, Beattie & Friese, 1995). Holt (1998) states that men also tend to express their social identities and values through symbolic consumption.

H₇: The level of gender equality in men has a direct effect on purchase intention.

Sensitivity to gender equality can directly influence male consumers' purchase intentions. Men who are moving away from traditional gender norms are adopting more flexible and individualised consumption behaviours (Tuncay & Otnes (2008). The questioning of power perceptions and the transformation of gender relations lead men to embrace egalitarian values, which are reflected in their consumption preferences and behaviours (Kaufman, 1999).

H₈: Gender equality among men indirectly affects purchase intention through symbolic consumption.

The perception of gender equality may indirectly influence purchase intention by reinforcing symbolic consumption behaviour among male consumers. Symbolic consumption is an important tool for individuals to express their social identities. Vigneron & Johnson (1999) stated that male consumers use prestigious products to display their social status and identity. Schau and Gilly (2003) revealed that consumers express their values through symbolic means. Therefore, the perception of gender equality indirectly affects purchase intention by reinforcing symbolic consumption among men.

H₁: The level of gender equality in women has an effect on the mediating variable symbolic consumption.

H₂: The level of gender equality in men has an effect on the mediating variable symbolic consumption.

H₃: Symbolic consumption has an effect on purchase intention in women.

H₄: The level of gender equality has a direct effect on purchase intention in women.

H₅: The level of gender equality in women has an indirect effect on purchase intention through symbolic consumption.

H₆: Symbolic consumption has an effect on purchase intention on men.

H₇: The level of gender equality has a direct effect on purchase intention on men.

H₈: For men, the level of gender equality has an indirect effect on purchase intention through symbolic consumption.

3.METHOD

3.1. Research Model

In this study, relational research model, one of the quantitative research approaches, was used since direct and indirect relationships between variables were wanted to be explained. Cross-sectional survey model was used in the study. This model aims to measure the intentions and behaviours of the participants in a certain period of time. Within the scope of the research, a total of 482 participants, 218 (45%) women and 264 (55%) men, were reached by using convenience sampling method. Kline (2016) states that the sample size in structural equation models should be above 200, while Hair and colleagues (2018) indicate that 200–500 participants are sufficient for models of medium complexity. Accordingly, the 482 participants in this study are seen to provide an appropriate and sufficient sample size for the analyses.

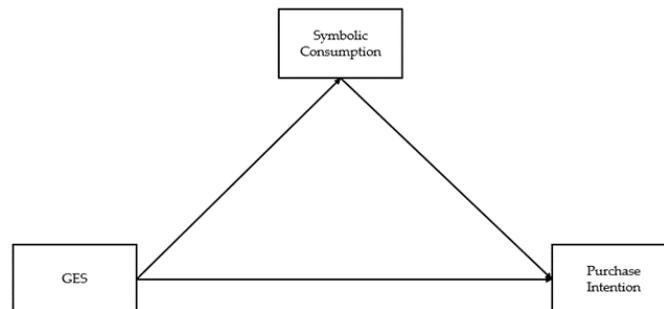


Figure 1. Model including research hypotheses

Source: Authors' own creation

It is also seen that the average age of the participants who participated in the study was ($\bar{X}_{\text{year}} = 29.05 \pm 9.71$). The demographic information of the participants is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Variable	Level	f	%
Gender	Female	218	45
	Male	264	55
Income	20.000 TL and below	7	2
	20.001 - 50.000 TL	72	15
	50.001 - 80.000 TL	144	30
	80.001 - 110.000 TL	224	47
	110.001 ve 140.000 TL	35	7

Note. TL= Turkish Lira

Source: Authors' own creation

It was stated above that convenience sampling method was preferred in the data collection process within the scope of the research. This method brings along certain methodological limitations. Data were collected both online and face-to-face. However, the fact that the participants were largely included in the research through digital platforms may lead to the disproportionate inclusion of individuals with internet access in the sample, thus weakening representativeness. In addition, the lack of balance in the sample in terms of demographic variables such as age, gender and income level is another factor that may limit the generalisability of the findings. The research data were collected only from individuals within the borders of Turkey, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other cultural or geographical contexts. Since gender roles, symbolic consumption patterns and attitudes towards sport may differ according to cultural contexts, the direct transfer of the results obtained to different societies should be carefully evaluated from a methodological point of view. In addition, financial resource constraints and logistical limitations encountered in the process of conducting the research limited the possibilities of expanding the sample, diversifying the data collection tools or extending the field research to different regions. Accordingly, research findings should be interpreted within the framework of the unique characteristics of the sample group and these limitations should be taken into account before generalising the results universally.

3.2. Data collection tools of the research

The survey method was used as a data collection tool in the study and the questionnaires were obtained from the participants through online and face-to-face survey method. The prepared questionnaire form consists of four sections. The first section includes demographic statements, the second section includes statements to measure the perception of gender equality, the third section includes statements about purchase intention and the fourth section includes statements measuring symbolic consumption. All items were graded on a 5-point Likert scale (1: Strongly Disagree - 5: Strongly Agree). Within the scope of the questionnaire, 'Gender Equality', 'Sponsorship Purchase Intention' with 3 items created by Özer (2011) and 'Symbolic Consumption' with 9 items adapted by Gürbüz and Çetinkaya Bozkurt (2022) were used due to the high correlations between the dimensions of the 2-dimensional scale developed by Gözütok, Toraman and Acar Erdol (2017).

The reliability values of the scales used in the research are as follows: Alpha value of Symbolic Consumption Scale is 0.977 and Omega value is 0.976; Alpha value of Gender Equality Scale is 0.975 and Omega value is 0.975; Alpha value of Sponsorship Purchase Intention Scale is 0.988 and Omega value is 0.988. Devellis (2012) states that a Cronbach Alpha value above 0.70 is sufficient for reliability. In this context, it is seen that the values of the scales used in the research are at a sufficient level.

