



HYBRID GOVERNANCE IN INDONESIA'S NATION BRANDING: M4 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2023

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of hybrid governance in Indonesia's nation branding practices through the 2023 M4 World Championship. The global esports tournament was organized by Moonton as a multinational private company, while the Indonesian government acted as a facilitator through policy support, institutional legitimacy, and symbolic involvement. This study employed an interpretivist qualitative approach with a single-case study strategy. Data were collected from policy documents, official press releases, government statements, organizer publications, and credible media coverage. Previous studies still limited research that specifically analyzes the 2023 M4 World Championship as a global esports event organized by a multinational corporation from the perspective of hybrid governance. This study addresses that gap by examining how the interaction between state and private actors constructs nation branding practices in Indonesia within a hybrid governance structure. The findings show that Indonesia's nation branding through M4 was formed within a hybrid governance configuration. Moonton controlled the operational and production aspects of the event, while the state utilized the event as a strategic platform to project Indonesia's national image. Indonesia was represented through narratives and symbols emphasizing modernity, tourism, digital entertainment, and the creative economy. The novelty of this study lies in its use of hybrid governance theory to explain nation branding practices in global esports events managed primarily by multinational private actors. This research demonstrates that nation branding in the digital era is no longer fully state-led, but emerges through collaborative governance between governments and global corporations in transnational digital spaces.

Keywords: esports, hybrid governance, Indonesia, nation branding, soft power

Introduction

Economic developments in the digital era have transformed the practice of international relations, particularly in how countries build their influence and image globally. The esports industry, as part of the digital creative economy, has now become a transnational arena involving multinational corporations, global communities, and government support. Several studies indicate that esports is increasingly understood as a new space for countries to strengthen their international appeal through popular culture and digital media (Jin, 2023). This shift raises a research question regarding the study of international relations: how does the practice of building a state's image work when global events are managed by private actors, not states?

In international relations literature, efforts to build a state's image and appeal are often associated with the concept of soft power. Soft power explains that states can influence others through cultural appeal, values, and a positive image, not just through military or economic power (Nye, Jr., 2004). One strategy that is often used within this framework is nation branding, namely a country's systematic efforts to shape and manage international perceptions of its national identity (Anholt, 2007). Early literature on nation branding tended to position the state as the primary actor controlling the narrative and promoting the national image. However, developments in globalization and digitalization indicate that the process of shaping a nation's image now increasingly involves non-state actors, including global corporations and digital platforms (Gilboa, 2008).

The change in role can be understood through the perspective of global governance, which emphasizes that the management of global issues is no longer entirely state-centric, but involves various actors in a more complex structure (Weiss & Wilkinson, 2014). In further developments, collaboration between the state and the private sector is understood as a form of hybrid governance, namely the regulation and distribution of authority between state and non-state actors in managing a public issue or activity (Bevir, 2012). This perspective is relevant for explaining how states continue to play a strategic role even when they are not the primary controllers in a global process.

Although research on esports in international relations has developed, most studies still focus on public diplomacy and strategic communication as instruments of soft power.

These studies generally highlight how states use popular culture to build a positive image. However, there is limited research specifically analyzing how the relationship between states and global corporations shapes nation branding practices within a hybrid governance structure, particularly in the context of Indonesia.

This gap is evident in the organization of the M4 World Championship 2023 in Jakarta. The tournament was fully managed by Moonton as a global private company, while the Indonesian government acted as a facilitator through policy support and institutional legitimacy. This condition indicates that Indonesia's nation branding did not occur through a fully state-led branding pattern, but rather through a hybrid governance configuration where the state and corporations have different but interconnected roles. However, the dynamics of this role division have not been extensively analyzed conceptually in existing literature.

Based on this background, this research poses the question: how does the hybrid governance configuration shape Indonesia's nation branding practices through the 2023 M4 World Championship? In digital esports mega-events, the state operates as a strategic facilitator rather than a primary organizer, leveraging privately controlled global platforms for nation branding objectives. Theoretically, this research contributes by developing a hybrid governance perspective as an analytical framework in nation branding studies in the digital era. Empirically, this research enriches the study of changes in soft power usage practices through the esports industry in the Indonesian context.

