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Branding countries through multicultural events: a quantitative analysis of the impact of the FIFA World Cup 2022 on Qatar's brand

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Private and public companies, as well as public authorities and governments, resort to corporate communication to build trust relationships with their stakeholders and, in this way, reinforce their corporate brands. However, they face different challenges including social transformations and cultural changes. This study evaluates how the FIFA World Cup 2022 impacted Qatar's brand. To do that, we conducted a review of the literature about corporate communication and nation branding, and then, we carried out a quantitative content analysis of how the leading newspapers in the world's most influential countries (United States, China, United Kingdom, France, and Germany) covered this event from a corporate communication perspective. These newspapers were selected based on highest circulation. The results from the analysis showed that media companies from France were the ones making more references to Qatar's History (59); journalists from the United States were the most interested in the Qatar Brand (14); and British newspapers were the ones who published more content about the FIFA World Cup 2022 brand (53).

KEYWORDS

corporate communication, brand, nation branding, culture, FIFA World Cup 2022

1 Introduction

Private and public companies resort to corporate communications to improve their stakeholder relations. Stakeholders are individuals or groups with an interest in the success or outcome of the actions of a company or organization and include employees, clients, suppliers, media companies, and public authorities. Due to these relations, companies and other types of organizations reinforce their reputation and brand value through the use of communication processes to influence opinion and behavior (Beger, 2018). However, many face challenges that make this process more complex, such as social transformations, economic crises, employees' new attitudes, and media companies' information requirements. To efficiently address this relational situation, many companies recruit experts in corporate communications, public relations, and advertising who can develop meaningful content that fulfills stakeholders' needs from a social, emotional, and information perspective. On the other hand, private and public companies are not the only ones to face this challenge. Governments and public authorities

must also promote their national brands and establish trust relationships with their stakeholders.

Nation branding refers to corporate communication initiatives that governments implement to build their brands credibly and achieve different business or societal objectives. The concept of ‘nation branding’ was first articulated by Arnholt as early as 1996. He explains that “Only a consistent, coordinated, and unbroken stream of useful, noticeable, world-class, and above all relevant ideas, products, and policies can gradually enhance the reputation of the country that produces them” (Arnholt, 2011). As Gudjonsson (2005) emphasizes, nation branding “uses the tools of branding to alter, confirm, or change the behavior, attitude, identity, or image of a nation in a positive way” in order to increase the prosperity of a nation. Nation branding includes six main factors, namely, business and marketing, political, social and cultural, economic and labor, international and environmental factors (Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis, 2023); because these factors are so critical, governments have signed up for cost-intensive efforts to develop nation branding in a professional way across the world (Gienow-Hecht, 2019). These governments employ experts in corporate communications who implement initiatives for influencing public opinion related, among other things, to global events, sports competitions, and diplomatic summits. Nevertheless, governments face a primary challenge when implementing their nation branding initiatives: *integrating cultural elements into branding strategies*. The Arab Gulf nation of Qatar, with its capital of Doha, has become one of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East and has made a strategic decision to promote itself and the Arab region through the use of a global sports competition. From November to December 2022, it hosted the FIFA World Cup 2022. This is the Fédération Internationale de Football Association’s international men’s national competition and is the most widely viewed and followed sports event globally. According to Plapinger (2022), Qatar had three geopolitical objectives: “to showcase Qatar’s unique identity, to achieve global recognition, and to diversify the economy away from fossil fuels” to areas such as tourism.

Many studies about nation branding, marketing, and global events have been published. Some authors have even focused their efforts on how countries manage security, safety, and diplomacy during these events and how these aspects influence their communication efforts (Rookwood, 2019). Nevertheless, few publications focus on how countries use media relations during these global events to implement corporate communication initiatives and reinforce the country’s brand more credibly. Using a content analysis, this study evaluates how the FIFA World Cup 2022 impacted Qatar’s brand through the influence

of news stories on major global newspapers. In other words, we try to answer a central research question: Did the FIFA World Cup 2022 contribute to the positive reinforcement of Qatar’s brand worldwide? To do that, we identified the world’s five most influential countries and the five most important newspapers in those countries. The selection of countries was based on a report and analysis developed by the *BAV Group* in partnership with the Wharton School of Business and the US News & World Report that identifies them as the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (U.S. News, 2022; Most Influential Countries, n.d.).

The selection of newspapers for each of these countries was based on circulation figures. Afterward, we developed a correlational research design of 16 quantitative indicators (see Table 1) related to nation branding for the analysis of the content. This design was used to analyze how the 25 most influential newspapers worldwide covered the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and how this coverage may have affected Qatar’s brand in a positive or negative way. According to Lischka (2023), content analyses are indispensable to identify “who says what,” a key component of the basic Model of Communications developed by Lasswell in 1948. From the analysis of our results in addressing the central research question of the specific example of Qatar and its brand, this study was able to propose recommendations to help countries understand how global sports events contribute to developing nation brands.

