

FIFA World Cup Host Nations in Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

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Abstract—With the announcement of the winning nations to host the upcoming World Cups in 2026, 2030, and 2034, global media started reporting on this pivotal event to international readers. Such media narratives play a crucial role in shaping readers' perceptions of the host countries' cultural identities, offering insights into their social, historical, and cultural contexts. However, these discourses may carry bias or prejudice, reinforcing or contesting dominant global narratives. The present study examines the discursive construction of the host nations in global media from a critical discourse analysis perspective. The dataset comprises a corpus of news stories and reports from various international news outlets. The underlying themes that dominate the discourses on the host nations were identified using a corpus analysis tool, and a qualitative analysis of their discursive strategies. The results emphasize the economic benefits of the World Cup and the opportunity to promote the host nation's culture and legacy. However, media discourse implies bias in favor of developed nations (the United States, Canada, Europe) compared to other host nations (Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia). A range of subtle discursive strategies was employed to influence public perception about the host nations' sociocultural identities.

Index Terms—CDA, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, World Cup

I. INTRODUCTION

The FIFA World Cup is one of the most prestigious global sporting events, bringing together nations and cultures in a shared celebration of football. Beyond the competition itself, the tournament serves as a strategic platform for host nations to shape their international image and assert their cultural identity. The global visibility offered by the World Cup allows host countries to influence perceptions about their culture, values, and societal norms. Historically, countries have leveraged this opportunity to showcase their national heritage and project a favorable image on the world stage. For instance, Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup was not merely a sporting endeavor but a calculated effort to highlight its Arab and Islamic heritage. The opening ceremony incorporated symbolic elements such as traditional Bedouin tents, reflecting the nation's cultural roots. Similarly, Brazil used the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics to promote its vibrant culture and address social issues, influencing international media portrayals (Gutierrez et al., 2021).

How the international media represent host nations plays a crucial role in shaping global perceptions and intercultural understanding. Media outlets in the United Kingdom and Egypt framed the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar differently, demonstrating how geopolitical biases and cultural narratives influence sports journalism (Dhaenens, 2023). Additionally, a single symbolic moment, such as Lionel Messi wearing a Bisht during the 2022 World Cup final, was interpreted in competing cultural, national, and political frames, sparking global debate on identity, tradition, and media representation (Ghobain, 2024). Furthermore, a comparative analysis of New York Times coverage of the 2018 Russia

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and 2022 Qatar World Cups reveals a stark contrast, with Qatar facing significantly more negative framing, often influenced by anti-Muslim and Western-centric narratives (El-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2024). These examples demonstrate how media narratives can reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes, impacting diplomatic relations, tourism, and foreign investment. Discussions surrounding the 2022 World Cup in Qatar also highlighted orientalist discourses in Western media, reflecting broader challenges that Middle Eastern nations face in reshaping their global image (Li et al., 2023).

Hosting the FIFA World Cup allows nations to engage in nation branding and soft power diplomacy, using the event to project cultural heritage, values, and traditions on an international stage. In a similar effort, Qatar strategically positioned itself as a global sports tourism destination; however, Western media critiques often contested Qatar's image by focusing on labor rights, social policies, and allegations of "sportswashing" (Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2020). Likewise, Japan's hosting of the 2019 Rugby World Cup demonstrated a deliberate effort to frame the nation as an inclusive, cosmopolitan society, while still maintaining traditional nationalist narratives (Kobayashi et al., 2023).

Despite extensive research on media portrayals of individual World Cup hosts, existing studies generally examine single events or focus on media narratives within limited or isolated cultural contexts. We find research on Qatar 2022, South Africa 2010, or Brazil 2014 provides constructive insights; however, these studies do not cover multi-event or cross-cultural comparisons. Additionally, very few studies have analyzed how different host nations are represented across successive tournaments, and genuinely none have compared the 2026, 2030, and 2034 hosts within a unified analytic framework. This gap limits our understanding of how media discourse evolves across regions and over time. Therefore, by examining representations of three upcoming World Cups together, this study contributes a broader comparative perspective on how international media construct cultural identity, hierarchy, and geopolitical narratives across diverse host nations.

Research Objectives

This study intends to address these gaps by accomplishing two main objectives:

- To identify and compare the dominant narratives used in international news coverage of FIFA host nations
- To examine how the discursive constructions of the host nations shape international discourse and perception

By addressing these gaps and achieving the stated objectives, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication dynamics in global sporting events and to provide insights into how media representations shape international perceptions of national identities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The FIFA World Cup, as a premier global sporting event, has long been a subject of academic inquiry, particularly regarding how the international media portray host nations. The intersection of sports mega-events and media representation plays a crucial role in shaping national identity and influencing global perceptions. This section synthesizes key scholarly works on the topic, focusing on cross-cultural discourse analyses, nation branding, and the role of media in framing host nations.

