

Coach Travel and Fan Perceptions: Ultras vs Regular Football Supporters**Sandrine GAYMARD*****Angers Research Laboratory for Systems Engineering (UR 7315), University of
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Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered to 135 football supporters, including 76 ultras and 59 regular fans. The study combines a characterisation questionnaire with a calling-into-question test in order to identify the central and peripheral elements structuring supporters' representations. Overall, coach travel is primarily associated with positive meanings related to collective identity, solidarity, and shared experience.

However, differences emerge between ultras and regular supporters. Ultras tend to conceptualise coach travel as a strong identity-based and festive practice, where the journey itself is meaningful reinforcing group cohesion beyond the match itself. In contrast, regular fans primarily view coach travel as a practical means of attending matches, with a weaker symbolic dimension. These differences reflect distinct forms of commitment and highlight the heterogeneity of supporter subcultures in football.

Keywords: Coach Travel; Football Supporters; Ultras; Regular Fans; Fan Perceptions; Supporter Mobility

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1. Introduction

Sports provide a dynamic environment for observing various social phenomena. Beauchamp and Eys (2007) note that sports serve as a unique platform for studying group dynamics and social psychology. This context allows for an in-depth analysis of group behaviour, social interactions, and identity processes (Bandyopadhyay, 2024). Research on supporter culture can examine several aspects related to sports fans, including the mobility and travel of supporters.

Our focus here is on the social representations (SR) of coach travel among football supporters, encompassing both regular fans and ultras. This study seeks to understand supporter mindsets and behaviour during collective travel. Such trips can involve tensions with law enforcement or conflicts with rival supporters (Rookwood & Spaaij, 2017; Sirois-Moumni, 2018), which often leads public authorities to ban supporter travel (Girard, 2023). By examining the social representations of these journeys, we can identify key factors influencing supporter behaviour and highlight the associated safety challenges.

Developed by Moscovici in 1961, social representations (SRs) refer to ‘a set of concepts, statements, and explanations derived from daily life during interpersonal communications’ (Moscovici, 1981, p. 181). In other

words, it reflects a collective interpretation of the world that guides the actions and interactions of group members, while also contributing to the development of shared norms and values within society. This concept provides an essential framework for understanding how individuals and groups construct and share their perceptions of the world (Bangerten, 1995; Batel & Castro, 2009; Farr, 1987 ; Gaymard, 2021). The study of social representations is inextricably linked to practices, and when examining an object of social representation, its appropriation by the group occurs through these practices (Abric, 1994; Flament & Rouquette, 2003). A major approach to understanding the structure of social representations (SR) is the central-core approach, developed by Abric (1976) and Flament (1987). This perspective posits that each SR consists of a central core and a peripheral zone (Abric, 1993). The central core corresponds to the area where elements are defined as being non-negotiable or absolute, while the periphery is close to individual practices. The central elements are seen as consensual (shared by the group) and resistant to change. Thus, the core consists of a limited number of beliefs (Guimelli, 1998). The peripheral elements, on the other hand, have greater flexibility and allow the representation ‘to anchor itself in the reality of the moment’ (Guimelli, 1998, p. 209). Additionally, the peripheral

elements are conditional and serve as prescribers of behaviour (Flament, 1994 ; Gaymard, 2014).

Football is the most popular team sport in the world (Dvorak et al., 2004). The football stadium can be considered ‘a social space where what happens in society is replayed’ (own translation, Defrance, 1995 cited in Gaymard & Joly, 2013, p. 267). Moreover, the ultra phenomenon is more entrenched in football than in any other sport in France (Bodin, 2001). This context makes football one of the sports where travelling to support one’s team away from home is most common. Supporting a team involves providing unwavering support to athletes or clubs. Bodin (1999, cited in Bernache-Assollant, 2010) describes being an ultra as ‘absolute supporterism,’ characterised by active and unconditional devotion to a club. These dedicated fans often travel across France several times a year, or even every two weeks, to attend matches, which is the focus of our study. Joining a hardcore fan group immerses individuals in the group’s norms, rituals, and values, shaping their social identity (Bandyopadhyay, 2024; Hourcade, 2004; Su et al., 2025). This engagement reinforces their sense of belonging and enhances their distinction from others, particularly in contrast to other supporters, such as regular fans. As Hourcade (2004) observes, being part of an ultra group is a lifestyle. Beyond match days,

members invest time in preparing tifos, managing resources, and organising trips, making their ultra identity a daily expression of their commitment.