2 Building nation brands through multicultural events

2.1 Corporate communication and culture

Companies implement corporate communication initiatives to improve their relations with stakeholders (Keller, 2021), reinforce their brand awareness (Kwan Soo Shin et al., 2019), and influence public opinion (Tran et al., 2020). Companies consider intellectual, social, and cultural elements determining stakeholders’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Wider et al., 2018). Integrating culture into branding initiatives allows companies to promote their uniqueness and become more credible institutions (Keller, 2021); that is why many companies conduct intellectual efforts to identify cultural elements that reinforce their brand identity, as well as their mission, vision, and values (Iyer et al., 2021). However, promoting culture and branding simultaneously constitutes a challenge to do it well. Therefore, companies should consider five main principles in managing this communication process:

TABLE 1 Indicators.

Qatar’s History	Qatar’s brand	FIFA World Cup event
1. Reference to Qatar’s history	6. Quotes from Qatar’s rulers	11. Reference to the official theme (<i>Now is All</i>)
2. Reference to founders’ families	7. Reference to national values (sustainable development, quality of life, tradition, and modernization)	12. Image of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022’s corporate logo
3. Reference to Qatar’s current social leaders	8. Reference to Qatar’s Anthem	13. Quotes from FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022’s organizers
4. Reference to religion	9. Image of Qatar’s flag	14. Links to FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022’s corporate websites
5. Reference to political conflicts	10. Image of the Oryx (national symbol)	15. Links to Qatar’s corporate websites
		16. Positive, neutral, or negative tone

Elaboration: authors.

First, implementing an in-house corporate communication department employs experts in communication and social sciences: history, sociology, and anthropology (Kreps, 2020).

Second, promoting culture as a strategic element determines the company's internal and external processes (Rahman et al., 2021).

Third, developing communication initiatives that help companies change some practices inconsistent with stakeholders' rights, such as employees' working conditions (Zhao, 2021).

Fourth, defining communication strategies that address stakeholders' cultural needs and other social issues, such as human rights, social discrimination, and climate change (Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2021).

Fifth, implementing different communication methods, such as corporate social responsibility and relations with minority groups, to enrich the brand from a cultural perspective (Correa et al., 2021).

Building a credible brand that fulfills stakeholders' cultural needs constitutes a challenge and a priority to protect companies' social legitimacy (Tran et al., 2020). To do that, companies must implement professional protocols and indicators, which involve monitoring their branding campaigns and evaluating their impact on stakeholders' perceptions (Romaniuk et al., 2017). Due to this information, companies can protect stakeholders' needs in a more efficient way (Beig and Nika, 2019) and involve some of them in the organization's branding initiatives (Swaminathan, et al., 2020), which helps to reinforce its credibility (Kelley and Thams, 2019). When companies or countries follow this professional logic, they build a brand that positively influences stakeholders' perceptions (Avraham, 2020). In fact, there is a direct relationship between nation-brand experience, nation-brand love, nation-brand loyalty, and positive word of mouth (Yadav et al., 2021), which is why some countries organize sports events, such as football tournaments, to reinforce citizens' experiences with the country and this way build reputed brands (Hao et al., 2021). Moreover, to efficiently do that, governments need to implement value co-creation strategies involving several factors such as event, sponsors, athletes, and places (Grohs et al., 2019).

2.2 Corporate communication, culture, and countries

Private and public companies are not the only ones to implement branding initiatives. Governments and public authorities also use these techniques to promote their brands and achieve their business objectives: tourism, diplomatic relations, investments, etc. (Zerfass and Viertmann, 2017). Due to nation branding, countries can reinforce their international influence in different areas. These include education, sports, and healthcare (Hao et al., 2021). Each country implements various nation branding initiatives. Some countries organize global events, such as the Olympic Games or the World Expos, to accelerate their internal transformations and improve their diplomatic relations with other countries (Dubinsky, 2019). Due to these events, countries also build bridges with international organizations (United Nations and World Health Organization, etc.) and develop global projects related to different areas, such as healthcare, tourism, or education (Knott et al., 2017). On the other hand, some countries prefer to focus on their nation branding initiatives on the Internet and social media, and they try to control the content disseminated on these platforms to efficiently influence

international public opinion (Budnitsky and Jia, 2018; Avraham, 2020). To do that, they launch digital companies, lead public opinion by publishing content about the country in the leading online media outlets, and approve laws regulating the use of technology for corporate communication purposes. Finally, other countries develop their brands by investing in global logistics centers, seaports, and airports, which allows them to improve their diplomatic relations with some countries and organizations (Rutter et al., 2018).

