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POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FACTORS SHAPING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATION IN SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS: A THEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The sustainability of sports organizations, the successful execution of events, and budget efficiency heavily rely on unpaid volunteer human resources. This study aims to critically examine the internal, external, institutional, and socio-demographic factors shaping volunteer motivation in sports organizations within a thematic framework, addressing both positive and negative dimensions. Utilizing a thematic review design, a total of 25 high-quality studies—comprising prominent articles and postgraduate theses from the sports volunteering literature—were analyzed. The synthesis of findings reveals that the primary positive drivers of sports volunteer motivation are goal-oriented dedication, the reflection of personal values, patriotism, personal development, and career aspirations. Conversely, factors that diminish motivation and lead to volunteer disengagement include a lack of managerial professionalism within sports organizations, ambiguous job descriptions and tasks, insufficient appreciation and feedback, and operational weaknesses in logistical processes. Ultimately, the sustainability and effectiveness of volunteer systems in sports organizations depend on positioning volunteers not as temporary or auxiliary labor, but as strategic internal stakeholders who directly drive organizational success.

Keywords: Sports volunteering, volunteer motivation, barriers, psychological contract, ethical violations.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, the drive to succeed and compete has been a fundamental dynamic of social structures and cultural development (Devecioğlu, Karakaya, & Kaya, 2020; Yanar, 2023). Sports stand out as one of the primary domains where individuals can manifest these motivational elements (Er & Güzel Gürbüz, 2021; Fişne & Karagöz, 2016; Yanar, 2023). In today's world, the sports industry spans a wide spectrum, ranging from low-budget local sporting events to mega-sporting organizations with multi-billion-dollar budgets. Beyond social development, these organizations contribute to the establishment of a robust sports culture by imparting prestige to host cities and countries (Rozmiarek, Poczta, & Malchrowicz-Moško, 2021; Wise, Kohe, & Koutrou, 2021; Berber & Terekli, 2019; Sadıkoğlu, 2024; Fişne & Karagöz, 2016).

The successful organization of sports events requires the fulfillment of numerous components, including planning, accreditation, venue management, and the provision of logistical resources. Volunteers play the most critical role in fulfilling human resource needs in these areas (Er & Güzel Gürbüz, 2021; Berber & Terekli, 2019; Devecioğlu, Karakaya, & Kaya, 2020). Volunteering is defined as an individual's voluntary contribution of time, knowledge, professional competence, and effort toward a socially beneficial purpose, free from external coercion, legal obligation, or financial compensation (Er & Güzel Gürbüz, 2021; Bańbuła, 2021; Sadıkoğlu, 2024; Fişne & Karagöz, 2016; Devecioğlu, Karakaya, & Kaya, 2020). Given that the sports industry inherently demands a massive workforce, the labor support provided by sports volunteers substantially relieves organizational budgets and yields significant financial savings (Er & Güzel Gürbüz, 2021; Devecioğlu, Karakaya, & Kaya, 2020; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019). Furthermore, volunteers in sports organizations generate millions of dollars in indirect economic value for host cities and sports institutions (Er & Güzel Gürbüz, 2021; Devecioğlu, Karakaya, & Kaya, 2020; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019). For instance, it has been documented that the 5,450,000 hours of labor contributed by volunteers at the Sydney 2000 Summer Olympic Games produced a net saving of \$109,756,925 for the organizational budget (Devecioğlu, Karakaya, & Kaya, 2020).

To elucidate the motivational sources of sports volunteers, various measurement tools have been developed in the literature based on foundational frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory and Social Exchange Theory. These include the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Bańbuła, 2021; Sadıkoğlu, 2024; Çevik & Gürsel, 2015), the Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale (SEVMS) (Yıldız, Yıldırım, & Koçak, 2015), and the Volunteer Motivation Scale for International Sporting Events (VMS-ISE) (Rozmiarek, Grajek, Sobczyk, et al., 2025; Fişne & Karagöz, 2016; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019). These theoretical frameworks analyze the extent to which volunteers' fundamental psychological needs—such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are satisfied in the field (Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019).

