

short communication

Club representation in the national team: Effects on identity fusion and intra-vs intergroup attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Identity fusion describes a psychological state in which personal and social identities are deeply aligned, fostering strong bonds with a group and influencing attitudes and behaviors, including in international contexts. However, how fusion to local (relational) and national (extended) groups interacts remains less understood. We investigated this among Turkish soccer fans ($N = 379$) using an experimental design to test whether local club representation in the national team influences national team fusion and behavioral intentions toward other fans. Fans viewed lineups for an upcoming international match that included either more of their local club's players or their rival's. Participants who saw a lineup dominated by rival players were less fused with the national team. Fusion with the national team was a key predictor of prosocial intentions toward the ingroup (fellow Türkiye fans). Mediation analysis showed that overrepresentation of rival players indirectly reduced ingroup prosociality via national team fusion. Hostility toward the outgroup was significantly associated with fusion to the local team, but not with fusion to the national team, nor with club representation.

In early societies and today's modern world, groups often come together to fight against a common threat. Similar to warfare psychology, athletes from rival teams come together in national team squads to compete for their nations against a 'bigger enemy' (Winegard & Deaner, 2010). In line with this, fans of local clubs are often able to put aside their differences to share in their support of a superordinate identity, the national team (e.g., Marivoet & Silvério, 2019). This can be considered a form of extended identity fusion (Swann et al., 2012), where the sense of identity and loyalty associated with the local team is expanded to include the national team. To date, an important question is yet to be addressed: can fans' fusion to their local team be transferred to the national level when they feel insufficiently represented in the national squad? This question is pertinent to fan communities, marketers, and sports managers globally, as well as having implications for the identity fusion literature. We investigated the situational factors promoting extended fandom, to a national team, in an understudied and highly emotionally charged fan culture: Turkish soccer. Specifically, we experimentally manipulated how relational ingroup representation (the number of players from one's local team in the national lineup) may influence fusion, hostility, and prosociality.

A wealth of psychological research on sports helps to explain fan behavior and culture (see Wann & James, 2018). Of particular societal and managerial importance are understanding and addressing fan violence and fan motivations to support the team. First, fan violence is a common concern among many sports and leagues, particularly soccer (football) (Ostrowsky, 2018; Newson, 2019). Second, the rapid marketization of sports means clubs must understand what motivates fans (e.g., Schellenberg et al., 2021), particularly their desire to financially support the team (Minnich, 2022). Studies examining intra-group and intergroup attitudes and behaviors have become particularly important in this context. As such, the current study explores the in-group and out-group behavioral intentions of national team supporters using an identity fusion framework (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015), through which the intensity of some fan behaviors can be understood as a profound and irrevocable bonding of personal and group identities.

1. Identity fusion

Identity fusion refers to a deep sense of *oneness* with a group, distinct from the more fluid nature of identification (Swann et al., 2009, 2012).

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This intense connection can lead to extreme forms of prosocial behavior, such as a willingness to fight and die for the group, donate to the in-group, or engage in violence to defend the group (Whitehouse, 2018). Unlike Social Identity Theory, which emphasizes situationally driven shifts in group identification and depersonalization (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), fusion theory posits a more stable and visceral alignment between personal and social identities. This distinction highlights the unique contribution of fusion theory in explaining extreme, costly sacrifices that go beyond what traditional social identity processes typically predict, as has been demonstrated among football fans in Brazil and Australia (Bortolini et al., 2018; White et al., 2021). A recent meta-analysis highlighted identity fusion's efficacy in explaining radical behavior when compared to alternative or equivalent constructs (Varmann et al., 2024), supporting earlier cross-cultural work evidencing fusion's relationship with extreme behaviors across five continents (Swann et al., 2014). Identity fusion is also a significant predictor of prosocial ingroup behaviors, including acts of kindness like buying another fan a drink or hugging them (Newson, Buhrmester, & Whitehouse, 2023). How do we encourage fan communities to tap into the more prosocial sides of their fused identities, and how might relational group representation (e.g., to a local club) influence support at extended group (national team) events?