Regardless of every country's communication strategy, they all try to explain to their stakeholders why the country's brand is unique worldwide (Gunek, 2018). Promoting the value of uniqueness contributes to making countries' brands more credible (Lahrech et al., 2020), which represents different advantages, such as attracting investors or reinforcing the country's social structures (Frig Sorsa, 2020). In addition to promoting this value, countries must communicate creatively and respect corporate communication principles: research, strategy, and evaluation (Carolino, 2018). When countries manage corporate communication professionally and focus on their brand uniqueness, they can enhance their international reputation (Gondim and Giardi, 2019) and influence public opinion in a positive way (Dogan, 2021).

2.3 Nation branding in the middle east

Before implementing any communication initiatives, countries conduct research about different cultural elements (history, international relations, and social issues) and analyze how other countries communicate with their stakeholders (Dogan, 2021). Based on that, they define a communication strategy and a brand positioning (Gunek, 2018). Each country focuses on a different idea that contributes to the structure of its nation's branding campaigns (Knott et al., 2017). For example, Germany's brand positioning refers to the country's leadership worldwide in economics, environment, and diplomacy (Wood, 2017). Canada prioritizes its unique national identity and ideologically deracialized discourse (Bhuyan et al., 2015). Poland bases its branding strategies on four values, namely, sincerity, excitement, sophistication, and humanism (Wawrzyniec and Wæraas, 2021).

Several events have radically changed these countries' branding strategies in the Middle East. In 2020, several Arab States formalized the normalization of relations with Israel following the Abraham Accords signature to the Abraham Accords signed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Israel (Karataş and Uslu, 2022). A few months later, several countries in the region, such as the UAE and Qatar, organized different international events (Expo 2020, FIFA World Cup, and Middle East Davos in Saudia) that attracted millions of international tourists, leading both countries to accelerate their social transformations (Teare, 2023). Finally, the biggest country in the region, Saudi Arabia, introduced a new economic blueprint called "Saudi Vision 2030" that will enable the kingdom to diversify its heavily oil-dependent revenue base, reduce its growing budget deficits, and promote long-term economic growth (Moshashai et al., 2020).

These historic milestones have led countries in the Middle East to update their nation branding strategies. For instance, Saudi Arabia tries to associate the country with three central values: (a) cultural reference in the Muslim world, (b) international hub for business, and (c) cultural bridge between Asia, Europe, and Africa (Alsedrah, 2021). The United Arab Emirates focuses its efforts on three main aspects:

(1) associating Dubai and Abu Dhabi with the concepts of tourism and international business, respectively (Zeinedinne, 2017); (2) promoting women's rights (Allagui and Al-Najjar, 2018); and (3) remaining neutral on international political conflicts (Tal, 2020). Finally, Qatar's brand positioning is directly related to sport and tourism: the country aims to be considered a distinctive destination worldwide, offering high-quality sports and unique tourism experiences (Theodoropoulou and Alos, 2020). Focusing on sports could help this country influence international media companies' perceptions of the Qatar brand, improving the country's public image.

3 Methodology

The FIFA World Cup 2022 contributed to promoting Qatar's brand worldwide. However, this event impacted the nation brand in different ways. To better understand this nation branding communicative process, the study used content analysis of journalistic coverage as news stories in the global press. We were guided by the 2022 Most Influential Countries Ranking, a report developed by BAV Group (WPP) and The Wharton School (University of Pennsylvania, United States). Both institutions surveyed 17,000 people from 36 countries who were asked to associate 85 countries with 73 qualitative attributes. All attributes were grouped into 10 main categories, namely, adventure, agility, cultural influence, entrepreneurship, heritage, movers, open for business, power, social purpose, and quality of life (see Appendix). Concerning countries, both institutions only considered countries fulfilling these four criteria: (a) Top 100 countries in terms of gross domestic product in any year between 2016 and 2020 based on World Bank data; (b) Top 100 countries in terms of foreign direct investment inflows in any year between 2016 and 2020 based on World Bank data; (c) Top 100 countries in terms of international tourism receipts or tourism arrivals in any year between 2016 and 2020 based on World Bank data; and (d) Top 150 countries in U.N.'s Human Development Index in any year between 2015 and 2019. Finally, concerning people included in the survey, both institutions focused on engaged citizens representing the global population (informed elites, business decision-makers, and the general public). Based on these three elements (attributes, countries, and survey), BAV Group's and The Wharton School's researchers developed the 2022 Most Influential Countries Ranking (U.S. News, 2022).

According to this ranking, the five most influential countries in 2022 were the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. To analyze how the FIFA World Cup 2022 impacted Qatar's brand, we considered the five leading newspapers by circulation in each of these countries: United States —*The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times* (Agility PR Solutions, 2022a); China —*People's Daily*, *Reference News*, *Global Times*, *Yangtze Evening Post*, and *Beijing Daily* (Statista, 2022); United Kingdom —*The Sun*, *Metro*, *The Sun on Sunday*, *Daily Mail*, and *Mail on Sunday* (Agility PR Solutions, 2022b); France —*Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *L'Equipe*, *Les Echos*, and *Liberation* (ACPM, 2022); and Germany —*Bild*, *Die Zeit*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Deutschland De, 2020).