‘Supporter travel’ refers to groups of individuals traveling from their city to attend their team’s away matches. This type of travel often involves crowd dynamics (Ingram, 1985; Van Trimpont & Etolo, 2023) and can lead to depersonalization, where individuals identify more as group members than as individuals (Koch & Berron, 2021). According to self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), this cognitive shift fosters conformity and a heightened sense of similarity among group members while distinguishing them from outsiders. This phenomenon can also be viewed as deindividuation, where group anonymity diminishes self-control and encourages deviant behaviours (Vilanova et al., 2017). In such contexts, mutual influence among group members can create an environment conducive to accidents and incidents. Additionally, these coach trips, usually conducted in a festive atmosphere, often involve alcohol and cannabis consumption (Lestrelin et al., 2013; X, personal communication, 17 December 2024¹), which can further increase risky

¹ See method part

behaviours. Consequently, authorities frequently ban these trips to avoid managing the associated risks (Benages, 2023).

Supporters' coach trips often raise safety concerns, including tensions with law enforcement and conflicts with rival groups (Rookwood & Spaaij, 2017; Sirois-Moumni, 2018). This has led public authorities to impose repressive measures, ranging from restricting rival supporters on match days to outright travel bans that prevent away fans from attending matches. French authorities have adopted a zero-tolerance policy, favouring collective sanctions, such as travel bans, over individual measures like stadium bans (Hourcade, 2020). During the 2021-2022 French football season, 156 prefectural orders and 28 ministerial orders were issued to regulate or prohibit supporter travel (Girard, 2023). Many supporters criticise these measures as disproportionate, arguing that they penalise all fans for the behaviour of a minority (Pearson, 2005). These restrictions are linked to numerous incidents that often occur during travel rather than at the stadiums (Frosdick & Newton, 2006, cited in Rookwood & Spaaij, 2017). These trips can be associated with issues such as violence or property damage (Hourcade, 2020), but we do not know what they actually represent for the supporters and the meaning they attribute to these trips.

Ultras tend to avoid heavily monitored areas to evade sanctions. Common incidents include bus attacks by local supporters, which can lead to violent confrontations. Law enforcement plays a vital role in these situations, as police escorts accompany ultra groups to ensure safety (Rookwood & Spaaij, 2017). In some instances, inadequate measures hinder intervention, while in others, excessive police presence in low-tension areas can create unnecessary anxiety and provoke confrontations both among ultras and with law enforcement.

While there are a number of studies on supporter culture, supporters' coach trips remain, to this day, unexamined as an object of social representation. How are these trips appropriated and experienced by the individuals concerned, according to their identity (regular or ultra)? This is the issue addressed in this study.

The following hypotheses are put forward:

H1: The social representation of supporter travel is primarily composed of words with positive connotations.

H2: The social representation of supporter travel is linked to notions of celebration and supporter culture.

H3: Ultras are more likely to associate the social representation of travel with incidents (e.g. violence).

H4: Regular fans are more likely to associate travel with control (e.g. law enforcement and bans).

2. Method

2.1. Ethical Statement

Participants were made aware of the study's objectives, assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and gave their free and informed consent before taking part.

2.2. Exploratory Phase

The exploratory phase was based on:

-A free association test (Vergès, 1992) conducted with 11 supporters, including 6 ultras and 5 regular fans.

This tool is frequently used to study spontaneous representation (e.g. Gaymard & Joly, 2013). The prompt used is: 'When you are told "coach travel" (for matches), what are the words or expressions that come to mind?' The main objective was to confirm that supporter travel could be considered an object of social representation for this population. The results highlighted recurring words such as 'fervour,' 'coach,' 'alcohol,' 'atmosphere,' and 'violence,' confirming a symbolic, practical, and social dimension of this object.

-A semi-structured interview conducted with the co-chair of an ultra group, who is also responsible for the group's 'travel commission' (referred to here as X).