Gómez et al. (2019) provide empirical evidence that identity fusion is susceptible to situational fluctuations, depending on relational and collective group ties. We extend this literature by investigating the relationship between relational and extended fusion in a novel context. As Duke and Crolley (2014) discuss, soccer is an effective tool for imagining a community and serves as a means of confirming national identity when eleven athletes represent their nation against another. Various factors contribute to shaping national team fandom. For instance, Gibbons (2011) demonstrated that English fans' perceptions of whether the national team represents them fluctuate depending on the team's success, suggesting that identity should be seen as flexible and movable rather than constant. National team fandom is also closely connected to local team fandom. Fans' fusion with the national team can be understood as an extended form of fusion (Swann et al., 2012), whereby behaviors associated with local fandom, such as hooliganism, are projected onto the international arena during competitions (Doidge et al., 2019).

National soccer teams often benefit from local team fandom and sometimes deliberately cultivate this potential. For example, the Portuguese Football Federation engaged with ultras supporters from Portugal's top clubs and brought them together during Euro 2004 (Marivoet & Silvério, 2019). National team fandom, similar to regional team identification, is not stable, but rather a performance negotiated through shifting social and emotional contexts (Gerke, 2019). Attitudes of national team supporters have been explained through various mechanisms, including gendered patterns of identification and emotional attachment (Billings et al., 2013; Mehus & Kolstad, 2011). Unlike regional team identification, which may gradually decline over the season (Campell et al., 2004), national team fandom, despite sensitivity to immediate outcomes like wins and losses, is potentially rooted in deeper, more enduring sentiments such as patriotism and nationalism. These core feelings are generally unlikely to be significantly altered by a single sporting event (van Hilvoorde et al., 2010). Nonetheless, sports may also amplify societal cleavages—reinforcing national rivalries, gender disparities, racism, or exclusionary nationalism—even as they foster unity (Knoester & Davis, 2022).

Indeed, national team fandom can unify societies marked by deep social divisions. For instance, in Zimbabwe, as Chiweshe (2017) discusses, national soccer team fandom, at times, transcended embedded ethnic, racial, and regional rivalries, temporarily overriding long-standing tensions between communities. Furthermore, international sports competition consumption is closely associated with national identification and can boost patriotic emotions (Billings et al., 2013), thus potentially elevating fusion through feelings of intense arousal

(Swann et al., 2009, 2012). Equally, other frameworks argue that sport can function as a contested terrain—simultaneously reinforcing power dynamics and serving as a site of resistance—reflecting both unity and conflict in social structures (Hartmann, 1997). Either way, we suggest that the intense emotional arousal experienced during such games (e.g., Gordon et al., 2021), could enhance identity fusion.

We propose that representation of one's local team on the national squad can lead to extended fusion to the national team and that this process depends on the intensity of local fusion (see Fig. 1). It is well-documented that local fans often develop a sense of psychological kinship with their teams (see Newson, Buhrmester, & Whitehouse, 2023). Precisely how these bonds form within football has received little experimental attention, instead relying largely on cross-sectional analyses (Newson et al., 2016). In this context, by analogy, fans might begin to perceive players and other national team supporters as extensions of their own kin network when a member of their 'psychological family' (i. e., a player from their local team) is included in the squad. As such, we tested the following three hypotheses¹:

H₁: Identity fusion to the national team will be stronger when the lineup includes more players from one's favorite local team, and weaker when the lineup is dominated by players from a rival team, compared to lineups without local team players.

H₂: The effect of lineup composition on national team fusion is dependent on (i.e., moderated by) fusion to one's favorite local team. The effect will be stronger among individuals with higher fusion to their favorite local team, such that these participants show greater sensitivity to whether local or rival players are represented in the national lineup.

H₃: Identity fusion to the national team (vs. local team) predicts more prosocial behavioral intentions towards fellow national team (in-group) fans and more hostile behavioral intentions towards opposing national team (outgroup) fans.

H₄: The composition of the national team lineup has both a direct effect on prosocial/hostile behavioral intentions, and indirect (i.e., mediated via fusion to the national team), such that lineups with more local team players promote greater prosociality toward national fans and greater hostility toward rival national fans.