The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 occurred from 20 November 2022 to 18 December 2022. For this research, we considered studies published between 1 September 2022 and 28 February 2023 so that we analyzed what media companies published before, during, and after this event. Based on the qualitative results gathered from a review of the research

literature and the initial overview of some press articles published about the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, we defined 16 branding indicators that we grouped into three main categories: (a) Qatar's history, (b) Qatar's brand, and (c) the FIFA World Cup event (see Table 1. Indicators). Due to these branding indicators, we analyzed whether international media companies covering the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 focused on facts about this event or whether they also mentioned some cultural elements related to Qatar's brand. In other words, the 16 indicators chosen allowed us to understand whether international media companies followed a journalistic logic focused on reporting facts (events, dates, and interviews) or whether these organizations also considered other elements of Qatar's history (social leaders, founders' families), its national brand (values, anthem, and flag), and the FIFA World Cup Event (official themes, quotes from organizers) to analyze the global, social, and cultural impact of this event. These 16 indicators were valuable since they helped us to understand better how international journalists worked to cover this event. On the other hand, these indicators were also helpful in understanding the role of media companies in countries' branding campaigns: journalists working for international media companies have the power to influence people's perceptions about cultural events and countries' corporate initiatives, which is essential to understand how to integrate these journalists into countries' branding campaigns.

The analysis was conducted from 25 April 2023 to 7 May 2023 and Google.com was used for the initial search. The words "FIFA World Cup," "Qatar," and each newspaper's name in its local language were input into the search engine. Then, we used SPSS to classify and codify our quantitative results. Several coders were used to classify each article: newspaper identification, country of origin, date, headline, and URL. These coders were coded for the three categories: (a) Qatar's History, (b) Qatar's Brand, and (c) FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Each category was coded to look for specific words and images as present in the story or not current. Each article was considered a single unit of analysis, so each item could only be coded once in the story, even if it was mentioned more than once. Finally, the number of times the items were coded for each category was added by the article.

4 Results

4.1 Global results

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the nation of origin of news coverage and the tone of coverage of the FIFA World Cup event in Qatar (see Table 2). The relationship between these variables was significant $\chi^2(12, N = 292) = 141.79, p < 0.001$. The country of origin of the FIFA World Cup coverage will lead to distinctively different coverage tones, with the United Kingdom and the United States more likely to offer negative coverage and Germany, France, and China more likely to provide favorable-neutral coverage. On the other hand, a chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the nation of origin of news coverage and the use of historical references, Qatar branding, and FIFA branding in news stories about the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. The relationship between the nation of origin and FIFA branding was not significant ($p = 0.75$). The relationship between the country of origin and Qatar branding was substantial ($p < 0.001$). The relationship between the nation of origin and historical Qatar references was also significant ($p < 0.001$).

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics of results.

	N	Historical references	Qatar branding	FIFA branding	Coverage tone		
					Positive	Negative	Neutral
U.S. Papers	52	23	14	15	6	17	29
France	31	59	11	10	10	1	20
Germany	22	6	2	1	1	1	20
China	14	0	1	2	10	0	4
UK	173	13	9	53	8	51	114

Elaboration: authors.

4.2 United States

When determining the results from the US newspapers, the two most significant publications and coverage regarding the number of articles, messaging, and the branding process were the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal. As one of the only two national newspapers in the United States (versus a city newspaper), the coverage of the Wall Street Journal, with its 14 stories, was in sharp contrast to the coverage of another national newspaper, USA Today, with only two stories articles' World Cup has just started. As one of the only two national newspapers in the United States (versus a city newspaper), the coverage of the Wall Street Journal, with its 14 stories, was in sharp contrast to the coverage of the other national newspaper, USA Today, with only two stories, 'World Cup has just started. However, the legacy of the tournament has already been secured' and 'World Cup knockout stage: Bracket schedule, news and match analysis,' both with a neutral tone.

One area of intercultural communication affecting Qatar's branding and the American coverage of the FIFA World Cup is directly related to the cultural and societal context of the football game for the newspapers' readership. The competitive game of the FIFA World Cup and what is globally identified as football differs from that played in the USA. Global football is placed in the USA as the game of *soccer* and neither holds a comparable appeal nor the central role of American football within the lifestyle and way of life of the USA. The critical sport of football in the USA is a different game from what the rest of the world identifies as *football* and the game played in the FIFA World Cup. Thus, this difference may also be understood to affect the coverage results with the indicators in different categories and Qatar's branding and communication process. The coverage in the US press begins in November, just as the game starts. However, there is one exception to earlier coverage, that of the New York Times, with the story "The World Cup's Carnival Comes at a Cost".

