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Applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to Explore Match Attendance Intentions and Behavioral Patterns of V. League Fans

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Abstract

This study applied the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine the determinants of match attendance intentions among professional football fans in the Vietnam Professional Football League (V.League). Specifically, the study investigated the effects of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control on spectators' behavioral intentions to attend football matches. A quantitative research design was adopted, and data collected using a structured questionnaire. The target population consisted of V.League spectators who had attended at least one professional football match during the previous six months. Using purposive sampling, a total of 439 valid questionnaires were obtained for analysis. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the proposed research model and hypotheses. The results indicated that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control positively influenced behavioral intention. Among the three antecedents, perceived behavioral control exerted the strongest effect on behavioral intention (β = 0.290), followed by subjective norm (β = 0.223) and attitude (β = 0.141). The model explained 28.5% of the variance in behavioral intention, demonstrating the applicability of the TPB in explaining football spectators' attendance intentions. This study contributes to the sport marketing literature by extending the application of the TPB to the context of professional football spectatorship in Vietnam. The findings provide practical insights for football clubs and league administrators seeking to enhance spectator attendance through strategies that improve accessibility, strengthen social engagement, and foster positive perceptions of match attendance.

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behavior; Professional Football; Match Attendance Intention; Spectator Behavior; V. League

1. Introduction

Vietnam has experienced substantial growth in football popularity during the past decade, particularly following the success of the national team in regional competitions such as the ASEAN Football Championship and the AFC U-23 Championship. These achievements have contributed to increased public interest in football and strengthened fan engagement across the country. Football is widely recognized as the most popular sport in Vietnam, and professional football leagues have become an important platform for sports consumption and spectator participation. As a result, stadium attendance has increasingly been viewed as a key indicator of league development, fan loyalty, and commercial sustainability (Jeong et al., 2021; Wang, 2024).

Despite the growing popularity of football in Vietnam, empirical studies examining the behavioral intentions and attendance patterns of Vietnamese professional football spectators remain limited. Existing sport management research has predominantly focused on European and North American contexts, while evidence from Southeast Asian football markets is relatively scarce. Consequently, there is a need to investigate the psychological determinants that influence spectators' decisions to attend professional football matches. Understanding these determinants can assist league

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administrators and football clubs in developing effective strategies to enhance fan loyalty, increase stadium attendance, and promote the sustainable development of professional football in Vietnam (Ajzen, 1991; Jeong et al., 2021; Wang, 2024).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was developed by Ajzen (1985) as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). Unlike the Theory of Reasoned Action, TPB incorporates perceived behavioral control in addition to attitude and subjective norm, thereby accounting for situations in which behavior is not entirely under volitional control. According to TPB, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control jointly influence behavioral intention, which subsequently predicts actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Owing to its strong explanatory and predictive power, TPB has been widely applied in studies of consumer behavior, tourism, and sport participation (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

Attitude refers to an individual's overall evaluation of performing a particular behavior and reflects the extent to which engaging in the behavior is perceived as favorable or unfavorable. Positive attitudes are generally associated with stronger behavioral intentions because individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors that they perceive as beneficial, enjoyable, or valuable. Previous studies have demonstrated that attitude is a significant determinant of behavioral intention across various contexts, including sport consumption, event attendance, and leisure participation (Conner & Armitage, 1998; Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). In the context of professional football, spectators who perceive match attendance as enjoyable, exciting, and worthwhile are more likely to develop stronger intentions to attend future matches.

Subjective norm refers to an individual's perception of social expectations regarding whether a particular behavior should be performed. It reflects the influence of important referent groups, such as family members, friends, colleagues, and other significant social networks, on an individual's decision-making process. When individuals perceive that people who are important to them support or encourage a particular behavior, they are more likely to develop stronger intentions to engage in that behavior. Previous research has demonstrated that subjective norm exerts a significant influence on behavioral intention, particularly in contexts where social interaction and group affiliation are important determinants of behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). In professional football settings, subjective norm may influence spectators' intentions to attend matches through encouragement from family members, peer groups, fan communities, and social networks. Therefore, stronger perceived social support for match attendance is expected to increase spectators' attendance intentions.