The context of this study is shaped by Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray, two Istanbul-based rival clubs widely regarded as the two largest teams in Türkiye (Turkey). Aggression between rival fans is typically higher than for other matches, illustrated by rival matches in Germany being

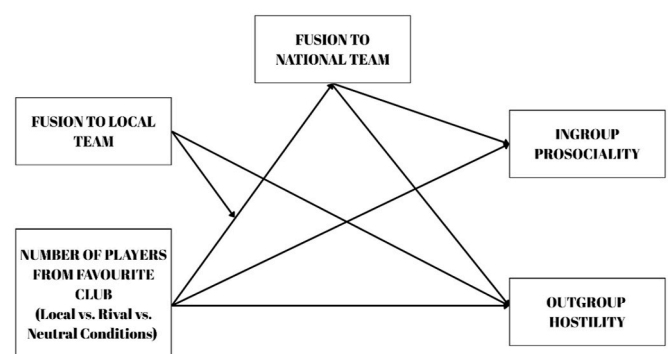


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

¹ The hypotheses presented in this manuscript represent six of the eight preregistered hypotheses and have been reworded and combined for conciseness. Two preregistered hypotheses, focusing on pride as an additional mediator between lineup composition and behavioral intentions, were not supported by the data and are not discussed in the main text to maintain focus on identity fusion. Full details of these hypotheses, including measures and analyses, are provided in the supplementary materials for transparency and completeness.

63 % percent more violent than regular games (Andres et al., 2023). The selected clubs for this study have maintained a fierce rivalry for over a century (e.g., Aytaç & Bilir, 2024). The rivalry between Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray, often referred to as the ‘Intercontinental Derby’, is renowned for its intensity (Keddie, 2018). A notable incident occurred during a 2025 Super Lig match at Rams Park, where Fenerbahçe supporters threw firebrands into the Galatasaray section in the 51st minute, despite the presence of 30,000 police officers, temporarily halting the game (Lianos, 2025). It is estimated that both clubs have a combined total of over 50 million supporters (Mitten, 2025), and, considering the occurrence of criminal incidents linked to this rivalry, the significance of the study’s context becomes even more apparent. Furthermore, the Turkish soccer league has increasingly garnered attention and financial investment, emerging as a major economic force in the country. Currently, in international rankings, Türkiye is placed 27th worldwide by FIFA and ranked 10th among UEFA member associations (FIFA, 2025).

2. Method

We investigated the interplay between soccer fans’ fusion to local and national teams during a national team contest. Specifically, we examined whether the local team’s representation in the national team lineup and fusion with the local team influence fusion to the national team. Furthermore, we compared the extent to which fusion with both local and national teams predicts fans’ intentions to engage in prosocial behaviors towards fellow national team fans and hostile behaviors towards fans of a rival national team in a hypothetical international match between Armenia and Türkiye. Armenia was chosen in the scenario due to the ongoing historical conflict between the two nations, which at times manifests in soccer stadiums (Hrant Dink Foundation, 2023). This study was preregistered via the Open Science Framework (OSF), where hypotheses, materials, data, and analysis scripts are available at https://osf.io/xb62r/?view_only=ddca5c124d7d460e8246f02e1cafb930.

2.1. Sampling

The study was distributed online via Aksaray University’s student portal and social media with the help of a Turkish social media influencer to recruit fans of the Istanbul-based soccer clubs Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray. Participants had to be at least 18 years old to participate and were offered a chance to win a voucher upon completing the survey. The Aksaray University Human Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for the research (protocol number 2023/07–77). Using G*Power, we conducted a priori power analysis for a one-way ANOVA with 3 groups, a medium effect size ($f = 0.25$), $\alpha = .05$, and power = 0.95. The analysis indicated that a total sample size of 252 participants is required, with 84 participants per group.