Methodology

Literature Review

This study uses hybrid governance theory as the main framework to analyze how state and non-state actors cooperate in organizing the 2023 M4 World Championship. This framework is supported by the concepts of nation branding and soft power to explain how the event is used to build Indonesia's image at the international level.

Hybrid Governance

Hybrid governance is a form of governance that involves collaboration between state and non-state actors in managing activities that have a public impact (Bevir, 2012). In today's global context, the state is not always the sole actor with full control, but rather shares roles with companies, organizations, or other institutions.

In the context of the 2023 M4 World Championship, the event is technically managed entirely by Moonton as a private company. However, the state remains present through policy support, facilitation, political legitimacy, and symbolic means. This is where a form of hybrid governance emerges: the state is not the primary organizer, but rather acts as a facilitator and legitimizer (Bevir, 2012).

This theory is used to analyze:

1. How the division of roles between the government and Moonton occurs.
2. The form of state involvement in events managed by business actors.
3. The state's position as a "strategic facilitator" on the global esports stage.

By using hybrid governance, this research can explain the structure of relationships between actors more systematically, rather than simply describing state involvement in general.

Nation Branding

Nation branding is a country's effort to build a positive image in the eyes of the world through specific symbols, narratives, and promotions. In recent developments, nation branding is not only carried out through formal diplomacy, but also through international events, the creative industry, and digital platforms (Anholt, 2007).

In this study, nation branding is used to examine how Indonesia is represented through M4. The analysis focuses on:

1. Narratives emerging in official government statements.
2. National symbols displayed during events.
3. Messages about Indonesia as a center for the esports industry or digital economy.

Thus, this concept helps explain how Indonesia's image is constructed through these events (Anholt, 2007).

Soft Power

Soft power is a country's ability to influence others through cultural appeal, values, and a positive image, rather than through pressure or military force. In the digital era, the creative industry and esports have become new sources of soft power due to their global reach (Nye, Jr., 2004).

In this study, soft power is not the primary theory, but rather it is used to explain why nation branding through esports is important. Events like M4 are not just gaming competitions, but also a platform to showcase Indonesia's national capacity, creativity, and position in the global digital economy.

This theoretical framework was used step by step in the data analysis: Hybrid governance was used to understand the structure of the relationship between the state and Moonton. Nation branding was used to identify how Indonesia's image was shaped. Soft power was used to explain the strategic significance of these practices in international relations.

The data were analyzed based on three main focuses:

1. The roles and positions of actors within the governance structure.
2. The narratives and symbols that shape Indonesia's image.
3. The strategic objectives pursued through these global events.

With this framework, the research not only explains the state's presence in M4 but also demonstrates how it leverages hybrid governance for nation branding and soft power projection.

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with an interpretivist perspective. This approach was chosen because the research seeks to understand the meaning, actor relations, and role configurations in Indonesia's nation branding practices through the 2023 M4 World Championship. In the tradition of international relations, an interpretivist approach is used to explain how actors construct meaning and carry out political practices in specific social contexts. This approach is relevant to the hybrid governance framework that emphasizes

the interaction and division of authority between state and non-state actors (Creswell, 2009).

The research strategy used is a single case study. The 2023 M4 World Championship was chosen as a case study because it represents a global esports event held in Indonesia, with a management configuration dominated by global private companies, while the state acts as a facilitator. The selection of this case study allows for an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of hybrid governance in a specific context and explores the relationship between the theoretical framework and empirical practice (Creswell, 2009).

The data used in this study is qualitative data sourced from government policy documents, official press releases, statements by state officials, Moonton publications, credible media reports, and official promotional materials and documentation for the 2023 M4 World Championship. The source selection criteria were based on relevance to the relationship between the country and Moonton, the credibility of the publishing institution, and direct links to nation branding practices within the event.

The choice of this method supports the research objective to explain how the dynamics of hybrid governance shape Indonesia's nation branding practices in the 2023 M4 World Championship. With an interpretivist qualitative approach and case study strategy, this research is able to examine actor relations and authority configurations in depth, in accordance with the analytical framework of hybrid governance, which forms the theoretical basis of the research.

