



GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

**SPORTS MEGA EVENTS AND NATION BRANDING: A TEXTUAL AND PERCEPTION
ANALYSIS OF QATAR'S IMAGE THROUGH THE 2022 WORLD CUP**

BY

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FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (MPHIL) IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC
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DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references.

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ABSTRACT

The 2022 FIFA World Cup, was historically hosted in the Middle East for the first time since the inception of this Sports Mega-event (SME) in 1930. Qatar, a small nation in the Arabian Peninsula, won the bid to host its biggest SME amidst various controversies, including but not limited to corruption allegations, alleged substandard living and working conditions of its labor migrants, and concerns about how it will welcome the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, and Asexual (LGBTQA+) community in a country perceived to have a strict stance towards individuals who identify as such. Scholarship has identified how countries instrumentalize SMEs to rebrand or promote an image. By employing the qualitative research methods of textual analysis, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, this case study explores how the 2022 World Cup hosted by Qatar was used to reshape its reputation and image. Through the utilization of textual analysis, the study examines 169 news stories published on Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) website. Additionally, since the SME was promoted by FIFA as a media phenomenon, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions of Ghanaian sports journalists who covered the event in both Qatar and Ghana. Both textual and interview data were supplemented by document analysis. Using textual analysis for data collection and thematic analysis for analysis, the study identified five themes related to Qatar's identity construction through the 2022 FIFA World Cup: (1) The brand message: First FIFA World Cup in the Middle East, Compact Nature, and Sustainable Projects; (2) Adeptly leveraging technology; (3) Qatar's response to the controversy; (4) The use of entertainment: sport-related branded entertainment; and (5) Response to Covid-19. Additionally, through an examination of Qatar's communication materials, the study identified five themes related to nation branding activities employed by Qatar: (1) The use of public relations-related activities, including media relations, employee relations, stakeholder relations (including coordination with local people), corporate social responsibility (CSR), and campaigns; (2) Communicators of nation brand identity, such as the use of prominent personalities and government foreign policy; (3) Rights of people with disabilities; (4) Partnership; and (5) Use of testimonials. Furthermore, findings corroborated by the in-depth interviews indicate that all 12 participants interviewed had a positive impression of Qatar after the event. The triangulation of all three methods revealed that Qatar crafted an attractive identity through its use of technology, hosting the first compact tournament, and fostering a culturally inclusive environment during the event.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the Greatest of all Time (G.O.A.T.) Lionel Messi, who, after winning the 2022 FIFA World Cup for Argentina, inspired this study when he was clothed by the Emir of Qatar in a Qatari Bisht before lifting the coveted FIFA World Cup trophy.

I also dedicate this research work to my family especially my parents, Beatrice Kumi Panyin and Martin Assane Kumi whose toil inspires us (their children) to greater heights. We appreciate everything they have done and do for us.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIPS: Association Internationale de la Presse Sportive/International Sports Press Association

AP: Associated Press

CONCACAF: Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football

FIA: Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile

FIFA: Fédération Internationale de Football Association

GFA: The Ghana Football Association

GFP: Generations for Peace

IOR: Inter-Organizational Relationships

IRT: Image Repair Theory

LGBTQA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, and Asexual

OPEC: Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries

SC: Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

SME/SMEs: Sports Mega Event/Sports Mega Events

PR: Public Relations

TPS: Total Population Sampling

UCI: Union Cycliste International

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

Qatar launched a bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup in 2009. In his capacity as the President of the Qatar 2022 bid, Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani projected that this first global sports event in the Middle East would provide “an opportunity for greater understanding and unity between the Arab and Western worlds and could inspire enthusiastic support from football fans young and old across the entire region” (Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, interview, May 17, 2009).

At the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha, as Qatar launched its bid to stage the World Cup finals in 2022, Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani emphasized Qatari people and its government's unwavering resolution to advocate for peace, modernize, and build for the future. He asserts that Qatar serves as an ideal ally for FIFA, guaranteeing the undisputed establishment of football as a transformative instrument, enriched with its intrinsic virtues, capable of constructing a more promising future.

Qatar's passion for sports is evident through its designation of the second Tuesday of every February as a public holiday known as National Sports Day. It has hosted a number of international sporting events, including but not limited to the 2006 Asian Games, the 2015 Men's Handball World Championship, the 2015 AIBA World Boxing Championship, the 48th Artistic Gymnastics World Championships, the International Handball Federation Super Globe, the 2019 ANOC World Beach Games, the FIFA Club World Cup Qatar 2019 and 2020, as well as the IJF Masters 2020 (Government Communications Office, State of Qatar, 2022).