3.3. Analysing the data

Before conducting hypothesis tests, hypothetical analyses were performed. Raw scores were transformed into standard z distribution and univariate outliers were examined within the reference interval of ± 3.29 suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). As a result of the examination, no

univariate outlier was found. Univariate normality was examined with descriptive statistics and normality test. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) suggested ± 1.5 kurtosis-skewness coefficients as the reference interval for univariate normality. Structural regression model, which is a combination of confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis, was used to test hypotheses H1:8. For structural regression analysis, in addition to univariate outlier and univariate normality assumptions, assumptions regarding multivariate outlier, multivariate normality, linearity, multicollinearity and singularity problem were examined. JAMOVI (2.4.14), R (4.3.2) and packages such as ‘lavaan’ (Rosseel, 2012), ‘psych’ (Revelle and Condon, 2019), ‘semPlot’ (Epskamp, 2022) and ‘qgraph’ (Epskamp et al., 2012) were used for data analysis. In this study, JAMOVI, R and related packages were chosen to enhance the methodological robustness of the analysis process. JAMOVI enabled the rapid and reliable execution of basic statistical analyses. The R software and other packages used were selected for their high accuracy and extensive functionality in other analyses and analyses such as network visualisation.

The required ethical approval document was approved by the Kayseri University Ethics Committee on 14 February 2025 with decision number 10/2025.

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the statistical analyses of the quantitative data obtained within the scope of the research and includes the findings reached in line with the research hypotheses.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics regarding total scores obtained from scales (N=482)

	Mean	SD	Median	QD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gender Equality	14.34	5.01	11.5	5	0.185	-1.74
Symbolic Consumption	27.45	7.94	32	8	-0.244	-1.71
Purchase Intention	9.34	2.99	12	3	-0.114	-1.78

Note. QD = Quartile Deviation; SD = Standard Deviation

Source: Authors' own creation

According to Table 2, the distribution of consumers' gender equality (GE) scores was observed to be right skewed and flattened. Although the skewness value is within the reference value range, the kurtosis value is outside the reference range. The distribution of symbolic consumption and purchase intention scores was observed to be left skewed and flattened. Similarly, the skewness coefficient is within the reference value range and the kurtosis value is outside the reference range.

Reporting and interpretation of structural equation modeling

Multivariate outliers were identified using Mahalanobis distance ($Mahalanobis D^2 > \chi^2$, $p < .001$, $sd = 16$, $\chi^2 = 39.25$), resulting in 57 outliers (11.83%). Mardia's test indicated deviations from multivariate normality (Skewness = 462, $\chi^2 = 37095$, $sd = 969$, $p < .001$; Kurtosis = 1100, $z = 336$, $p < .001$). Due to high multivariate outliers and violated normality assumptions, the Robust Maximum Likelihood method was preferred for structural equation modeling (Kline, 2016). A similar suggestion was made by Preston (2022). He suggested that Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation method should be used in structural equation modelling when the data do not show multivariate normal distribution. He suggested that this method can be preferred to correct distortions in model fit statistics and standard errors. In the present data set, this method was preferred due to the high rate of outliers and the inability to achieve multivariate normality. Bartlett's Sphericity test confirmed the adequacy of the correlation matrix (For data matrix, $\chi^2 = 20190.56$, $sd = 136$, $p < .000$; Gender equality, $\chi^2 = 3472.57$, $sd = 10$, $p < .000$; Symbolic consumption, $\chi^2 = 10729.77$, $sd = 36$, $p < .000$; Purchase intention, $\chi^2 = 4257.767$, $sd = 3$, $p < .000$). SMC values, ranging from .72 to .89 across latent variables, showed no multicollinearity or singularity issues (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Spearman correlations revealed strong relationships: gender equality and symbolic consumption ($r = -0.77$), gender equality and purchase intention ($r = -0.83$), and symbolic consumption and purchase intention ($r = 0.80$), all significant at $p < .001$.

A multi-group structural regression model was established to examine the direct and indirect effects of gender equality on the prediction of purchase intention in gender subgroups and the mediating effect of symbolic consumption (Estimation method = Maximum Likelihood, Number of observation = 482,

Number of model parameters = 114, Standard errors = Robust, Scaled test = Satorra-Bentler mean adjusted, Iterations = 323). Model-data fit of the established model was provided ($\chi^2 = 535$, $sd = 226$ and $\chi^2 / sd = 3.54$). Goodness of fit indices regarding errors exhibited an acceptable level of fit feature (For scaled type RMSEA = .075 [.07, .08], SRMR = .048). The goodness of fit indices calculated for the explanatory power of the model generally showed a good fit (For robust CFI = .96, TLI = .95, NNFI = .95, RNI = .96). All paths in the measurement model were found to be statistically significant ($z > 3.09$ and $p < .001$). The fact that the β coefficients in the measurement model were above .50 showed that the observed variables (items) had a high level of effect on the latent variables of gender equality, symbolic consumption and purchase intention and, accordingly, the observed variables represented the latent variables. Table 3. presents the findings regarding the effects of gender equality on the mediator variable symbolic consumption in gender subgroups.

Table 3. Path coefficients for predicting symbolic consumption in gender subgroups

Group			B	S.H.	z	p(> z)	β	95% CI	
								LL	UL
Symbolic Consumption									
Female	Gender Equality	(a ₁)	-.534	.119	-4.48	<.001	-.422	-.767	-.303
Male	Gender Equality	(a ₁)	-.883	.038	-23.23	<.001	-.857	-.957	-.809

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient, β = Standardized regression coefficient, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit

Source: Authors' own creation

According to Table 3, it was observed that in the female gender group, gender equality (a₁ Female = β = -0.42 [-.77, -.30]) had a negative and highly significant effect on the mediator variable, symbolic consumption ($z = -4.48$ and $p < .001$). Each one-point increase in gender equality was associated with a decrease in symbolic consumption by a₁ Female = -.53 points [S.H. = .12]. In the male gender group, gender equality (a₁ Male = β = -0.86 [-.96, -.81]) had a negative and highly significant effect on the mediator variable, symbolic consumption. Each one-point increase in gender equality was associated with a decrease in symbolic consumption by a₁ Male = -.88 points [S.H. = .04]. Table 4 shows the total effect of the mediator variable, symbolic consumption, on the prediction of purchase intention in gender subgroups and the path coefficients for the direct and indirect effects of gender equality.