Result

The findings of this study indicate that the 2023 M4 World Championship functioned not only as an international esports tournament but also as a transnational interaction space involving both state and non-state actors (Moonton Games, 2023; CNN Indonesia, 2023). Indonesia's involvement as the host country was reflected not only through administrative participation but also through symbolic representation, promotional visibility, and the integration of national identity elements throughout the event (Basudewa, 2022).

This section discusses three main findings: (1) the roles and positions of actors within the governance structure of the event, (2) narratives and symbols representing Indonesia's national image, and (3) strategic objectives associated with Indonesia's involvement in the organization of the 2023 M4 World Championship.

Roles and Positions of Actors in the Governance Structure

The findings show that Moonton held primary authority over the operational and technical implementation of the 2023 M4 World Championship. As the intellectual property owner of Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, Moonton controlled various aspects of tournament organization, including competition formats, match systems, international broadcasting production, digital staging, and content distribution across online platforms. Official tournament publications and event broadcasts consistently positioned Moonton as the central organizer of the event (Moonton Games, 2023).

In addition to Moonton's dominant operational role, the Indonesian government participated through institutional support and symbolic facilitation. Government involvement was reflected in promotional collaborations, public support for the event, and the integration of tourism branding within tournament-related content (CNN Indonesia, 2023). The use of the "Wonderful Indonesia" identity in several promotional materials demonstrated the government's presence in the international exposure generated by the tournament (Basudewa, 2022).

The findings also indicate that Indonesia's role as host was represented through collaborative interaction between public institutions and private organizers. Although the tournament remained largely controlled by Moonton as a multinational private company, state actors were visibly involved in supporting the event's international legitimacy and reputational visibility (Moonton Games, 2023).

This pattern reflects a governance arrangement in which responsibilities and forms of participation were distributed between state and non-state actors (Bevir, 2012). Moonton controlled the operational and digital dimensions of the tournament, while the Indonesian government utilized the event as a platform for symbolic representation and international promotion (Basudewa, 2022). In this context, the organization of the 2023

M4 World Championship illustrates how global esports events may involve collaborative interactions between private organizers and public institutions within transnational governance spaces (Bevir, 2012).

Narratives and Symbols that Construct Indonesia's Image

The findings show that Indonesia's national image during the 2023 M4 World Championship was constructed through visual representations, promotional narratives, and symbolic displays integrated throughout the event and its international broadcasts (Moonton Games, 2023; CNN Indonesia, 2023). Various elements presented during the tournament reflected Indonesia's attempt to position itself as a modern, digitally connected, and culturally adaptive country within the global esports industry.

In terms of investment and digital industry representation, the tournament presented Indonesia as a country capable of hosting large-scale international digital entertainment events. This representation was reflected in the quality of the event production, the use of advanced stage and lighting technology, digital broadcasting systems, and the overall organization of the tournament. International esports media coverage also highlighted the high production standards and significant viewership achieved during the event, further contributing to Indonesia's professional image in the esports sector (Esports Insider, 2023; Esports Charts, 2023).

The findings also indicate that Indonesia's involvement as the host country was associated with the growing digital economy and esports industry in Southeast Asia. Reports regarding the expansion of the global gaming and esports market frequently position Indonesia within discussions surrounding digital entertainment growth and regional esports development (Newzoo, 2023; Reuters, 2023). Through the organization of M4, Indonesia was represented as part of the broader development of the digital creative economy.

In the tourism dimension, several visual and promotional elements during the tournament displayed Indonesia as an attractive destination for international audiences. Broadcast segments and promotional materials included visual representations of Jakarta's urban landscape, public spaces, and tourism-related imagery connected to

Indonesia (CNN Indonesia, 2023). In addition, the “Wonderful Indonesia” branding appeared in promotional content associated with the tournament, indicating the integration of tourism promotion within the event’s international exposure (Basudewa, 2022).

The findings further show that media representation played an important role in constructing audience perceptions of Indonesia throughout the event. Visual exposure to Jakarta and Indonesian public spaces provided international audiences with representations associated with modernity, accessibility, and tourism appeal. The integration of tourism-related visuals into global broadcasts contributed to Indonesia’s visibility beyond the esports competition itself (OECD, 2024).

