



Original Article

Building Hope For The World Cup Media Discourse Analysis On Indonesia's National Team Qualification 2026

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Abstract

This study examines how online media construct discourse surrounding the Indonesian National Football Team during the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign. The research focuses on the ways in which media organizations shape public attention, collective expectations, and nationalist narratives through football-related news coverage. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize match performance, team development, or sports policy, this study investigates the role of media as social actors that construct reality through agenda-setting and framing processes. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed using discourse analysis. Data were collected through digital documentation of online news articles, social media content, and public responses related to the Indonesian National Team from December 2023 to May 2025. The primary data sources included major Indonesian online media outlets, namely Kompas.com, CNN Indonesia, Detik.com, and Bola.com. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that online media consistently construct narratives centered on the resurgence of Indonesian football, aspirations for World Cup qualification, the success of player naturalization policies, and the leadership of Erick Thohir as a symbol of institutional transformation. These narratives not only foster public optimism but also contribute to the construction of collective identity and contemporary forms of nationalism through sports symbolism. The study highlights the significant role of online media in shaping public perceptions, national aspirations, and collective meanings surrounding Indonesian football. Theoretically, the findings extend agenda-setting and framing perspectives by demonstrating how sports media function as cultural institutions that mediate the relationship between football, national identity, and collective aspiration in the digital era.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Indonesia's pursuit of qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup has emerged as one of the most prominent topics in the national public sphere. This phenomenon has developed alongside the improving performance of the Indonesian National Football Team in the Asian World Cup Qualifiers and a series of transformations in the governance of Indonesian football. The national team's progression to the advanced stages of qualification, combined with the implementation of player naturalization policies, has generated renewed optimism among the public regarding



Indonesia's prospects of participating in the world's most prestigious football tournament (Rr. Pramesthi Ratnaningtyas & Yusuf Alawy Muhammad, 2023). Amid these developments, online media platforms have actively produced and circulated narratives concerning the resurgence of Indonesian football and the nation's potential pathway to the World Cup. Coverage of the Indonesian National Team has consequently become one of the most dominant topics within sports journalism across national media outlets (Pradana, 2025). In this context, football is no longer understood merely as a sporting competition; rather, it has evolved into a space for the expression of collective aspirations, identity, and national pride. As argued by Ibnu et al. (2023), the intensity of media coverage plays a significant role in directing public attention toward specific sporting issues. Therefore, examining the representation of the Indonesian National Team in online media constitutes an important area of scholarly inquiry.

Media discourse surrounding the Indonesian National Team has evolved into a complex and contextually embedded form of representation. Nevertheless, existing studies on the relationship between media and football in Indonesia have largely concentrated on several key themes. First, previous research has examined the role of traditional and social media in shaping public perceptions of football actors through digital communication and audience interaction (Agustina et al., 2025; Bare et al., 2021). Second, scholars have investigated the construction of public opinion in media coverage of domestic football competitions, particularly Liga 1 and the dynamics of sports journalism in Indonesia (Adnan, 2023; Ibnu et al., 2023). Third, a number of studies have focused on national football policies, especially player naturalization and strategies aimed at enhancing the performance of the Indonesian National Team (Zulhidayat et al., 2022; Rr. Pramesthi Ratnaningtyas & Yusuf Alawy Muhammad, 2023). Other research has explored the development of Indonesian football from the perspectives of sports management and team performance (Pradana, 2025). Although these studies have contributed significantly to the literature, they have predominantly emphasized sports communication, domestic competitions, and football governance. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how media institutions construct narratives of hope, expectation, and opportunity surrounding Indonesia's qualification campaign for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. This gap is noteworthy given that the national team's journey toward World Cup qualification represents a significant social and media phenomenon that warrants further investigation.

The representation of the Indonesian National Team in online media constitutes a dynamic and meaning-laden phenomenon. This perspective is consistent with the view that media serve not only as channels for information dissemination but also as sites of discourse production that shape how society interprets social reality. Within the context of Indonesian

football, media coverage extends beyond reporting match results and team developments; it also constructs narratives of hope, optimism, and possibility regarding Indonesia's participation in the FIFA World Cup. These narratives are continuously reproduced through news reports, opinion pieces, and public discussions across digital platforms. Through this process, media organizations contribute to the formation of collective meanings concerning the position of the Indonesian National Team within the global football landscape. However, previous studies have yet to provide a comprehensive explanation of how online media construct discourse surrounding Indonesia's World Cup qualification campaign. Consequently, investigating media discourse on the Indonesian National Team is essential for understanding how collective hopes and expectations are produced, negotiated, and represented through contemporary journalistic practices.