A total of $N = 899$ participants provided consent and completed the survey using the platform Google Forms. $N = 38$ participants indicated that they were fans of a team other than Fenerbahçe or Galatasaray, and $n = 348$ participants failed in basic attention checks, $n = 139$ failed a manipulation check,² and were removed from analyses. Due to the

nature of the incentive (i.e., prize draw), a considerable portion of participants appeared to have completed the survey without sufficient attention, suggesting random or careless responding. Although the preregistration stated to exclude participants who exceeded the maximum completion time, the platform used did not allow this due to technical limitations. The final sample consisted of $N = 379$ participants, was relatively young ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.70$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 5.46$), majority male (64.6 %, female = 35.4 %), and had mixed educational backgrounds (graduated from university = 42.7 %, graduated from high school = 53.3 %, no high-school degree = 4 %). The sample was fairly balanced between fans of the two target teams and included 42.5 % Fenerbahçe and 57.5 % Galatasaray fans.

2.2. Design & procedure

The study followed a between-subject experimental design. After providing informed consent, participants were first asked to indicate their favorite soccer team. They then completed the Pictorial Identity Fusion Measure (Swann et al., 2009) to assess their level of fusion with their favorite local team (either Fenerbahçe or Galatasaray), by selecting the degree of overlap between two circles that best describes the relationship between themselves and their club (1 = no relationship, 2 = little relationship, 3 = some relationship, 4 = close relationship, 5 = total oneness). Following this, participants were introduced to a scenario about attending an international soccer match featuring Türkiye and Armenia: “Imagine that tomorrow, the Turkish National Team has an official match against the Armenian National Team, and you will be watching this match from the stands. The national team will take the field with the starting eleven shown below. Please examine the lineup and then complete the following statements.”

They were then randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions, showing a fictional starting eleven for the Turkish national soccer team. The composition of the national team’s starting eleven was manipulated as follows; in the local team condition, the lineup included five players from the participant’s favorite local team, no players from the rival team, and six players from other teams. In the local rival team condition, the lineup consisted of five players from the rival of the participant’s favorite local team and none from their favorite team. In the neutral condition, the starting eleven featured no players from either the participant’s favorite team or their rival team. The team allegiances in the starting eleven were visualized, showing each player wearing their respective club’s jersey rather than the national team jersey (see Fig. 2).

Following exposure to the experimental conditions, participants completed a manipulation check by indicating how much, on average, they liked the players shown in their condition (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much). Next, participants completed the Pictorial Identity Fusion Measure, this time assessing their fusion with the Turkish national team. They then completed measures of ingroup prosociality toward Turkish fans and outgroup hostility toward Armenian fans (Newson, White, & Whitehouse, 2023). Participants indicated how likely they would be to engage in a variety of prosocial and hostile behaviors at the aforementioned upcoming fictional game against Armenia directed at fellow Türkiye or Armenia fans respectively (6 items captured prosocial actions, e.g., “emotionally supporting them” or “spending money on them; Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.92$; 7 items captured hostile actions, e.g., “insulting them” or “swearing them”, Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.95$, see full list of items in the supplementary materials). Finally, participants indicated demographic characteristics (age, gender, education).

3. Results

3.1. Manipulation check

A one-way ANOVA, followed by LSD-corrected post-hoc comparisons, was conducted to test whether the manipulation led to different

² The experimental conditions aimed to manipulate participants’ fusion with the national team, by presenting a contemporary lineup of the team with varying numbers of players from participants’ favorite or rival local team. As a manipulation check, we asked participants to rate how much they liked the players in the national team lineup on average (on a Likert scale from 1 = not at all, 7 = very much), assuming greater representation of one’s local team players should increase liking of the lineup overall. Where someone was assigned to the rival team condition and rated the national team lineup as extremely likable (6–7 on the Likert scale) -they were excluded. Conversely, in the favorite team condition, participants who rated the lineup as extremely unlikable (with 1–2 points) - were also excluded.