Despite Qatar's numerous achievements, controversies related to labor and corruption surrounded its success in winning the bid to host the Sports Mega Event (SME) of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the Middle East for the first time. Then FIFA President Joseph S. Blatter announced that the FIFA World Cup would go to new lands in the years 2018 and 2022, with respect to Russia and Qatar.

In a statement captured in a press release from the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA, 2010), Joseph S. Blatter, the then FIFA President, welcomed the development of football and highlighted that the FIFA World Cup had never been held in Eastern Europe or the Middle East during an event at Zurich's Messe in December 2010. It was also during this event that he announced the results of the FIFA Executive Committee's secret vote, revealing that Qatar had won the bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. According to Ganji (2016), the declaration that Qatar would host the 2022 World Cup by FIFA was the result of years of political and economic growth that had established Qatar as a significant geopolitical actor.

Qatar, a small nation in the Arabian Peninsula, has the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per person in the world, primarily supported by its natural gas reserves (Khaled & Gray, 2019). Located in the Middle East, the State of Qatar shares borders with Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arabian/Persian Gulf. As a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which continues to exert influence over the world oil markets, Qatar ranks among the top nine producers based on proven reserves, alongside the United Arab Emirates (OPEC, 2017 in Ennis, 2018). The need to diversify the nation's economy, making it more knowledge-based and service-oriented, has been highlighted due to the rapid decline in oil and natural gas prices and as part of Qatar's National Vision 2030 (Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2018; FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Sustainability strategy, 2020). Sepp Blatter announced Qatar had won the vote of the members of

the executive committee to host the 2022 World Cup, defeating competing bids from countries such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States of America.

Macdonald (2010) posits, the competition to host the 22nd FIFA World Cup, the biggest international football event in the world, is competitive due to the potential to boost a nation's economy through tourism, broadcasting, and logistics; it also gives the host nation's government a lot of prestige. Paine (2023) and Dwyer (2023) aver that Qatar's public relations (PR) objective for the World Cup aimed at debunking the prevailing notion of its insignificance as a small entity in the oil-rich Middle East, endeavoring instead to position itself as a globally renowned hub for business and tourism, comparable to neighboring destinations, such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

In the past, Qatar has hosted some major international sports events such as the 2016 Union Cycliste International (UCI) World Road Championship and the 2021 Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) Formula One World Championship among others. Hosting the FIFA World Cup was its biggest endeavor.

Qatar won the bid amidst various controversies (Foxman, 2022; “Qatar denies allegations of corruption...”, 2020; Ramsay, 2020), adding up to an already dire reputation of the Arab Country. It was alleged that two members of the FIFA Executive Committee were each given US\$1.5 million in bribery by Qatar to promote its candidacy for the competition—an accusation made by members of the English Football Association (Samuel-Azran et al., 2016). In an interview with BBC Sport, Hassan al Thawadi, the General Secretary of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) for the 2022 World Cup, dismissed the corruption allegations as "unsubstantiated" and criticized them as being based on "prejudice" and taken out of context (BBC Sport, 2011). The SC, formed in 2011, is responsible for delivering the proposed tournament venues, host country planning, and operations for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the first World

Cup to be held in the Arab world. It works with national stakeholders to provide essential tournament infrastructure and services and aims to ensure a meaningful legacy in Qatar and the wider region through the power of football, promoting sustainable economic, educational, and social development (FIFA, 2019). In 2014, after a two-year investigation, Qatar was declared innocent (BBC Sport, 2014 in Jarvie & Xu, 2022).

Also, Qatar received international criticism for the alleged substandard living and working circumstances of its labor migrants (Ganji, 2016). Qatar, with an estimated population of 2.9 million and being the smallest host in World Cup history, had invested \$220 billion to build 7 new stadiums, 100 new hotels, roads, a new metro system linking the stadiums, and a new airport to cater for an estimated 1.5 million football fans expected to attend the tournament, making it the most expensive ever with a cost more than Russia's hosting of the tournament in 2018 at just over \$14 billion US dollars, including hospitality centres, shopping malls, and handling 1,300 daily flights (Jarvie & Xu, 2022). Reports emerged regarding forced labor, human trafficking, and lengthy detention for foreign employees, with little progress being made in their welfare (Ganji, 2016). In a 2014 report titled "A Case Against Qatar," the International Trade Union Confederation criticized the Middle Eastern nation, declaring that "Qatar is a Nation without Conscience" (ITUC, 2014, p.4).