Perceived behavioral control refers to an individual's perception of the extent to which a behavior can be successfully performed based on the availability of resources, opportunities, and personal capabilities. This perception is formed through control beliefs regarding factors that may facilitate or impede behavioral performance, such as time, financial resources, knowledge, experience, and situational constraints. Individuals who perceive greater control over performing a behavior are generally more likely to develop stronger behavioral intentions and engage in the behavior itself. Numerous studies have identified perceived behavioral control as a significant predictor of both behavioral intention and actual behavior, highlighting its importance in explaining behaviors that are not entirely under volitional control (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Godin & Kok, 1996; McEachan et al., 2011). Furthermore, meta-analytic evidence has demonstrated that perceived behavioral control contributes unique explanatory power beyond attitude and subjective norm in predicting behavioral outcomes (Steinmetz et al., 2016; Hagger et al., 2022). In sport and leisure settings, perceived behavioral control has been found to influence participation decisions through factors such as accessibility, affordability, time availability, and perceived convenience (Jeong et al., 2021). In the context of professional football, perceived behavioral control may reflect spectators' perceptions of ticket affordability, transportation accessibility, scheduling flexibility, and other resources necessary for attending matches. Therefore, greater perceived control is expected to increase spectators' intentions to attend professional football matches.

Behavioral intention refers to an individual's readiness and willingness to perform a particular behavior and is widely recognized as the most immediate antecedent of actual behavior. It reflects the extent to which an individual is motivated to engage in a specific action and the effort that he or she is willing to exert to perform that behavior. Previous research has consistently demonstrated that behavioral intention is a strong predictor of subsequent behavior across a variety of contexts, including consumer behavior, tourism participation, and sport consumption (Sheeran, 2002; McEachan et al., 2011; Bosnjak et al., 2020). According to the TPB, behavioral intention is jointly influenced by attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Individuals who hold favorable attitudes toward a behavior, perceive stronger social support, and believe that they possess sufficient resources and opportunities to perform the behavior are more likely to develop stronger behavioral intentions (McEachan et al., 2011; Hagger et al., 2022). In the context of professional football, spectators with positive evaluations of match attendance, supportive social influences,

and greater perceived control over attendance-related resources are expected to exhibit stronger intentions to attend future matches.

The TPB has been applied in sport marketing to explain spectators' intentions to attend sport events, consume sport products, and engage with teams. Cunningham and Kwon (2003) used the theory to examine consumers' intentions to attend a hockey event and found that attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and previous behavior explained a substantial proportion of attendance intention. Lu (2011) tested the theory among sport spectators in Taiwan and confirmed that behavioral intention mediated the effects of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control on spectator behavior.

In football-specific research, Eddosary et al. (2015) applied the TPB to professional soccer events among Saudi Arabian soccer fans, showing that the model is useful for explaining soccer attendance intention in a non-Western sport market. More recently, Jeong et al. (2021) examined South Korean sport fans' decisions to attend stadium events during the pandemic and showed that the TPB remains relevant for explaining attendance decisions under conditions involving perceived risk and behavioral constraints. Recent studies have also extended spectator behavior research by incorporating perceived value, fan identity, team loyalty, and engagement into sport consumption models.

Although previous studies have applied the TPB to sport event attendance and soccer spectators, several research gaps remain. First, most existing studies have been conducted in Western, East Asian, or Middle Eastern contexts, while empirical evidence from Southeast Asian professional football remains limited. Second, football spectator studies have often focused on general sport events or established leagues, whereas fewer studies have examined developing football markets such as Vietnam. Third, although V.League has recently reported strong spectator attendance in Southeast Asia, with the 2023–2024 season averaging 5,890 spectators per match, limited academic research has examined the psychological factors behind Vietnamese fans' intentions to attend matches. Therefore, applying the TPB to V.League fans can address an important gap by examining how attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control influence match attendance intention and behavioral patterns in Vietnam's professional football context.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the factors influencing professional football fans' match attendance intentions and behavioral patterns based on the TPB. A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to V.League spectators. The questionnaire consisted of measurement items adapted from established scales in the relevant literature. The survey instrument included constructs measuring attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants. This criterion ensured that respondents possessed relevant experience and were able to provide informed evaluations of their match attendance behavior. Data collection was conducted through both on-site distribution at football stadiums and online fan communities. The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis followed a two-step approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated by examining indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was assessed.

2.2. Eligible Respondents

The target population of this study comprised professional football fans of the V.League who attended at least one live match within the preceding six months. This criterion was adopted to ensure that respondents had recent, relevant match-attendance experience and were therefore capable of providing informed evaluations of their attendance intentions and behaviors.