This interview allowed us to explore essential aspects of our study in greater depth. The interviewee illuminated key themes, such as the role of celebration, the prominence of violence during trips, and the guidelines followed by members in case of incidents. They explained the process of a supporters' trip, including all the organisation it entails. We were also able to discuss the differences between members of ultra groups and regular fans, particularly regarding attitudes and practices during trips. According to the interviewee, it is necessary to differentiate between supporters affiliated with an ultra group and those who are not affiliated with such a group (X, personal communication, 17 December 2024). The former pay a subscription fee and actively participate in the organisation of trips (logistics) and all aspects related to it (preparation of activities, purchasing alcohol, etc.). Moreover, integration into an ultra group engages the individual in a process of learning the norms, rituals, and values specific to the collective, thereby contributing to the construction of their social identity (Bandyopadhyay, 2024; Hourcade, 2004). The second category of supporters travels to a match without formal affiliation

to a group, although they share the same passion. This group belonging is more episodic and occasional, limited to the duration of the trip (X, personal communication, 17 December 2024). This results in notable differences in practices during the trip (X, personal communication, 17 December 2024).

In addition to the elements derived from the free associations, this interview provided valuable support in constructing our tools. It is also worth noting that, during this interview, a free association was conducted with the co-chair to enrich the data from our exploratory phase.

2.3. Study Phase

2.3.1. Sample

Supporters must have made at least one trip to see their team play during the 2023-2024 and/or 2024-2025 seasons. We only survey individuals who are legal adults (18 years and older), but there is no upper age limit. In fact, age is not a focal point of our study. Our sample is divided into two groups: supporters affiliated with an ultra group and regular fans.

Our sample consists of 145 respondents, of which 135 are usable. Ten individuals who were minors could only complete the sociodemographic section and were therefore excluded from the analyses. Among the 135 supporters meeting the study's criteria, 76 are members

of an ultra group and 59 are regular fans. Among the respondents, 88.15% are male (N=119) and 11.85% are female (N=16). This imbalance in our sample reflects the predominantly male nature of football support, where ultra groups comprise over 80% men (Hourcade, 2004). To best represent this population, we did not limit ourselves to supporters of a single club. Our respondents support various clubs across France.

2.3.2. Data Collection

To reach this specific population and maximise the number of respondents, we employed various strategies. Firstly, we distributed the questionnaire to groups on social media (Twitter and Discord) composed of supporters undertaking away trips. To gain access to these groups and obtain permission to circulate the questionnaire, we explained the framework of our study. We targeted different types of groups: some identifying as ultras, while others gathered supporters making away trips, regardless of whether they were ultras or not. This method allowed us to collect approximately 120 responses.

We also conducted data collection during a football match (French top division) by creating a QR code that enabled participants to access the questionnaire directly on their phones. On that day, we targeted the supporters of the away team, who had travelled that day. We obtained 25

additional responses, mostly from individuals not affiliated with an ultra group. Indeed, the use of phones during matches by ultras is frowned upon; the leaders of these groups request that phones not be taken out in order to remain focused on supporting their team (X, personal communication, 17 December 2024). The data collection took place over a period of about two months, from 22 February to 13 April 2025.

2.3.3. Tools

The tool we used to survey our sample of football supporters is a questionnaire created on Google Forms. It consists of 17 questions divided into three parts: one section focused on sociodemographic data, one section containing a characterisation questionnaire (Gaymard & Joly, 2013; Vergès, 2001), and one section including a calling-into-question test (Moliner, 1988). These tools are reference tools in the structural approach to social representations (Abric, 1993, 2005; Flament & Rouquette, 2003; Guimelli 1993, 1998 ; Gaymard 2021).

-The sociodemographic section collects data on gender, legal adulthood, membership in an ultra group or regular fan groups, and the number of trips made by coach to support one's team.

-The characterisation questionnaire (Vergès, 2001) comprises nine items selected from the literature and the exploratory phase: fervour, law

enforcement, celebration, violence, atmosphere, freedom, alcohol, bans, and commitment. Gaymard and Joly (2013) explained the relevance of this tool: ‘...the property of a central element is to be more characteristic of the object...’ (own translation, p. 273). This is a block choice methodology (Abric, 1994) with a constrained order. Firstly, each participant was required to choose the three most characteristic elements of supporters’ coach travel and, secondly, from the remaining items, the three least characteristic ones; there will be three unselected items remaining. Thus, this questionnaire is categorised as a ‘rectangular Q-sort.’ This contrasts with the classical Q-sort, which aims to align itself with a Gaussian distribution. We are not concerned here with items that have a distribution with a mode in a central category; rather, we focus on those that exhibit a highly asymmetrical distribution, prioritising the dimensions of ‘characteristic’ or ‘non-characteristic’ (Vergès, 2001).

