

## Investigating relationships between motivation and loyalty in the context of physical recreation

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### Abstract

**Introduction.** The concept of motivation is very important for participation in recreation. There are three types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. The present study investigates consumer behavior issues related to the practice of mini football in Greece. **Aim of Study.** The study aimed specifically to: a) identify the most important motivation factors that drive individuals to participate in mini football; and b) investigate the predictability of motivation factors towards consumer loyalty. **Material and Methods.** 150 Greek men participated in the study and were asked to fill in a survey questionnaire. A path analysis method was used to assess the impact of motivation on loyalty. **Results.** The most important motivation type was extrinsic motivation comprising items related to enjoyment. The path analysis revealed the importance of extrinsic motivation and amotivation for predicting participants' sport loyalty. **Conclusions.** The results of the present study can help managers of sport centers understand the significance of mini-football as a recreational activity.

**KEYWORDS:** motivation, mini football, loyalty, sport recreation, customer behavior.

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### What is already known on this topic?

There are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. A negative motivation factor called amotivation can be also distinguished.

### Introduction

Although physical recreation in Greece and other countries has been experiencing a significant growth in recent years, a large percentage of Greeks of all ages still spend their leisure time passively, expressing little interest to physical activities, and preferring sedentary recreation [1].

Mini football is a popular form of sports recreation. It is a team sport played within a controlled space and does not require a large number of players. The concept of motivation is very important for participation in physical recreation. There are two types of motivation: intrinsic (internal) motivation, e.g. when someone does something for his or her personal pleasure without any reward; and extrinsic (external) motivation, e.g. when someone does something tied to others and/or reward [2]. Apart from intrinsic and extrinsic motivation there is also amotivation, i.e. when there is a relative lack of motivation. For example, when individuals are amotivated, they have no expectations to participate in an activity and are prone to quit [3].

Alexandris and Carroll [4] conducted a study on a sample of Greek population related to factors that led people to sports participation. They found that participants in sports want to relax to handle stress they experience daily. According to some researchers, motivation is linked to a range of positive behaviors, such as increased

positive emotions and sports participation [5]. Other important motivation factors are various exogenous factors related to perception by others such as health and physical status, attractiveness, fun and entertainment, appearance, and weight control [6]. Finally, an important factor of one's participation in sports recreation is sport loyalty. According to Oliver [7], consumer loyalty is a deep commitment to repurchase a preferred product-service in the future, despite changing circumstances and marketing conditions.

The present study examined the effectiveness of motivation factors and amotivation for participation in mini football, in consideration of participants' dedication to this recreational activity. The results of the present study can help managers of sport centers to understand customers' choice of mini-football as a sport recreation activity, the need of development and popularization. Understanding participation incentives will primarily help mini football companies increase the volume of customer participation, which is considered their main business objective, with the ultimate aims of improving their activity and stimulating the sport recreation market.

## Theoretical Background

### Self-determination theory and the concept of motivation

Motivation is defined as a person's behavior designated by the internal and external experiencing of incentives, or the lack of thereof (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, amotivation) [2, 3, 8]. This theoretical approach implemented by many researchers has been found to be appropriate and applicable in the field of sport participation [3, 9]. There may be different reasons why a person participates in a sport, e.g. to elicit new sensations or emotions, master complex skills, or conquer challenges. Thus, participants in sporting activities set some goals (e.g. to have fun, improve their performance, etc.). According to the Self-Determination Theory [8, 10] the goals of each individual are determined by particular psychological needs. Specifically, there are three important needs that activate human action: autonomy – referring to the individual's desire for self-initiative in regulating actions; competitiveness – referring to a person that wants to interact effectively with his or her environment; and social relations – referring to the desire of a person to feel that his or her commonalities are connected with others. In Self-Determination Theory [3, 8] these

three activators represent the psychological mediators of the impact of social facts to mobilize an individual. Moreover, because social conditions vary, and each person perceives them differently, the reasons for participation vary accordingly [11].

Intrinsic motivation, according to Deci [2], indicates that an individual who participates in a sport activity derives satisfaction and enjoyment without gaining an award or material benefits [3]. An intrinsically motivated individual who participates in sport finds it interesting and rewarding, and learns as much as possible about it. Extrinsic motivation refers to non-self-determined behavior, which could vary due to external factors (e.g. a prize). An externally motivated person participating in sport feels that there is nothing emotionally to gain, but it is interesting in terms of some material reward that can be achieved.

Finally, a person that is amotivated, i.e. not motivated either internally or externally, acts in a state of absence of incentives (amotivation). An amotivated person participating in sport often experiences helplessness and loss of control, and ultimately does not understand the real cause of their participation [3], and sometimes decides to stop participating.