Furthermore, Qatar faced accusations of its alleged involvement in sponsoring terrorist groups. Scholars have indicated that Qatar aims to promote itself as a sporting nation explicitly to rehabilitate its tarnished reputation as a state that finances terrorism (Cohen, 2014; Jones, 2015; Longman, 2010; Reiche, 2015 in Samuel-Azran et al., 2016). In addition to these controversies, it has been alleged that Qatari laws and practices discriminate against women and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, and Asexual (LGBTQA+) persons (Amnesty

International, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022), raising questions about how these groups will be treated at a global event such as the World Cup.

The significance of the World Cup sparked scholarly interest on Qatar, with studies focusing on various aspects of the host country before and after the event. The 2022 FIFA World Cup garnered attention in academic literature and worldwide, as some scholars argue that hosting Sports Mega Events (SMEs) has the potential to enhance a country's image (Knott et al., 2017).

Grix (2012) observed that many states instrumentalize sports to promote their country's brand and gain prestige. He asserted that Germany deliberately utilized a leveraging strategy during the 2006 FIFA World Cup to improve its international image (Grix, 2012). Li and Feng (2022) also suggest that football can serve as an effective tool for nation branding, as demonstrated in their study on China during the post-Beijing Olympic era, highlighting the importance of cultivating a vibrant football culture to enhance a country's brand image. They argued that sports nation branding in China primarily involves internally directed political efforts aimed at reshaping national identity to strengthen the state's legitimacy and social integration. Regarding Brazil, Schallhorn (2019) argued that the country successfully capitalized on global media attention to present itself as an appealing tourist destination, potentially stimulating additional economic activities within the tourism sector.

Investigating shifts in perceptions and connections between German individuals and Brazil, as well as their travel intentions, before and after the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games, Schallhorn (2019) asserts that the media's impact on viewers' perceptions is likely more significant when the audience lacks direct experience and prior knowledge of the host nation, relying on media coverage for information. This is consistent with earlier studies (Giffard and

Rivenburgh, 2000; Zeng et al., 2011 in Schallhorn, 2019) highlighting the instrumental role of sports mega-events in driving tourism development.

These and other studies have broadly addressed how SMEs benefit host countries as tools for boosting their international image (Knott et al., 2015; Knott et al., 2016) as well as building 'soft power' (Crilley et al., 2021; Grix & Kramareva, 2017; Kobierecki & Pierzgalski, 2022; Vierhaus, 2018; Woods & Stokes, 2019) – the description of a country's ability to influence global affairs in international politics through its performative attraction (Grix & Lee, 2013; Nye, 2008). Given the discussion thus far, it is worthwhile to explore the branding strategies communicated during the 2022 World Cup hosted by Qatar, as they may have been utilized to change its reputation and image through nation branding mechanisms.

Nation branding has traditionally been researched as a strategy that aims to attract tourists from abroad, promote exports, and increase foreign direct investment in a country (Anholt, 2002). The practice of creating, evaluating, and proactively managing a nation's image in order to enhance or strengthen its reputation among a specific global audience is known as nation branding (Fan, 2010). Nation brands are intentionally created and controlled by stakeholders, rather than emerging spontaneously, with the strategic intention of generating a positive reputation (Knott & Jones, 2016). Nation branding is concerned with shaping a country's image on the international stage and relies on developing a realistic, competitive, and compelling strategic vision that is supported, enriched, and reinforced through every act of communication (Clarke, 2003; Fan, 2010). It is seen as a potential solution to issues that may affect a nation and is considered both a global phenomenon and a legitimate transnational practice (Lekakis, 2014).

