

Research article

# The Psychological Dynamics of Team Love and Social Identity Among Football Fans in Indonesia

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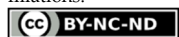
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**Abstract:** Football is the world's most popular sport. In Indonesia, support for this sport is marked by enthusiasm and a high level of emotional involvement among fans with the team they support. This phenomenon indicates a sense of team love among fans. This is what underlies this study to find out how emotional aspects, such as team love, can shape the team identification of football fans. This study aims to examine the influence of football team love on strengthening team identification among football fans in Indonesia. This study uses a quantitative research type involving 201 active football fans with an average age of 23.18 years. Participants in this study were obtained through non-probability sampling techniques with purposive sampling. The data for this study were collected using the Football Team Love Scale and the Sport Team Identification Scale. Data were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, which was then analyzed using simple regression analysis techniques. The results showed a significant and positive effect of football team love on team identification among football fans in Indonesia, with a regression coefficient value = 0.755 and  $p < 0.001$  and a contribution of 55.5% to the variance. The findings suggest that football team love is not a temporary emotional state, but a multidimensional construct involving various aspects.

**Keywords:** football; football team love; team identification; Indonesian football fans

## 1. Introduction

Sport represents a social and cultural phenomenon that reflects the characteristics of the modern and contemporary era [1]. Among the various forms of sport, football has emerged as the most popular sport, being the most widely played, followed, and consumed sport in the world, whose popularity is irreplaceable among other sports [2,3]. Not only does it have a huge fan base, but it also consists of fans who come from a wide variety of backgrounds, be it cultural, educational, or social. Based on data presented by World Atlas in 2021, it is known that as many as 4 billion people are fans of this sport [4]. This figure reinforces the popularity of football as the most popular sport. The popularity of football has remained unchanged over the years [5]. Football is not only seen as a sporting activity, but an activity with deep social and cultural phenomena. Through the sport, fans can express their identity, solidarity, and community spirit [6].

This phenomenon also seems to occur in Indonesia, where enthusiasm and emotional involvement are very high and strong in fans. Amali and Suswantoro [7] revealed that Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest football fan base in Asia. Data from Country Cassette [8] shows that Indonesia is the third-ranked country in the world with the most football fans, which is 276.4 million people or with a percentage of 60% of the total population of Indonesia. These fans are not only present at the stadium during matches to support the team, but they also show their love

through various means, such as social media, purchasing football or team-related attributes, and active involvement in fan communities [9]. Interestingly, support for the football team continues despite its problems [9,10], such as the Kanjuruhan tragedy that killed hundreds of people, including children. This finding shows a sense of love that involves a deep emotional bond between fans and the team they support.

This love in the realm of psychology can be explained through football team love, which is a form of intense love for a football team that includes self-integration with the team, long-term loyalty, and passionate behavior [9]. Team love is also defined as when fans support their team under any circumstances without expecting rewards, and have positive feelings towards the team they support [11]. Love as a form of support is not temporary, but rather a unique and deep emotional attachment to the fan and team interaction [12]. This emotional bond that fans have is a core component of team love. Fans also view this sense of love and loyalty to the team not just as a sense of love and support, but also as something that can be passed on to the next generation [9]. This love also makes fans willing to invest their resources without demanding anything in return as a form of support [13,14].

This support and love for the team grows into a collective fan identity described by the concept of team identification. Team identification refers to the extent to which fans identify themselves as part of the team. Where this has become a fan's self-concept centered on the sports team they support [10]. This concept helps the process of understanding how the psychology, attitudes, and behaviors of fans [15]. Fans who have team identification even consider that the team is the main part that represents their identity [16]. However, team identification has been shown to have a positive impact on various aspects of well-being, such as collective self-esteem, meaning in life, individual satisfaction with their social life, and emotional support [17].