-The calling-into-question test, proposed by Moliner (1988), allows the centrality of the elements to be tested. As central elements are necessary for recognising the object, the elements of the representation are examined according to this principle. If respondents do not recognise the object when an element is questioned, it means that it is a central element; if respondents still recognise the object after it has been questioned, it

indicates that it is a peripheral element. The items of the characterisation questionnaire have been called into question following this formulation based on the principle of negation: ‘Can it be said of a travel without fervour that it is a coach travel for football supporters?’ Please respond on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means it is not a football supporters’ trip, 5 means it is a football supporters’ trip, and the intermediate levels refer to ‘it’s possible.’

2.3.4. Analysis strategies

To analyse the results of the characterisation questionnaire, we adopted the commonly used transcoding method for the calculation of the weighted average (Gaymard & Joly, 2013) : 1 for the least characteristic items, 2 for the unselected items, and 3 for the most characteristic items. The distribution of the items helps to identify the consensual items; those that show a ‘J’ distribution are central elements (Flament & Rouquette, 2003). Allport mentioned in 1934 the links between the J-curve hypothesis and conformity behaviour.

We compared the characterisation means of each group with the Kendall graph which allows for the statistical description of the degree of concordance between two rankings (Flament, 1994). The principle is to align the means vertically from highest to lowest for both groups and to

connect the same items. This way, we can visualise the concordances and differences in means between ultras and regular fans.

For the calling-into-question test, a threshold of 75% of refutations (as a percentage) was used to determine the centrality of the element (Flament & Rouquette, 2003; Gaymard et al., 2019). A rejection rate of 75% or higher (it is not a coach trip for football supporters) indicates that respondents do not recognise the object of study if the stated characteristic (fervour, alcohol, celebration, etc.) is absent. We also used a Mann-Whitney test to visualise the mean ranks and compare the responses of the two groups.

3. Results

3.1. Away Trips of Supporters

Among the 135 participants, 43.7% (N=55) indicated that they had made 1 to 3 away trips to support their team over the past two seasons. A further 24.4% (N=33) reported undertaking between 4 and 6 trips, 11.1% (N=15) between 7 and 9, and 23.7% (N=32) had made 10 trips or more. When we separate the two sub-groups, we observe that, of the 55 respondents stating they had made 1 to 3 trips, 36 are non-affiliated supporters, which represents 65%. Conversely, 72% of those individuals who made 10 trips or more are members of an ultra group (N=23).

On average, an ultra makes 6.5 trips to support their team over two seasons, while a non-member supporter makes 4.29 trips. When we compare these averages, the results show a significant difference between the two groups ($U=3066.5$, $p < .001^{***}$), with members of an ultra group undertaking significantly more trips on average than non-members.

3.2. Results of the characterisation questionnaire

The RS of supporters' away trips within the entire population

The analysis of the responses for each item and the characterisation average allows us to identify the three items selected as the most characteristic of supporters' travel: fervour, atmosphere, and celebration, as well as the three least characteristic of the object: violence, freedom, and bans (Table 1). We observe that the first three items exhibit a J-shaped distribution, ranging from 1 (the least characteristic) to 3 (the most characteristic).

Table 1 : Distribution of responses (in absolute values) to the characterisation questionnaire and mean characterisation (from most to least characteristic) within the entire population.

Items	1.The least characteristic	2.Unselected items	3.The most characteristic	Mean
Fervour	3	21	111	2,8
Atmosphere	3	32	100	2,72
Celebration	21	56	58	2,27
Commitment	27	67	41	2,1
Law enforcement	55	54	26	1,79
Alcohol	49	67	19	1,78
Bans	60	49	26	1,75
Freedom	78	37	20	1,57
Violence	109	22	4	1,22

Comparison of characterisation between ultras and regular fans

Starting from the distributions of responses and the characterisation average for each group (details in Appendices 1 and 2), we used the Kendall diagram.