Hosting Sports Mega Events (SMEs), according to Grix and Houlsthan (2014) has realized an increasing and obvious politicization of sports with particular emphasis in the last three decades

for both emerging and developing economies. SMEs such as the Olympics or football World Cup tournaments, help a country's image by increasing its visibility and awareness in the international media, showcasing the country, spreading its language, heritage, and culture, and as a result of the prestigious position of hosting such a significant international event, attracting tourists (Grix, 2013; Grix & Brannagan, 2016). They are “windows of opportunity” (Smith, 2014, p. 15) that gives host countries the opportunity to rebrand as well as build or promote an image (Anholt, 2007; Florek & Insch, 2011 in Knott & Jones, 2016). Thus, it may have been strategic for a nation like Qatar to submit its bid to host the World Cup as a form of leverage – that is, activities that seek to maximize the long-term benefits of events (Chalip, 2004). Despite being a small state, Qatar has utilized sport as part of its nation branding strategy (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015). Therefore, it becomes necessary to contribute to the ongoing literature on nation branding by investigating how the 2022 World Cup hosted by Qatar may have been used to reshape its reputation and image.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup constitute what is referred to as Sports Mega Events (SMEs). Roche (2003) defines SMEs as large-scale cultural events with a dramatic character, mass popular appeal, and international significance. Studies have broadly addressed how SMEs benefit host countries as tools for boosting their international image (Knott & Jones, 2015; Knott & Jones, 2016) as well as, building ‘soft power’ (Crilley et al, 2021; Grix & Kramareva, 2017; Kobierecki & Pierzgalski, 2022; Vierhaus, 2018; Woods & Stokes, 2019) - a concept described as a country’s ability to influence global affairs in international politics through its performative attraction (Grix & Lee, 2013; Nye, 2008).

Other studies have specifically focused on the FIFA World Cups hosted in 2018 in Russia, 2014 in Brazil, 2010 in South Africa, 2006 in Germany, and 2002 in South Korea and Japan to mention but a few. Notable among the areas these studies have focused on are: the impact of video

assistant referee (VAR) on match performance (d'Andréa & Stauff, 2022; Kubayi et al, 2021), media coverage of the women's World Cup (Black & Fielding-Lloyd, 2017; Coche, 2022; Ravel & Gareau, 2016), and analysis of FIFA's corruption scandal (Jennings, 2011; Kimball, 2017; Onwumechili & Bedeau, 2016; Rowe, 2016). In relation to the just-ended 2022 World Cup held in Qatar, some prior studies have given attention to human rights risks and workers' welfare (Ganji, 2016; Khaled & Gray, 2019; Piper, 2022; Samuel-Azran et al, 2022) as well as, urban development and tourism (Scharfenort, 2012; Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2018). However, the FIFA World Cup hosted in Qatar encompasses several other unexplored areas that lately have attracted research attention - particularly, how the organization of the FIFA World Cup was used by Qatar as a nation branding instrument.

To this end, within the context of communication, the present study seeks to explore the communication strategies Qatar used to brand itself by analyzing the news content of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy's (SC) official website used for the 2022 FIFA World Cup using the research method of textual analysis. It is evident in the case of Qatar as Akotia (2009) identified that, it is indeed "imperative that a country possesses a one-stop country website/official internet gateway as this contributes to integration, consistency, and coherence in a country's communication, a sine qua non to successful country branding programs" (pp. 73). Formed in 2011, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) is responsible for delivering the proposed tournament venues, host country planning, and operations for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 - the first World Cup to be held in the Arab world, working with national stakeholders to provide essential tournament infrastructure and services - with the aim of ensuring a meaningful legacy in Qatar and the wider region through the power of football, promoting sustainable economic, educational, and social development (FIFA, 2019). This study aims to discuss the

branding approach deployed by Qatar, the host country for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, in order to redefine its standing among the comity of nations.

Moreover, Rein and Shields (2007) in Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2013) anticipated that, Qatar's FIFA World Cup will represent an essential step in its government's investment, attracting media coverage that will permit Qatar to have "a permanent window for international promotion" (p. 234). With thousands of media professionals and journalists covering the tournament, the FIFA World Cup in Qatar 2022 had the largest media coverage in history, which was facilitated by a centralized and state-of-the-art infrastructure provided for accredited media representatives in and around Doha (FIFA, 2023). The role of the media in SMEs cannot be underestimated. Journalists wield significant influence over the way a sports event is portrayed, and their reporting can shape the perspectives of the audience with respect to the players, teams, and unfolding events.