Based on the above, it is known that a fan's love for a football team is not only symbolic but involves complex and intricate psychological processes. This support and love continue to exist in a large and collective way, even when the world of Indonesian football is plagued by various controversies and tragedies that even take victims. This shows that football team love and team identification are not just ordinary support. So it is important to know how a football team love influences team identification on the formation of loyalty, commitment, and fan behavior which not only has a positive impact but also has a further negative impact.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Design**

The design of this research is quantitative research with a survey-type approach through the distribution of questionnaire instruments in collecting data. Quantitative research is a type of research that focuses on measuring data and generalizing the results based on research samples from various perspectives [18]. The survey method is used because this type of research is able to collect systematic information from participants with the aim of understanding and predicting the behavior of the population under study [19]. In this study, this type of approach was used to examine the influence of football team love in strengthening team identification among football fans in Indonesia. This research design is considered relevant in collecting comprehensive data to be statistically analyzed through survey data collection using questionnaires.

### **2.2. Procedure**

There are two research instruments used in this study, namely by using the Football Team Love scale with a composite reliability coefficients score is 0.94 [9] and the Sport Team Identification scale with a marginal reliability coefficients score is 0.95 [15]. The Football Team Love scale instrument is used to measure fans' love for the football team they support. Meanwhile, the Sport Team Identification instrument is used to measure how far fans identify themselves as part of the team they

support. Both instruments were adapted into Indonesian. First, the original scales were forward-translated into Indonesian. The translated versions were then evaluated through two expert judgments in social psychology, who examined item clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness. Revisions were made based on their feedback, after which a backward translation into English was conducted to ensure conceptual equivalence with the original versions. A readability test was subsequently carried out with a small group of participants to confirm that the adapted items were easily understood and appropriately interpreted. Each item on each scale uses a five-point Likert scale with points 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Participants in this study were obtained online. Participants were given informed consent before completing the questionnaire. The link to the questionnaire was shared with the target population through football fan communities and social media. All data were obtained anonymously to maintain confidentiality and to minimize social bias.

### 2.3. Informants

The participants in this study amounted to 201 people who were obtained using a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling type. This purposive sampling technique is a technique used to determine research samples based on certain criteria [20]. The criteria for this study are that they are active football fans and have watched the team matches they support either live or online. The number of samples in this study was calculated using the formula number of indicators  $\times$  5-10 [21]. Of the total participants, 130 participants were male (64.7%) and 71 participants were female (35.3%), with an average age of 23.18 years.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The data that has been obtained in this study were analyzed using the simple regression analysis method. Simple regression analysis is a case model that uses one independent variable [22]. This analysis can predict the quantitative response of variable Y based on one predictor variable, variable X [23]. This analysis is used to see how much influence the two variables under study have statistically. In addition, this analysis method is also used to see whether the two variables studied are statistically significant or not. The data analysis process in this study was carried out using the help of JASP 0.19.3.0 software.

## 3. Results

This research was conducted on 201 football fans in Indonesia. The participants in this study consisted of 130 (64.68%) people of male gender and 71 (35.32%) people of female gender. The average age of the participants was 23.18 years, which shows that young adults generally have a high emotional involvement in the football team they support. In this study, the research participants had moderate levels of football team love and team identification, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Prior to hypothesis testing, normality and linearity tests were conducted first. The normality test was conducted by looking at the Q-Q plot of the residuals. The test found that the data were normally distributed. Where the residuals are seen to spread following the diagonal line, as shown in Figure 1. Meanwhile, the linearity test is carried out by looking at the results on the scatter plot, which shows that there is no particular pattern and the data spreads linearly as shown in Figure 2.