Coverage of the Indonesian National Team consistently occupies a prominent position within the national sports media agenda. Accordingly, this study addresses three primary research questions. First, how do online media construct discourse surrounding the Indonesian National Team in the 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers? Second, what issues and themes are most prominently represented in media coverage of the national team? Third, how does this discursive construction produce meanings related to Indonesia's hopes and opportunities for World Cup qualification? These questions are grounded in the assumption that media do not merely reflect the realities of national football but also actively participate in the construction of social realities consumed by the public. Discourse concerning the Indonesian National Team not only reflects developments in Indonesian football but also functions as a collective symbol embodying public aspirations, optimism, and imagination regarding the future of the sport. Such representations illustrate how media shape public understandings of national football, framing it not solely as a sporting competition but also as a social and cultural phenomenon closely connected to national identity, collective pride, and broader national aspirations.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the increasing intensity of online media coverage surrounding the Indonesian National Football Team during the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign. The scope of the study was limited to explaining and reflecting upon the media discourse constructed around the national team in Indonesian football news coverage. The study was guided by three primary considerations. First, discourse concerning Indonesia's prospects of qualifying for the 2026 FIFA World Cup has emerged as a prominent media phenomenon that has attracted widespread public attention but remains underexplored from a discourse-analytic perspective. Second, media coverage

of the Indonesian National Team exhibits dynamic and contextual characteristics, encompassing narratives of hope, optimism, nationalism, and public expectation. Third, the representation of the national team in online media constitutes a significant social phenomenon that warrants examination to better understand how media institutions construct meanings regarding the future of Indonesian football. These considerations provide the foundation for investigating and interpreting the media discourse surrounding the Indonesian National Team throughout the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification process.

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data consisted of online news articles reporting on the Indonesian National Team during the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification period, spanning from December 2023 to May 2025. The data were collected from several major Indonesian online news outlets that consistently covered developments related to the national team, including Kompas.com, Detik.com, CNN Indonesia, and Bola.com. Data collection was conducted systematically by focusing on news headlines, themes, and article content that represented narratives related to Indonesia's qualification prospects, player naturalization policies, team performance, and the roles of key actors in national football governance. A digital documentation technique was employed to archive relevant news articles and record textual materials that aligned with the objectives of the study.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The first stage, data reduction, involved organizing, selecting, and coding online news articles collected from Kompas.com, Detik.com, CNN Indonesia, and Bola.com according to recurring themes related to the Indonesian National Football Team, including World Cup qualification, player naturalization, football governance, public expectations, and nationalism. The second stage, data display, involved organizing the coded news texts into thematic categories and comparing discourse patterns across the four online media outlets to identify similarities and differences in media representation. The third stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying the findings through repeated interpretation of the news texts to identify consistent framing patterns, dominant narratives, and recurring meanings concerning the Indonesian National Football Team throughout the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign. All data were analyzed inductively, with news texts treated as social representations that convey particular constructions of meaning regarding the Indonesian National Football Team. Through these procedures, the study explains how online media construct discourse surrounding the hopes, expectations, and opportunities associated with Indonesia's pursuit of qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

RESULT

Representation of the Indonesian National Team in Online Media Coverage

Media coverage of the Indonesian National Football Team throughout the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign reveals a complex and context-dependent representation. Online news outlets not only disseminate information regarding matches and team developments but also construct narratives imbued with hope, optimism, and national identity. This finding is consistent with the study of Rr. Pramesthi Ratnaningtyas and Yusuf Alawy Muhammad (2023), which demonstrates that sports media frequently employ positive narratives to foster public optimism toward the Indonesian National Team. Through recurring headlines and sustained media attention, the national team is represented as both a symbol of the resurgence of Indonesian football and a manifestation of collective aspirations for Indonesia's participation in the FIFA World Cup. These discursive tendencies are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Dominant Narrative Themes in Media Coverage of the Indonesian National Team (2023–2025)