Regarding tone, 56% of the articles were identified as neutral and 32% were negative. Although this more significant percentage of neutrality in the US coverage may represent an objective approach in its practice of journalism, the 32% that were negative may also represent a counter-productive messaging effect on the branding process of Qatar and its aim of positive image-making through branding. This negative tone appears substantial as influencing a large population of the readership. This contrasts with only 11% of news stories being optimistic regarding appeal and influence. As an example of a negative quote, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article on 16th November 2022 titled "The Most Unlikely Host in World Cup," where they stated that "Amid allegations of vote-trading and influence-peddling, which Qatar's organizing committee denies, the country held

off rival bids from the US, Australia, Japan, and South Korea." However, some weeks before, the same newspaper published (14 November 2022) a positive article titled "Qatar Wanted to Host the World Cup. First It Needed a Soccer Team." Finally, the *Los Angeles Times* released a paper on 18 December 2022 titled "Most dramatic World Cup final caps a unique and controversial tournament in Qatar," where the journalist only focused on sport and analyzed the event neutrally.

In an analysis of the branding indicators, the historical references as indicators were in 44% of the news stories. Of these indicators, 19% of these indicators were the mention of religion. This was predominant in comparison with other indicators in this category of Historical References, including 12% of the articles having Qatar History indicators. Of note is The Washington Post, the only publication with political conflict indicators, with four being identified. The indicators for the Current Qatar Brand predominantly referenced national values, and 8 out of the 52 stories have the same. The only other indicators appearing for this category in the US press were those of Qatar's rulers' quotations, with seven stories having them.

The FIFA World Cup Event category predominantly exhibited indicators in Quotations about FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Organizers. However these indicators may be related to negative issues from the FIFA World Cup event; as a representative example, rather than sports coverage of the event itself, the New York Times covered the negative aspects of using the FIFA World Cup event for reporting on the influence and impact of the Qatar brand. Thus, Qatar's branding became the focus of the coverage rather than the FIFA World Cup as a newsworthy event. Stories of poor image building and branding by Qatar included 'Qatar Stepped Onto the World Cup Stage. And Immediately Stumbled' and "The Qatar World Cup Is Peak' Sportswashing.' But Will It Work?" One could understand the indicators as representing a negative impact rather than a positive one, such as the branding impact of the Qatar brand. The objectivity of the American press could have easily provided positive imaging as objective news coverage.

4.3 China

When data were collected, the coverage in the Chinese newspapers appeared very limited. Only Qatar Ruler Quotation and World Cup Organizers Quotations about the FIFA World Cup 2022 had indicators, and no other branding indicators of the three categories were present in the limited number of stories. Of the five Chinese publications, only People's Daily and Global Times had any coverage of the event, and there was more of an emphasis on China's role in Qatar in the construction of the stadiums. This may represent more of a Chinese national promotion

to its domestic and international readership rather than Qatar's branding messaging process. This may reflect the propagandistic nature of journalism practice in China as a form of public relations versus objective Western style and democratic-based journalism.

Furthermore, the lack of coverage and indicators may imply that a decision had been made to neither cover the event nor engage in message branding for Qatar's nation-building. On the other hand, no article had a negative tone about this event; ten were positive, and four were neutral. As an example of a positive article, we can mention an article from *People's Daily Online* published on 22nd November 2022 titled "FIFA World Cup opens in Doha after 12-year build-up." In this article, Chinese journalists focused on positive aspects of this event, such as the number of fans, the facilities, and the official schedules.

4.4 United Kingdom

Of the five publications identified as significant, only three covered the FIFA World Cup effectively: the Sun, the Metro, and the Daily Mail. The coverage of the FIFA World Cup begins in the UK in September, much earlier than in the USA, and is specific to the Daily Mail. This may indicate the readership interest in sports, including more significant numbers of Middle Easterners in the UK readership. Business, cultural, political, and historical ties between the United Kingdom and Qatar may support the high number of articles published compared with other countries. The population of the United Kingdom may be a more viable messaging target for branding as well. Furthermore, the issues that emerged related to the FIFA World Cup and Qatar may more directly impact and influence the UK population and public opinion for Qatar's national branding.