2.3. Instrument

The questionnaire was developed based on the TPB and adapted from previously validated studies in the sport spectator and consumer behavior literature. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section collected respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, educational level, and match attendance frequency. The second section measured the study constructs. Attitude was measured using four items adapted from Conner and Armitage (1998), assessing respondents' overall evaluations of attending professional football matches. Sample items included perceptions of match attendance as enjoyable, valuable, and worthwhile. Subjective norm was measured using four items adapted from Rivis and Sheeran (2003), assessing the extent to which important others, such as family members, friends, and fellow supporters, encouraged or approved of match attendance. Perceived behavioral control

was measured using four items adapted from Armitage and Conner (2001), evaluating respondents' perceived ability, resources, and opportunities to attend professional football matches. These items reflected factors such as time availability, financial affordability, and accessibility. Behavioral intention was measured using four items adapted from Sheeran (2002), assessing respondents' intentions and willingness to attend future professional football matches. In total, the questionnaire contained 16 measurement items across four constructs. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating stronger agreement with the corresponding statements.

2.4. Data Collection

A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit eligible respondents. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to spectators at V.League matches and through online fan communities. A total of 439 valid questionnaires were obtained and included in the final analysis. According to recommendations for structural equation modeling, a sample size exceeding 200 is generally considered adequate for model estimation and hypothesis testing, while larger samples contribute

2.5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics and SmartPLS 4.0. Descriptive statistics were first conducted to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics. Subsequently, PLS-SEM was employed to examine the proposed research model. The measurement model was evaluated for reliability and validity, followed by an assessment of the structural model.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic

A total of 439 valid questionnaires were included in the final analysis. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Regarding gender, the sample consisted of 312 males (71.1%) and 127 females (28.9%). In terms of age, the largest proportion of respondents was between 21 and 30 years old (42.8%), followed by those aged 31–40 years (28.5%), 41–50 years (15.5%), 20 years and below (8.2%), and above 50 years (5.0%). With respect to educational level, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (52.6%), followed by senior high school graduates (24.8%), master's degree holders (15.3%), associate degree holders (5.5%), and doctoral degree holders (1.8%). Regarding match attendance frequency during the previous six months, 173 respondents (39.4%) attended 1–2 matches, 146 respondents (33.3%) attended 3–5 matches, 78 respondents (17.8%) attended 6–10 matches, and 42 respondents (9.5%) attended more than 10 matches. These results indicate that the respondents possessed recent and relevant experience attending professional football matches, supporting their suitability for the purposes of this study.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 439)

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	312	71.1
	Female	127	28.9
Age	≤20 years	36	8.2
	21–30 years	188	42.8
	31–40 years	125	28.5
	41–50 years	68	15.5
	>50 years	22	5.0
Educational Level	High School or Below	109	24.8
	Associate Degree	24	5.5
	Bachelor's Degree	231	52.6
	Master's Degree	67	15.3

	Doctoral Degree	8	1.8
Match Attendance Frequency (Past 6 Months)	1–2 Times	173	39.4
	3–5 Times	146	33.3
	6–10 Times	78	17.8
	More Than 10 Times	42	9.5

3.2. Reliability and Validity

Table 2 presents the results of measurement model evaluation. Factor loadings ranged from 0.601 to 0.787, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60 and indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. Internal consistency reliability was supported, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.586 to 0.741 and composite reliability values ranging from 0.763 to 0.837. Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). The constructs of attitude (AVE = 0.563) and subjective norm (AVE = 0.504) exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, while perceived behavioral control (AVE = 0.495) and behavioral intention (AVE = 0.447) were slightly below the criterion. However, given that all composite reliability values exceeded 0.70, the convergent validity of the measurement model was considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2022). Overall, the results indicate that the measurement model demonstrated adequate reliability and acceptable convergent validity for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 2 The Scale of Reliability and Validity

Variables	**Item**	**Factor loading**	**Cronbach's α**	**C.R.**	**AVE**
Attitude	A1	0.763	0.741	0.837	0.563
	A2	0.787			
	A3	0.782			
	A4	0.662			
Subjective norm	SN5	0.765	0.670	0.802	0.504
	SN6	0.711			
	SN7	0.671			
	SN8	0.688			
Perceived behavioral control	PBC9	0.640	0.658	0.796	0.495
	PBC10	0.758			
	PBC11	0.719			
	PBC12	0.693			
Behavioral intention	BI13	0.660	0.586	0.763	0.447
	BI14	0.697			
	BI15	0.711			
	BI16	0.601			

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, whereby the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct should exceed its correlations with other constructs. As shown in Table 3, the square roots of the AVE values ranged from 0.668 to 0.750 and were consistently greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. Specifically, attitude exhibited the highest square root of AVE (0.750), exceeding its correlations with behavioral intention (0.370), perceived behavioral control (0.458), and subjective norm (0.435). Similarly, the square roots of AVE for behavioral intention (0.668), perceived behavioral control (0.704), and Subjective Norm (0.710) were greater than their respective correlations with other constructs. These results indicate adequate discriminant validity, suggesting that each construct captures a distinct conceptual domain and is empirically

distinguishable from the others. Overall, the findings support the discriminant validity of the measurement model and confirm that the constructs are sufficiently unique for subsequent structural model evaluation.

