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Social Connectedness among Aremania Supporters: A Literature Review on Belonging, Group Identity, and Community Experience

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Abstract. Social connectedness is a subjective experience of closeness, attachment, and having a place in the social world. In football supporter communities, this experience can form through shared identities, repeated interactions, group symbols, offline and online activities, and emotional experiences as club supporters. This article presents a conceptual literature review on social connectedness within the context of Aremania supporters in Greater Malang. Literature on the measurement of social connectedness, social identity, football fandom, and Indonesian supporter communities is reviewed integratively to outline construct definitions, potential underlying mechanisms, and relevant future research directions. The review indicates that social connectedness must be distinguished from interaction frequency, social support, group cohesion, social identity, and solidarity, although these constructs may be interrelated. The context of Aremania provides a crucial space to examine how the feeling of community belonging is maintained through encounters, communication, support rituals, and social activities, without assuming that all members experience the same level of connectedness. This article recommends empirical research directly testing social connectedness among Aremania supporters using validated instruments with transparent contextual adaptations.

Keywords: *social connectedness; Aremania; football supporters; social identity; sense of belonging*

1 Introduction

Social connectedness refers to an individual's subjective experience of feeling connected to others and being part of a broader social world. This concept does not merely refer to the number of relationships or how frequently someone interacts, but rather to the psychological quality of feeling close, accepted, and having a place within social relationships. Lee and Robbins (1995) developed the Social Connectedness Scale to capture individuals' perceptions of their relationships with others; this measurement subsequently became a primary reference in psychological research on belongingness and interpersonal connectedness.

In daily life, social connectedness can be experienced through family, friendships, local communities, organizations, and interest-based affinity groups. Football supporter communities represent a particularly relevant context because membership is expressed not only through supporting a club, but also through symbols, chants, gatherings, match travel, digital conversations, and shared emotional experiences. Recent research on football fandom demonstrates that fan communities can serve as spaces for belonging and collective identification, although these dynamics vary across individuals and do not automatically eliminate existing social boundaries (Biel, 2026; Smith et al., 2026).

Aremania, as the supporter community of Arema FC deeply rooted in Greater Malang, offers a local context to examine how supporter identity relates to the psychological experience of belonging to a group. Studies on Aremania have discussed loyalty, traditions of support, relationships between supporters, and the need to strengthen social bonds within the community (Zubaidhi, n.d.). Research on Aremania's digital communication following the Kanjuruhan Tragedy also indicates that social media can serve as a space for community consolidation and communication, even though group consolidation is not identical to individual social connectedness (Firdous & Winata, 2026).

The events of the Kanjuruhan Tragedy also emphasize that supporter experiences cannot be reduced merely to matchday support. Fandom can be linked to collective grief, expressions demanding justice, public engagement, and shared meaning-making. Research on the linguistic landscape of football fans' protests over the Kanjuruhan Tragedy shows how expressions of support and protest can become social practices connecting fans with issues of shared significance (Sakhiyya et al., 2025). However, such collective expressions are insufficient to infer that every supporter possesses a high level of social connectedness.

This article aims to provide a conceptual synthesis of social connectedness among Aremania supporters, delineate its construct boundaries from adjacent concepts, and identify testable mechanisms and research agendas. This article is a narrative-conceptual literature review, not a systematic review with a registered search and selection protocol. Consequently, conclusions are oriented toward theoretical synthesis and research implications rather than prevalence estimates or empirical claims regarding Aremania's level of social connectedness.

2 Review Methods

This article employs a narrative-conceptual literature review approach. The sources forming the foundation of this synthesis include psychological literature on social connectedness and its measurement, social identity theory, and studies on football fandom and Indonesian supporter communities, specifically Aremania. Literature was selected based on relevance to construct definitions, mechanisms of belonging, community communication, and the context of football fandom.