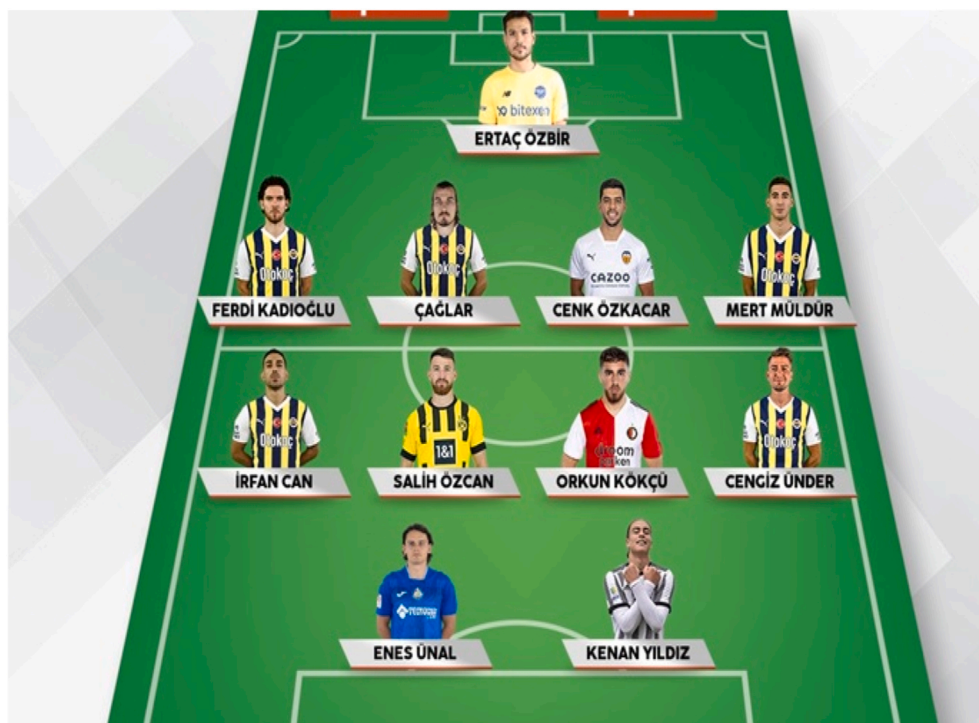


Fig. 2. Visual Presented to Fenerbahçe Fans (See Supplementary Materials for all visuals).

average favorability scores between the conditions. Participants in the local team condition rated the players in the lineup as more likable ($M = 5.02$; $SD = 1.28$) than those in rival team ($M = 3.42$; $SD = 1.20$, $p < .001$) and neutral conditions ($M = 3.65$; $SD = 1.45$, $p < .001$), $F(2, 376) = 50.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.21$, indicating that the manipulation of the lineup composition was successful. The difference between neutral and Rival Team Domination conditions was not statistically significant ($p = .146$).

3.2. Experimental effects

An ANOVA was conducted to test whether the lineup composition influenced levels of fusion to the national team as hypothesized. Results supported H_1 , showing a significant experimental effect on levels of fusion to the national team, $F(2, 376) = 3.20$, $p = .042$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. LSD-corrected post hoc pairwise comparisons showed higher levels of fusion in the local ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.23$, $p = .022$) and neutral condition ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.27$, $p = .045$), compared to the rival team condition ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.40$), which suggests that the overrepresentation of rival team players suppressed fusion to the national team.

The robustness of this finding was tested by conducting an ANCOVA, including sex as a covariate, given its significant bivariate association with national team fusion ($r = -0.24$, $p < .001$). Results showed that the model was statistically significant, $F(3, 375) = 9.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$, but the experimental effect no longer reached the statistical significance threshold, $F(2, 375) = 2.59$, $p = .076$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$. LSD-corrected multiple comparisons showed that the difference between the rival and local team conditions remained statistically significant ($B = -0.33$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .045$), the difference between rival and neutral conditions was not ($B = -0.29$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = .060$). Instead, sex significantly predicted national team fusion $F(1, 375) = 20.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$, with female participants being significantly less fused ($B = 0.63$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$) to the national soccer team.