Table 3 The Scale of Discriminant Validity

	Attitude	**Behavioral intention**	**Perceived behavioral control**	**Subjective norm**
Attitude	0.750			
Behavioral intention	0.370	0.668		
Perceived behavioral control	0.458	0.470	0.704	
Subjective norm	0.435	0.435	0.518	0.710

3.3. Structural Model

The structural model results are presented in Figure 1. The model explained 28.5% of the variance in behavioral intention (R^2 = 0.285), indicating moderate explanatory power. The findings revealed that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control all positively influenced behavioral intention. Among the three antecedents, perceived behavioral control exhibited the strongest effect on behavioral intention (β = 0.290), followed by subjective norm (β = 0.223) and attitude (β = 0.141). These results suggest that spectators' perceptions of available resources and opportunities, together with social influences and favorable evaluations of match attendance, contribute to stronger intentions to attend professional football matches. Overall, the model supports the theoretical proposition of the TPB, demonstrating that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control jointly explain spectators' behavioral intention toward attending professional football matches.

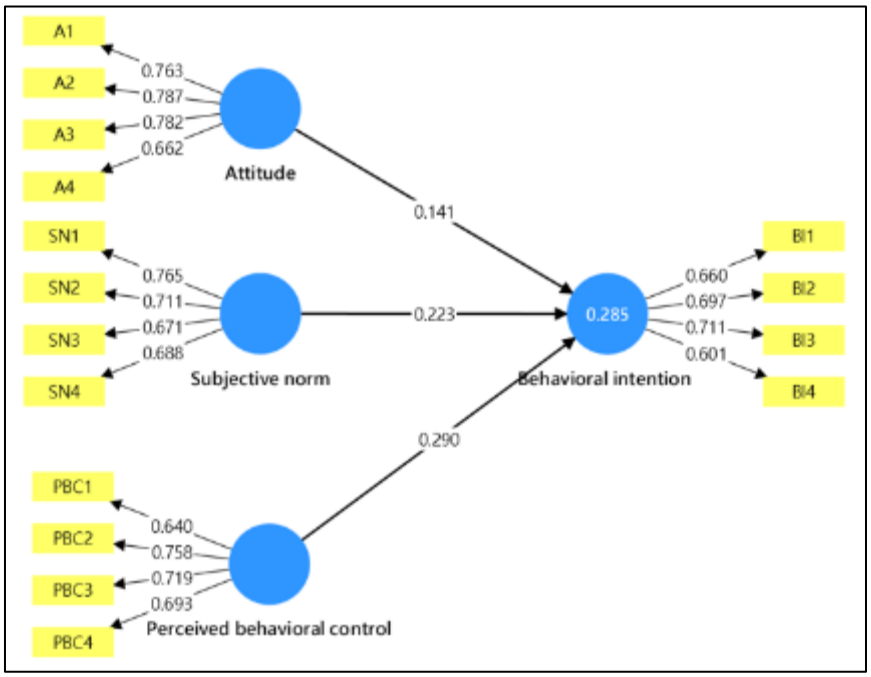

Figure 1 The Results of the Structural Model

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control positively influence professional football fans' behavioral intention to attend V.League matches. These results are consistent with the fundamental propositions of the TPB and provide empirical support for its applicability in the context of professional football spectatorship.

Perceived behavioral control emerged as the strongest predictor of behavioral intention (β = 0.290). This finding suggests that spectators' perceptions of their ability to attend matches, including factors such as ticket affordability, transportation accessibility, and time availability, play a critical role in shaping attendance intentions. The result is consistent with previous studies that identified perceived behavioral control as a significant determinant of sport participation and event attendance behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Hagger et al., 2022). In the context of Vietnamese professional football, practical constraints may be particularly important because attendance decisions often depend on the availability of resources and opportunities rather than solely on personal preferences.

Subjective norm was the second strongest predictor of behavioral intention (β = 0.223), indicating that social influences contribute substantially to spectators' attendance decisions. This finding supports previous research suggesting that recommendations and encouragement from family members, friends, and fan communities can strengthen individuals' intentions to engage in sport-related behaviors (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). Football spectatorship is inherently social in nature, and attendance is often associated with collective experiences and group identity. Consequently, social support and peer influence may play an important role in motivating spectators to attend matches.