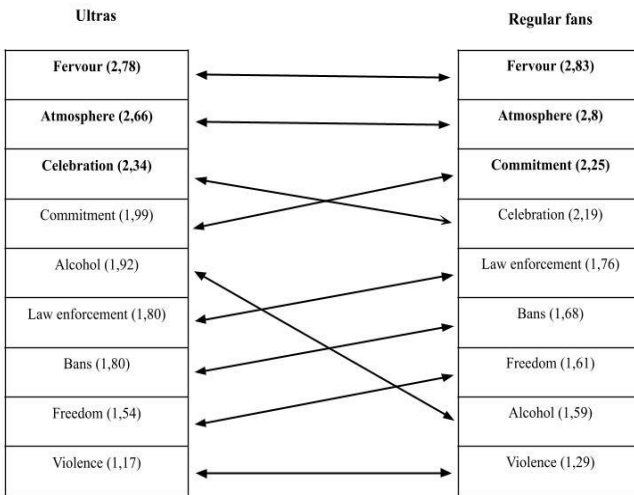


Figure 1 : Kendall diagram : the supporters' away trips for ultras and regular fans.

Both groups identified fervour and atmosphere as the two most characteristic items. However, for the ultras, celebration is the third most characteristic element, whereas for regular fans, it is commitment. The distribution of items (Appendices 1 and 2) shows that the items fervour, atmosphere, and celebration appear central (J-shaped curves) among the

ultras. However, among regular fans, only the items fervour and atmosphere appear central to the representation. The item alcohol shows the greatest difference in means.

3.3. Results of the calling-into-question test.

The results of the calling-into-question test show that rejection rates of 75% or higher pertain to the items: fervour, atmosphere, and celebration (Table 2). Furthermore, a difference in centrality between the two groups is noted. The item commitment appears to be central, but only among regular fans (81%). This result in the composition of the central core indicates that the social representations for the two groups are not the same. Analyses of the Mann-Whitney test show a significantly different rank distribution between the two groups for the items fervour and alcohol (Tables 3 and 4), suggesting a variation in the distribution of values.

Table 2: Results to the calling-into-question test: percentages of refutations (It is not...).

	Groups	It is not	It is possible	It is
"Can it be said of a travel without fervour that it is a coach travel for football supporters.?"	Ultras (U) N=76	90% (68)	1% (1)	9% (7)
	Regular Fans (RF) N=59	78% (46)	12% (7)	10% (6)
"...without	U	88% (67)	7% (5)	5% (4)

atmosphere ..."? RF	86% (51)	7% (4)	7% (4)
"...without U	86% (65)	10% (8)	4% (3)
celebration"? RF	75% (44)	15% (9)	10% (6)
"...without U	67% (51)	21% (16)	12% (9)
commitment"? RF	81% (48)	15% (9)	4% (2)
"...without U	67% (51)	18% (14)	15% (11)
freedom"? RF	56% (33)	32% (19)	12% (7)
"...without U	49% (37)	31% (24)	20% (15)
alcohol..."? RF	30% (18)	30% (18)	39% (23)
"...without U	38% (29)	12% (9)	50% (38)
bans..."? RF	22% (13)	27% (16)	51% (30)
"...without law U	29% (22)	22% (17)	49% (37)
enforcement..."? RF	12% (7)	52% (31)	36% (21)
"...without U	18% (14)	20% (15)	62% (47)
violence..."? RF	15% (9)	14% (8)	71% (42)

Table 3 : Mann-Whitney Test : Ranks

	Groups	N	Mean ranks	Sum of ranks
Fervour	1 U	76	62,42	4744,00
	2 RF	59	74,16	4301,00
Atmosphere	1	76	66,29	5038,00
	2	59	69,09	4007,00
Celebration	1	76	67,84	5155,50
	2	59	67,06	3889,50
Commitment	1	76	71,19	5410,50
	2	59	62,66	3634,50
Freedom	1	76	63,33	4813,00
	2	59	72,97	4232,00
Alcohol	1	76	61,01	4637,00
	2	59	76,00	4408,00
Bans	1	76	64,47	4900,00
	2	59	71,47	4145,00
Law enforcement	1	76	68,05	5171,50
	1	59	66,78	3873,50
Violence	1	76	64,13	4874,00
	2	59	71,91	4171,00