First, the study investigates sports mega-events and national identity construction, where international sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games serve as powerful platforms for host nations to shape their cultural narratives and global images. Early studies, such as those by Tomlinson and Young (2006), explore the political, cultural, and economic dimensions of these events, highlighting how they serve as both nationalistic spectacles and instruments of soft power. Similarly, Roche (2000) examines the historical evolution of mega-events, from the 1851 Crystal Palace Expo to the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, illustrating how they contribute to national identity construction and international recognition.

Building on this foundation, Grix and Houlihan (2014) analyze the strategic use of sports mega-events as tools for soft power. Their studies of Germany (2006) and the United Kingdom (2012) demonstrate how host nations leverage these events to strengthen their diplomatic standing and reshape international perceptions. However, media representation plays a decisive role in this process. Knott et al. (2017) provide an empirical analysis of media coverage of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, revealing how global narratives emphasized crime and infrastructural shortcomings over cultural vibrancy. These findings reinforce the idea that media narratives can either enhance or hinder a host nation's image. Further reinforcing this perspective, Dhaenens (2023) argues that sports mega-events offer a platform for nation branding, but that media framing often overshadows official narratives. Similarly, Misener (2012) highlights how the 2010 Winter Paralympics' legacy discourse focused primarily on economic benefits, largely ignoring accessibility and social inclusion. These studies collectively emphasize the media's power to shape perceptions, influencing whether a host country is seen positively or negatively on the global stage.

The second factor underscores cross-cultural discourse analysis in sports media, providing a deeper understanding of how different media outlets construct narratives about the same event. Kim (2023) examines South Korean media representations across multiple World Cups, demonstrating how nationalism in sports media has evolved from collectivist portrayals to more globalized narratives. This shift underscores how domestic and international political contexts influence media framing. Additionally, a comparative analysis of British and Egyptian media coverage of the 2022 Qatar World Cup highlights stark differences in framing that reflect ideological and political biases (Dhaenens,

2023). Similarly, Japan's 2019 Rugby World Cup was framed as an example of cosmopolitan nationalism, presenting an image of an open, inclusive society while still maintaining strong nationalist narratives (Kobayashi et al., 2023). Gender representation in sports media has also been a subject of analysis. Coche (2021) investigates ESPN's coverage of the 2019 Women's World Cup, highlighting persistent gender disparities in sports journalism, despite record-breaking viewership numbers. This study ties into broader discussions on how media construct dominant narratives in sports, whether through cultural identity, nationalism, or gender bias.

Third, the research emphasizes a few studies on the media's role in framing host nations, finding that the host nations' portrayals in international media significantly impact global perceptions and diplomatic relations. Grix and Houlihan (2014) discuss how countries utilize events like the World Cup to enhance their soft power, arguing that positive media coverage strengthens a nation's brand, while negative portrayals reinforce stereotypes. Their study aligns with Knott et al. (2017), who found that media coverage of South Africa's 2010 World Cup often focused on crime and infrastructure challenges, overshadowing the nation's efforts to promote its cultural diversity and progress. Further research explores how Western and non-Western media frame the same sporting event differently. Kim's (2023) study on South Korean media and Kerry et al.'s (2024) analysis of global media coverage of Qatar's 2022 World Cup indicate that media outlets vary in their emphasis on cultural heritage versus political controversies. For example, while some media sources highlighted Qatar's Islamic traditions, others focused on human rights concerns, demonstrating the subjectivity of media narratives.

The concept of sportswashing has also emerged in discussions about media framing of mega events. Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018) argue that Qatar's hosting the 2022 World Cup was part of a broader strategy to reshape its international image, but media coverage largely focused on labor rights and governance issues. Similarly, Hellmeier and Zurn (2022) surveyed European public perceptions of Qatar, revealing that countries with a more critical media landscape (e.g., Germany and Sweden) maintained skeptical views about Qatar's World Cup despite its branding efforts.

The fourth factor examines the research conducted to identify the major emerging research and gaps in literature. Recent studies continue to explore the complexities of media representation of World Cup host nations. For example, Alhugbani (2025) conducted a content analysis of the Gulf States' media coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup, uncovering a regional divide between supportive and critical narratives. These findings suggest that even within the Arab world, perceptions of Qatar's hosting varied significantly.

Despite the extensive body of literature, gaps remain in understanding the long-term effects of media portrayals on host nations' cultural identities and international relations. Additionally, existing research primarily focuses on Western media perspectives, with limited studies analyzing non-Western media representations of sports mega-events. The primary research discussed here provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the intersection of sports mega-events, media representation, and national identity. They highlight how media narratives can reinforce stereotypes, reshape global perceptions, or serve as instruments of soft power. At the same time, these studies emphasize the need for further comparative analyses to fully understand the long-term impact of media framing on host nations.