As a narrative review rather than a systematic literature review, the search process is not claimed to be exhaustive or reproducible. The article does not conduct a meta-analysis, formal risk of bias assessment, or tally of studies meeting inclusion criteria. Evidence derived

from studies on supporter identity, cohesion, consolidation, or solidarity is treated as adjacent contextual evidence rather than direct measurements of social connectedness.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Social Connectedness as a Subjective Experience

Conceptually, social connectedness emphasizes an individual's perception of closeness and relatedness to others. Lee and Robbins (1995) position social connectedness as an aspect of belongingness that pertains to how individuals view themselves in relation to their social environment. Thus, two individuals with the same number of friends or the same frequency of community presence do not necessarily experience equal social connectedness. A supporter might regularly attend matches at the stadium yet feel unrecognized or unaccepted, whereas another supporter might attend rarely but feel a profound sense of closeness with the community.

Psychological literature also links social connectedness to interpersonal relational patterns and psychological well-being. Lee, Draper, and Lee (2001) tested a model linking social connectedness to dysfunctional interpersonal behaviors and psychological distress. These findings support the construct's relevance as a psychological variable, though this does not imply that social connectedness is uniformly high in all communities or that supporter membership automatically yields psychological benefits. Context, relationship quality, and experiences of acceptance must still be empirically examined.

3.2 Social Connectedness and Adjacent Concepts

Social connectedness must be differentiated from social interaction. Interaction is a relational process or behavior—such as speaking, messaging, coordinating, or attending joint activities—whereas social connectedness is a subjective assessment of feeling attached and close. Interaction can provide opportunities for connectedness to develop, but that outcome is not automatic. Interactions that are superficial, exclusive, conflictual, or purely instrumental can occur without generating a sense of acceptance.

Social connectedness also differs from social identity. Social identity refers to that part of an individual's self-concept deriving from group membership together with the value and emotional significance attached to it (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An individual may strongly identify as Aremania, yet their interpersonal closeness with fellow Aremania may vary. Conversely, someone may feel connected to a few community members without making supporter identity a salient part of their self-concept.

Group cohesion and solidarity are likewise not synonymous with social connectedness. Cohesion concerns the strength of bonds and the tendency of a group to remain united, while solidarity emphasizes mutual support, care, or collective action. Both can be collective phenomena visible in supporter activities. Social connectedness, in contrast, focuses on the individual's subjective experience. Therefore, evidence of Aremania's solidarity actions or community consolidation should not be directly used as proof that every member experiences high social connectedness.

3.3 Football Fandom as a Potential Arena for Connectedness

Football fandom provides several conditions that theoretically support social connectedness. First, club affiliation offers a shared identity category that facilitates mutual recognition

among members. Second, repeated activities—such as watching matches, chanting, wearing club colors, and participating in community events—create opportunities for interaction and shared emotional experiences. Third, online communication allows relationships to be maintained outside match times and physical venues. European fandom literature indicates that fan engagement can relate to a sense of belonging, cross-group communication, and forms of social cohesion; however, those findings stem from different social contexts and cannot be directly generalized to Aremania (Biel, 2025, 2026).

Interview studies with English football club fans highlight the importance of club communication and providing channels for fans to voice aspirations as part of a positive club-fan relationship (Smith et al., 2026). Although focused on fan-club relationships rather than measuring interpersonal social connectedness among members, this research serves as a reminder that the feeling of belonging is influenced by communication quality and responsiveness to member concerns. For Aremania, the implication is that inclusive participation and communication channels are worth studying as conditions potentially linked to feeling connected.

In the Indonesian context, studies on Aremania and the Kanjuruhan Tragedy demonstrate that supporter identity can manifest in communication activities, public expressions, and community consolidation (Firdous & Winata, 2026; Sakhiyya et al., 2025). Such practices can create opportunities for sharing meaning and experiences. However, inferences about social connectedness require direct individual measurement rather than relying solely on social media posts, group symbols, or collective actions.

3.4 Aremania Context: Opportunities and Boundaries of Connectedness

The Aremania community should not be treated as a homogenous group. Supporters vary in age, gender, length of support, geographic location, proximity to local sub-groups (*korwil*), match attendance frequency, and digital or offline participation. These differences can influence access to friend networks and experiences of acceptance. Research on Aremania must account for this internal heterogeneity rather than assuming that collective identity yields uniform social experiences for all members.