Table 4 : Test

Items	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymptotic significance (two-tailed)
Fervour	1818,000	4744,000	-2,045	,041^a
Atmosphere	2112,000	5038,000	-,542	,588
Celebration	2178,500	3889,500	-,129	,897
Commitment	1923,500	3634,500	-1,377	,168
Freedom	1923,500	3634,500	-1,377	,168
Alcohol	1711,000	4637,000	-2,274	,023^a
Bans	1974,000	4900,000	-1,090	,276
Law enforcement	2162,500	3873,500	-,194	,846
Violence	1948,000	4874,000	-1,230	,219

Note. ^a Significant at the .05 level

4. Discussion

The emergence of football in England in the nineteenth century can be seen in the public schools that were shaping future elites (Harvey, 2016). Football is generally regarded as the most popular sport in the world (Dvorak et al., 2004; Lindner & Hawkins, 2012). With billions of fans across the globe, it is played in numerous countries and enjoys extensive media coverage, particularly during major competitions like the FIFA World Cup. Its universal appeal lies in its simplicity, accessibility, and the passion it generates (Bromberger, 2004; Cleland, 2015; Croci & Ammirante, 1999; Foer, 2004). A recent study shows that it is a source of happiness for both men and women among the Amerindians of French

Guiana (Gaymard et al., 2025). However, today, supporters' travel is a topic of societal debate and faces numerous restrictions (Girard, 2023; Soldano, 2020, 2022) arising from phenomena of violence (Aguirre, 2008; Lewis, 2007; Rookwood & Spaaij, 2017). On the other hand, these journeys are festive events that bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds (X, personal communication, 17 December 2024), united by a shared passion and fostering a form of community solidarity (Parks, 2002, cited in Soldano 2022, p. 44). In the context of this study, we investigated whether football supporters' travel by coach constitutes an object of social representations for these supporters. The meaning of this appropriation, based on their group affiliations and practices, can contribute to reflections on supporters' behaviours.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that the SR is composed of words with positive connotations, while Hypothesis 2 posits that this SR is linked to notions of celebration and supporter culture. Both hypotheses are validated. According to the characterisation questionnaire and the J-shaped curves, the items fervour, atmosphere, and celebration are central for the ultras, whereas for regular fans, we identify the items fervour and atmosphere. With the calling-into-question test, the central items remain the same for the ultras, while four items are identified for regular fans: fervour,

atmosphere, celebration, and commitment ; thus, we observe greater consistency in the results with the ultras group. It is important to note that the item freedom, a word with a positive connotation, is the second least characteristic word regarding our social object. This trend could suggest that the restrictions surrounding supporters' travel lead respondents not to consider this item as characteristic; this term is often echoed in chants during journeys to matches, much like the well-known slogan: 'Freedom for the ultras' (own translation, X, personal communication, 17 December 2024).

Hypotheses 3 and 4 stipulated that ultras would be more likely to associate the SR with violence, while regular fans would be more likely to associate it with restrictions. Upon reviewing the results, we find that these hypotheses are not validated. The fact that violence is perceived as the least characteristic item is notable, given its significance in the world of football (Giulianotti et al., 1994; Sirois-Moumni, 2018). It is important to remember that the issue of violence is often associated to the identity of another group, that of the hooligans (Armstrong & Harris, 1991; Dunning et al., 1982; Frosdick, 2006; Ingram, 1985). While ultras are known for their elaborate displays and passionate support, hooligans are directly

involved in activities that focus on violence, clashes with rival supporters, and confrontations with law enforcement².

The comparison conducted between our two groups revealed certain elements that had not been anticipated in our hypotheses. These results emerge from the calling- into-question test, which allowed for the collection of rates of refutation and the Mann-Whitney rank comparison test.

Although alcohol does not appear to be a central element of supporters' representations, as refutation rates remain below the 75% threshold (49% among ultras and 30% among regular fans), the Mann-Whitney U test nevertheless indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Ultras are therefore more likely than regular fans to consider that a coach trip for football supporters is not complete without alcohol. For many ultras, the consumption of alcohol is an integral part of the trip, which is not the case for regular fans. This result aligns with the literature (Lestrelin et al., 2013; Pearson, 2012). For the item fervour, the percentage of refutations is higher among ultras (90%) than among regular fans (78%), indicating that more ultras disagreed with the statement in the Calling-into-question Test. Despite this, the item is

² <https://theshowvdsports.com/ultras-vs-hooligans/>

considered central for both groups and remains the most characteristic. The Mann–Whitney U test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, and the characterization questionnaire showed a higher score for the regular fans group (Kendall diagram). These results may appear contradictory; however, the divergence is relatively minor, as it would have been more problematic if the calling-into-question test had suggested that fervour was a peripheral element while the characterisation questionnaire identified it as the most characteristic one.