Attitude also positively influenced behavioral intention (β = 0.141), although its effect was weaker than those of subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. This finding suggests that spectators who perceive match attendance as enjoyable, entertaining, and worthwhile are more likely to express stronger attendance intentions. The result is consistent with previous sport marketing studies demonstrating that favorable evaluations of sport events contribute to spectator attendance intentions (Cunningham & Kwon, 2003; Jeong et al., 2021). However, the relatively smaller effect of attitude implies that favorable perceptions alone may not be sufficient to drive attendance behavior when practical constraints and social influences are also present.

The model explained 28.5% of the variance in behavioral intention (R^2 = 0.285), indicating a moderate level of explanatory power. Although the TPB successfully explained a meaningful proportion of spectators' attendance intentions, a substantial amount of variance remained unexplained. This finding suggests that additional factors may influence football spectators' behavioral intentions. Previous sport marketing studies have highlighted the importance of team identification, fan loyalty, perceived value, stadium atmosphere, and emotional attachment as predictors of sport consumption behavior (Biscaia et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2024). Future research may therefore extend the TPB by incorporating these sport-specific variables to improve the explanatory power of the model.

Overall, the findings confirm the usefulness of the TPB in explaining V.League spectators' attendance intentions and contribute to the limited literature on professional football spectatorship in Southeast Asia. The study extends previous research by providing empirical evidence from the Vietnamese professional football context, where spectator behavior has received relatively limited academic attention.

4.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the sport marketing and spectator behavior literature in several ways. First, it extends the application of the TPB to the context of professional football spectatorship in Vietnam, a setting that has received limited scholarly attention. Although the TPB has been widely examined in Western and developed sport markets, empirical evidence from Southeast Asian professional football remains scarce. By validating the relationships among attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention, the present study provides additional support for the cross-cultural applicability of the theory.

Second, the findings enhance the understanding of football spectators' attendance intentions by identifying perceived behavioral control as the strongest predictor of behavioral intention. This result suggests that practical considerations may play a more important role than personal evaluations in emerging football markets, thereby extending existing knowledge regarding the determinants of spectator behavior.

Third, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on sport consumption by providing empirical evidence from V.League spectators. The findings offer a foundation for future studies seeking to integrate sport-specific constructs, such as team identification, fan loyalty, stadium atmosphere, and perceived value, with the TPB to develop more comprehensive models of football spectator behavior.

4.2. Practical Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for football clubs, league administrators, and sport marketers. Given that perceived behavioral control was found to be the strongest determinant of attendance intention, football organizations should prioritize reducing barriers associated with match attendance. Strategies such as affordable ticket

pricing, improved transportation accessibility, convenient ticket purchasing systems, and flexible match scheduling may enhance spectators' willingness to attend matches.

The significant influence of subjective norm suggests that social interaction plays an important role in football attendance decisions. Clubs may therefore strengthen fan communities through membership programs, supporter clubs, referral campaigns, and social media engagement initiatives that encourage group participation and collective match attendance.

Furthermore, although attitude exerted a comparatively weaker effect, it remained a significant predictor of behavioral intention. Football clubs should continue to enhance the overall match-day experience by improving stadium facilities, entertainment programs, fan engagement activities, and service quality. Positive spectator experiences may contribute to favorable attitudes toward match attendance and encourage future participation.

At the league level, the results suggest that increasing attendance requires not only improving the quality of competition but also creating a convenient and socially engaging environment that encourages spectators to attend matches regularly. Such efforts may contribute to the long-term sustainability and commercial development of professional football in Vietnam.

4.3. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the study variables. Future studies may adopt longitudinal designs to examine changes in spectators' attendance intentions over time.

Second, purposive sampling was used to recruit respondents who had attended at least one V.League match during the previous six months. Although this approach ensured that participants possessed relevant attendance experience, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all football fans or spectators in other professional sports contexts.

Third, the study focused exclusively on the core constructs of the TPB. While the model explained a meaningful proportion of variance in behavioral intention, other sport-specific factors, such as team identification, fan loyalty, stadium atmosphere, perceived value, and emotional attachment, were not examined. Future research may incorporate these variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of football spectators' attendance behavior.

Finally, the study was conducted within the context of the V.League. Cultural, social, and market characteristics may influence spectators' behavioral intentions; therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to other countries or professional football leagues. Comparative studies across different football markets may provide additional insights into the determinants of spectator attendance behavior.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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