Next, we used Hayes' (2022) PROCESS macro (Model 1) to test whether the experimental effect on national team fusion was dependent on (i.e., was moderated by) participants' fusion to their local team (H_2). The model was overall significant, $F(5, 373) = 18.59$, $R^2 = 0.20$, $p < .001$, but the interaction terms of the experimental conditions and local

team fusion were not significant (local team condition $\times$ local fusion, $B = -0.18$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .075$; neutral team condition $\times$ local fusion, $B = -0.12$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .218$), thereby providing no support for Hypothesis 2. The interaction block explained less than 1 % of additional variance in the outcome ($\Delta R^2 = 0.0075$, $f^2 \approx 0.009$), below the conventional threshold for a small effect. Thus, the absence of significance likely reflects the negligible size of the interaction rather than insufficient statistical power. Including sex and education as covariates in the model did not change the results.

3.3. Fusion and intergroup intentions

To examine the effects of fusion on behavioral intentions, two linear regression analyses were conducted, predicting ingroup pro-sociality and outgroup hostility, respectively, based on fusion to the Turkish national team and fusion to the local team. Results showed that fusion to the national team ($B = 0.35$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$), but not fusion to the local team ($B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .717$), significantly predicted prosocial intentions towards the ingroup, $F(2, 376) = 13.82$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.07$. In contrast, outgroup hostility toward Armenian national team fans was significantly associated with levels of fusion to the local team ($B = 0.32$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$) and not with national team fusion ($B = 0.01$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .955$), $F(2, 376) = 10.90$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.06$. Both effect patterns held after including demographic factors as covariates and further showed that both age and sex significantly correlated with hostility, such that older and female participants were less hostile (see Table 1).

Lastly, it was tested whether there was an effect of the experimental condition on prosocial behavioral intentions. Hayes PROCESS macro model 4 was used to estimate the potential direct and indirect effects of experimental conditions on ingroup prosociality via national team fusion, controlling for participant sex. The relative direct and total effects of being in the rival team condition (vs. being in the local team condition) were non-significant, but we observed a significant relative indirect effect through national fusion. The relative direct, total and indirect effects contrasting the neutral vs local team condition were all non-significant (see Fig. 3). Overrepresentation of rival team players

Table 1
Linear Regression predicting prosocial and hostile intentions.

	In-group prosociality					Outgroup hostility				
	95 % CI					95 % CI				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	<i>p</i>
Fusion to national team	0.35	0.08	0.203	0.506	<0.001	-0.01	0.08	-0.180	0.152	0.868
Fusion to local team	0.02	0.07	-0.097	0.173	0.583	0.24	0.08	0.093	0.390	0.002
Age	-0.01	0.02	-0.038	0.028	0.762	-0.05	0.02	-0.085	-0.011	0.010
Sex^a	0.13	0.20	-0.255	0.518	0.505	-0.83	0.22	-1.258	-0.408	<0.001
Education	0.10	0.09	-0.085	0.279	0.296	-0.06	0.10	-0.255	0.144	0.585
Model summary	$F(5,373) = 5.82, p < .001, R^2 = 0.07$					$F(5,373) = 8.73, p < .001, R^2 = 0.11$				

Note: a:1 = male, 2 = female.