No.	Narrative Theme	Main Media Outlet	Frequency	Framing Type	Implicit Meaning
1	The Rise of Garuda	Kompas.com	15	Emotional–Symbolic	Revival of national spirit through football
2	The World Cup Dream	CNN Indonesia	12	Prospective–Euphoric	Collective hope for global achievement
3	The Golden Generation	Bola.com	9	Heroic–Collective	Reinforcement of team identity as a symbol of the future
4	Pride in Naturalization	Detik.com	8	Integrative–Nationalistic	Rearticulation of Indonesian national identity

Source: Online Media

Table 1 demonstrates that representations of the Indonesian National Team in online media are primarily embedded within narratives of nationalism, collective hope, and football resurgence. Across multiple media outlets, the national team is consistently portrayed as a symbol of positive transformation capable of generating public optimism. Two dominant tendencies can be identified within these representations.

First, the Indonesian National Team is frequently portrayed as a symbol of national revival. This representation is evident in narratives such as *The Rise of Garuda* and *The Golden Generation*, which position football as a site for the expression of national identity and collective pride. Media reports often employ heroic language, including terms such as “rise,” “struggle,” and “future,” to construct the perception that the development of

the national team reflects a broader national resurgence. In this discourse, the team's achievements are understood not merely as sporting accomplishments but as indicators of Indonesia's progress on the international stage.

Second, the national team is represented as a symbol of hope for World Cup qualification. Narratives such as *The World Cup Dream* and *Pride in Naturalization* illustrate how media outlets cultivate public optimism regarding Indonesia's prospects of competing on the global football stage. Through coverage emphasizing naturalized players, improvements in team quality, and institutional reforms within Indonesian football governance, the media construct an image of World Cup qualification as an increasingly attainable objective. These representations demonstrate that media organizations do not merely transmit information but also shape collective imaginations concerning the future of Indonesian football.

Taken together, these findings suggest that football has evolved beyond the boundaries of sport to become a social and cultural phenomenon imbued with symbolic meaning. Online media play a crucial role in constructing narratives of hope, revival, and national identity, positioning the Indonesian National Team not only as a sporting institution but also as a collective symbol representing the aspirations of Indonesian society for qualification to the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Factors Shaping Media Discourse on the Indonesian National Team Naturalized Players as Symbols of Hope

The representation of the Indonesian National Team in online media is frequently associated with the issue of player naturalization. The presence of foreign-born players of Indonesian descent has become one of the dominant themes in media coverage throughout the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign. Awagu (2021) argues that media institutions often frame naturalization policies as strategies for strengthening national unity while simultaneously enhancing football performance. This tendency is reflected in the patterns summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Framing of Naturalized Players in Media Coverage (2023–2025)

No.	Dominant Narrative	Main Media Outlet	Framing Type	Discursive Function	Key Expressions
1	World-Class Naturalization	Bola.com	Glorification	Legitimization of professionalism	"European level," "resilient," "solid"
2	Dutch Blood, Indonesian Spirit	Kompas.com	Integrative–Nationalistic	Construction of a unified national identity	"Love for the Red and White," "true Garuda"
3	Descendant Players as Game	CNN Indonesia	Emotional–Heroic	Symbol of transformative	"match winner," "savior," "hero"

Changers	hope
Source: Online Media	

Table 2 indicates that naturalized players constitute a central element in the construction of media discourse surrounding the resurgence of the Indonesian National Team. Their presence is discussed not only in relation to technical and tactical contributions but also as a symbol of hope and transformation within Indonesian football. Two dominant framing tendencies can be identified.

First, naturalized players are frequently represented as solutions to improving the quality and competitiveness of the national team. This representation is reflected in narratives such as *World-Class Naturalization*, which portray players of Indonesian descent as individuals capable of introducing international standards of professionalism into the national squad. Media coverage emphasizes their experience in European leagues, technical abilities, and professional discipline as crucial factors in enhancing Indonesia's competitiveness at the international level. Within this discourse, naturalized players are positioned as symbols of football modernization and renewed optimism for World Cup qualification.

Second, naturalized players are represented as components of an emerging and more inclusive national identity. Narratives such as *Dutch Blood, Indonesian Spirit* demonstrate how media outlets seek to integrate the backgrounds of diaspora players into broader conceptions of Indonesian identity. Rather than being portrayed as outsiders, these players are framed as integral participants in a national project aimed at strengthening the Indonesian National Team. This representation reflects an evolving understanding of nationalism in football, where national belonging is defined not solely by birthplace but also by commitment to representing and advancing the interests of the nation.