According to the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA, 2022), the FIFA World Cup hosted in Qatar was "a media phenomenon" whose "success is [was] closely related to the extensive media coverage that it receives" (p. 12). Since scant scholarship exists to assess the opinions of sports journalists regarding the impact of the 2022 FIFA World Cup on Qatar's reputation, the study additionally seeks to explore the perception of Ghanaian sports journalists on the SME's use by the host country to redesign its image.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this case study is to examine Qatar's nation branding approach through the 2022 World Cup to transform its previously negative reputation. The research objectives include;

1. To explore how Qatar constructed its identity through the 2022 FIFA World Cup.
2. To examine the nation branding activities/tools used by Qatar in the World Cup.

3. To ascertain the perception of Qatar prior to the World Cup among Ghanaian Sports Journalists.
4. To explore the experience of sports journalists from their exposure to Qatar through the FIFA World Cup.
5. To assess the perception of Qatar after the World Cup among Ghanaian Sports Journalists.

1.3 Research Questions

The study will seek to answer the following exploratory research questions;

1. How did Qatar construct its identity through the 2022 FIFA World Cup?
2. How does Qatar employ nation branding activities/tools in the World Cup?
3. What was the perception Ghanaian Sports Journalists held of Qatar prior to the World Cup?
4. How do the experiences of sports journalists reflect their exposure to Qatar through the FIFA World Cup?
5. How do Ghanaian sports journalists perceive Qatar after the World Cup?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the contribution of SMEs to nation branding – specifically, how Qatar utilized the hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to communicate its image to the world. It aims to achieve this by investigating the communicative material of Qatar's SC, specifically focusing on its website's news hub, using textual analysis. A combination of textual analysis and document analysis will provide insights into Qatar's nation branding strategies as well as, motive(s) for bidding for the World Cup. Additionally, it will explore how those motives manifest themselves in the buildup as well as during the event. Since research on the World Cup in Qatar is still an emerging one, the study aims to focus on other aspects of Qatar's branding by focusing on textual analysis of the website and also analyzing the views of Ghanaian journalists.

In so doing, it serves as a valuable source of empirical evidence, contributing to the existing knowledge and closing the knowledge gap regarding nation branding strategies. Also, the findings from the study can serve as a valuable resource for governments, policymakers, public relations practitioners, as well as brand experts, regarding how nations brand themselves through SMEs.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The research work focuses on the utilization of the 2022 World Cup by Qatar, covering various phases of the tournament, starting from its preparation through to its commencement with 32 nations and ending with the declaration of the winner in the finals. The research utilizes textual analysis to investigate the branding strategies conveyed during the 2022 World Cup hosted by Qatar. This analysis involves examining the news content on the news hub of Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) website. The study also utilizes document analysis to understand the host nation's objectives for hosting the SME. In addition, this analysis is supplemented by interviews to gather the viewpoints of Ghanaian sports journalists regarding the measures implemented by Qatar in organizing the event. Therefore, the principal sources of data for analysis will include text, images, videos, interviews, and official documents.

It is worth reiterating that the research will use the country of Qatar and the 2022 FIFA World Cup as a case study for investigation. A case study is an empirical investigation that explores a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life setting, especially when there is uncertainty about the boundary between the subject being examined and its surrounding context (Yin, 2003 in Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). Creswell (2013) adding to the description of a case study defined it as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and

case themes” (p. 93). The single or specific case identified is the 2022 FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar. Being an intrinsic type of case study, the focus is on the event of the 2022 FIFA World Cup which presents a unique situation (Creswell, 2013) of being hosted in the middle-East for the first time amidst varied controversies.

The types of data this study will collect include text and images, documents, audio-visual digital materials, and interviews as they will help present an in-depth understanding of the case. In case study research, it is common to utilize multiple data sources and employ various data collection methods (Durdella, 2019). As Creswell (2013) posits, typically the data collection in case study research is extensive and draws on multiple sources of information, such as interviews, observations, audiovisual materials, and documents. Hence, a case study will be an appropriate method to study the phenomenon of Qatar’s hosting of the 2022 World Cup.

1.6 Organization of Study

The research is organized into five chapters. Chapter One will cover the introduction, background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study as well as, the scope of the study. Chapter Two shall comprise of literature review, the theoretical framework, and a review of related studies. Chapter Three on the other hand will present the methodology of the study, the instruments to be used, the research design, and the procedure. Chapter Four will cover the analysis and findings of data as well as highlight limitations. Chapter Five will present recommendations, conclusions, suggestions for future studies, and limitations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Within the broader context of nation branding through sports mega-events, this chapter situates the current study within applicable conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature. This chapter explores concepts in nation branding and sports mega-events (SMEs) appraising extensive research on nation branding through sports. To contextualize the study on how a nation's brand is influenced by SMEs, the chapter also examines relevant literature on nation branding, referencing empirical studies. Finally, the section discusses the theoretical framework for the study.