Table 4. Path coefficients for predicting purchase intention in gender subgroups

Group			B	S.H.	z	p(> z)	β	%95 CI		
								AL	ÜL	
Female	Purchase Intention ~									
	Mediator									
		Symbolic Consumption	(b ₁)	.714	.095	7.48	<.001	.568	.373	.762
	Direct Effect									
		Gender Equality	(c ₁ ')	-.354	.173	-2.04	.041	-.222	-.450	.005
	Indirect Effect									
	Gender Equality	(a ₁ *b ₁)	-.381	.117	-3.27	.001	-.240	-.381	-.098	
Male	Purchase Intention ~									
	Mediator									
		Symbolic Consumption	(b ₁)	.274	.093	2.94	.003	.274	.097	.452
	Direct Effect									
		Gender Equality	(c ₁ ')	-.650	.097	-6.73	<.001	-.631	-.810	-.452
	Indirect Effect									
	Gender Equality	(a ₁ *b ₁)	-.242	.083	-2.93	.003	-.235	-.390	-.080	

Note. Effects on purchase intention were interpreted at a significance level of ($\alpha / n3$) = .017 by applying Bonferroni correction to reduce the probability of Type 1 error.

Source: Authors' own creation

The findings in Table 4 indicate that gender equality directly ($\beta = -0.63$, $p < .001$) and indirectly ($\beta = -0.23$, $p = .003$) affects purchase intention in male consumers. This suggests that men perceive

sponsorship as a ‘status indicator’ and that the emphasis on equality weakens this perception. For women, only the indirect effect is significant, suggesting that brands should emphasize functional utility rather than symbolic value in communicating to female consumers.

The demographic distribution (age, education level) of male and female participants in the sample may differ. For example, the fact that male participants are from higher income groups may have increased their status-oriented consumption tendencies. Cultural norms related to gender roles may explain why men are more sensitive to symbolic consumption as a ‘status indicator’. Women, on the other hand, may attach more importance to functional utility. Finally, it should be taken into consideration that this finding may be related to the cultural context. In societies with a strong patriarchal structure such as Turkey, it can be thought that the perception of gender equality leads to a higher symbolic meaning attribution in male consumers and this situation shapes their consumption behaviour more.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and toxic masculinity studies (Berke et al., 2017) suggest that men are more sensitive to the perception of status loss. Our findings show that the emphasis on gender equality can be interpreted as a threat that ‘contradicts traditional norms of masculinity’ in men, while this effect is weaker in women, which is consistent with feminist consumption literature (Varman et al., 2018).

According to Table 4, it was observed that the mediator variable symbolic consumption (for b_1 Female parameter $\beta = .57$ [.37, .76]) had a positive and highly significant effect on purchase intention in the female gender group ($z = 7.48$ and $p < .001$). Each one point increase in symbolic consumption was associated with an increase in purchase intention of b_1 Female = .71 points (SD = .09). It was observed that gender equality had no direct effect on purchase intention ($p > .017$). It was observed that gender equality (for a_1*b_1 Female parameter $\beta = -.24$ [-.38, -.10]) had a negative and moderate indirect effect on purchase intention ($z = -3.27$ and $p = .001$). In the relationship between gender equality and purchase intention, for every a_1 Female = -.53 point (S.H. = .12) decrease, an indirect decrease in purchase intention a_1*b_1 Female = -.38 point (S.H. = .12) was observed. It was observed that the mediating variable symbolic consumption (for b_1 Male parameter $\beta = .27$ [.10, .45]) had a positive and moderately significant effect on purchase intention in the male gender group. Each one point increase in symbolic consumption was associated with an increase in purchase intention b_1 Male = .27 point (S.H. = .09). It was observed that gender equality (for c_1' Male parameter $\beta = -.61$ [-.81, -.45]) had a negative and highly significant direct effect on purchase intention ($z = -6.73$ and $p < .001$). Each one point increase in gender equality is directly associated with a decrease in purchase intention a_1*b_1 Male = -.65 points (S.H. = 0.10). It was observed that the negative and moderate indirect effect of gender equality ($\beta = -.23$ [-.39, -.08] for the a_1*b_1 Male parameter) on purchase intention was significant ($z = -2.93$ and $p = .003$). For every a_1 Male = -.88 point (S.H. = .04) decrease in the relationship between gender equality and purchase intention, an indirect decrease of a_1*b_1 Male = -.24 points (S.H. = .08) was observed in purchase intention. Figure 2 shows the R2 statistics for the structural regression model tested in gender subgroups.

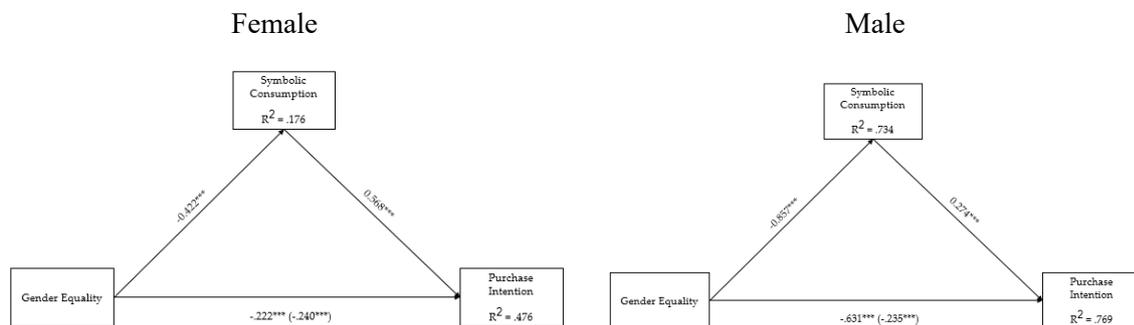


Figure 2. Standardized coefficients and adjusted R 2 for the gender subgroups

Source: Authors' own creation

According to Figure 2, in the female gender group, the total effect of gender equality explained approximately 18% of the variability in symbolic consumption and was observed to be at a very weak level ($R^2 = .178$, Conv. $R^2 = .176$). In the male gender group, the total effect of gender equality explained

approximately 73% of the variability in symbolic consumption and was observed to be close to significant ($R^2 = .735$, Conv. $R^2 = .734$). In the effects of gender equality and symbolic consumption explained approximately 77% of the variability in purchase intention and was observed to be significant ($R^2 = .770$ and Conv. $R^2 = .769$). Figure 3 shows the standardized path coefficients of the structural regression model tested in gender subgroups.