Cultural representation was also visible during the opening ceremony and tournament-related performances. Indonesian cultural elements were presented through modernized performances that combined music, choreography, stage visuals, and entertainment formats adapted to the characteristics of esports audiences. Media coverage surrounding the event also highlighted the incorporation of local cultural themes within the opening ceremony and promotional content (Kaorinusantara, 2022; One Esports, 2023).

The findings indicate that Indonesia’s representation during the 2023 M4 World Championship was not limited to administrative hosting responsibilities but also involved the presentation of national identity through digital media exposure, tourism branding, and cultural performances. In this context, international esports events functioned as platforms through which Indonesia’s image and symbolic representation were communicated to global audiences (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2008).

Strategic Goals Associated with the Organization of Global Events

The findings indicate that the organization of the 2023 M4 World Championship was associated with several broader strategic objectives related to Indonesia’s international image, tourism promotion, and digital economy representation. Indonesia’s involvement as the host country reflected efforts to utilize international esports events as part of

broader international exposure and reputational visibility (Moonton Games, 2023; CNN Indonesia, 2023).

One of the most visible objectives identified in the findings was the representation of Indonesia as a modern country capable of organizing international digital entertainment events. Through the successful hosting of a large-scale esports tournament, Indonesia was presented as having the infrastructure, technological capability, and organizational capacity required for global esports competitions (Esports Insider, 2023; Esports Charts, 2023). International media attention toward the scale of the tournament and audience engagement also contributed to this representation.

The findings also show that tourism promotion formed an important component of Indonesia's involvement in the event. Visual representations of Jakarta, the inclusion of public spaces within broadcast materials, and the use of the "Wonderful Indonesia" identity indicated efforts to introduce Indonesian destinations to international audiences through esports-related exposure (Basudewa, 2022; CNN Indonesia, 2023). The integration of tourism branding into the tournament demonstrated how international esports events may function as promotional platforms beyond the competition itself.

Another strategic objective reflected in the findings relates to the representation of Indonesia within the regional digital economy and creative industry sectors. Media reports and industry discussions surrounding the tournament frequently associated Indonesia with the growth of esports, gaming industries, and digital entertainment markets in Southeast Asia (Newzoo, 2023; Reuters, 2023). Through M4, Indonesia was positioned within narratives concerning the expansion of the global esports ecosystem and the development of digital industries in the region.

The findings further indicate that the implementation of these objectives involved collaboration between multiple actors, including government institutions, private organizers, and media platforms. While Moonton maintained control over tournament operations and content distribution, Indonesian state involvement was visible through symbolic promotion, tourism branding, and institutional support associated with the event (Basudewa, 2022).

In this context, the 2023 M4 World Championship functioned not only as an esports competition but also as a platform through which Indonesia presented aspects of its national image to international audiences. The event created opportunities for Indonesia to gain visibility within global digital entertainment spaces while simultaneously promoting tourism, cultural representation, and participation in the growing digital economy (Anholt, 2007; Grix & Brannagan, 2024).

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the organization of the 2023 M4 World Championship reflected a governance arrangement involving interactions between state and non-state actors. Although Moonton maintained primary authority over operational and digital aspects of the tournament, the Indonesian government remained involved through symbolic facilitation, tourism promotion, and reputational support. This pattern illustrates a governance structure in which authority and participation are distributed across multiple actors rather than being centralized solely within the state (Bevir, 2012).

In this context, the role of the Indonesian government can be understood as that of a strategic facilitator rather than a primary organizer. The state did not control the tournament's technical operations, competition systems, or international broadcasting infrastructure, which remained under Moonton's authority as a multinational private company. However, the government was still able to utilize the international visibility generated by the tournament to promote national identity and tourism branding. This finding indicates that contemporary international events, particularly within digital industries such as esports, may provide states with opportunities to pursue reputational objectives even when operational control is dominated by private actors (Bevir, 2012).