2.1 Nation branding

A brand is frequently regarded as a source of competitive advantage, as it possesses the capability to differentiate itself from competitors and thereby provide unique value to customers (Kapferer, 2008 in Panwar & Khan, 2020). When it comes to brands, branding is applicable to products, services, organizations, places, individuals, and even nations. A particular aspect of branding that has garnered attention is nation branding.

Nation branding involves the collaborative practice of governments, public relations firms, and corporate businesses to foster a country's image and reputation, with the goal of advancing its global competitive advantage and international influence through economic and political means (Li & Feng, 2022). Miño & Austin (2022) on the other hand introduced a cultural dimension to the definition of nation branding. They described the concept as the application of marketing principles to establish a positive image of a country among a specific set of targeted publics, driven by political, economic, or cultural objectives.

Fan (2010, in Dubinsky, 2023) further elaborates on nation branding as the collective impression formed in the minds of international stakeholders, encompassing various elements such as place, people, history, culture/language, food, famous faces (celebrities), fashion, global brands, and more. To be more encompassing, Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis (2023) offers a comprehensive definition of nation branding from their study, *“Conceptualizing nation branding: The Systematic Literature Review”*. They define nation branding as the “systematic strategic process of involving public and private sectors to design a branding strategy for the nation, communicate the nation’s core values and national identity, and apply branding strategies and tactics to promote a nation’s image, improve the country’s reputation among all different audiences, differentiate a nation from other nations, and reach economic, social, political, business, and international competitiveness” (p. 114). They found the components of nation branding as comprising International mega-events (Sports Mega Events), Public relations, Branding techniques, Public diplomacy, Marketing communication, Brand ambassadors, Nation branding strategy, Nation brand personality, Country image, National identity, Umbrella brands, and National symbols (Rojas-Méndez & Khoshnevis, 2023). It is worth mentioning that, the terms "nation branding" and "country branding" are frequently used interchangeably (Dinnie, 2016 in Frig & Sorsa, 2018).

Justifying an approach to branding, Anholt (2011) one of the leading scholars in nation branding argued that the use of branding to suggest a technique for constructing brand equity is “incorrect and unjustifiable” (p.2), as there is no such method; instead, favorable products and services created by a reputable corporation attain a positive brand image that ultimately reflects on the corporation and becomes its primary asset, and likewise, favorable products, services, culture, tourism, investments, technology, education, businesses, people, policies, initiatives, and events generated by a reputable country acquire a positive brand image that eventually reflects on the

country and may also become its primary asset. Anholt (2011) emphasized that for a country to enhance its international reputation, a consistent, coordinated, and unbroken stream of useful, noticeable, world-class, and relevant ideas, products, and policies is essential, and that countries should focus on product development and marketing rather than on branding if they are serious about enhancing their image, as there are no shortcuts. He summarized the process as encompassing three main elements: strategy, substance, and symbolic actions. To explain:

- Strategy according to Anholt (2011) is comprised of three main components: knowing a nation's current position, internal and external perceptions, and where it wants to be, as well as how to achieve it. He added that the two biggest challenges are reconciling the various desires and needs of national actors and establishing a strategic goal that is both achievable and motivational - often incompatible.
- Substance as the successful implementation of the strategy through tangible outcomes such as novel economic, legal, political, social, cultural, and educational initiatives (that is, innovative businesses, legislation, reforms, investments, institutions, and policies) that will facilitate the intended advancements.
- Symbolic action which is the substance that possesses an inherent communicative power to strengthen the overall branding process. It can be innovative, legislative, reformative, institutional, or policy-oriented, and are notable, evocative, memorable, pictorial, newsworthy, current, poetic, touching, surprising, or dramatic; and most significantly emblematic of the strategy while serving as both components and means of telling the national story.

According to Anholt (2011), the lasting impact of a single symbolic action is rarely achieved and therefore, a diverse range of multiple actions from various sectors must be implemented continuously over a prolonged period to establish a well-rounded and credible image of a place.