Self-Determination Theory addresses the degrees of self-determination differentiating conditions, i.e. a scale sequence from amotivation, through external motivation, to internal motivation [3]. The highest level is considered acquired internal motivation. The bottom level of the self-determination sequence is the lack of incentives (amotivation). Amotivation refers to behavior that is neither internally nor externally motivated and reflects the lack of incentives. A behavior of this kind is the least self-determined because there is no sequence of actions by an individual in response to an outside impact.

### Motivation in sports and recreation

The majority of studies in leisure and recreation point to the importance of the fun-related incentives [6, 12]. Duda and Tappe [13] proposed a range of incentives of participation in exercise, consisting of skill mastery, competition, social affiliation, recognition, health benefits, and physical fitness. Two more dimensions (enjoyment and creativity) were added by Markland and Hardy [14]. Kavussanu and Roberts [15] in their study of novice tennis players showed that the dominant climate created by participants had a significant effect on the intrinsic motivation of each individual. When the climate is intensely competitive internal motivation is

limited, and when directed by increasing performance, it is maintained on a high level. Finally, Vallerand [16] reported empirical evidence that intrinsic motivation was related to positive affective experiences such as satisfaction and enjoyment, while lack of motivation is related to negative affective experiences such as stress and anxiety.

### **The context of loyalty**

Customer loyalty is the level of continuity of the customer's relationship with a brand or service provider [17]. Behavioural and attitudinal loyalty are the two main types of loyalty [18]. Behavioural loyalty may include, for example, customer share, frequency of visits, and duration of the relationship. Attitudinal loyalty refers to attitudes, preferences, commitments, and intentions [18, 19].

It is widely accepted today that it costs more money to attract new customers than to retain the existing ones [20]. Iwasaki and Havitz [21] proposed the definition of loyalty both in behavioral and attitudinal terms, while viewing it as one of the main consequences of involvement in leisure. Furthermore, retention of customers and measuring customer loyalty are increasingly important issues for managers of recreational facilities. Retention of loyal customers, word of mouth advocacy, and, ultimately, profitability are important consequences of customer service quality as well as customer satisfaction [22]. Previous studies on recreation measured attitudinal loyalty mainly in terms of intention to continue doing skiing [23], and intention to continue visiting a specific resort [24]. Furthermore, motivations and negotiation strategies were shown to be determinants of loyalty in recreation [23, 25], while place attachment, value, and service quality were shown to influence the development of loyalty and word of mouth communication [24, 26].

### **Mini football in Greece**

Football on a compact field, better known as mini football or  $5 \times 5$  football, appeared in the USA several decades ago when small groups of participants were playing football on tennis or basketball courts. In the UK, mini football appeared in the late 1970s, and in continental Europe small football fields ( $5 \times 5$ ) became popular about twenty years ago. Over the last ten years mini football has been constantly expanding in all of Europe, being mostly played in small autonomous sports centers.

Mini football has gained many fans as it is easy to play by people of all ages and social and economic classes.

It is relatively inexpensive, and can be played by people who simply like sports, entertainment and fun, without any previous football experience. Mini football players exercise, practice their skills, and enjoy the company of their friends. As a recreational activity mini football is played by two five- or six-member groups on separate pitches. The pitch dimensions are  $6 \times 6$ ,  $7 \times 7$ ,  $8 \times 8$ , and  $9 \times 9$ , depending on the number of participants.

Mini football involves an entire industry that sells and rents out sport-related products and services such as sports facilities, sports equipment and clothing, food, and fun for participants, board and video games, and big screens for watching matches. Mini football sports centers are not associated in organizations or federations, and companies offering services in recreational mini football pitches are regular commercial companies or one person companies. The main problems related to the development of recreational mini football are short playing seasons, male-dominated customer activity, lack of state endorsement, and lack of a central governing body.

### **Aim of Study**

The aims of this study were to:

- a) identify the most important incentives behind participation in mini football;
- b) investigate the correlations and predictability of different incentives towards customer loyalty to mini football.

### **Material and Methods**

#### **Material**

The study sample consisted of 150 male players from central Greece, who participated in several mini football matches. The participants' age was 26.4 years ( $SD = 5.48$ ). In terms of participants' experience, the mean retention time was 9.03 years ( $SD = 4.9$ ). Data was collected from a single sport center that was a part of a company specializing in leisure services. The sport centre provided additional services such as a playground, a swimming pool, and a sauna, as well as basketball and tennis courts. Permission to collect data was obtained from the sports center management.