Furthermore, media coverage frequently portrays naturalized players as heroic figures capable of transforming the fortunes of the national team. Narratives such as *Descendant Players as Game Changers* reveal a tendency to position specific individuals as central actors in the team's success. Through the use of expressions such as "savior," "hero," and "match winner," media organizations construct expectations that the success of the Indonesian National Team is closely linked to the contributions of naturalized players. This discourse demonstrates that these athletes function not only as football players but also as symbolic embodiments of collective aspirations for the future of Indonesian football.

Overall, the media framing of naturalized players illustrates how the issue of naturalization has become an integral component of the discourse surrounding the resurgence of the Indonesian National Team. Media representations extend beyond assessments of sporting quality, positioning

naturalized players as symbols of a redefined nationalism, football modernization, and the collective hopes associated with Indonesia's pursuit of qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Erick Thohir as an Agent of Change in the Discourse of Indonesian Football Revival

The representation of the Indonesian National Football Team in online media is also frequently associated with the figure of the Chairman of the Football Association of Indonesia (PSSI), Erick Thohir. Throughout media coverage of the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign, Erick Thohir has consistently been positioned as a central actor in the transformation of Indonesian football. According to Fedora Reyvi (2023), media organizations tend to construct Erick Thohir's public image as a leader who embodies reform, professionalism, and optimism regarding the future of Indonesian football. This tendency is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Media Framing of Erick Thohir in Online News Coverage (2023–2025)

No.	Narrative Theme	Main Media Outlet	Framing Type	Symbolic Role	Key Expressions
1	Erick Thohir and Reform	Kompas.com	Progressive–Structural	Representation of institutional transformation	“clean PSSI,” “new era,” “real reform”
2	Erick's Closeness to Players	Bola.com	Personalization	Charismatic and emotionally engaged leader	“visited the dressing room,” “motivator”
3	Erick as the Nation's Hope	CNN Indonesia	Symbolic–Collective	Icon of national aspiration	“public hope,” “uniting the nation”

Source: Online Media

Table 3 demonstrates that Erick Thohir has become a significant component in the construction of media discourse surrounding the resurgence of the Indonesian National Team. Media coverage extends beyond reporting organizational policies and institutional activities undertaken by PSSI, instead placing considerable emphasis on Erick Thohir as a symbolic figure of transformation within Indonesian football. Two dominant framing tendencies can be identified.

First, Erick Thohir is frequently represented as an agent of football reform. This representation is evident in narratives such as *Erick Thohir and Reform*, which portray him as a leader responsible for initiating structural changes within PSSI. Media reports emphasize issues such as organizational transparency, governance improvement, and increased professionalism as indicators of successful leadership. Within this discourse, Erick Thohir is positioned as a symbol of institutional transformation capable of guiding Indonesian football toward a more modern and competitive future.

Second, Erick Thohir is portrayed as a symbol of collective hope regarding the future of the Indonesian National Team. Narratives such as *Erick as the Nation's Hope* illustrate how media organizations construct a close relationship between the team's success and his leadership. News coverage frequently depicts him as a figure capable of uniting diverse stakeholders within Indonesian football, including players, coaches, federation officials, and supporters. This representation demonstrates that media outlets frame Erick Thohir not merely as a sports administrator but also as a symbolic actor embodying public aspirations for the advancement of Indonesian football.

Furthermore, media coverage often employs personalization strategies in portraying Erick Thohir. Narratives such as *Erick's Closeness to Players* highlight direct interactions between him and members of the national team. His presence in dressing rooms, training sessions, and other team-related activities is frequently presented as evidence of emotional engagement and commitment. Through such framing, media organizations construct an image of Erick Thohir as a leader who is not only involved in policymaking but also actively participates in the national team's journey toward international competition.

Overall, the representation of Erick Thohir in online media has evolved into a central element within narratives of Indonesian football revival. Media portrayals extend beyond his institutional role, positioning him as an agent of change, a symbol of reform, and a manifestation of collective aspirations regarding the future of the Indonesian National Team in the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign.