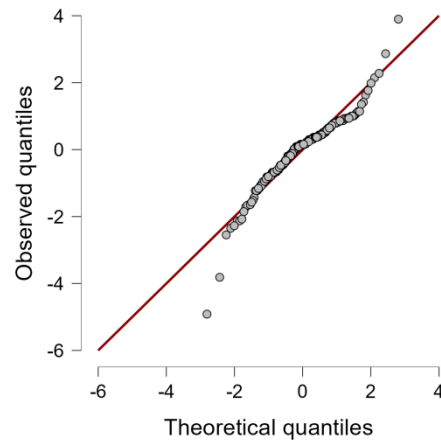


Figure 1. Q-Q Plot

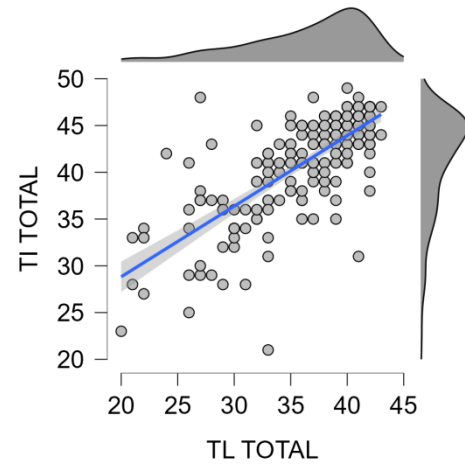


Figure 2. Scatter Plot

Then, a simple regression analysis was conducted in this study to determine the effect of football team love on team identification among football fans in Indonesia. Based on the results of the analysis conducted, it was found that there was a significant positive effect on football team love on team identification among Indonesian football fans. This is known from the F value in Table 3, which shows a number of 247,739 with a p value <0.0001. This result shows that there is a statistically significant effect of the regression test.

In addition, Table 5 shows that the t value obtained is 15.470 with a p value <0.0001, which reinforces the result that the football team love variable has a significant influence on team identification. The regression coefficient obtained is 0.755, which indicates that every 1 unit increase in the football team love variable will increase the team identification variable by 0.755. This coefficient value indicates that there is a positive and strong influence on the football team love and team identification variables, which reinforces the assumption that fans' love for the team they support is not just an emotional aspect that feels misguided, but is an important part of the social identity of the fans. The significance of this regression analysis is also statistically seen in the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) value in Table 4, which is obtained at 0.555, which shows that the football team love variable has an influence of 55.5% which can explain and influence the team identification variable. This finding shows that there is a strong influence of fan love on the formation of collective fan identity.

Table 1. Football team love categorization

| Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Low      | 32        | 15.92%         |
| Medium   | 141       | 70.15%         |
| High     | 28        | 13.93%         |
| Total    | 201       | 100%           |

Table 2. Team identification categorization

| Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Low      | 31        | 15.42%         |
| Medium   | 153       | 76.12%         |
| High     | 17        | 8.46%          |
| Total    | 201       | 100%           |

**Table 3. ANOVA**

| Model          |            | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F       | p     |
|----------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------|
| M <sub>1</sub> | Regression | 3212.455       | 1   | 3212.455    | 247.739 | <.001 |
|                | Residual   | 2580.450       | 199 | 12.967      |         |       |
|                | Total      | 5792.905       | 200 |             |         |       |

**Table 4. Model summary**

| Model          | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE  |
|----------------|-------|----------------|-------------------------|-------|
| M <sub>0</sub> | 0.000 | 0.000          | 0.000                   | 5.382 |
| M <sub>1</sub> | 0.745 | 0.555          | 0.552                   | 3.601 |

**Table 5. Coefficients**

| Model          |             | Unstandardized | Standard Error | Standardized | t       | p     |
|----------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|---------|-------|
| M <sub>0</sub> | (Intercept) | 41.159         | 0.380          |              | 108.426 | <.001 |
|                |             |                |                |              |         |       |
| M <sub>1</sub> | (Intercept) | 13.732         | 1.761          |              | 7.798   | <.001 |
|                | TL Total    | 0.755          | 0.048          | 0.745        | 15.740  | <.001 |

#### 4. Discussion

The results showed that football team love has a significant and positive effect on team identification among football fans in Indonesia. Based on the findings, it is known that the higher the level of fan love for the football team they support, the higher the level of fan self-identification as part of the team they support. This finding shows that the love for the team felt by fans is not a temporary emotional condition, but has a deep meaning in the formation of the social identity of fans. In line with Özgen's [9] findings, team love is multidimensional and includes various aspects, ranging from affective, cognitive, and long-term emotional attachment. Team love not only strengthens the bond between fans and the team they support, but also plays a major role in the formation of the identity of the wider sports fan community [24]. The development of intense team love is often linked to the social bonds that grow between fans [25].