The number of 293 analyzed articles represents 59% of all articles from the 15 publication sources of this study. Of these 293 articles, 66% were neutral in tone, which may indicate some level of objectivity in the coverage. However, only 5% were positive in tone for the event, and 29% were negative, a significant percentage as an unintended result for Qatar and its intent for positive messaging, national image building, and branding. The very nature of a tabloid British press in the United Kingdom may partly explain these percentages. The British media covering the FIFA World Cup is tabloid and significantly differs from an American press and approach to journalism. They can be characterized as aggressive sensationalism, and in analyzing the issues, they are focused on negative issues that fuel their positioning in the press world of the UK to achieve large circulation numbers. They are described as a 'toxic global matrix of news coverage' (Reader's Digest, 2023). As an example of a negative quote, *The Sun* published on 16th November 2022 an article titled "BC blasted for 'very racist' coverage by Qatar World Cup chief who says pundits are pushing Middle East stereotypes," where journalists explained how some international media companies, such as *BBC*, were using this sport event to criticize Qatar. Nevertheless, the same newspaper published on 20th December 2022 an article that analyzed this event positively: "Who is the topless Argentina fan Noe?" Finally, on 15th November 2022, *Daily Mail* published a neutral article titled "World Cup 2022 wallchart: download and print off your guide to Qatar to make sure you do not miss a SINGLE match," where they analyzed different facts about this event without mentioning anything related to the country.

Possibly driven by the need for sensationalism, the British tabloid press may have focused on negative issues in a more significant

percentage of the stories. These issues and their stories include content about prostitution, inappropriate clothing, gender roles of women, mistreatment of migrant workers, and discrimination against the LGBT community. In addition, other negative topics were attendance figures, climate heat, and journalists' deaths. The press coverage itself became the story in the UK press of the counterclaim by Qataris of racism and stereotyping.

Regarding the results based on the indicators and the categories, for historical references, there were very few indicators except for religion. These stories were explicitly related to describing the cultural context of Lionel Messi wearing a Bisht, a traditional Arab robe, before he lifted the World Cup Trophy after the win. When Qatar branding was examined, the indicators were produced by quotations from Qatar's rulers and references to national values. This category made a significantly lower percentage at 5% compared with 26% in the USA news stories or 35% in the French press within the context of the Western media (not in comparison with the Chinese press).

FIFA branding Indicators for the FIFA World Cup Event took place with two categories: 16 indicators as the image of the Qatar World Cup corporate logo and 36 indicators as quotations by the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 organizers. The latter occurred in negative or neutral stories framed by an issue, and the quote from FIFA was in response to an issue as the story's focus. Of the 173 articles, 32% had indicators of FIFA Branding included, and 9% of the 173 articles promoted the branding messaging by showing the logo. For the total articles, 21% mentioned a quotation from the organizers. The majority of these latter indicators were in the Daily Mail. This suggests that the Qatar branding was effective for messaging if the stories were about the sports event as sports news and reporting using the corporate logo. The use of a logo can be understood to be quite effective, as explained by Tailorbrands: "Because it grabs attention, makes a strong first impression, is the foundation of your brand identity, is memorable, separates you from the competition, fosters brand loyalty, and is expected by your audience" (Tailor Brands, 2023).

4.5 France

Throughout the tournament, French media companies highlighted the intersection between global politics and the FIFA World Cup 2022. Every match tells a story about international affairs — sometimes directly through football and other times in an indirect way. However, the reality is sport always happens in times and places, and the political dimension cannot be ignored. Even if 20 out of 31 studies used a neutral tone, we should highlight that some positive studies focus on three main areas: (a) the long-term economic impact of the event in the sports industry in Qatar; (b) social and cultural transformation related to different groups such as individuals with special needs; (c) evolution of Qatari women's sport under traditional code/religious ethics including their participation in a variety of national and international sport competitions. On 4 December 2022, *Le Monde* published a neutral study titled 'We were ashamed to say we were going to Qatar, but we'll return happy' in which they highlighted the positive and negative aspects of this event. Other media companies were more optimistic, such as *Le Figaro*, which published on 19th December 2022, "World Cup: the 2022 edition is a great success for Qatar." Finally, *Les Echos* criticized this event by publishing "Football World Cup: Qatar's Ruined Dream" on 9th

November 2022, where they criticized the controversial aspects of this event, such as employees' horrible working conditions, lack of human rights, and disrespect of the environment.

French media companies published 31 studies about the Qatar FIFA World Cup, a higher number than Germany. However, it remains less than the United States and the United Kingdom. French journalists were the most active in mentioning cultural elements and social issues related to Qatar, which could be associated with cultural, social, and economic ties of France with Gulf region countries, such as Qatar, United Arab Emirates, or Bahrain. According to different studies published by French journalists after the event, the FIFA World Cup 2022's main legacy includes five areas: (1) the investment in the sports sectors and facilities was dedicated to inspiring and supporting the development as well as reshaping the future of the country; (2) the legacy of these infrastructures is of design and engineering inspiration, sustainability innovation, and heritage that extends to education, research, and social reforms; (3) stadiums that were designed by renowned architects around the world took inspiration from Qatar history and were built to serve next generations; (4) Qatar reinforced its social engagement by offering some infrastructures to different developing countries; and (5) transform citizens' behaviors by promoting social life, public transport, and cultural events.