These two sub-groups experience travel in different ways, as their objectives are distinct. For ultras, the festive dimension is a fundamental part of the journey; the match becomes a ‘pretext for partying,’ often accompanied by significant consumption of alcohol and cannabis (X, personal communication, 17 December 2024). In fact, alcohol serves as an identity marker within supporter groups (Redhead, 2013). Regular fans, on the other hand, undertake this journey primarily to attend the match, with the celebratory aspect playing a less significant role. The identity function of travel is much more pronounced among members of an ultra group than among regular fans. For the former, the journey serves as a strong vector of identity expression, allowing them to ‘represent their city, their club, their group’ (own translation, X, personal communication,

17 December 2024). Among regular fans, this identity dimension is also present, albeit in a more subdued manner and mainly centred on the team they support, rather than the collective of supporters.

This distinction is also evident demographically. Active members of ultra groups are primarily young adults aged 18 to 25 (Hourcade, 2004). In contrast, regular fans undertaking trips are often older and may include families with children (X, personal communication, 17 December 2024). The item commitment, for which the rate of refutation is higher among regular fans, is unexpected, even paradoxical at first glance. It can be interpreted to mean that ultras do not need to justify their commitment, both physically and mentally, given their organisation (creating tifos, etc.), stronger supporter identity, and more frequent travel. Their ultra identity, expressed on a daily basis, reflects their commitment (Hourcade, 2014). This result allows us to conclude that social representation differs between the two groups because their practices differ (Flament, 1994).

Although this study has deepened our understanding of the social representation of supporter travel, it has certain limitations. Firstly, we decided not to collect the ages of the participants; we merely ensured that they were of legal age. Considering age and even family situation would have allowed us to verify certain aspects of the literature regarding the

age difference between ultras, a population of young adults (Hourcade, 2004), and regular fans, a more family-oriented group (X, personal communication, 17 December 2024). Additionally, we chose not to ask about the supported club. This information would have enabled us to compare different regions of France and observe any potential variations in the social representations of travel. However, this would have required a larger sample size. Another issue in the field of social representations is that of social desirability or normative pressure on discourse. There may be a ‘masking’ zone around certain items such as violence and alcohol. Thus, the substitution methodology could be used to circumvent this issue (Gaynard & Etoundi, 2018).

5. Conclusion

This research has, for the first time, allowed for the study of the social phenomenon of ‘supporter travel by coach’ among two groups of football supporters: ultras and regular fans. The social representations, which differ for each group, are centred around positive aspects. As a result, the current issue of violence, although central to the restrictions imposed during these journeys, is not a focal point in our sample. It appears necessary to deepen the understanding of subcultures (Redhead, 2013). Additional research is required to investigate the complexities of football-

related violence and its different manifestations, as mentioned by Frosdick (2006). Given the security concerns, it seems worthwhile for future research to delve deeper into certain elements, such as alcohol and violence, focusing on ultra groups.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix 1 : Distribution of responses (in absolute values) to the characterisation questionnaire and mean characterisation (from most characteristic to least characteristic) for the ultras

Items	1.The least characteristic	2.Unselected items	3.The most characteristic	Mean
Fervour	2	13	64	2,78
Atmosphere	2	22	52	2,66
Celebration	9	32	35	2,34
Commitment	21	35	20	1,99
Alcohol	20	42	14	1,92
Law enforcement	33	25	18	1,80
Bans	31	29	16	1,80
Freedom	46	19	11	1,54
Violence	64	11	1	1,17

Appendix 2 : Distribution of responses (in absolute values) to the characterisation questionnaire and mean characterisation (from most characteristic to least characteristic) for the regular fans

Items	1.The least characteristic	2.Unselected items	3.The most characteristic	Mean
Fervour	1	8	50	2,83
Atmosphere	1	10	48	2,80
Commitment	6	32	21	2,25
Celebration	12	24	23	2,19
Law enforcement	22	29	8	1,76
Bans	29	20	10	1,68
Freedom	32	18	9	1,61
Alcool	29	25	5	1,59
Violence	45	11	3	1,29