An examination of the sports volunteering literature reveals that factors influencing volunteer motivation are generally categorized into two main groups: positive (incentivizing) and negative (inhibiting). Existing studies indicate that the primary motivational drivers enabling individuals to serve as sports volunteers without

financial expectations are intrinsic satisfaction, personal development, and career aspirations (Er & Güzel Gürbüz, 2021; Sadıkoğlu, 2024; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019). Volunteers demonstrate a strong commitment to voluntary activities through mechanisms such as contributing to society, acquiring new skills, expanding social networks, and gaining professional experience. Conversely, prominent negative factors that impair motivation and lead to disengagement include deficiencies in the managerial professionalism of institutions and leaders running sports organizations, ambiguous job descriptions and task allocations, insufficient appreciation and feedback mechanisms, and operational failures in basic logistical processes such as transportation, accommodation, nutrition, and coordination (Berber & Terekli, 2019; Sadıkoğlu, 2024). These encountered adversities create a profound mismatch between volunteers' expectations and organizational realities (Berber & Terekli, 2019; Sadıkoğlu, 2024). This phenomenon, widely recognized as "psychological contract violation," erodes institutional commitment, disrupts motivation, and paves the way for volunteer withdrawal (Wise, Kohe, & Koutrou, 2021; Sadıkoğlu, 2024; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019).

The literature demonstrates that sustainability in sports volunteering extends beyond individual motivational drivers; it is also directly contingent upon the management approaches adopted by organizations and volunteer-oriented corporate policies. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the positive and negative factors shaping the motivational structure of sports volunteers within a holistic and thematic framework, drawing upon national and international literature. By analyzing the synthesized findings from a critical perspective, the study intends to offer theoretical contributions to the sports management literature alongside practical insights for field applications.

METHOD

This study employed a document analysis model—a qualitative research design—to comprehensively examine the motivational factors driving sports volunteers, the elements encouraging their participation, and the obstacles they encounter throughout managerial processes. Studies meeting the predefined inclusion criteria from the literature review were subjected to thematic analysis. Because this research was conducted through the synthesis of existing literature, formal ethics committee approval was not required; nevertheless, all sources utilized throughout the process have been appropriately cited, and scientific research and publication ethics have been meticulously observed.

Database and Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature review was conducted across prominent databases—including PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science—alongside the Google Scholar search engine to access national and international literature concerning the positive and negative factors shaping sports volunteer motivation. Keywords such as "sports volunteering," "volunteer motivation," "motivational factors," "incentivizing factors," "inhibiting factors / barriers," "psychological contract," and "ethical violations" were utilized as search terms. The search encompassed publications spanning from 2006 to 2026. The initial literature search utilizing the identified

keywords yielded 345 studies. These publications were subsequently evaluated against specific exclusion criteria, which included irrelevance to the research topic, inaccessibility of the full text, non-peer-reviewed status, and publication in languages other than Turkish or English. Following this rigorous screening process, 320 publications were excluded, leaving 25 high-quality studies that fully satisfied the criteria to be included in the thematic analysis.

Inclusion Criteria

The following criteria were established for selecting the studies included in the review:

- Studies must focus directly on volunteers serving within sports organizations and events.
- Studies must investigate and examine the participation drivers, intrinsic/extrinsic motivational factors, or managerial obstacles and challenges faced by sports volunteers.
- Studies must comprise peer-reviewed journal articles reflecting developments in national and international literature, validated scale adaptation studies, or accepted postgraduate theses.

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of the data obtained from the reviewed studies revealed that the factors shaping sports volunteer motivation cluster into two core dimensions. These findings are categorized and detailed under two primary axes: positive factors supporting volunteer participation and commitment, and negative factors diminishing motivation and leading to system disengagement.

1. Factors Positively Affecting Volunteer Motivation in Sports Organizations

Expression of Values and Goal-Oriented Altruism

The primary participation motivators for sports volunteers include the desire to benefit society and the organization's target audience without expecting financial rewards, the drive to support disadvantaged groups, and the aspiration to contribute to the successful execution of the event (Er & Güzel Gürbüz, 2021; Hidzir et al., 2021; Eraslan, Kural, & Aydın, 2022; Bańbuła, 2021; Berber & Terekli, 2019; Yıldız, Yıldırım, & Koçak, 2015). Consequently, the "Values" dimension enables volunteers to channel their social responsibility into pro-social actions within the organization (Hidzir et al., 2021; Bańbuła, 2021; Sadıkoğlu, 2024). Notably, in sports organizations designed for individuals with special needs, volunteers' "Values" and "Understanding" motivation levels reach significantly higher thresholds compared to conventional sports events (Yılmaz, Sertbaş, & Gümüş, 2019; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019).