Research Questions

1. How do media representations shape the discourse on FIFA World Cup host countries in international news coverage?
2. What are the comparable discursive aspects of FIFA World Cup host countries in international news coverage?
3. What are the dominant narratives employed by media to represent FIFA World Cup host countries, and how do these narratives shape public perceptions?

III. METHODOLOGY

To gather relevant data and address the research questions, this study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative aspects utilized Antconc (Laurence, 2020), a corpus analysis tool, to generate a list of statistically significant keywords in the target corpus (see Appendix A), which was compared against the reference corpus of American English 2006: press reportage (Baker, 2006). The analysis focused on content words that convey meaningful information about themes and concepts, excluding grammatical or functional words, as well as corpus-specific terms like FIFA, World, Cup, and geographical names. The Discourse Analyzer AI Toolkit (Khettab, 2024) was utilized to extract latent themes.

The identified keywords were then examined in broader contexts to uncover underlying sociocultural meanings and discursive constructions through a critical discourse analysis perspective. The qualitative analysis was grounded in the sociocognitive approach (SCA) to critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2014, 2015, 2016), which triangulates discourse, cognition, and society. SCA provides a theoretical and analytical framework for critically examining media discourse, particularly in uncovering power abuse and discursive strategies such as framing, foregrounding and backgrounding, and nominalization. This study applied SCA to analyze media discourse structure, including macrostructure (title, headlines, lead sentence) and microstructure (lexicon, syntax, style, rhetoric), and explicated the cognitive and social underpinnings through discussion.

Data Collection and Processing

The dataset was collected from the Corpus of News on the Web (Davies, 2016), often known as the NOW Corpus. This corpus comprises about 19.5 billion words of data from news media, newspapers and magazines, from 20 English-speaking countries. The NOW Corpus is cumulative, with the news collection continuing to grow from 2010 to the present. The search terms were the phrase FIFA World Cup and the planned dates (2026, 2030, 2034) to retrieve texts and contextualized instances from various news media outlets. A search conducted in April 2025 found 600 news articles about the 2026 FIFA World Cup, 50 articles about the 2030 World Cup and 35 articles about the 2034 World Cup. This disparity likely stems from the media's heightened interest in the upcoming 2026 World Cup. The target was to create three separate small corpora corresponding to the World Cups in 2026, 2030, and 2034, comprising 100 articles for each corpus. However, the final corpora comprised 100 articles from the 2026 World Cup (61,850 words), 50 articles from the 2030 World Cup (13,061 words), and 35 articles from the 2034 World Cup (23,189 words), totaling 98,100 words.

IV. RESULTS

After preparing each corpus and running it through the corpus analysis tool, a keyword list (see Appendix A) was generated that included words typical of news about the FIFA World Cup in all corpora. However, by investigating the keywords within the wider context, the underlying meanings and themes are subtly unveiled using the Discourse Analyzer AI Toolkit (Khettab, 2024). Whereas the economic and financial benefits of organizing the FIFA World Cup have been a common theme in media discourse, the social and cultural representations of the host nations were intricately constructed. The subsequent analysis explores the dominant themes in media coverage of host nations and the discursive strategies, in bold, used to construct narratives about these countries. Selective instances from each corpus, including some keywords, are examined in their wider contexts with a critical perspective. Example keywords were made bold in the excerpts for analysis purposes.

(a). FIFA World Cup 2026

The keyword list for the FIFA World Cup 2026 corpus included words that generally relate to football cups. The contexts through which the host countries (the United States, Canada, Mexico) were represented in media coverage vary; however, featured themes for each host nation can be identified. The United States is associated with **proven leadership** and a **growing soccer culture**. On the other hand, Canada is portrayed as **multicultural** and **committed to gender equity**. Regarding Mexico, media coverage highlights its **cultural pride** and **football heritage**.

Excerpt 1

FIFA's Council, the organization's most powerful decision-making body, chose the U.S. at a virtual meeting this week. "The decision was reached based on the United States' position as a proven leader in staging global events and because it would allow FIFA to maximize synergies with the delivery of the FIFA World Cup 2026, to the benefit of both **tournaments** and the development of **football** in the North American region" (Bushnell, 2023).

However, media discourse implies unequal representations of the host countries. For instance, excerpt 1 portrays the United States as a reliable host for major world events. The macrostructure of excerpt 1 features the news article's title ("Another soccer bonanza, the 2025 Club World Cup, is coming to the United States"), where the word bonanza suggests the prevailing profitable view of the event. The microstructure is marked by deliberate word choice and the strategic use of passive structures. The lexicon, featuring terms such as leader, allow, maximize, synergies, and benefit, conveys a narrative of leadership and leverage. Furthermore, the deployment of passive structures, as seen in phrases like the decision was reached, contributes to a broader discursive strategy of nominalization, which subtly shifts agency and emphasis.