Theoretically, team love not only brings fan loyalty, but can also trigger a variety of fan behaviors, both positive such as loyalty to the team, and negative such as aggressive behavior towards opponents or fanaticism [2,25]. Even the negative effects of excessive team love can lead to serious violence [26]. This is due to the fans' deep love for the team they support and the emotional attachment that triggers various behaviors [2]. Wong and Hung [27] revealed that team love is influenced by fans' passion, intimacy, and commitment to the team they support. These expressions of love emerge from a variety of actions performed in real life, such as wearing team attributes, attending matches, and voicing support online [2,4,28,29]. Even when the team's performance is down, fans continue to provide support that shows a high and deep emotional involvement [31].

The high level of love for the team not only indicates emotional involvement, but also collective identity formation [24]. Where fans identify themselves as part of the team. For fans, team identification is a fundamental concept to explain the emotional connection that exists between fans and the teams they support [30]. Team identification is not only the glue between teams and fans, but has a broader social meaning [10]. It is one of the important steps to understand fan behavior [15]. Furthermore, a fans' involvement with the team, such as through watching games, can fulfill an individual's need for group acceptance that shapes fan identity and commitment [33].

Fans who have a high level of team identification will maintain their relationship with the team, even when the team they support loses. They show higher loyalty than other fans when the team is not doing well [10]. In line with conditions in Indonesia,

this team identification not only has a positive impact on the team, but team identification among fans has also been shown to have a positive impact on fan welfare, such as collective self-esteem, meaning of life, satisfaction with the social environment, and emotional support from fellow fans [17]. However, furthermore, intense team identification among fans often leads to a decrease in fans' self-control, making them prone to exhibiting undesirable behaviors, such as violent and confrontational actions [32,33]. This phenomenon is evident in various tragic events related to violence in the context of soccer in Indonesia, such as riots in stadiums and clashes between fans, which also show that strong emotional bonds can trigger destructive behavior. This violent behavior often stems from social identity and excessive team identification [34].

This finding reinforces the assumption that team love is not just a momentary emotional experience, but an experience that can strengthen self-identity within a community or social group. Through this explanation, it is evident that football team love has an important role in strengthening team identification in football fans in Indonesia. A sense of love and self-identification as part of a team that not only has a positive impact, but can also have a negative impact through violence, aggressive behavior, and fanaticism. Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics of team love and team identification. Thus, understanding how the psychology, attitudes, and behaviors of fans are not only on the surface. But, more deeply that can affect the social life, behavior, and well-being of individuals as fans.

However, this study has several limitations that need to be considered. The sample in this study was dominated by young fans with an average age of 23.18 years, which may limit the generalization of the results to older fans groups. In addition, the online recruitment method has the potential to cause sample bias, as this method can only reach some fans who are active on digital platforms. Future research should involve a more diverse age group by applying more varied recruitment strategies in order to obtain a broader representation of the football fans population in Indonesia.

## 5. Conclusions

The results showed that there is a significant and positive influence between football team love and team identification among football fans in Indonesia. Through this finding, it is known that the higher the fan's love for the team, the higher the level of fan self-identification as part of the team they support. This suggests that team love is not a momentary emotional experience, but a deep psychological attachment that shapes the social identity of fans. The results of this study also highlight the multidimensional nature of the football team love variable, which consists of various aspects that form fan commitment and loyalty that are not affected by the good or bad performance of the team they support. Self-identification as part of the team also strengthens the individual's attachment to the team which has an influence on individual well-being. This research contributes to the development of sport psychology which reveals how psychological and emotional aspects can underlie the relationship between fans and teams. This research is also expected to provide a better understanding of how emotional involvement can shape collective self-identity.

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