Patriotism, Social Belonging, and Individual Empowerment

The endeavor to elevate the global image and prestige of the host country during mega-sporting events serves as one of the most powerful social catalysts driving volunteer motivation (Rozmiarek, Poczta, & Malchrowicz-Moško, 2021; Fişne & Karagöz, 2016; Nordin et al., 2023). Sports volunteers operating in such settings exhibit exceptionally high performance because they perceive their service as a national duty. Furthermore, the positive collective experiences generated throughout the process foster a profound sense of individual "empowerment" and social belonging among volunteers (Nordin et al., 2023).

Personal Development and Career Goals

Particularly among younger populations and Generation Z, sports organizations function as vital platforms for gaining personal development and practical experience (Rozmiarek, Grajek et al., 2023; Rozmiarek, Grajek, Sobczyk et al., 2025; Bondar & Petrenko, 2015; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019). Volunteers participating in these events have the opportunity to acquire core competencies such as teamwork, time management, leadership, crisis resolution, professional know-how, and foreign language proficiency (Rozmiarek, Grajek et al., 2023; Hidzir et al., 2021; Sadıkoğlu, 2024). Evidence indicates that the "Career" motivation levels of volunteers aiming to pursue a professional career within the sports industry are notably higher than those of other participants (Rozmiarek, Grajek et al., 2023; Bańbuła, 2021).

Social Relations, Peer Interaction, and Self-Worth (Egoism)

Meeting new individuals, integrating into vibrant social environments, engaging with peers sharing common interests, and striving toward a collective objective represent critical motivational drivers that ensure the continuity of volunteer participation (Er & Güzel Gürbüz, 2021; Krajňáková et al., 2018; Rozmiarek, Grajek, Sobczyk et al., 2025; Yıldız, Yıldırım, & Koçak, 2015; Mirsafian & Mohamadinejad, 2012). Such social interactions reinforce feelings of appreciation and group affiliation, thereby sustaining pro-social behaviors (Sadıkoğlu, 2024; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019). Indeed, research demonstrates that the "Egoism Factor"—encompassing the desire for self-actualization, respect, and recognition—stands out as a prominent motivational driver in local projects (Yılmaz, Sertbaş, & Gümüş, 2019).

Passion for Sports and Branch Interest

An individual's specialized interest in a specific sports discipline, coupled with viewing sports as an active component of daily life, constitutes a fundamental source of intrinsic motivation directly influencing their decision to serve in sports organizations (Casey et al., 2023; Hidzir et al., 2021; Rozmiarek, Grajek, Sobczyk et al., 2025; Fişne & Karagöz, 2016).

2. Factors Negatively Affecting Volunteer Motivation in Sports Organizations

Lack of Managerial Professionalism and Informal Management Practices

Incompetent management personnel within sports organizations and the unprofessional allocation of tasks impede volunteers' access to reliable institutional guidance; this environment engenders feelings of devaluation and adversely impacts motivation (Berber & Terekli, 2019; Sadıkoğlu, 2024).

Logistical Inadequacies and Transactional Contract Violations

The disruption or inadequate provision of volunteers' fundamental physiological needs—such as proper nutrition, secure accommodation, reliable transportation, and appropriate equipment or attire—is conceptualized in the literature as a "Transactional Contract Violation" and emerges as the primary catalyst for rapid volunteer dissatisfaction (Krajňáková et al., 2018; Berber & Terekli, 2019; Sadıkoğlu, 2024; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019).

Organizational Irregularities and Ethical Erosion

Rule infractions during organized sporting competitions, the neglect of assigned responsibilities, and deviations from a fair managerial approach undermine institutional belonging and threaten the long-term sustainability of volunteer participation (Casey et al., 2023; Yanar, 2023).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A critical evaluation of the literature on volunteer motivation in sports organizations reveals a profound structural paradox in the practices of sports institutions (Wise, Kohe, & Koutrou, 2021; Sadıkoğlu, 2024). While individuals aspire to serve in organizations driven by pro-social values, personal development, social contribution, and the ideals of fair play, sports organizations and their management frequently view volunteers merely as a source of free labor to offset budget deficits. This paradox engenders a deep vision discrepancy between sports volunteers and organizational leadership (Wise, Kohe, & Koutrou, 2021; Berber & Terekli, 2019; Sadıkoğlu, 2024; Devocioğlu, Karakaya, & Kaya, 2020).

