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Soccer fans, stadium attendance, and interpersonal trust in the Mexican population

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Abstract

Social capital can be understood as the existing bond between individuals and social groups. An important component of that bond is trust, especially interpersonal trust. Latin American peoples tend to be untrusting, but participation in sports, either as an athlete or as a spectator, can be an important generator of social capital. The present study aimed to investigate whether Mexican soccer fans who frequently attend the stadium to watch soccer matches show greater interpersonal trust than those who do not usually attend these events. Data were collected through an online survey and analyzed using the cross-tabulation technique. The results show that the respondents in general show little interpersonal trust, but no statistically significant differences were found between those who attend the stadium and those who do not.

Introduction

Social capital has been the subject of research of different kinds and in different fields, since it can contribute significantly to both individual and community well-being, by regulating relationships, trust, and solidarity among people (Forsell et al., 2020). However, when reviewing the literature, it becomes clear that there is no single concept of what is meant by the term. Bourdieu (1980), for example, understood it as one more resource –along with cultural capital and economic capital– to advance within society. In this meaning, social capital is understood as the social networks to which one can have access, and the more people one knows, and the more powerful those people are, the more one can advance.

Other scholars understand social capital as a series of norms, rules, and shared knowledge that regulate interactions between people (Ostrom & Ahn, 2003). Understood in this way, social capital can serve both to create ties with those close to us, such as family, or to extend the social network outwards, towards neighbors, acquaintances, or even strangers with whom one comes across in everyday life (Putnam, 2001; Woolcock, 2001).

To distinguish between the types of relationships that can be created, Putnam (2001) uses the terms *bonding* and *bridging*. Bonding refers to the relationships that are established between members of the close circle, such as family and friends. This is usually a stronger link with an affective dimension (Urteaga, 2013), which creates a sense of belonging and solidarity, although it can also lead to antagonism towards non-members of the group. On the other hand, *bridging* is a

metaphor that conveys the idea of extending the network outward, including neighbors and other members of the community. This link is usually not as strong (Urteaga, 2013), but it is nonetheless important for society.

Social capital is made up of different elements. Claridge (2018) distinguishes three dimensions of social capital: structural, cognitive, and relational. The first of these covers the social structure with its roles, its rules, and its procedures. The cognitive dimension includes what is shared socially: language, beliefs, narratives, behaviors. Finally, the relational dimension encompasses trust and reliability, identity, and identification. Research on the role of sport in the creation and maintenance of social capital could be approached from any of these three dimensions or from their sub-elements. However, for this study, it was decided to take trust as the central axis.

Trust, in fact, is an essential element of social capital (Uslaner 1999); social relationships cannot exist without trust between the parties (Claridge, 2020). Trust helps create communities and support networks; where trust exists, it is easier to find people willing to serve others, and to comply with social and moral norms (Uslaner, 1999). Despite the benefits that trust offers to a society, trust seems to be decreasing around the world, and this phenomenon has been observed since the 1970s (Putnam, 2001; Uslaner, 1999) with the consequent loss for the common good. This trend can be seen in how participation in volunteer projects, membership in clubs of all kinds, and philanthropic acts has decreased. The decline is noticeable especially among the younger population (Putnam, 2001). More recent studies (Gutiérrez-Rentería et al., 2018, for example) confirm the trend.

The level of trust shown by a population in its institutions -government, army, police- and in other people is an indicator of the capacity that country has had to solve its most prevailing social problems. Perhaps for this reason, Latin America registers the lowest trust indices in the world (Latinobarómetro, 2018). In terms of interpersonal trust, that is, trust in other people, in Mexico, only 18% of the population say they trust others. This rate is high for the region, since in Brazil, for example, the rate is 4%.

Social capital and sport

Sport, like any other community activity, contributes to the formation of social capital by opening spaces that foster personal connections and a sense of belonging (Forsell et al., 2020). Erickson (1996, cited in Gemar, 2020) talks about how sport is the common language in the workplace and, therefore, it serves to create ties between people of different social classes and ideologies. Contrary to the belief that avid sports fans are socially maladjusted people, Wann and James (2018) point out that numerous studies have found that those who frequently attend sporting events are also more likely to attend cultural or artistic events, and to volunteer at community events. That is, sports fans tend to participate in activities that generate social capital. Likewise, sporting events can generate social capital among spectators (Rajabi et al., 2019).