4.6 Germany

Most media companies in Germany follow a journalistic approach, focus on facts, and do not mention many references to history (6), the Qatar brand (2), and the FIFA World Cup 2022 brand. Some journalists focus on sports medicine and, more precisely, two main areas. On the one hand, some journalists mentioned the case of Aspetar, a specialized Orthopedics and Sports Medicine Hospital accredited as a "FIFA Medical Centre of Excellence." Journalists analyzed how medicine determines sport from medical, business, and social perspectives. On the other hand, some German media companies published content about the Anti-Doping Lab Qatar. This first specialized laboratory maintained accreditation from the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) and provided anti-doping testing for all athletes in the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Out of 23 articles published about the FIFA World Cup 2022, 20 were neutral and did not mention any controversial topic, which proved that German journalists publish professional content according to journalistic criteria. As an example of a neutral article, *Bild* published on 18th December, "Will Messi now be printed on banknotes?" where they analyzed facts about this event without mentioning anything about controversial aspects. However, some weeks before, on 7 November 2022, *Frankfurter Allgemeine* journalists covered a controversial issue when a Qatar minister accused German authorities of 'double standards' criticizing Qatar and its respect for human rights. Finally, other journalists focused on positive aspects, such as *Frankfurter Rundschau*, who published on 19th November 2022 an article titled "Diary for the 2022 World Cup: Landed in Doha" and focused on the event, the challenges for each team and the facilities proposed to fans.

German media companies highlight the logistic advantages of the FIFA World Cup and focus on some areas such as fan experience (football fans could watch up to two live matches per day), safety and security guarantees for fans and visitors, and technological edges for fans (live translation, mobile apps, etc.). German newspapers, as well

as the French ones, highlighted the social impact of this event on Qatar's international legacy and some internal priorities in the country: sustainability, recycling, assistive technology for individuals with special needs, and social integration of international visitors.

5 Discussion

Brand management activities that promote brand affective attitudes are crucial to helping people feel a strong resonance with the brand (Lithopoulos et al., 2021). To do that, organizations highlight their mission statement as a main branding element (Singla and Sharma, 2021), find emotional connections between the brand and its different stakeholders (Zhang et al., 2021), and implement various activities to reinforce the brand's credibility and this way influence stakeholders' perceptions about the organization (Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2021). According to our results, French journalists made many references to Qatar's history (59), especially if we compare with journalists from the United States (23), United Kingdom (13), Germany (6), or China (0). These results indicate that most journalists focus on the sports event rather than historical elements, negatively affecting Qatar's brand since the country developed this event to express its cultural heritage. The only country that highlighted this element was the United Kingdom since both countries have cultural, political, and historical ties. This supports the understanding that organizing cultural events constitutes a challenge from a business and a communication perspective since every initiative should be carefully associated with cultural references so that media companies understand the message and cover the facts globally.

Stakeholders need to be satisfied with the brand and its social legacy (Rahman et al., 2021), which means organizations need to manage their branding activities in an integrated way and provide stakeholders with meaningful content that improves their lives (Gómez-Rico et al., 2022). In addition, this content should be consistent with ethical standards and legal frameworks (Sander et al., 2021). When organizations manage their brands this way, they can positively influence stakeholders about the brand's uniqueness (Hart and Phau, 2022). Nevertheless, our quantitative analysis revealed that Qatar's organizers did not efficiently promote the brand through media relations. Most countries did not consider branding elements (United States —14, France —11, United Kingdom —9, Germany —2, and China —1). Organizing an international event constitutes challenges since many countries and companies promote their values and business interests, which could negatively affect Qatar's efforts to promote its brand. This situation was critical in China, where most journalists avoid mentioning branding elements related to Qatar. These results prove that countries and organizations need to innovate and implement different actions, such as personal branding campaigns, cultural branding strategies, and online branding initiatives, to promote the event and efficiently reinforce the organization's brand. These results contrasted with the experiences of different countries that organized the Olympic Games these last years —Brazil, UK, and China— and efficiently managed to implement value co-creation strategies and promote the values of excellence, friendship, and respect (Tjandra et al., 2020).

Stakeholders with a high level of brand engagement have greater brand loyalty and perceive the value of a brand (Razmus, 2021). That is why organizations implement different initiatives to promote this

brand engagement: get stakeholders to establish meaningful memories that involve the brand and are related to their personal lives (Rahman et al., 2021), find facts proving the correlation between the brand and its original roots to promote its authenticity (Rindell and Santos, 2021); launching initiatives that promote the credibility of the brand and its social impact on stakeholders' lives (Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2021). Nevertheless, our quantitative results prove that the FIFA World Cup did not negatively impact Qatar's brand. In fact, out of 173 articles, most (114) used a neutral tone, meaning that journalists focused on the event rather than criticism concerning social, cultural, or political issues. However, we should highlight that 32% of articles published by US newspapers were negative, which represented a problem for the brand since US newspapers, especially the Wall Street Journal, are some of the most influential media companies in the world. The fact that Qatar is a small country could influence how international media companies covered this event. This idea would be consistent with the results by Mangani and Tizzoni (2017) about the international press coverage of countries attending the Milan Expo 2015: the largest countries obtained more coverage than the smaller ones in the most important media companies.