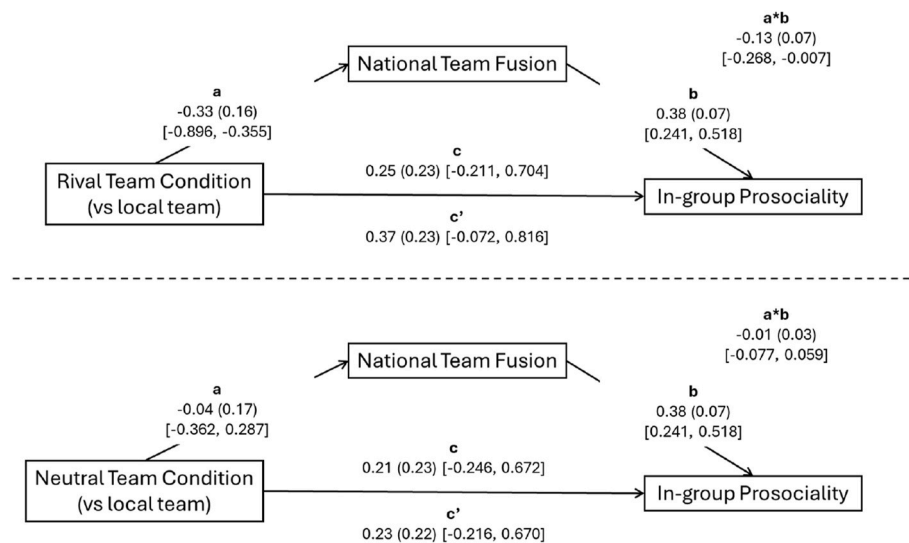


Fig. 3. Mediation diagram; a, b, c and c' path coefficients represent unstandardized regression weights with standard errors (in parentheses) and 95 % confidence intervals [in square brackets]. The c path coefficient represents the relative total effect of the experimental condition on in-group prosociality. The c-prime path coefficient refers to the relative direct effect, and the a*b coefficient refers to the relative indirect effect. Effects of sex (as a covariate) were omitted for visual clarity.

(compared to overrepresentation of local team players) decreased prosocial intentions towards members of a superordinate shared group (fellow national team fans) by lowering a sense of fusion to the national team, providing partial support for H₄.

4. Discussion

We conducted an experimental investigation focusing on the rivalry between Türkiye's two largest soccer clubs, whose competition is notably intense within a country characterized by a developing economy and a predominantly young population. Specifically, we examined how the level of representation of club players in the national team affects fans' identity fusion with the national team, and how this, in turn, shapes their attitudes toward other national team supporters and fans of the rival club. We also evaluated the role of local fusion on outgroup hostility/ingroup prosociality in the national team domain. Overall, we found that overrepresentation of rival team players (compared to overrepresentation of local team players) decreased prosocial intentions towards members of a superordinate shared group (national team) by lowering a sense of fusion to the team. We also found that local team fusion is more strongly related to outgroup hostility, while fusion to the national team predicted prosocial intentions.

This study contributes to the sports and social psychology literatures in three main ways. First, our findings offer an insight into the relationship between relational and extended fusion, i.e., how local group ties are projected onto larger groups, or 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 2020; Swann et al., 2012). Our findings show that extended

fusion (e.g., to a national team) is moderated by the perceived representativeness of a more local or relational group (e.g., a regional club). Representation may also play a critical role in facilitating fusion to relational targets by including representations of self in others. Future research can examine the role of representation as a potential antecedent of fusion, potentially linked to feeling understood (Gómez et al., 2024) or a sense of shared biology (Vázquez et al., 2017).

Second, the visual manipulation employed in this study has not previously been used in the context of social identity theory research. It may have served as a self-verification cue by signaling participants that they were part of the 'right' group/right position. Exposure to such visuals could provide a rapid perceptual confirmation of group membership. As prior research has shown, self-verification can strengthen identity fusion and, in turn, increase pro-group behaviors (Gómez et al., 2024). Visual cues of group composition might operate similarly by triggering fusion, particularly in settings where subgroup rivalry and superordinate identity coexist. Third, the findings challenge Berendt and Ulrich's (2018) suggestion that public statements emphasizing dual identity (both local and national) reduce fan aggression. Our results indicate that when national team fans are highly fused with their local team but not with the national team, their intention to engage in aggressive behavior becomes more likely. This suggests that activating dual identities may not always yield prosocial outcomes, in this case, when fusion with the extended group is weak or absent. From the perspective of the Ingroup Projection Model (Wenzel et al., 2016), we propose shifting the focus in communication from dual identity to inclusive diversity that targets the superordinate category, e.g., 'Turkish

fans' or 'all fans everywhere'. Our findings indicate that emphasizing inclusive diversity within a superordinate category, using visual cues, can strengthen fusion with that category and, in turn, foster positive ingroup behaviors.