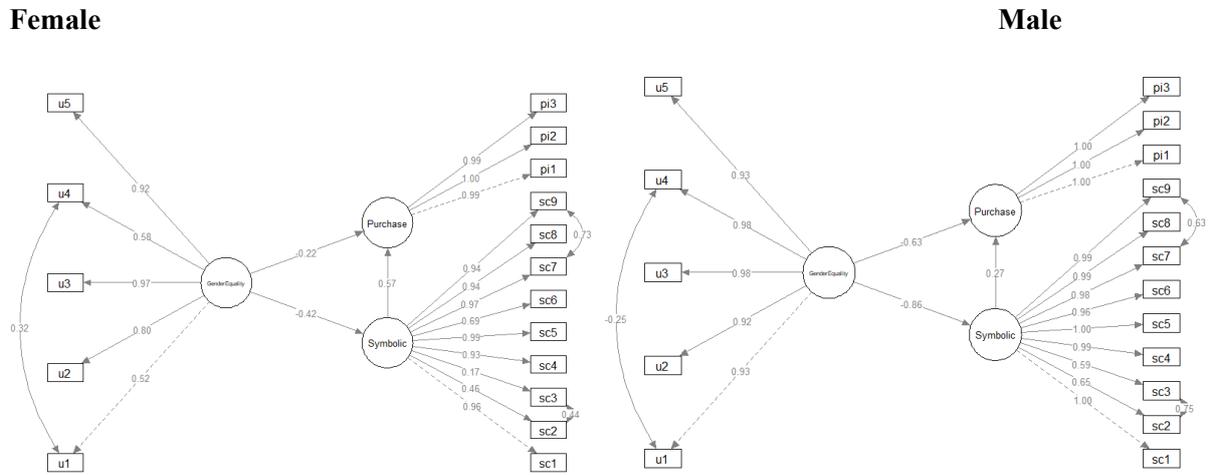


Figure 3. Structural regression modelling for gender subgroups

Source: Authors’ own creation

5. RESULTS

This research examines how consumers’ perception of gender equality influences consumers’ purchase intentions through the impact of sport sponsorship on symbolic consumption. The research findings revealed that the perception of gender equality has a significant impact on the symbolic value of sponsored sport products and thus on purchase intention. The strengthening of the perception of gender equality among the participants contributed to the increase in the symbolic value offered by sports sponsorship, which positively affected the purchase intention. Within the scope of the research, separate models were established for male and female consumers and the data were analysed separately for each gender. Table 5 below provides information on the acceptance and rejection of the hypotheses.

Table 5. Acceptance-rejection status of hypotheses

	Dependent	Independent		p value	Accept/Reject
H1	Symbolic Consumption	Gender Equality	SEM Total Effect	<.001	Accept
H2	Symbolic Consumption	Gender Equality	SEM Total Effect	<.001	Accept
H3	Purchase Intention	Symbolic Consumption	SEM Total Effect	<.001	Accept
H4	Purchase Intention	Gender Equality	SEM Direct Effect	.041 ^a	Reject
H5	Purchase Intention	Gender Equality	SEM Indirect Effect	<.001	Accept
H6	Purchase Intention	Symbolic Consumption	SEM Total Effect	.003	Accept
H7	Purchase Intention	Gender Equality	SEM Direct Effect	<.001	Accept
H8	Purchase Intention	Gender Equality	SEM Indirect Effect	.003	Accept

Note a = Interpreted at a significance level of $(\alpha / n3) = .017$ by applying the Bonferroni correction to reduce the probability of Type I error.

Source: Authors’ own creation

According to Table 5, The hypotheses H₁₋₈ were tested with the established structural regression model. According to the established model, the level of gender equality in the female gender group negatively affected the mediator variable symbolic consumption and the hypothesis “H₁: The level of gender equality in women has an effect on the mediator variable symbolic consumption.” was accepted. The

level of gender equality in the male gender group negatively affected the mediator variable symbolic consumption and the hypothesis “H₂: The level of gender equality in men has an effect on the mediator variable symbolic consumption.” was accepted. The level of symbolic consumption in the female gender group positively affected the purchase intention and the hypothesis “H₃: Symbolic consumption in women has an effect on purchase intention.” was accepted. The level of gender equality in the female gender group did not directly affect the purchase intention and the hypothesis “H₄: The level of gender equality in women has a direct effect on purchase intention.” was rejected. The level of gender equality in the female gender group negatively affected the purchase intention indirectly through symbolic consumption and the hypothesis “H₅: The level of gender equality in women has an indirect effect on purchase intention through symbolic consumption.” was accepted. In the male gender group, the symbolic consumption level positively affected the purchase intention and the hypothesis “H₆: Symbolic consumption in men has an effect on purchase intention” was accepted. In the male gender group, the gender equality level directly affected the purchase intention and the hypothesis “H₇: The gender equality level in men has a direct effect on purchase intention” was accepted. In the male gender group, the gender equality level indirectly affected the purchase intention negatively through symbolic consumption and the hypothesis “H₈: The gender equality level in men has an indirect effect on purchase intention through symbolic consumption” was accepted.

6. DISCUSSION

The study reveals the mediating effect of symbolic consumption on the relationship between consumers' gender equality levels and their purchase intentions towards sports sponsorship activities. Evaluations of studies with both similar and different results are summarized as follows.

Hazari (2018) examined the purchase intentions of male and female consumers towards brands involved in sports sponsorship. It was found that male consumers exhibit higher purchase intentions compared to females, supporting the current study's findings.

Zardini Filho (2019) explored whether sports sponsorship could alter negative brand perceptions, finding that male individuals have higher purchase intentions in the context of sports sponsorship, aligning with the current research.

Kamath et al. (2021) evaluated intentions towards brands sponsoring sports by age and gender, concluding that males display more positive intentions and a higher likelihood of word-of-mouth communication. Young consumers were also found to have greater purchase intentions compared to other age groups, reinforcing the current study's results.

In contrast, Ghasemi Siani et al. (2021) found that young individuals' intentions towards sponsorship activities do not differ by gender, indicating different outcomes from the current research.

Hussain and Ma (2024) investigated food sponsorships and gender stereotypes, revealing that male consumers prefer brands perceived as more masculine, while females lean towards more feminine brands. This supports the findings of the current study regarding gender differences affecting purchase intentions.

Trachlser et al. (2014) analyzed the connection between gender and sports sponsorship, concluding that while participants do not differ by gender, their views vary with age. Both genders perceive positive impacts from businesses in sports sponsorship, with young individuals exhibiting a more favorable perception, a result that resonates with the current research.