Public Expectations Toward the Indonesian National Team

The representation of the Indonesian National Team in online media has also contributed to the formation of various forms of public expectation throughout the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification process. The intensity of media coverage concerning team performance, naturalized players, and reforms within PSSI has fostered widespread optimism and collective aspirations regarding Indonesia's prospects of qualifying for the FIFA World Cup. Sania et al. (2025) argue that improvements in team quality and the implementation of naturalization policies have significantly influenced supporter satisfaction and expectations concerning the achievements of the national team. These dynamics are reflected in Table 4.

Table 4. Public Expectations Reflected in Social Media Comments (January–April 2025)

No.	Social Media Platform	Dominant Comment Narrative	Public Emotional Category	Example Comment
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1	Instagram @timnas.indonesia	Optimism about Qualification	Euphoria	“We will definitely reach the World Cup!”
2	CNN Indonesia YouTube	Hope in Naturalized Players	Anticipatory	“The diaspora players have changed everything!”
3	Twitter (X) #TimnasDay	Demands for Performance	Social Pressure	“If they fail again, PSSI should be dissolved.”
4	Instagram @pssi	Support for Erick Thohir	High Trust	“As long as Erick is in charge, I fully believe.”
5	Detik.com Comment Section	Excessive Concern	Anxiety and Frustration	“Enough with the rhetoric—prove it on the pitch!”

Source: Online Media

Table 4 indicates that media coverage of the Indonesian National Team generates not only public support but also diverse emotional expectations within digital spaces. Through sustained and intensive reporting, media organizations contribute to the formation of perceptions regarding Indonesia’s prospects in international football. Two dominant tendencies emerge from these patterns.

First, media discourse encourages the development of public optimism and collective euphoria concerning Indonesia’s prospects of qualifying for the World Cup. This tendency is reflected in comments expressing strong confidence in the national team’s ability to achieve international success. Narratives such as *Golden Generation*, *Dream Team*, and *Global Garuda* demonstrate how audiences internalize media-generated messages. In this context, media function as agents that transmit collective aspirations through positive and inspirational reporting.

Second, media coverage also contributes to the emergence of social pressure directed toward the national team and football stakeholders. Elevated public expectations transform every match result into a highly emotional object of evaluation. When performances fail to meet expectations previously constructed through media narratives, public reactions frequently shift toward criticism, anxiety, and disappointment. This finding suggests that public expectations are shaped not only by sporting outcomes but also by the narratives continuously reproduced within media discourse.

In addition, public expectations are increasingly attached to specific actors, particularly naturalized players and Erick Thohir. Social media comments reveal that supporters often associate the success of the national team with individuals who receive extensive media attention. This tendency illustrates that media organizations shape expectations not only toward the team as a collective entity but also toward particular actors who are perceived as central to the revival of Indonesian football.

Taken together, public expectations toward the Indonesian National Team emerge through the interaction between media representations and

audience responses in digital spaces. Media play a crucial role in generating optimism, hope, and social pressure that accompany Indonesia's pursuit of qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The Relationship Between Media Agenda and Nationalist Aspirations

The representation of the Indonesian National Football Team in online media throughout the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign demonstrates a strong relationship between media agenda-setting and the construction of nationalist aspirations. In media discourse, the national team is not merely positioned as a sporting institution competing at the international level; it is also framed as a symbol of national resurgence and collective identity. Eliya (2020) argues that media organizations frequently employ national symbols, such as the Indonesian flag, the national anthem, and supporter attributes, to reinforce feelings of unity and collective pride. Within this context, football has evolved into a symbolic arena in which sport, national identity, and public aspirations for the future of the nation converge. These patterns are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Nationalist Narratives in Media Coverage of the Indonesian National Team (2023–2025)

No.	News Headline/Narrative	Online Media Outlet	Nationalist Symbolism	Emotional and Symbolic Expressions
1	<i>Garuda Goes Global: A Dream Realized</i>	Kompas.com	Indonesia's global image	"great nation," "Asia's representative," "national pride"
2	<i>PSSI on the Path of National Reform</i>	CNN Indonesia	Institutional transformation	"new era," "sports democratization"
3	<i>Defending the Nation at the 2026 World Cup</i>	Detik.com	Emotional nationalism	"sacrifice," "fighting spirit," "pride"
4	<i>Indonesia United Through Football</i>	Bola.com	National unity and collective identity	"Garuda on our chest," "the people's team"

Source: Online Media

Table 5 demonstrates that online media consistently establish connections between the success of the Indonesian National Team and broader narratives of nationhood. Media coverage extends beyond the technical aspects of football competition by linking team performance to national symbols capable of evoking collective pride and emotional attachment. Two dominant tendencies emerge from this relationship between media agendas and nationalist aspirations.