Sports practice is a fertile field for the creation of social capital (Pérez Flores & Muñoz Sánchez, 2018). In fact, according to Uslaner (1999), no other recreational activity contributes as much to the generation of social capital as sport. This is because sport fosters self-trust and respect for the rules, as well as teamwork, integration, and solidarity (Duarte Bajaña &

Cáliz 2005).

Uslaner (1999) points out that those who participate in sports activities, either as athletes or as spectators, tend to be more trusting than the rest of the population, although he clarifies that causality cannot be inferred. That is, you cannot know if people are more trusting because they enjoy sports, or if they enjoy sports because they are more trusting. For their part, Wann et al. (2011) have found an important correlation between highly identified fans –those with a deep connection to their club- and social well-being, including greater interpersonal trust.

The objective of this study is to investigate whether there is a connection between soccer fans and stadium attendance, and trust in other people among the Mexican population. The research questions are: What is the relationship between soccer fans and interpersonal trust? And what relationship exists between attendance at soccer matches in a stadium and interpersonal trust?

Based on the literature, it is hypothesized that those who usually attend the stadium to watch live soccer matches are more trusting than those who do not usually attend. Considering that a trusting society is a healthy society (Putnam, 2001), the results can be valuable.

Methodology

The study is quantitative and non-experimental, carried out through a survey prepared with Google Forms and distributed through social networks.

Instrument

The instrument was adapted from the *Integrated questionnaire for the measurement of social capital* by Grootaert et al. (2003), developed for the World Bank to measure social capital in its multiple dimensions and in different contexts. The version translated into Mexican Spanish by Banda and Peñaflor (2017) was used in this study.

Grootaert et al.'s (2003) questionnaire measures six dimensions of social capital. These are: groups and networks; trust and solidarity; collective action and cooperation; information and communication; social cohesion and inclusion; and empowerment and political action. The authors tested and validated their questionnaire in various contexts, including Nigeria and Albania. In the Mexican context, the questionnaire was used and validated by Gutiérrez Rentería et al. (2018) in their study on trust in the media and institutions among the university population.

As mentioned above, the present study was only intended to measure trust, so it included only those questions from the questionnaire. Thus, it consists of 12 questions, two of a demographic type (age and sex), two related to soccer fans (which team do you support and how often do you go to the stadium) and the rest related to trust in others. Those who say they attend the stadium are asked how much they trust other fans of the same team. For those who say they do not attend, the question is how much they trust members of clubs and organizations they attend. Questions about trust are

answered on a Likert scale. The first four questions have five options, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The following four questions are answered out of ten options, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Participants

Two-hundred eighty-four useful responses were obtained. 56% of the respondents are men, 47.3% are women, and one person preferred not to state sex. The ages of the respondents are described in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Participants by age		
Age range	Number	Percentage
18 or less	2	0.07
19-29	98	34.5
30-39	96	33.8
40-49	48	16.9
50-59	29	10.2
60 or more	11	3.9

Regarding soccer fans, 33.1% of the respondents indicated that they were not fans of any Mexican team; the remaining 66.9 said they were fans of one of 20 different teams, including 14 teams that play in the first division, five in the second division, and a women's soccer team. 39.4% of the respondents reported never going to the stadium; 44%, the largest group, say they sometimes attend matches.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using cross tabulation, which allows describing the behavior of social groups based on their attributes (Santesmases Mestre, 2001). To find out if the results are statistically significant, a *t*-test for two related means was used.

Results

Men are slightly more trusting in general than women, though the difference is not significant (see Table 2).

Table 2. General trust by gender

Sex	Mean Trust in others
Male	3
Female	2.98
Total general	2.99

Men are also less likely to believe that one should be wary of others, although women are less likely to believe that most people seek to take advantage of others, and that people only think of themselves. Again, the differences are not statistically significant.

The oldest respondents are the most trusting group, followed by those under 18 years of age, as seen in Table 3 below. The least trusting are people between the ages of 19 and 29, followed by respondents between the ages of 30 and 39.