Excerpt 1 employs three discursive strategies to attribute FIFA's decision to award the 2026 World Cup to the United States to its proven leadership rather than its adherence to bid criteria. Specifically, excerpt 1 utilizes **intertextuality**, **nominalization**, and **appealing to authority**. Intertextuality was employed through a selective quote to support the newspaper's narrative of the United States as a reliable host for major world events. The phrase the decision was reached exemplifies nominalization, which obscures agency and shifts the focus from the decision-makers to the decision itself and the winning country. The appeal to authority is achieved by referencing FIFA's council to invoke the credibility of the governing body and, thus, the news story on FIFA's decision.

Excerpt 2

Cochrane repeated that Canada Soccer's offer to the national teams involved equal **match** fees and splitting competition prize money between them. "Simply put, national team players, regardless of their gender identity, will be paid the same amount for their work in representing our **country**," Cochrane said. He said the proposed deal would make the Canadian women the second-highest-paid team in the world, behind only the U.S. (Davidson, 2023).

The commitment to gender equity has emerged as a prominent theme in media discourse surrounding Canada, particularly in the context of the World Cup. The news report's title, "Canada Soccer officials defend controversial deal with Canadian Soccer Business," suggests an argumentative tone, setting the stage for a discussion of the issues. At the microstructure level, excerpt 2 reveals stylistic and grammatical features that characterize the report's language. Notably, the organization's general secretary, Cochrane, employs a sympathetic tone, evident in phrases like, "Simply put, national team players, regardless of their gender identity, will be paid the same amount for their work in representing our country." The informal language style used here conveys Cochrane's understanding and empathy

toward the gender equity issue. Furthermore, the use of the inclusive pronoun *our* in “our country” reinforces a sense of shared identity and community, aligning with Cochrane’s attempt to build a connection with the audience.

Cochrane utilized two key strategies to reinforce Canada Soccer’s commitment to gender equity: **legitimation** and **quantification**. Through legitimation, he appealed to widely accepted values and norms, such as equality, to validate the organization’s stance on gender equity. Specifically, he emphasized Canada Soccer’s commitment to equal match fees and prize money for national teams, thereby legitimizing its position. Additionally, Cochrane employed quantification, citing concrete numerical data, such as the women’s team being the second-highest-paid in the world, to demonstrate tangible progress and convey a promising plan to support the national women’s team.

Mexico’s football heritage theme is reflected in media coverage, with the country having participated in the FIFA World Cup 17 times and hosted it twice. Despite the United States leading the winning joint bid for the 2026 World Cup, with Canada and Mexico as cohosts, news media coverage often places Mexico in a secondary position, either in the middle or at the end, when mentioning the host countries. This **foregrounding and backgrounding** discursive strategy prioritizes the United States and Canada, relegating Mexico to a less prominent role. Figure 1 illustrates a sample (see Appendix B for full concordance) concordance output from Antconc, highlighting Mexico’s recurrent positioning at the end of host-country references, which reveals a notable discursive trend of foregrounding and backgrounding.

Total Hits: 54 Page Size 100 hits 1 to 54 of 54 hits			
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 FIFA 2026...	that the 2026 World Cup in Canada, the United States, and	Mexico	will have four-team groups and 24 more games than
2 FIFA 2026...	set to take place in Canada, the United States and	Mexico.	The governing body’s council announced on Tuesday that
3 FIFA 2026...	to four-team groups. The competition in the United States,	Mexico	and Canada was due to feature 16 groups of three
4 FIFA 2026...	also hosted the sold-out 2023 CONCACAF Gold Cup Final between	Mexico	and Panama. The fourth edition of the Concacaf Nations
5 FIFA 2026...	set to take place in the United States, Canada and	Mexico.	USMNT striker Jesus Ferreira was asked about his thoughts
6 FIFA 2026...	World Cup which will be held in the United States,	Mexico	and Canada. In what was the biggest announcement of
7 FIFA 2026...	s Hard Rock Stadium will host the bronze medal match	Mexico	City will host the tournament opener on June 11, 2026 (Friday,
8 FIFA 2026...	FIFA World Cup 2026 will be held in 16 cities across Canada,	Mexico	and the United States, 11 June–19 July, 2026." "The FIFA World
9 FIFA 2026...	billion people. With the United States of America, Canada, and	Mexico	already guaranteed qualification as hosts, the remaining 45 spots have
10 FIFA 2026...	of the upcoming World Cup in the USA, Canada and	Mexico	will be broadcast live, free and exclusive on SBS,
11 FIFA 2026...	Cup will feature 16 stadiums, including 11 in the USA, three in	Mexico,	and the remaining two in Canada. Only Mexico’s
12 FIFA 2026...	three in Mexico, and the remaining two in Canada. Only	Mexico’	s Estadio Azteca has previously hosted a World Cup
13 FIFA 2026...	the FIFA World Cup 2026, which will be broadcast from Canada,	Mexico	and the US on SBS, SBS VICELAND and SBS
14 FIFA 2026...	the biggest TV audience event of 2026. "Coming live from Canada,	Mexico	and the USA – it will be a World Cup
15 FIFA 2026...	Men’s World Cup being staged in the United States,	Mexico	and Canada. With Qatar hosting in 2022, Asia would ordinarily