The marketing portrayals and sponsorship experiences of professional female athletes were examined by Harris and Trussell (2024), while Nithin et al. (2024) discussed how digital media challenges established gender norms in sports, increasing visibility for female athletes and opening new sponsorship avenues.

Napoli et al. (2024) explored how sponsors communicate about women's sports, revealing emerging gender stereotypes. Jensen and Smith (2024) researched differences in the retention of sponsors between men's and women's sports facilities.

Marceau and Pons (2024) investigated perceived altruism and intention towards inclusive sponsorship activation through gender equality, determining the impact of various factors on sponsorship intention.

When examining studies related to sports sponsorship and consumer attitudes, Mehta and Shah (2019) found that consumers across various age groups showed positive interest in brands after sponsorship activities, indicating no significant differences.

Melovic et al. (2019) assessed purchasing intentions across various age groups, revealing that intentions among younger consumers were notably higher, which aligns with the current findings.

Koronios et al. (2021) assessed attitudes, awareness, and purchase intentions of various consumer groups, discovering higher awareness and positive attitudes towards sponsoring brands among younger consumers, supporting the current study.

Santos et al. (2024) concluded that older individuals exhibit less alignment with sponsoring brands, leading to lower purchase intentions compared to younger groups, which is consistent with the results of this study.

The rejection of Hypothesis 4 (no direct effect of gender equality on purchase intention for women, $p = 0.041$) contrasts with the significant direct effect found for men (H7) and appears inconsistent with prior theoretical frameworks (e.g., Stüber, 2014). This discrepancy may stem from several factors. The findings should be interpreted within the cultural and theoretical context of Turkey, where traditional gender norms continue to shape consumer behavior. Women's purchase intentions may be driven more by functional utility, such as product quality or practical benefits, rather than by symbolic values associated with gender equality. In contrast, men may perceive sponsorship activities as status signals, aligning with patriarchal structures in which gender equality messaging can disrupt traditional hierarchies. Additionally, there are measurement limitations related to the operationalization of "gender equality perspectives," which may not fully capture the nuanced attitudes of women. While they may support gender equality in principle, their actual consumption decisions may be more strongly influenced by factors such as price, convenience, or functionality. From a theoretical perspective, Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982) provides a useful lens for understanding these dynamics. Women's alignment with gender equality does not necessarily translate directly into purchase intentions unless the sponsored product or brand explicitly reflects their self-concept. This theoretical reinterpretation is supported by the indirect effect observed in the study, as symbolic consumption mediates the relationship between gender equality perspectives and purchase intention.

While Stüber's (2014) work suggests gender-congruent sponsorships universally enhance purchase intent, our findings indicate that this may apply only when gender norms are explicitly activated (e.g., men's sports). For women, the lack of direct effects could reflect a 'glass ceiling' in sponsorship—where equality messaging is welcomed but insufficient to override deeper market barriers (e.g., product availability, pricing). For female consumers, marketers should adopt a 'show, don't tell' approach—e.g., sponsoring women's sports leagues with equal budgets (demonstrating commitment) while highlighting product benefits (e.g., 'engineered for female athletes'). This balances symbolic and functional appeals, addressing the indirect effect pathway revealed in H5.

The rejection of H4 (no direct effect of gender equality on women's purchase intention) contrasts with both H7 (significant direct effect for men) and prior theory (Stüber, 2014). Three explanations may reconcile this discrepancy:

- **Patriarchal Reactance:** Men's significant direct effect (H7) could reflect resistance to equality messaging perceived as challenging traditional masculinity, whereas women's indirect effect (H5) aligns with internalized pragmatism—endorsing equality ideologically but prioritizing functional benefits in purchases.
- **Measurement Artifacts:** The gender equality scale may fail to distinguish between 'active feminists' (for whom equality directly drives purchases) and 'moderate supporters' (who decouple ideology from consumption). Implicit measures (e.g., IAT) could clarify this.
- **Contextual Boundaries:** Stüber's (2014) findings may apply primarily to overtly gendered products (e.g., razors), whereas our sports sponsorship context invokes broader social identities, diluting direct effects for women.

For practitioners, this implies tailoring communications: Men may respond to equality framing only when paired with masculine-coded appeals (e.g., 'Empowering Champions'), while women require functional proofs (e.g., 'Tested by Female Athletes') to activate indirect pathways. This gender asymmetry (direct effects for men vs. indirect for women) may also reflect deeper societal power dynamics. While men's consumption is often tied to identity defense (e.g., resisting equality to maintain privilege), women's purchasing behavior may be more influenced by systemic barriers (e.g., limited disposable income or product access) that override ideological alignment. This aligns with intersectional feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1989), which posits that women's actions are shaped by competing social forces—explaining why gender equality alone may not directly drive intent without addressing structural inequities.

This inconsistency can be explained by differences in cultural norms, the limitations of measurement instruments and the theoretical context. The findings highlight that the impact of gender equality messages on consumer behavior is not universal and varies by context and product category. The findings highlight that the impact of gender equality messages on consumer behavior is not universal and varies by context and product category.

From a managerial viewpoint, brands looking to leverage gender-equality-focused sponsorships should craft execution strategies that cater to distinct consumer segments instead of believing in a one-size-fits-all approach. For campaigns targeting male audiences, it can be effective to use identity-safe messaging that promotes equality without challenging traditional status norms. Highlighting equality through competence-focused messaging or competitive narratives can create positive associations while reducing defensive responses among consumers with high masculinity traits.

On the other hand, female audiences are more responsive to equality claims that are backed by concrete evidence, such as endorsements from female athletes, visible investment in women's sports, or product testing results that demonstrate functional performance. These credibility-boosting tactics can transform positive feelings into purchase intentions by addressing the structural barriers that influence women's buying behaviors. Furthermore, marketers should steer clear of generic equality messages and develop sponsorship activations that are specific to the context. In product categories that are traditionally perceived as masculine, weaving in women-centered storytelling and amplifying the visibility of female athletes can add significant value. Conversely, in more mainstream product categories, messaging around equality may be more impactful when tied to community-driven initiatives.

Lastly, implementing layered activation strategies that merge emotional connections with behavioral incentives—like limited-edition products promoting equality, collaborative campaigns with female athletes, or social-impact commitments—can help translate symbolic meaning into tangible commercial results. Overall, these insights suggest that sponsorships that focus on equality can achieve the most significant impact when they resonate with sociocultural realities, are backed by meaningful actions, and are communicated through narratives that enhance identity expression via symbolic consumption.