Table 3. General trust by age	
Age	Mean Trust in others
60 or more	3.36
between 19 and 29	2.95
between 30 and 39	2.87
between 40 and 49	3.10
between 50 and 59	3.17
under 18	3.5
Total general	2.99

People who say they do not support any team are more trusting (3.05 on average) than those who say they are fans (2.97 on average). The difference is not statistically significant ($t = -0.76$ $p = .44$). As for trust in relation to stadium attendance, the trend is not clear, as can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Trust by attendance frequency

Stadium attendance	Average Trust in others
Sometimes	3.1
Never	2.99
All home games and some away games	3.08
All or almost all of my team's home games	3
Multiple games per season	2.38
Total general	2.99

The least trusting people are those who attend several games per season, followed by those who never attend a game. The most trusting are those who attend the stadium sometimes, followed by those who attend all the home games, and some away ones. The differences between the more and less trusting groups are not statistically significant. If we compare those who never go to the stadium (average 2.99) and those who do go, at least sometimes (average 3.00), we see that those who do not go to the stadium are slightly less trusting, but the difference is not statistically significant.

When analyzing the level of trust in specific groups, such as neighbors and other social relationships, it is observed that people who usually attend the stadium are generally more trusting than those who never attend. The exception is the difference between people we meet through clubs and organizations, with an average of 7.23. In general, it is observed that the respondents have very little trust in strangers, fair trust in neighbors, and more trust in co-workers or schoolmates.

Table 5a. Trust in other social groups (not stadium attendees)

Attendance	Neighbors	Strangers	Co-workers	Social
Never	6.05	3.47	7.58	7.23

Table 5b. Trust in other social groups (stadium attendees)

Attendance	Neighbors	Strangers	Co-workers	Fans
Sometimes	6.51	3.76	7.76	5.8
All home games and some away	6.25	3.58	8.08	7.75
All or almost all of my team's home games	6.35	4.14	8.21	6.92
Multiple games per season	6.38	3.04	7.66	6.09
Total general	6.46	3.69	7.81	6.06

Those who indicated that they did attend the stadium were asked how much they trust fans of the same team. We find a

low average, with the exception of those who say they go to all the games and some away games. This may be explained because they see each other with some frequency, or they may even travel together to away games. However, it is necessary to mention that, of the 12 people who selected this option, 10 said they were Atlas fans. When doing the analysis by fans of different teams, it was found that Atlas fans are the ones who trust the fans of the same team the most, and Club Guadalajara fans are the ones who trust the least, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Trust by Team	
Team	Trust in fans of the same team
Yes, Pumas	5.44
yes América	6.00
Yes, Atlas	7.20
Yes, Cruz Azul	6.67
Yes, Guadalajara	5.41
Total general	6.32

The t value is 4.10. The p value is 0.000096. The result is significant at $p < .01$. For this calculation, only the five teams selected by more than 15 respondents were considered.

Conclusions

The results show low interpersonal trust in general, with a rating of $\sim 3/5$. In general, men are more trusting than women, and older people are more trusting than younger people. This replicates what was found by Gutiérrez-Rentería et al. (2018).

However, a statistically higher level of trust was not found between people who regularly attend the stadium to watch a soccer match in Mexico and those who do not. Neither were significant differences found in the levels of trust in those who stated they were fans of a team and those who did not. Non-fans are slightly more trusting, without there being a significant difference. Thus, the hypothesis established before the study cannot be proved.

In this way, the results obtained contradict what was found in other studies (Rajabi, et al., 2019; Wann, et al., 2011). This can be due to several factors. First, the survey does not distinguish between highly identified fans and casual viewers; the former tend to be more trusting than the latter (Wann et al., 2011). Likewise, it does not consider the socio-economic level of the respondents, and other studies show that there is greater trust in people with a higher socio-economic level (Gil de Zúñiga, et al, 2019). Additionally, the small sample size is an important limitation.

Future studies should include socio-economic information, information on the degree of identification with a sports club,

and even an expansion of the questionnaire to include questions that assess the level of solidarity of those surveyed. This information can provide more specific data and contribute to the state of the art.

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