Figure 1. Concordance of the Keyword Mexico in the 2026 World Cup

(b). FIFA World Cup 2030

Media discourse depicts the host countries of the 2030 FIFA World Cup through a lens of unity and collaboration, with each nation showcasing distinct themes. Morocco is celebrated for its *cultural identity* and *religious values*, while Spain is lauded for its *footballing reputation* and *social legacy*. Portugal’s *historic significance* and *legacy* as the host of the inaugural World Cup take center stage.

Excerpt 3

Speaking after the announcement at the FIFA Extraordinary Congress, Dr. Motsepe said, “The Morocco, Portugal, and Spain partnership brings together and unites Africa and Europe through **football** and inspires all of us to work together to make the world a better place. Today is a proud day for African football as Morocco becomes only the second African **country** in FIFA’s history to **host** the FIFA World Cup.” Morocco, the only African country to have reached the semi-final of the FIFA World Cup, follows in the footsteps of South Africa, which hosted the competition in 2010 (JoySports, 2024).

Excerpt 4

Hosting the FIFA World **Cup** could be transformative for Africa. **Football** can be a catalyst for large-scale development across the continent. We often forget that this would only be the second time the FIFA World Cup™ is held in Africa in 100 years of history (Brand Spur, 2024).

However, the media narrative subtly uses a **framing** strategy to view the partnership between the host countries through a Eurocentric lens, emphasizing European superiority. Notably, in excerpts 3 and 4, the joint bid is presented as a triumph for African football, with Morocco’s involvement seen as a benchmark of success due to its African representation. The deliberate lexical choice of words and phrases collectively emphasizes the significance of European involvement; for example, *partnership*, *unites*, *proud*, *African country*, *only*, and *100 years of history*.

This narrative is further reinforced by the **repetition** strategy in excerpt 4, which highlights the significance of Africa hosting the World Cup for only the second time and positions it as an opportunity for development. Using **hyperboles**, such as “FIFA World Cup could be transformative for Africa” and “large-scale development across the continent,”

serves as a rhetorical device to amplify the anticipated impact of the European partnership with Africa. The underlying tone implies that Europe's involvement lends credibility and weight to the bid, possibly due to Morocco's previous unsuccessful attempts to host the World Cup. This subtle suggestion underscores the perceived value of European expertise and validation in the joint bid.

(c). *FIFA World Cup 2034*

The dominant themes in the 2034 corpus, which Saudi Arabia will host, revolve around the *national transformation* under the KSA's Vision 2030 and the country's *growing influence in global sports*. The keyword list bears similarities to those of the 2026 and 2030 corpora, with notable exceptions such as *human* and *rights*. Media coverage focused on two critical issues: concerns about LGBTQ+ human rights and the potential agency involved in securing the 2034 bid.

Excerpt 5

Peter Tatchell has written to Saudi Arabia's **Football** Federation urging organisers to guarantee the safety of LGBTQ+ folks attending the men's World Cup in 2034, given the country's harsh anti-queer laws (Perry, 2025).

Excerpt 6

Human rights advocates have responded after Saudi Arabia was awarded as hosting the men's football World Cup in 2034, despite anti-gay laws in the country (PinkNews Reporter, 2024).

Excerpts 5 and 6 employ an **oversimplification** strategy, reducing the human rights issue to LGBTQ+ rights and framing it in simplistic terms. This strategy is evident in phrases like guarantee the safety, which proposes a straightforward solution, and the binary representation in anti-gay laws, which collectively oversimplifies the complexities of ensuring safety and rights for LGBTQ+ individuals.

In excerpt 7, news media coverage frames Saudi Arabia's World Cup win with skepticism, hinting at potential FIFA involvement in the 2034 bid award. This narrative employs a **mitigation** strategy, downplaying Saudi Arabia's achievement and subtly implying that external factors, rather than the country's actual capabilities, may have influenced the outcome. This example uses grammatical structure through a hypothetical conditional clause, which allows for a nuanced expression of doubt regarding FIFA's agency in the bid process.