Additionally, the study may offer new approaches for sports industry practitioners. Coaches and managers of national teams are frequently faced with the challenge of announcing lineups that will disappoint large numbers of fans whose local clubs are not represented. Our findings suggest that national fusion is a predictor of prosociality in the national context and having fewer players from a fan's local team can cause decreased fusion to the national team, in turn leading to reduced prosociality. As such, managers and coaches should run transparent, communicative squad-announcement campaigns that engage fans in decision-making, preempting potential disengagement. Additionally, we suggest that marketing communications avoid emphasizing dual identity, as Berendt and Urich (2018) suggested, at least in the Turkish context. Media and marketing coverage should highlight a unified national identity. Through an integrated marketing approach (see Manoli & Hodgkinson, 2020), especially during pre-tournament periods, marketing communication efforts and officials' statements should focus on a player's potential contribution to the national team, rather than what they achieved during the season. Talking too much about local team performance in the media could overshadow players' national identity and instead emphasize their local identity, negatively affecting fan prosociality. Finally, the findings illustrated how higher local fusion may cause aggression toward outgroups in the national team context. Therefore, we would encourage carefully considering approaches inviting large proportions of highly bonded fans such as Ultras (e.g., Marivoet & Silvério, 2019), especially during national games with strong rivalries, to support the national team. Instead, federations can use databases to invite fans from a variety of local teams. For example, in Türkiye, ticketing systems collect fans' local team information and data on previously attended games. Data-driven strategies may thus help sports organizers apply a quota system to ensure a balanced representation and help mitigate violence emerging in relation to local team representation in the national team.

In terms of limitations, even though experimental designs can be effective in revealing participants' attitudes and intentions in aggression studies (Bushman, 1998; Bushman & Anderson, 1998), this research could be extended by employing additional methodologies to triangulate the results, such as netnographic research to delve into the main arguments and motivations of fans through secondary data (e.g., on social media). Additionally, as this study relied on a hypothetical scenario, future research should investigate whether the observed patterns hold in real-world settings and actual fan behavior/intention. Although random assignment, manipulation checks, and controlled conditions strengthened our design's internal validity, the use of a convenience sample of Turkish participants limits external validity, particularly given the relatively young age of our sample. Young fans may have had less exposure to their club's historical highs and lows, experiences that can shape the depth of fusion and loyalty (Newson et al., 2016). Generational differences may also shape responses to national team composition: older fans may recall past periods when national team success coincided with heavy representation from a single club (e.g., Galatasaray in the early 2000s), whereas younger fans, without these reference points, may interpret overrepresentation differently.

Triangulating our findings, identity fusion has also been identified as a predictor of antisocial behaviors in other football contexts as diverse as Brazil, Poland, the UK, Indonesia, and Australia (Newson et al., 2018; Kossakowski & Besta, 2018; Newson, Buhrmester, & Whitehouse, 2023; Newson et al., 2024). Türkiye is a patriarchal, high-power distance country, with cultural values that emphasize competitiveness, achievement, and loyalty, all of which are likely to reinforce fan cohesion (Eroglu & Picak, 2011). Consistent with our findings, national team fusion was high, yet, unlike local club fusion, it did not predict hostility, suggesting that national-level fusion may be more inclusive and

symbolic. Cultural context may, however, shape these effects differently elsewhere.

Of particular importance for future research, we encourage further exploration of the path from relational to extended fusion via ingroup representation. In the present study, the relational group was only relational in contrast to the vastness and anonymity of national team identity – the local soccer clubs under study still have fanbases into the millions, meaning that truly relational networks are not possible. Nonetheless, the club identity is characterized by local geographies, traditions, and rituals at a more intimate scale than national team identities. We would propose working with smaller units of fan groups, such as those who frequently sit in stands together or hardcore soccer groups who have tighter, smaller networks, to further unpack how relational ties are projected onto increasingly larger identities.

Soccer fandom has been a well-researched area for identity fusion theory, a population that this study has benefited from for its intense and long-lasting rivalries, fierce loyalty, and superordinate identities. We hope that the results will be helpful to researchers in psychology more generally to further understand the relationships between complex and layered identities, ranging from those fundamentally relational to extended, national projections, and ultimately even extended global identities.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Martha Newson: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Muhammed Bilgehan Aytaç:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Linus Peitz:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Software, Methodology, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.103001>.

Data availability

Data is available at https://osf.io/xb62r/?view_only=ddca5c124d7d460e8246f02e1cafb930.

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