7. CONCLUSIONS

According to the study's findings, there are differences in gender equality, purchase intention, and symbolic consumption levels across consumer groups. Those with higher gender equality exhibit reduced symbolic consumption, as they rely less on traditional gender roles and external validation. However, the relationship between symbolic consumption and purchase intention differs by gender: for women, increased symbolic consumption leads to higher purchase intention, whereas for men, it decreases their purchase intention. Additionally, while gender equality directly influences men's purchase intentions positively, it has no direct impact on women's purchase intentions.

These findings suggest that businesses should develop differentiated strategies to address varying consumer needs and motivations. For consumers with price sensitivity and traditional values, marketing strategies should highlight functionality, durability, and affordability. For instance, products offering long-term use and strong price-performance balance can be effective. Communication should focus on emphasizing quality and practical benefits through traditional media channels.

In light of the findings of this study, various concrete marketing strategies can be developed for brands to effectively implement their commitments to gender equality. First of all, it is important to allocate

equal budgets to women's and men's sports branches in sponsorship activities and to support women athletes in sports branches traditionally perceived as "masculine". For example, a sportswear brand investing equally in both women's and men's football teams or an automotive brand supporting women race pilots can be evaluated within this scope.

In the field of content marketing, documentaries themed on gender equality and advertising campaigns featuring athletes' success stories that break gender stereotypes will be effective. The principle of gender equality should also be adopted in product design and pricing strategies. Ensuring price equality in women's and men's sports equipment or developing special product collections aimed at increasing girls' interest in science and technology are among the strategies that can be implemented within this scope.

In digital marketing channels, social media filters that interact with gender equality surveys can be designed or sponsorship criteria that require equal representation of women's and men's teams in e-sports tournaments can be determined. In the retail experience, gender stereotypes can be broken in store windows and shelf layouts, and sales teams can be given gender equality-focused customer communication training. These concrete strategies will enable brands to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality not only at the rhetorical level but also through operational practices, and will help them establish meaningful connections with Generation Z consumers in particular. For example, Adidas – as part of its “She Breaks Barriers” campaign, actively sponsored sports where women are less represented, included the principle of “equal representation” in its sponsorship criteria, and provided equal sponsorship to men’s and women’s teams in the same tournament. For consumers prioritizing sustainability and social responsibility, strategies should emphasize environmentally friendly and ethically produced products. For female consumers, marketers should adopt a dual emphasis: highlight functional benefits (e.g., product performance, durability) while integrating equality messaging, as symbolic value alone may not drive purchase intent. This aligns with the study’s finding that women’s intentions are indirectly influenced by gender equality through symbolic consumption (H5), whereas functional utility may serve as a more direct trigger. For instance, sportswear brands could pair technical features (e.g., breathable fabrics) with campaigns showcasing female athletes breaking stereotypes, thus addressing both practical and symbolic need. The significant direct effect for men (H7) may stem from patriarchal norms where gender equality messaging is perceived as a threat to traditional masculine identities, thus triggering reactive consumption behaviors (e.g., men may consciously avoid brands promoting equality to maintain status quo). In contrast, women’s purchase decisions may be less directly tied to equality perceptions due to internalized ambivalence—supporting equality in principle but prioritizing pragmatic factors (e.g., price, functionality) in practice.

Engaging these consumers through digital channels, such as social media and e-commerce platforms, allows businesses to create personalized experiences. Campaigns aligning with values like environmental sustainability and ethical production can further strengthen purchase intentions.

To address the impact of gender equality on consumption, businesses should adopt value-oriented approaches. Products and services should focus on functionality, sustainability, and ethical production rather than symbolic attributes. Advertising and communication campaigns should avoid traditional gender roles and instead promote inclusivity and equality, creating a trustworthy and progressive brand image.

Internally, businesses should invest in employee training programs, market research, and social responsibility initiatives to better understand and address diverse consumer expectations. Differentiated solutions in product development processes are key to meeting the needs of both male and female consumers. Marketing strategies for women should emphasize functional, aesthetic, and symbolic values, while for men, functionality, durability, and ethical production should be prioritized.

Additionally, personalized marketing messages tailored to individual consumer values and needs can enhance engagement and loyalty. Social responsibility projects that emphasize equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability should be transparently communicated to build a strong and credible brand identity.

By implementing these approaches, businesses can better respond to consumer needs, foster satisfaction and loyalty, and achieve a long-term competitive advantage.

The findings of the study reveal that cultural context plays a critical role in the effects of gender equality on symbolic consumption and purchase intention. These effects may show significant differences, especially according to cultural values and social norms. According to Hofstede's distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, consumers who place high value on gender equality in individualistic cultures (e.g., USA, Sweden) may give less importance to symbolic consumption because self-expression is associated with individuality and personal success in these societies. On the other hand, in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Japan, Turkey), where traditional gender roles are more strongly maintained, even brands emphasizing gender equality cannot completely eliminate symbolic consumption behaviors because social approval and belonging mechanisms operate more dominantly in these cultures. In addition, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) is also an important indicator in understanding these differences. In countries with high levels of equality (e.g., Norway, Finland), since gender equality has become normative, the effect of symbolic consumption that addresses this theme may weaken. On the other hand, in countries with low gender equality indexes (e.g. Saudi Arabia, India), brands that emphasize gender equality may carry a symbolic value that questions norms and breaks taboos, which may strengthen consumers' purchase intentions. The findings are more specific in cultures where gender norms are relatively strict; comparative studies are needed for cross-cultural generalizability.

While these findings have strong relevance for transitional economies such as Türkiye, where traditional and modern values coexist, the effects may be weaker in Western countries. Therefore, strategies should be adapted in a way that is sensitive to the cultural context.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the sample of the study is limited to participants from Turkey. The perception of gender equality may show significant differences between countries depending on cultural and social norms. The fact that attitudes towards gender equality are more developed especially in Western countries may mean that a similar study in these countries may produce different results. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies in different cultural contexts to test the universal validity of the findings.

The non-significant direct effect of gender equality on women's purchase intention (H4) may reflect sample-specific cultural norms or measurement constraints, warranting replication in diverse settings.