This study aimed to analyze and better understand how the FIFA World Cup 2022 impacted Qatar's brand. Even though we found different quantitative results helpful for countries organizing similar events, we must highlight three main limitations affecting this study. First, we could not contact FIFA World Cup's organizers or Qatar's public authorities, which prevented us from accessing the corporate communication plan they developed, its main objectives, branding strategies, and key performance indicators. Second, we found no publication analyzing stakeholders' perceptions of the Qatar brand. This prevented us from better understanding how the FIFA World Cup 2022 affects people's perceptions of this country. Third, we could not find any science-based study focusing on the same topic, so we could not expand our conclusion. Finally, we recommend researchers interested in this area focus their efforts on three main areas: analyze the relations between sports celebrities and countries' reputations in humanitarian areas, evaluate the role of social media platforms in building countries' brands collectively, and study the role of journalists in promoting countries' brand architecture (identity, mission, vision, values, and culture).

6 Conclusion

Countries resort to corporate communication initiatives to reinforce their relationships with stakeholders such as citizens, governments from other countries, or international organizations (United Nations System, World Health Organization). Due to these initiatives, companies accelerate their diplomatic efforts, positively influencing them from an economic, social, and political perspective. On the other hand, these communication initiatives are also essential to promote nations' brands and spread different elements related to culture, history, or social values. However, countries face additional barriers to achieving this goal: strict legal frameworks, global competition with other countries, and stakeholders' new needs and requirements. To overcome these challenges, some countries organize international cultural events. This study aimed to answer the following research question: Did the FIFA World Cup 2022 contribute to reinforcing Qatar's brand worldwide? To answer this question, we wanted to highlight three last ideas.

First, most journalists focused their articles on data directly related to the FIFA World Cup 2022 (dates, schedules, and highlights) rather than background information (country's history, cultural challenges), which demonstrates that most of them cover this event from a journalistic perspective, not from a corporate communication perspective. This was especially the case of German newspapers since they barely mentioned Qatar's history (6), Qatar brand (2), or FIFA World Cup brand (1). This suggests that before these events start, governments should organize corporate communication presentations with international media companies to explain the event's role in the country's cultural context. Second, organizing an international event constitutes a challenge requiring countries to conduct previous research about global media companies' interests and perceptions concerning these events' organizers in the following areas: political environment, business interests, economic projects, diplomatic relations, and legal frameworks. This information is essential to adapt their media relations strategies and ensure journalists cover the event neutrally. However, our results provide evidence that FIFA World Cup 2022's organizers could have managed this aspect more efficiently and, this way, avoided so many media companies from the United States and the United Kingdom offering negative coverage. Third, our results further support the proof that countries organizing international events should develop material (b-roll videos, information graphics) and propose initiatives (online interviews with organizers, virtual visits) allowing international journalists to have the material they need to cover these events more globally and include references to cultural elements, local brands, and social issues affecting the country. To do this efficiently, governments could organize meetings with media companies' directors before, during, and after the event to promote their information needs and prepare informational material accordingly.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

LK: Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. PA: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. SB: Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. LC: Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix

List of attributes.

1. Quality of life (**14.52%**): a good job market, affordable, economically stable, family-friendly, income equality, politically stable, safe, well-developed public education system, well-developed public health system.
2. Entrepreneurship (**14.17%**): connected to the rest of the world, educated population, entrepreneurial, innovative, provides easy access to capital, skilled labor force, technological expertise, transparent business practices, well-developed infrastructure, well-developed digital infrastructure, well-developed legal framework.
3. Agility (**13.96%**): adaptable, dynamic, modern, progressive, and responsive.
4. Social purpose (**13.49%**): cares about human rights, cares about the environment, gender equality, religious freedom, respect property rights, trustworthiness, well-distributed political power, racial equity, cares about animal rights, committed to climate goals, and social justice.
5. Movers (**10.57%**): different, distinctive, dynamic, unique.
6. Cultural influence (**10.36%**): culturally significant in entertainment, fashionable, happy, influential culture, strong consumer brands, modern, prestigious, trendy.
7. Open for business (**9.35%**): cheap manufacturing costs, favorable tax environment, bureaucratic, corrupt, transparent government practices.
8. Adventure (**5.48%**): friendly, fun, suitable for tourism, pleasant climate, scenic, sexy.
9. Power (**5.02%**): a leader, economically influential, strong exports, politically effective, strong international alliances, strong military.
10. Heritage (**3.09%**): culturally accessible, rich history, great food, many cultural and geographical attractions.