Excerpt 7

If Saudi Arabia could have designed a process for choosing future **World Cup** hosts, it might look similar to what FIFA unveiled this week for the 2030- and 2034-men's soccer **tournaments** (Dunbar, 2023).

V. DISCUSSION

This analysis of media discourse on the upcoming FIFA World Cups presents striking differences in how host nations are framed, illustrating deeper cultural hierarchies and geopolitical descriptions. These representations are not neutral; they operate as powerful discursive strategies that outline international understandings of host countries and fortify prevailing global inequalities. The succeeding paragraphs underscore three overarching themes that emerge from the findings: first, the privileging theme of developed nations as "ideal hosts"; second, the marginalizing of Mexico in cohosting contexts; and third, the framing of Saudi Arabia as a place of cultural tension between Western liberal values and local traditions.

A. *Developed Nations as the Ideal for Hosting*

Most nations globally concede that media discourse consistently positions developed nations, predominantly the United States and Canada, as replicas of reliability and modernism. The United States is described in terms of proven leadership, organizational capacity, and global infrastructure, demonstrating an image of efficiency and solidity. Similarly, Canada is known for its commitment to gender equity, with reports emphasizing equal pay and inclusivity as characteristic of its modern social values. These interpretations reinforce the perception that advanced democracies are not only capable but also foreseeably aligned with FIFA's global initiatives. Such narratives illustrate what van Dijk (2014, 2016) identifies as discursive legitimation, where shared values like leadership, equality, and progress are invoked to naturalize certain nations as "ideal" hosts. In addition, comparable discursive strategies have also been documented in the coverage of Germany 2006 and the UK 2012, where media highlighted democratic credentials and infrastructural superiority as benchmarks of success (Grix & Houlihan, 2014).

B. *Mexico's Secondary Positioning*

Mexico, in contrast, is often relegated to a background role, even though it has a long footballing tradition and successfully hosted the tournament in 1970 and 1986. Media coverage regularly lists Mexico last among the 2026 cohosts, subtly diminishing its role and supporting and reinforcing the United States and Canada instead. This discursive marginalization shows the strategy of foregrounding and backgrounding, where certain players are prioritized while others are downplayed. Such positioning raises questions about the implicit hierarchies surrounding and implanted in global sports reporting. Similar discursive imbalances were evident in international coverage of South Africa's 2010 World Cup, where global narratives highlighted crime and infrastructural shortcomings while minimizing cultural vibrancy (Knott et al., 2017). Thus, Mexico's football heritage is acknowledged; nevertheless, it is overshadowed by narratives that represent it as dependent on its North American counterparts, sustaining a symbolic center-periphery dynamic (Tomlinson & Young, 2006).

C. Saudi Arabia as a Potential “Clash of Civilizations” Narrative

Looking ahead to 2034, Saudi Arabia’s selection as host has been framed through a markedly different lens. Some media have been trying to paint a different image since they do not portray and highlight the organizational capacity or infrastructure but emphasize human rights issues, particularly concerning LGBTQ people and freedoms. Unfortunately, this framing places the event as a potential “clash of civilizations” between Western liberal norms and Saudi sociocultural traditions. On one hand, Saudi Arabia projects itself as modernizing under Vision 2030; on the other, Western media often reduce its hosting narrative to questions of rights and restrictions. The oversimplification and generality of complex cultural and legal contexts into a binary of freedom versus repression mirrors broader orientalist discourses that have long shaped Western portrayals of Middle Eastern nations (Li et al., 2023; El-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2024). Similar criticisms were leveled at Qatar during the 2022 World Cup, where Western-centric reporting focused disproportionately on human rights while downplaying cultural heritage initiatives (Hellmeier & Zurn, 2022; Dhaenens, 2023). This tendency not only foregrounds conflict but also obscures Saudi Arabia’s agency in reshaping its international image through sports diplomacy, a strategy increasingly described in the literature as sportswashing (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018).

D. Toward a Critical Understanding of Media Bias

Against this backdrop, these findings demonstrate that media discourses around FIFA World Cups do more than report sports news and reproduce hierarchies of legitimacy and belonging in the global order. Media position developed nations, such as the United States and Canada, as norm setters; however, middle-tier nations like Mexico are symbolically subordinated, and non-Western nations like Saudi Arabia and Qatar are framed as problematic or culturally incompatible. Such patterns and perceptions underscore the importance of critical discourse analysis in unpacking power relations and abuse embedded in media narratives (van Dijk, 2014, 2016). Therefore, understanding these dynamics is crucial for appreciating how global sports not only reflect but also actively construct perceptions of culture, identity, and international standing.