#### **Methods**

The scale for evaluation of participation motivation was developed by Pelletier et al. [5], and its validity and reliability was successfully tested in the Greek context. The scale was designed to assess individuals' levels of motivation towards sport, using the self-

determination theory framework. Participants reported the extent to which the listed reasons for practicing their sport corresponded with their own personal reasons. Participants' motivation was assessed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Does not correspond at all) to 7 (Corresponds completely). The scale consisted of 28 items divided into three factors: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the psychometric properties of the scales.

In order to evaluate participants' loyalty, a scale proposed by Zeithaml et al. [19], and modified for the Greek population by Alexandris et al. [27] was used. The scale comprised four items (e.g. How much determined do you feel to remain a customer of a specific mini football company?). A five-point Likert type scale, ranking from "Very much" (5) to "Not at all" (1) was used.

**Procedure**

The questionnaires and all appropriate details concerning data selection were provided by a single researcher. Data collection took place after the end of fifteen mini football games. The questionnaires contained scales of participation incentives, loyalty and demographics.

**Results**

The most important component of participants' intrinsic motivation was 'Excitement during participation' (M = 5.65, SD=1.21), followed by 'Pleasure from excitement' (M=5.62, SD =1.03). 'The importance of exercising to stay fit' (M = 5.97, SD = 1.10) and 'Regular exercise' (M = 5.50, SD =1.24) were the most important extrinsic motivation items, while 'Doubts of continuing' was the most important amotivation item (M = 3.14, SD = 1.62).

Regarding the mean score of the three motivation types, the most important was intrinsic motivation, with a mean score of M = 4.97 (SD = 0.97), followed by extrinsic motivation (M = 4.29, SD = 1.06). Amotivation had the lowest mean value (M = 2.57, SD = 1.96). All reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) were greater than 0.70 (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, internal consistency coefficients and correlation coefficients

	M	SD	a	r		
Loyalty	3.45	0.71	0.83			
Intrinsic Motivation	4.97	0.97	0.90	0.54		
Extrinsic Motivation	4.29	1.06	0.89	0.47	0.795	
Amotivation	2.57	1.16	0.77	-0.26	-0.093	0.052

**Model Testing**

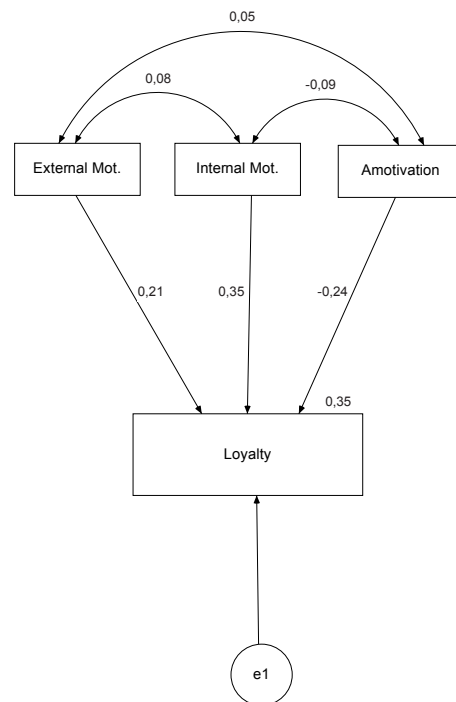
Our analysis began with the use of confirmatory factor analysis (AMOS 7.0) to validate the psychometric properties of the scales. In addition to model fitting the data well ( $\chi^2 = 902.01$ ,  $df = 644$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.042$ ,  $NFI = 0.990$ ,  $CFI = 0.994$ ), all factor loadings were in excess.

**Summary – Path Model**

The findings of the study illustrated that only intrinsic motivation ( $\beta = 0.348$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and amotivation ( $\beta = -0.237$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) had a significant impact on loyalty. It should be mentioned that amotivation had a negative impact on this variable (Table 2). The three motivation types accounted for 35 percent of variance in loyalty ( $F(3.146) = 26.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Figure 1).