The findings also support the argument that global esports events can function as spaces for nation branding practices. Through international broadcasts, promotional materials, and visual representation, Indonesia was associated with narratives of modernity, digital capability, tourism attractiveness, and cultural creativity. The integration of the "Wonderful Indonesia" identity, the presentation of Jakarta's urban

landscape, and the incorporation of Indonesian cultural elements within tournament performances contributed to the construction of Indonesia's image before international audiences (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2008).

Furthermore, this study indicates that esports may function as an emerging instrument of soft power within the digital era. Unlike conventional diplomacy, the projection of national image in esports does not primarily rely on formal diplomatic channels, but rather on audience experiences, entertainment exposure, and participation within global digital culture. International audiences who consumed the M4 broadcasts were exposed not only to the esports competition itself, but also to symbolic representations associated with Indonesia as the host country. In this sense, esports events may create indirect forms of international influence through cultural visibility and digital media exposure (Nye, Jr., 2004; Grix & Brannagan, 2024).

The findings additionally suggest that hybrid governance within global esports events involves interdependence between governments and private corporations. Moonton possessed the technological infrastructure, digital platform control, and operational authority necessary for organizing the tournament, while the Indonesian government contributed symbolic legitimacy and national representation. This demonstrates that the implementation of nation branding strategies in global digital industries increasingly depends on collaboration between public institutions and transnational private actors (Bevir, 2012; Anholt, 2007).

However, the findings also indicate that the state's position within this governance arrangement remains limited. Since operational authority and content distribution were primarily controlled by Moonton, the Indonesian government's ability to shape the overall narrative of the event was constrained. As a result, nation branding practices within esports events may depend significantly on the priorities and commercial interests of private organizers. This suggests that although esports can provide opportunities for soft power projection, states may not fully control the international narratives emerging from privately managed digital platforms.

Therefore, the 2023 M4 World Championship illustrates how nation branding practices and soft power projection increasingly operate within hybrid governance

structures characterized by collaboration, shared authority, and the growing influence of transnational private actors in global digital spaces.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the 2023 M4 World Championship represented Indonesia's nation branding practices within a governance structure involving both state and non-state actors. In the organization of the event, Moonton functioned as the primary actor controlling operational, technological, and content distribution aspects of the tournament, while the Indonesian government participated through symbolic facilitation, tourism promotion, and reputational support. This finding indicates that nation branding practices within global esports events increasingly occur through collaborative arrangements between governments and multinational private companies.

The findings also show that Indonesia's national image during the 2023 M4 World Championship was constructed through various narratives and symbolic representations integrated throughout the event. Indonesia was represented as a modern and digitally connected country through the quality of tournament production, the use of advanced broadcasting technology, and participation in the global esports industry. In addition, tourism branding, visual representations of Jakarta, and the incorporation of Indonesian cultural elements contributed to the presentation of Indonesia's identity before international audiences.

From a soft power perspective, this study indicates that esports may function as an alternative platform for international image projection in the digital era. Through global broadcasts and entertainment exposure, esports events create opportunities for states to gain international visibility and communicate symbolic representations to global audiences beyond conventional diplomatic channels.

This study also contributes to discussions on hybrid governance by showing that authority within global esports events is distributed between public institutions and private corporations. While governments may utilize esports events for reputational purposes, operational authority and digital infrastructure often remain under the control

of multinational private actors. As a result, nation branding strategies within digital entertainment industries increasingly depend on collaboration and negotiation between state and non-state actors.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed. First, the Indonesian government should develop a more coordinated strategy for utilizing international esports events as part of long-term nation branding efforts. Second, stronger coordination mechanisms between public institutions and private organizers are necessary to ensure that promotional and reputational objectives can be integrated more effectively into global esports events. Finally, future research is encouraged to examine audience perceptions more directly through social media analysis, interviews, or comparative studies involving esports events in different countries to better understand how national image is interpreted within global digital culture.

Declaration Of Interest

The author states the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT, in the preparation of this manuscript, specifically to assist with proofreading, grammar correction, and translation to improve text readability. Nevertheless, the author emphasizes that all substantive aspects of the research, including data analysis, interpretation of findings, and conclusions, are entirely the result of the author's own thought and responsibility. The author takes full responsibility for the originality and integrity of the entire content of this article.

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