Despite this study’s valuable insights into the media representation of FIFA World Cup host nations, it has certain limitations. The dataset was confined to English-language media sources, excluding diverse perspectives from non-English outlets, including those within the host nations. Moreover, the corpus focused only on the pre-tournament period and therefore does not capture post-event media shifts. The qualitative component of the mixed-methods design primarily focused on textual analysis and did not include audience reception data, which could have provided a better understanding of how readers interpret these media narratives. Nevertheless, future research could bridge these gaps by integrating multilingual corpora, longitudinal data, and audience-centered approaches to gain a better understanding of global media discourse surrounding mega sporting events.

VI. CONCLUSION

A considerable bias toward host nations in North America and Europe influences Western media discourses on the upcoming FIFA World Cups in 2026, 2030, and 2034. This study identified three major themes that characterize Western media bias: the privileging of developed nations as “ideal hosts,” the marginalizing of Mexico in cohosting contexts, and the framing of Saudi Arabia as a place of cultural tension between Western liberal values and local traditions. Thus, negative narratives mark the discursive constructions of the cultural identity of host countries such as Mexico, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. A range of implicit and explicit discursive strategies was utilized, including legitimization, oversimplification, intertextuality, and hyperbole. Further research could explore data from diverse countries or analyze media discourses from past FIFA World Cups to uncover biases toward specific nations.

APPENDIX A. KEYWORDS LIST PER CORPUS

FIFA 2026 Keywords						
Keyword	Freq_Tar	Freq_Ref	NormFreq_Tar	NormFreq_Ref	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
soccer	155	4	2503.27	44.802	243.837	0.005
matches	142	1	2293.319	11.201	242.874	0.005
stadium	123	2	1986.466	22.401	201.363	0.004
host	132	6	2131.817	67.204	192.81	0.004
football	151	15	2438.67	168.009	184.892	0.005
tournament	117	5	1889.565	56.003	172.563	0.004
team	191	42	3084.675	470.425	165.692	0.006
qualifiers	67	0	1082.059	0	119.675	0.002
content	74	3	1195.11	33.602	109.988	0.002
final	79	5	1275.86	56.003	108.471	0.003

FIFA 2030 Keywords						
Keyword	Freq_Tar	Freq_Ref	NormFreq_Tar	NormFreq_Ref	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
cup	174	11	13482.101	123.207	641.617	0.027
football	122	15	9452.968	168.009	415.237	0.019
tournament	55	5	4261.584	56.003	194.732	0.008
bid	57	12	4416.55	134.407	175.565	0.009
host	41	6	3176.817	67.204	135.497	0.006
matches	24	1	1859.6	11.201	91.229	0.004
countries	35	18	2711.917	201.611	81.846	0.005
infantino	18	0	1394.7	0	74.51	0.003
centenary	17	0	1317.217	0	70.369	0.003
digital	15	0	1162.25	0	62.089	0.002

FIFA 2034 Keywords						
Keyword	Freq_Tar	Freq_Ref	NormFreq_Tar	NormFreq_Ref	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
cup	325	11	14080.846	123.207	940.559	0.028
world	362	84	15683.896	940.85	756.973	0.031
host	147	6	6368.875	67.204	418.182	0.013
football	155	15	6715.48	168.009	396.86	0.013
bid	125	12	5415.71	134.407	320.352	0.011
tournament	92	5	3985.962	56.003	254.412	0.008
rights	74	23	3206.1	257.614	138.719	0.006
asian	43	0	1863.004	0	136.177	0.004
human	50	7	2166.284	78.404	119.108	0.004
infantino	35	0	1516.399	0	110.832	0.003