Secondly, this study was conducted only in the context of sports sponsorship. Sponsorship activities are also carried out in different fields such as culture, arts, education or social responsibility projects. How the relationship between gender equality and symbolic consumption is shaped in these areas has not yet been investigated. Therefore, it may not be possible to generalize the findings of this study to other types of sponsorship. In future research, testing a comprehensive model that includes different types of sponsorship will provide a more holistic contribution to the literature.

Recommendations for future research

In line with the findings of this study, it has been revealed that consumers' level of gender equality affects their purchase intentions through sport sponsorship activities and symbolic consumption. Campaigns developed within the scope of sports sponsorship can reach a wider target audience by emphasising gender equality. It can be emphasised that especially Generation Z may be sensitive to social responsibility values such as gender equality and may intend to prefer sponsorship activities of brands that advocate these values. Developing customised messages that appeal to each age group in sponsorship campaigns can increase consumer loyalty. For example, for Generation Z, content that supports gender equality can be presented on digital and social media channels. Consumers attach importance not only to the economic value of a brand, but also to the symbolic value it offers. In this context, image studies on gender equality that will create symbolic value in sports sponsorships of brands can be carried out. In addition, brands can try to attract the attention of consumers more by supporting sustainability and social responsibility-oriented projects on gender equality. In addition, in future studies, issues such as the effect of different sports branches, the effect of cultural differences, the effect on generations, in-depth analyses with qualitative research, and the effect of advertisements and contents that support gender equality experimentally can be addressed.

In order to extend and deepen the findings of this study, important suggestions can be made for future research. Firstly, cross-cultural comparative studies should be conducted to examine how the effects of

gender equality perception on sponsorship effectiveness are shaped in different cultural contexts. In particular, applying the same research model in countries such as Sweden, which has a high gender equality index, and Saudi Arabia, which has more traditional values in this regard, will provide valuable information in terms of understanding the impact of cultural factors on sponsorship effectiveness.

In addition, qualitative research methods can be utilised to support the findings obtained with quantitative data and to understand consumers' perceptions of sponsorship activities in more depth. Through methods such as focus group discussions or in-depth interviews, rich data can be collected on participants' individual experiences, attitudes and motivations regarding the relationship between gender equality and sponsorship. Such qualitative data can help us to understand the reasons and context behind quantitative findings, thus contributing more holistically to the development of sponsorship strategies.

The use of a 5-point Likert scale for gender equality attitudes may not capture nuanced differences between 'active feminists' and 'passive supporters,' leading to non-significant direct effects. Future studies could employ implicit association tests (IAT) to measure subconscious biases that may better predict purchase intent.

The findings obtained in terms of marketing strategies show that it is imperative to take the cultural context into consideration in particular. Adopting “glocal” strategies is important for global brands. For example, Nike’s campaigns supporting female athletes in the Middle East market, while emphasizing the theme of social transformation, prefers a more performance-oriented communication language in Western countries, which is an effective example of cultural sensitivity. In this context, it should be taken into account that symbolic values are not perceived in the same way in every culture, and the impact of these values on consumer behavior should be tested in a cultural context. For example, while women’s empowerment messages can increase purchase intention in developing countries with collectivist values such as Turkey, the impact of such messages may be more limited in Scandinavian countries where gender equality has become the norm. For local brands, it may be more effective to develop campaigns that do not conflict with existing traditional norms but aim to transform these norms. For example, initiatives such as a bank’s “Financial Literacy for Women” project in Turkey both create social benefits and strengthen brand value. When combined with cultural sensitivity, such strategies provide more meaningful and effective communication in the eyes of the consumer.

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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Breaking Stereotypes: The Impact of Gender Equality and Sports Sponsorship on Purchase Intention Through Symbolic Consumption

Kalıpları Yıkarak: Cinsiyet Eşitliği ve Spor Sponsorluğunun Sembolik Tüketim Aracılığıyla Satın Alma Niyetine Etkisi

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DOI : [10.63556/ankad.v10i1.345](https://doi.org/10.63556/ankad.v10i1.345)

Geliş/Received: 04/10/2025

Kabul/Accepted: 22/01/2025

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Spor sponsorlukları, günümüzde markaların yalnızca tanıtım faaliyetleriyle değil, aynı zamanda toplumsal değerlerle bütünleşerek tüketicilerle daha derin ve anlamlı ilişkiler kurmalarına olanak sağlayan stratejik bir pazarlama aracı olarak öne çıkmaktadır (Meenaghan, 1991; Quester & Farrelly, 1998). İşletmeler, sponsorluk faaliyetleri aracılığıyla hedef kitleleriyle duygusal bir bağ kurmakta, marka imajlarını güçlendirmekte ve kurumsal sosyal sorumluluklarını görünür hâle getirmektedir. Sağlık, eğitim, kültür-sanat, müzik ve spor gibi toplumun önem atfettiği alanlara yapılan sponsorluklar, markaların sosyal sorumluluk algılarını pekiştirmekte ve tüketicilerin zihninde olumlu çağrışımlar yaratmaktadır.

Spor alanındaki sponsorluklar, özellikle geniş kitlelere ulaşabilme potansiyeli sayesinde, markaların tüketici tutumlarını ve satın alma niyetlerini etkileyen önemli bir pazarlama unsuru hâline gelmiştir. Ancak sponsorluk faaliyetlerinin başarısı yalnızca görünürlükle değil, aynı zamanda bu faaliyetlerin toplumsal değerlerle ne ölçüde örtüştüğüyle de yakından ilişkilidir. Günümüzde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği gibi sosyal konular, tüketicilerin markaları değerlendirme biçimlerinde belirleyici bir rol oynamakta; bireylerin marka mesajlarını yorumlama, aidiyet geliştirme ve satın alma kararlarını etkilemektedir. Bu nedenle, toplumsal değerlerle sponsorluk stratejilerinin etkileşimini anlamak, hem akademik hem de uygulamalı açıdan önem taşımaktadır.

Literatürde sponsorlukla ilgili pek çok araştırma yapılmış olsa da, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği algısının sembolik tüketim ve satın alma niyeti üzerindeki etkilerini sistematik olarak ele alan çalışmalar sınırlıdır. Önceki araştırmalar, erkek tüketicilerin spor sponsorluğuna yönelik satın alma niyetlerinin kadınlara kıyasla daha yüksek olduğunu ortaya koymuştur (Hazari, 2018; Zardini Filho, 2019). Grau ve Zotos (2016), reklamlardaki toplumsal cinsiyet kalıplarının tüketici davranışlarını biçimlendirdiğini vurgularken; Ghasemi Siani vd. (2021), genç tüketiciler arasında anlamlı bir fark gözlemlenmediğini belirtmiştir. Bu çalışma, söz konusu bulgulara alternatif olarak Türkiye'nin kültürel bağlamı ve sporun toplumsal yapıyla etkileşimini dikkate alarak kadın ve erkek tüketiciler arasındaki farklılıkları ortaya koymaktadır.