First, media organizations frequently represent the Indonesian National Team as a symbol of national resurgence. This tendency is evident in narratives such as *Garuda Goes Global* and *Defending the Nation at the 2026 World Cup*, which frame the achievements of the national team as indicators of Indonesia's success on the global stage. Media coverage often

associates victories with national dignity, international prestige, and the country's ability to compete internationally. Such representations demonstrate that media discourse does more than generate public interest in football; it embeds sporting success within broader narratives of national identity and collective achievement.

Second, football is consistently represented as a mechanism for social cohesion and national unity. Narratives such as *Indonesia United Through Football* illustrate how the national team is positioned as a collective symbol capable of transcending social, cultural, and political divisions. Within this discourse, support for the national team is portrayed as participation in a broader national project that unites citizens across diverse backgrounds. Through the repeated use of national symbols—including the Garuda emblem, the red-and-white national colors, and expressions of patriotic pride—media organizations strengthen the emotional bond between the public and the national team.

Furthermore, media discourse frequently links reforms in Indonesian football governance with broader aspirations for national progress. Narratives such as *PSSI on the Path of National Reform* suggest that changes within football institutions are interpreted as part of a wider process of national transformation. Consequently, media coverage of the Indonesian National Team extends beyond sport itself, reflecting public expectations concerning institutional development, professionalism, and Indonesia's competitiveness in the international arena.

These findings indicate that media agendas play a crucial role in shaping contemporary forms of nationalism rooted in popular culture. By emphasizing national symbols and emotionally resonant narratives, media organizations cultivate a symbolic relationship between the public and the Indonesian National Team. As a result, both success and failure on the football field are often interpreted not merely as sporting outcomes but as reflections of the nation's broader condition and aspirations.

Overall, the relationship between media agendas and nationalist aspirations demonstrates that football has evolved into a symbolic arena imbued with social, political, and cultural significance. Through agenda-setting and framing processes, media organizations actively construct these meanings, positioning the Indonesian National Team as a symbol of hope, unity, and national pride in Indonesia's pursuit of qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that online media coverage of the Indonesian National Football Team throughout the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign was constructed through a series of narratives emphasizing hope, optimism, and the resurgence of Indonesian football.

Narratives such as Garuda Goes Global, The World Cup Dream, and The Golden Generation appeared repeatedly across multiple media platforms and emerged as dominant issues within the public sphere. From the perspective of Agenda-Setting Theory, these patterns indicate that media organizations have positioned the Indonesian National Team as a salient public issue deserving sustained societal attention (McCombs, 2005). This finding supports the argument advanced by Bare et al. (2021), who contend that media possess the capacity to shape issue priorities through processes of selection, emphasis, and repetition. Consequently, coverage of the national team extends beyond the dissemination of sporting information and contributes to the social construction of collective aspirations regarding Indonesia's pursuit of international football success.

The findings further reveal that media function as sites of meaning production that connect football to broader constructions of national identity. Coverage of the Indonesian National Team does not merely report match outcomes; it also mobilizes national symbols that reinforce collective unity and public pride. The recurring use of expressions such as The Rise of Garuda, Defending the Nation, and Indonesia's World Cup Dream illustrates how football is discursively framed as a representation of national struggle and achievement. This finding is consistent with Eliya (2020), who argues that sports media frequently employ nationalist symbolism to strengthen social solidarity. From a broader theoretical perspective, Anderson's (2006) concept of imagined communities provides a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon. National identity is not simply inherited but continuously reproduced through shared symbolic experiences. In this context, online media serve as discursive arenas through which collective imaginations of nationhood are constructed, circulated, and reinforced through football-related narratives.

Another significant finding concerns the media construction of particular actors as symbolic representations of football revival. Naturalized players were predominantly portrayed as symbols of professionalism, modernization, and enhanced sporting competitiveness, whereas Erick Thohir was framed as an agent of institutional transformation and reform. These findings corroborate Awagu's (2021) observation that media discourse frequently presents naturalization policies in positive terms, emphasizing their contribution to national achievement and unity. Similarly, the findings align with Fedora Reyvi (2023), who demonstrates that media representations often position Erick Thohir as a progressive and transformative leader. From a framing perspective, these patterns illustrate that media organizations do not merely determine which issues receive attention but also shape how those issues are interpreted through the strategic emphasis of particular actors while marginalizing others (D'Angelo, 2018). As a result, the successes of the Indonesian National Team are

frequently personalized and attributed to specific individuals, thereby encouraging public interpretations centered on leadership figures and star players rather than on broader institutional and structural developments within Indonesian football.