Connectedness can also operate across multiple levels: relationships with close supporter friends, feeling accepted within a local sub-group (*korwil*), and feeling connected to the broader Aremania community. These three levels may be interrelated but are not necessarily identical. An individual might feel close to their small group yet unrepresented by the broader community, or take pride in being Aremania while having few personal ties with other supporters. Differentiating these levels of analysis is essential so that measurement instruments and interpretations do not conflate interpersonal experiences with collective identification.

Furthermore, social connectedness should not be romanticized. Strong group boundaries can enhance in-group closeness but may be accompanied by distance toward out-groups. Community activities can also involve experiences of exclusion, conflict, or pressure to conform. Thus, research on Aremania should avoid assuming fandom is inherently positive; the more appropriate empirical question is what conditions relate to feeling connected, for whom, and at which community level.

3.5 Measuring Social Connectedness Among Aremania Supporters

The Social Connectedness Scale–Revised (SCS-R) is a relevant instrument for measuring perceived social connectedness. In the Indonesian context, Bagaskara and Widyastuti (2023) reported an Indonesian adaptation of the 20-item SCS-R, demonstrating high internal consistency (α = .915) and a single-factor structure confirmed via confirmatory factor

analysis on a sample of 206 participants aged 17–35. This evidence makes the Indonesian version a promising starting point, though it does not automatically guarantee suitability for a football supporter population.

If the research objective is to measure general social connectedness among Aremania members, using the unmodified Indonesian version helps preserve the general construct meaning. If items are modified to explicitly refer to fellow Aremania, this represents a contextual adaptation that must be documented and re-tested. Appropriate procedures include expert review, cognitive interviews or comprehension testing, pilot testing, and evaluating construct reliability and validity within the target sample (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). Researchers must also ensure usage permissions if required by rights holders.

Operational choices must align with the research question. An unmodified SCS-R is suitable when the target construct is general connectedness with others. Conversely, if the focus is specifically on connectedness within the Aremania community, researchers must state that the construct has been contextualized and provide appropriate validity evidence. Replacing "others" with "fellow Aremania" without empirical testing alters construct coverage, meaning scores between the two versions cannot be assumed to be directly comparable.

3.6 Synthesis and Research Agenda

Overall, the literature supports understanding social connectedness as a psychological construct distinct from interaction activity, group identity, cohesion, and solidarity. Football fandom can provide an arena for connectedness through shared identity, repeated experiences, communication, and participation. However, literature directly measuring social connectedness among Aremania needs strengthening; studies on consolidation, solidarity expressions, and supporter identity offer valuable context but cannot substitute for direct empirical evidence on subjective individual experiences.

Relevant research agendas include:

- Mapping social connectedness levels among Aremania members using appropriate instruments.
- Testing the relationships between offline/online social interactions and social connectedness.
- Examining whether group identification, relationship quality, or feeling accepted accounts for variations in connectedness.
- Comparing supporter experiences based on community involvement without inferring causality in cross-sectional designs. For quantitative studies, terms such as "associated with" or "statistically predicts" are more appropriate than "causes" when data are collected at a single time point.

4 Conclusion

Social connectedness among Aremania supporters is an important topic for understanding the psychological experience of belonging to a fan community beyond indicators of attendance, loyalty, identity, or collective action. Literature shows that fandom can generate belonging through shared symbols, interaction, communication, and emotional experiences. However, social connectedness must be measured directly at the individual level and cannot be inferred solely from solidarity or group consolidation. Future research should distinguish general social connectedness from community-specific connectedness to Aremania and validate any instrument adaptations on the target population.

5 Implications

Theoretically, this review positions social connectedness as an overlapping yet distinct construct from social identity, social interaction, cohesion, and solidarity. Methodologically, Aremania research should employ explicit operational definitions and instruments aligned with the construct's reference level. Practically, supporter communities and club management can consider two-way communication, inclusive participatory activities, and safe gathering spaces as practices worth evaluating—rather than as interventions proven to increase social connectedness among Aremania.

6 Limitations

This review is narrative-conceptual and does not follow a registered systematic review protocol. Literature directly addressing Aremania focuses more on identity, consolidation, loyalty, communication, or solidarity rather than measuring social connectedness. Therefore, this article does not conclude the level of social connectedness among Aremania nor claim that the discussed mechanisms have been specifically tested on this population.

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