Bu bağlamda araştırmanın amacı, tüketicilerin spor sponsorluğuna ilişkin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği algılarının satın alma niyetleri üzerindeki etkisini ve bu ilişkide sembolik tüketimin aracılık rolünü incelemektir. Çalışma, hem kuramsal hem de uygulamalı açıdan, sponsorluk stratejilerinin toplumsal değerlerle nasıl örtüşebileceğine ilişkin özgün katkılar sunmayı hedeflemektedir.

Yöntem

Araştırma verileri, yüz yüze ve çevrimiçi anket yöntemleri kullanılarak 482 katılımcıdan toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar, spor sponsorluğuna yönelik tutumlarını, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği algılarını, sembolik tüketim düzeylerini ve satın alma niyetlerini ölçmeye yönelik ifadelerle yanıt vermiştir. Ölçüm araçlarının geçerlilik ve güvenilirlik analizleri doğrulayıcı faktör analizi (DFA) ile yapılmıştır. Araştırma hipotezlerini test etmek amacıyla yapısal regresyon modeli kullanılmış; toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği algısının sembolik tüketim aracılığıyla satın alma niyetine etkisi incelenmiştir. Aracılık etkisinin anlamlılığı için dolaylı yolların katsayıları değerlendirilmiştir.

Sonuç ve Tartışma

Araştırma bulguları, tüketici grupları arasında toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği algısı, sembolik tüketim düzeyi ve satın alma niyeti açısından anlamlı farklılıklar bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği düzeyi yüksek bireylerde sembolik tüketim eğilimi azalmakta, bu da geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ve dışsal onay mekanizmalarına daha az ihtiyaç duyulduğunu göstermektedir. Ancak sembolik tüketim ile satın alma niyeti arasındaki ilişki cinsiyete göre farklılaşmaktadır. Kadın tüketicilerde sembolik tüketim arttıkça satın alma niyeti yükselirken, erkeklerde bu ilişkinin ters yönde olduğu görülmektedir. Ayrıca toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği erkeklerin satın alma niyetini doğrudan olumlu etkilerken, kadınlarda bu etki doğrudan anlamlı değildir; kadınlarda etki sembolik tüketim aracılığıyla dolaylı olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Bu bulgular, işletmelerin tüketici gruplarının farklı motivasyon ve beklentilerine uygun farklılaştırılmış pazarlama stratejileri geliştirmesi gerektiğini göstermektedir. Kadın tüketiciler için pazarlama stratejilerinin hem ürünün işlevsel faydalarını (örneğin performans, dayanıklılık) hem de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği mesajlarını birlikte vurgulaması etkili olacaktır. Bu yaklaşım, kadın tüketicilerin sembolik değerlere önem vermekle birlikte satın alma kararlarında pratik unsurları da göz önünde bulundurduklarını göstermektedir. Erkek tüketicilerde ise eşitlik mesajlarının geleneksel erkeklik normlarıyla çatışabileceği, bu nedenle iletişim dilinin kültürel bağlama duyarlı şekilde tasarlanması gerektiği anlaşılmaktadır.

Markalar açısından çalışmanın bulgularına dayalı olarak çeşitli stratejik öneriler geliştirilebilir. Öncelikle sponsorluk faaliyetlerinde kadın ve erkek spor branşlarına eşit bütçe ayrılması, özellikle “maskülen” olarak algılanan alanlarda kadın sporcuların görünürlüğünün artırılması önemlidir. Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği temalı içerik pazarlaması faaliyetleri, örneğin kalıplaşmış rolleri yıkan sporcu hikâyelerini içeren kampanyalar veya belgeseller, marka imajını güçlendirebilir. Ürün tasarımı ve fiyatlandırmada da eşitlik ilkesi benimsenmeli; örneğin kadın ve erkek spor ekipmanlarında fiyat eşitliği sağlanabilir ya da kız çocuklarının STEM alanlarına ilgisini artıracak özel koleksiyonlar geliştirilebilir.

Dijital pazarlama kanallarında, etkileşimli sosyal medya filtreleri veya e-spor turnuvalarında kadın-erkek temsiline eşitlik şartı getiren sponsorluk kriterleri uygulanabilir. Perakende deneyiminde ise vitrin düzenlemeleri, raf yerleşimleri ve satış ekibi eğitimleri aracılığıyla toplumsal cinsiyet kalıpları kırılabilir. Bu tür uygulamalar, markaların toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ilkesine yalnızca söylemsel düzeyde değil, operasyonel düzeyde de bağlılık göstermesini sağlayarak özellikle Z kuşağıyla daha güçlü bağlar kurmasına yardımcı olacaktır.

Bulgular, kültürel bağlamın toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, sembolik tüketim ve satın alma niyeti ilişkilerinde belirleyici bir rol oynadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bireyci kültürlerde (örneğin ABD, İsveç) eşitlik temalı mesajların sembolik etkisi daha zayıfken, toplulukçu kültürlerde (örneğin Türkiye, Japonya) sosyal onay mekanizmalarının baskın olması nedeniyle sembolik tüketim daha güçlü rol oynamaktadır. Bu nedenle pazarlama stratejileri kültürel değerlere duyarlı şekilde uyarlanmalıdır.

Çalışmanın bazı sınırlılıkları bulunmaktadır. Öncelikle örneklem Türkiye ile sınırlıdır; farklı kültürel bağlamlarda yapılacak karşılaştırmalı araştırmalar bulguların genellenebilirliğini test edecektir. İkinci olarak, araştırma yalnızca spor sponsorluğu bağlamında yürütülmüştür. Kültür, sanat veya sosyal sorumluluk projeleri gibi farklı sponsorluk türlerinde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ve sembolik tüketim ilişkisinin nasıl şekillendiği gelecekteki çalışmalar için önemli bir araştırma alanı oluşturmaktadır.