According to Self-Determination Theory, the sustainability of an individual's behavior and its fuel through intense intrinsic motivation are directly contingent upon the extent to which corporate management fulfills their fundamental needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019; Yanar, 2023). However, the examined studies indicate that the hierarchical, inflexible, and centralized management practices characteristic of many sports institutions fail to afford volunteers meaningful spheres of responsibility or decision-making autonomy. Consequently, sports volunteers are frequently relegated to the status of vest-wearing, unskilled personnel treated as mere statistical numbers (Berber & Terekli, 2019; Sadıkoğlu, 2024). As

strikingly highlighted in Sadıkoğlu's (2024) study, this demotivating management approach stems from a failure to value the volunteer as a genuine stakeholder, exposing them instead to drudgery that shatters the "psychological contract" within the volunteering ecosystem. Such managerial frameworks ultimately alienate younger generations—such as Generation Z—who exhibit pragmatic, innovative profiles with elevated expectations (Rozmiarek, Grajek et al., 2023; Wise, Kohe, & Koutrou, 2021; Bondar & Petrenko, 2015).

Conversely, in scenarios where sports organizations effectively implement professional volunteer management policies, volunteer motivation reaches its zenith. Evidence demonstrates that a positive climate fosters robust behavioral loyalty, manifesting as a willingness to volunteer for future events, advocate enthusiastically for the organization within social networks, and even revisit the host city as a tourist (Nordin et al., 2023; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2019).

In this study, the factors shaping the motivational architecture of sports volunteers were critically evaluated within a thematic framework, drawing upon national and international literature. The synthesis indicates that sports volunteering is not merely a mechanism for uncompensated labor support, but is underpinned by complex psychological, social, and institutional dynamics. The findings confirm that the sustainability of the volunteering system is primarily driven by positive factors such as intrinsic satisfaction (altruism), patriotism, social belonging, personal development, and career aspirations. While volunteers generate considerable social value through their knowledge and labor, they concurrently harbor legitimate expectations of personal growth and recognition. Conversely, managerial disruptions, ambiguous job descriptions, a lack of appreciation, and deficiencies in basic physiological needs—such as nutrition, transportation, and accommodation—severely erode motivation. Ultimately, the utilitarian approach that treats sports volunteers as 'free human resources providing budgetary savings' triggers psychological contract violations, driving younger demographics away from the system.

In conclusion; the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of volunteering systems in sports organizations depend fundamentally on positioning volunteers not as temporary or auxiliary labor, but as strategic internal stakeholders who directly drive organizational success.

SUGGESTIONS

To maximize volunteer performance in sports organizations and establish a sustainable volunteering ecosystem, adopting the following strategic approaches is recommended:

- **Strategic Internal Stakeholder Positioning:** Sports institutions and managers should perceive volunteers not as auxiliary personnel performing menial tasks wearing vests, but as strategic internal stakeholders who directly influence organizational success.

- **Logistical and Institutional Security:** Essential logistical provisions—such as meeting volunteers' basic physiological needs (nutrition, transportation, accommodation) and supplying appropriate organizational attire—must be planned comprehensively as a core corporate responsibility rather than perceived as supplementary rewards.
- **Professionalism in Volunteer Management:** Management personnel overseeing volunteers should be appointed based on merit, possessing high communication competencies and a sound understanding of volunteer psychology. The recruitment, placement, and coordination of sports volunteers must be managed exclusively by these qualified professionals.
- **Clear Job Descriptions and Appreciation-Reward Mechanisms:** Prior to events, the duties and responsibilities of sports volunteers should be explicitly defined, and task allocations must align with their individual skill sets. Post-event processes—such as certificates of participation, constructive feedback, and recognition mechanisms that acknowledge performance—should be actively implemented.
- **Establishment of a National Sports Volunteering Database:** To ensure long-term sustainability and continuity, a centralized "Sports Volunteer Database" should be established on a national scale. This platform should systematically archive volunteers' service history, completed training, and areas of expertise, acting as a bridge to streamline coordination between sports volunteers and organizing institutions.

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