**Table 2.** Summary of direct effects

Dependent Variable	Predictors	B	$\beta$	SE	t-value	Sig.
Loyalty	Intrinsic Motivation	0.256	0.348	0.083	3.08	0.002
	Extrinsic Motivation	0.143	0.211	0.076	1.87	0.063
	Amotivation	-0.147	-0.237	0.042	-3.46	0.001



Note: Unidimensional arrows represent direct paths, bi-directional arrows represent noncausal influence and e1 represent the error of the observed variable

**Figure 1.** The direct effect model

## Discussion

The present study examined participants' motives to take part in mini football games as well as the effect of motivation on customer loyalty. It is important for managers of mini football centers to acknowledge their current participants' preferences. Mini football players' participation motivation had a remarkable effect on their loyalty to the sport. The results of the present study support the positive relationships between motivation and consumers' behavioural outcomes such as loyalty. The analysis of demographic characteristics of the sample revealed that the overwhelming majority of people who participate in recreational mini football are men. This is explained by the fact that mini football is related to original football generally characterized as a predominantly men's sport. This, of course, is a negative effect on the market expansion and further development of mini football sports centers. Possible opening of the mini football market to female participants will increase the number of potential customers of mini football centers. Descriptive statistics supported that participants' intrinsic motivation was scored highest. The analysis of mean scores revealed high scores of excitement and pleasure during participation, both considered important motivation elements for participation. Sport centers and especially mini football administrators should focus on the establishment and maintenance of such conditions that would attract participants for the reason of enjoyment of mini football activities. Although there were no significant results based on both descriptive statistics and predictability analyses of extrinsic motivation, the element of importance of physical exercise gained the highest mean score of all the questionnaire's items. A proposed marketing strategy here is a promotional plan for the sport centers that will focus on the propagation of the positive effects of that kind of health exercise.

Finally, the statistical significance of the item 'Doubts of continuing activity' related to amotivation, indicates that mini football companies should develop marketing and pricing strategies that will attract customers.

It is rather difficult to compare the findings of the present study with the results of other studies, due to methodological differences, and the fact that the present research focused on a very specific activity. However, the Sport Motivation Scale [5] used in the present study had been originally developed for competitive sports such as mini football.

Previous studies showed that motivation was related to a number of positive behavioral effects such as increased levels of participation, positive emotions, and

increased satisfaction [5, 6]. The results of the present study provide evidence for the positive relationship between motivation and loyalty. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have been suggested to influence behaviour [28].

Moreover, the present study used an alternative approach based on the self-determination theory [3] model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as proposed by Vallerand and Losier [11], and Fortier et al. [29] including the significance of amotivated individuals who often cease their participation. These results suggest that personal characteristics might also negatively affect customers' purchasing intentions.

As regards the results of the present study, intrinsic motivation was shown to be the most powerful predictor of loyalty. The positive effect of intrinsic motivation has been mentioned in many studies of leisure and recreation settings [6, 12]. Sport and recreation activities provide opportunities for individuals to express behaviors that provide intrinsic rewards. Iwasaki and Mannell [30] suggested that populating the leisure service and providing a variety of choices could possibly increase participants' intrinsic motivation.

Additionally, the amotivation factor revealed a negative but significant effect on loyalty. Fortier et al. [29] reported that amotivated individuals are likely to quit the activity. Amotivated individuals are neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated. Their behavior is out of their control, and occasionally they do not think of the outcomes of their behavior.

In terms of lack of any significant effects of external motivation on loyalty one possible reason for this is that participants in mini football do not attach great importance to body weight control, body image, and fitness [25]. However, the high importance of physical exercise contradicts reports presenting the Greek population as inactive.

## Conclusions

The present study identified successfully the most important motivation factors for participation in a Greek mini football center and confirmed the strong relations between motivation and participants' loyalty. Results revealed the significant influence of intrinsic motivation mini football participants' loyalty. Managers of mini football sport centers should address all the issues related to programming, service, assistance, and training that are important for improving intrinsic motivation.

Moreover, a significant amount of loyalty variance was explained by the amotivation factor. Sport center

administrators should identify elements that prompt participants to quit the activity. Further research is required to establish the relationship between amotivation and loyalty. It is an issue particularly important for mini football practitioners.

The present study sought for the first time to examine the results of motives on loyalty in the activity of mini football among the Greek population. The outcome of the present study may help administrators of mini football centers develop further their activities. Several limitations can be formulated in this research, such as the size of the sample, which was relatively small, and the fact that the data originated from a single center. Thus the results can be only seen as indications, not as representative of the entire Greek population. Furthermore, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study in the future in participants in other recreational activities in order to identify factors that might prevent participation. It is also possible that some factors that were found to be important in the present investigation may play an important role in other geographical locations. Additionally, future studies should focus on developing a valid and reliable scale adjusted for sport recreation. Finally, loyal and satisfied participants help establish brand names of sport centers in the very competitive Greek recreation market.

#### What this paper adds?

The present study identified successfully the most important motivation factors for participating in mini football in Greece and confirmed the strong relationship between motivation and participants' loyalty. Results revealed the significant impact of intrinsic motivation on the loyalty of mini football participants.

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