The study also demonstrates that media constructions of the Indonesian National Team significantly influence the formation of public expectations. The sustained intensity of media coverage regarding Indonesia's prospects of qualifying for the FIFA World Cup has generated widespread optimism among audiences. This phenomenon reflects the process of transfer of salience, whereby issues considered important by the media are subsequently perceived as important by the public (McCombs, 2005). The findings support Agustina et al. (2025), who argue that media communication surrounding the national team plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of football-related actors and institutions. Furthermore, Sania et al. (2025) found that improvements in team quality, particularly through naturalization policies, contributed to increased supporter satisfaction and expectations. However, the findings of the present study suggest that the continuous reproduction of optimistic narratives may also generate substantial social pressure on players, coaches, and football authorities when actual performances fail to meet media-generated expectations. In this sense, media do not merely cultivate public support; they also establish standards of success against which the national team is evaluated.

More broadly, the findings indicate that the relationship between media, football, and nationalism is mutually constitutive within contemporary digital society. Media no longer function solely as neutral channels of information but operate as social actors that actively shape realities, identities, and collective aspirations surrounding the Indonesian National Team. Through the mechanisms of agenda-setting and framing, media organizations construct public understandings of football revival while simultaneously producing symbolic meanings associated with nationalism, leadership, and visions of national progress. These findings reinforce the continuing relevance of Agenda-Setting Theory in explaining the relationship between media coverage and public opinion formation within the context of national sport. At the same time, they extend existing scholarship by demonstrating how agenda-setting processes intersect with symbolic constructions of national identity and collective aspiration in digital media environments.

The practical implications of this study are equally significant. Given the influential role of media in shaping public expectations, sports journalism should strive to provide more balanced, contextualized, and reflective coverage of national football development. Such an approach would contribute to fostering realistic public expectations while minimizing

excessive social pressure on athletes, coaches, and governing institutions. Ultimately, a more nuanced media discourse may support a healthier relationship between public aspiration, national identity, and the long-term development of Indonesian football.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that online media function not merely as channels for the dissemination of sports information but also as sites of meaning production that shape public perceptions of the Indonesian National Football Team during the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign. Through agenda-setting and framing processes, media organizations actively constructed narratives of football revival through dominant themes such as The Rise of Garuda, The World Cup Dream, The Golden Generation, and Pride in Naturalization. These narratives extended beyond representations of sporting performance, contributing to the construction of collective aspirations, national identity, and public optimism regarding the future of Indonesian football. Furthermore, media portrayals of naturalized players and Erick Thohir illustrate how new symbolic figures are produced and mobilized to represent professionalism, institutional reform, and national hope within contemporary football discourse.

The findings contribute to the existing literature by demonstrating that media play a broader role than that commonly emphasized in studies focusing on match performance, sports policy, or institutional communication. Rather than merely reporting football-related events, media organizations actively participate in the social construction of nationalism, collective identity, and public expectations through sports coverage. These findings support McCombs' (2005) argument that media influence public priorities by determining which issues receive sustained attention. They also reinforce the framing perspective articulated by Entman and discussed by D'Angelo (2018), which suggests that media shape not only what audiences think about but also how they interpret social reality. In the context of the Indonesian National Team, media coverage functions as a mechanism through which collective imaginaries of national revival and international recognition are articulated and reproduced through football narratives.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is confined to online news coverage and digital discourse during the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualification period and therefore does not incorporate the perspectives of journalists, media practitioners, or audiences who consume and interpret such content. Second, the study focuses on textual and discursive analysis and does not empirically examine the extent to which media narratives influence public attitudes, perceptions, or behavior. Future research could address these limitations by integrating discourse analysis with interviews, surveys, or audience reception studies to develop a more comprehensive

understanding of the relationship between media representations, public expectations, and the construction of nationalism in Indonesian football. Such approaches would provide valuable insights into how media discourse is interpreted, negotiated, and internalized by different segments of society.

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