APPENDIX B. CONCORDANCE OF THE KEYWORD MEXICO IN THE 2026 WORLD CUP

15	FIFA 2026...	New Zealand, the FIFA World Cup 2026 in the United States,	Mexico	and Canada and the FIFA Women's World Cup 2027
16	FIFA 2026...	to four-team groups. The competition in the United States,	Mexico	and Canada was due to feature 16 groups of three
17	FIFA 2026...	the continent of North America, the United States of America,	Mexico	and Canada will host the FIFA World Cup 2026. Earlier
18	FIFA 2026...	World Cup which will be held in the United States,	Mexico	and Canada. In what was the biggest announcement of
19	FIFA 2026...	Men's World Cup being staged in the United States,	Mexico	and Canada. With Qatar hosting in 2022, Asia would ordinarily
20	FIFA 2026...	World Cup, which will be hosted by the U.S.,	Mexico	and Canada. They are: MetLife Stadium, Hard Rock Stadium,
21	FIFA 2026...	also hosted the sold-out 2023 CONCACAF Gold Cup Final between	Mexico	and Panama. The fourth edition of the Concacaf Nations
22	FIFA 2026...	will the number of competing nations will increase from 32 to 48.	Mexico	will also host 10 matches, and the U.S will
23	FIFA 2026...	of the upcoming World Cup in the USA, Canada and	Mexico	will be broadcast live, free and exclusive on SBS,
24	FIFA 2026...	that the 2026 World Cup in Canada, the United States, and	Mexico	will have four-team groups and 24 more games than
25	FIFA 2026...	three-country host in World Cup history. Canada, along with	Mexico,	will host only 10 games during the group stage, with
26	FIFA 2026...	set to take place in Canada, the United States and	Mexico.	The governing body's council announced on Tuesday that
27	FIFA 2026...	are 14 host cities — 11 in the U.S. and three in	Mexico.	The tournament is scheduled to run June 11 to July 19, 2026,
28	FIFA 2026...	November's contest in Qatar would be jointly hosted by	Mexico,	the U.S., and Canada, the first three-country
29	FIFA 2026...	Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Mexican hosting cities are	Mexico	City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. It had already been confirmed
30	FIFA 2026...	Miami, and New York/New Jersey. The Mexican sites are	Mexico	City, Monterrey and Guadalajara." "TORONTO — After an "extensive global
31	FIFA 2026...	in the U.S., and 10 in each of Canada and	Mexico	in the first expanded 48-team tournament. The B.C.
32	FIFA 2026...	in the U.S., and 10 in each of Canada and	Mexico	in the first expanded 48-team tournament. Toronto was the
33	FIFA 2026...	official bid book put forward by the U.S./Canada/	Mexico	United Bid, which in 2018 won the right to host
34	FIFA 2026...	official bid book put forward by the U.S./Canada/	Mexico	United Bid, which in 2018 won the right to host
35	FIFA 2026...	Brazil) Flamengo (Brazil) Monterrey (Mexico) Seattle Sounders (U.S.) León (	Mexico)	Al Ahly (Egypt) Wydad Casablanca (Morocco) Al-Hilal (Saudi
36	FIFA 2026...	billion people. With the United States of America, Canada, and	Mexico	already guaranteed qualification as hosts, the remaining 45 spots have
37	FIFA 2026...	already committed to hosting 60 matches, with 10 to be hosted in	Mexico	and 10 in Canada. Canada-hosted games were to be
38	FIFA 2026...	which is being co-hosted by the U.S. and	Mexico.	Canada Soccer's annual general meeting took place Saturday
39	FIFA 2026...	s Hard Rock Stadium will host the bronze medal match	Mexico	City will host the tournament opener on June 11, 2026 (Friday,
40	FIFA 2026...	hosts have been confirmed as Canada, the U.S., and	Mexico.	FIFA is expected to finalize the host cities in
41	FIFA 2026...	the watershed in Argentina's World Cup campaign. From the	Mexico	game onwards, we saw the true Argentina, fighting for
42	FIFA 2026...	body confirmed that Canada — along with the U.S. and	Mexico —	have secured automatic berths as co-hosts of the 2026
43	FIFA 2026...	be joined by six CONCACAF qualifiers. The host United States,	Mexico,	Jamaica and Panama earned their spots by winning in
44	FIFA 2026...	Scaloni learnt from his mistakes. His team became unpredictable from	Mexico	onwards, in a good way. Be it a centre-
45	FIFA 2026...	s Mercy Park on the Kansas side of the border.	Mexico	opens in Houston on June 22, plays four days later
46	FIFA 2026...	three in Mexico, and the remaining two in Canada. Only	Mexico'	s Estadio Azteca has previously hosted a World Cup
47	FIFA 2026...	Spain) Manchester City (England) Palmeiras (Brazil) Flamengo (Brazil) Monterrey (	Mexico)	Seattle Sounders (U.S.) León (Mexico) Al Ahly (Egypt)
48	FIFA 2026...	matches and won two of them while drawing one against	Mexico.	So, playing against such a team will be difficult
49	FIFA 2026...	Qatar. Canada qualified for the first time since competing at	Mexico 1986.	The 2010 naming of Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup
50	FIFA 2026...	to co-host the 2027 Women's World Cup along with	Mexico.	Then comes the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Now, 12 months before
51	FIFA 2026...	FIFA originally awarded in 2018 to the U.S., Canada and	Mexico	under an 80-match format. However, after high international TV
52	FIFA 2026...	set to take place in the United States, Canada and	Mexico.	USMNT striker Jesus Ferreira was asked about his thoughts
53	FIFA 2026...	will be jointly hosted by Canada, the United States and	Mexico	with matches held in select host cities across North
54	FIFA 2026...	event being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and	Mexico.	Yet the decision marks a seismic shift in the

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