In the present era of globalization, the concept of nation branding has gained significance as countries strive to attract the attention, respect, and trust of various stakeholders such as investors, tourists, consumers, donors, immigrants, media, and other governments (Dinnie, 2008). According to Dinnie (2008), the term nation-brand refers to “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (p.15). Temporal (2002) and Dinnie (2008) note that countries are increasingly making deliberate endeavors to enhance their nation branding with the aim of fulfilling various objectives, such as attracting tourists, boosting exports, stimulating inward investment, attracting skilled workers and education students, restoring international credibility and investor confidence, reversing international ratings downgrades, increasing international political influence, and promoting stronger international partnerships.

Akotia (2009) underscored the transformation of branding from a discretionary decision to an essential requirement. Notably, branding is no longer confined to the tasks of state authorities or individual corporations alone; rather, it demands a united and inclusive effort from all relevant stakeholders. Anholt (2003 in Akotia, 2009) explained that country branding is founded on the recognition that, in a globalized world, nations must vie for global attention and prosperity, wherein development is equally contingent on strategic positioning as any other factor.

Van Ham's (2001) perspective, as cited by Dinnie (2008), suggests that the state without a brand faces challenges in attracting economic and political attention, highlighting the increasing significance of image and reputation as integral components of the nation's strategic equity. Nation branding may serve to dispel misconceptions about a country and enable it to strategically reposition itself more positively toward its intended audiences (Dinnie, 2008).

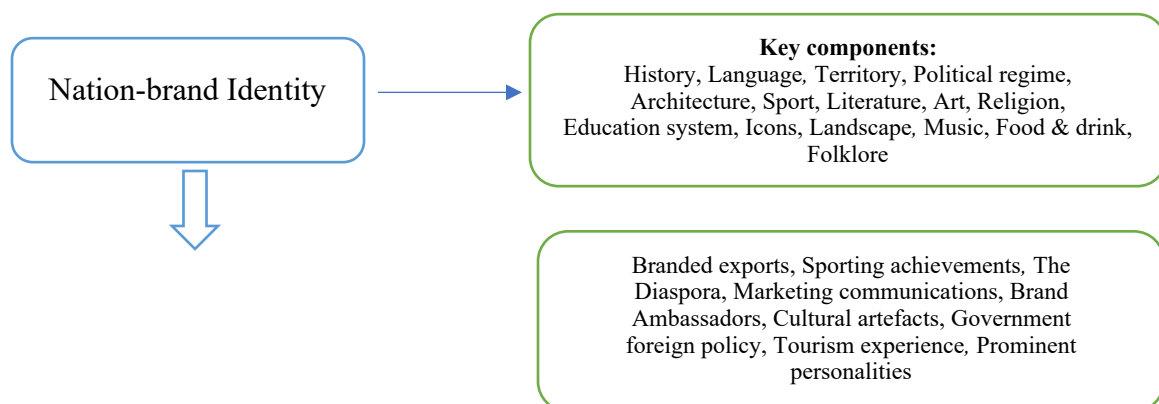
Dinnie (2008) also made a distinction between brand image and nation-brand image. Whereas brand image refers to the mental representation that is subjective and shared by a group of consumers (Riezebos, 2003 in Dinnie, 2008), nation brand image on the other hand, encompasses the cognitive perceptions that individuals hold regarding the country, which can be influenced by a diverse range of factors including personal experiences, word-of-mouth communication, preconceived national stereotypes, sports achievements, political occurrences, media depictions, the quality of brands originating from the nation, and the conduct of individuals affiliated with the country (Dinnie, 2008). These inputs, as Dinnie (2008) asserts, can all determine a country's nation-brand image to a greater or lesser extent, even without taking into account the potential impacts of nation-brand advertising, promotion, and development. Similar to product brands segmenting their consumer base based on appropriate segmentation variables, nation-brands should also segment their diverse audiences to comprehend current nation-brand images and establish tailored communication strategies that address negative perceptions and reinforce positive ones (Dinnie, 2008). It is important to note that nation branding and destination branding are distinct concepts (Ferreira et al, 2022). As Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009 in Ferreira et al, 2022) aver, the image of a country encompasses a wide range of factors, including generalized perceptions shaped by representative products, political and economic maturity, historical events and relationships, culture and traditions, and the degree of technology and industrialization, while the destination image primarily emphasizes specific aspects rather than the overall attributes of the country.

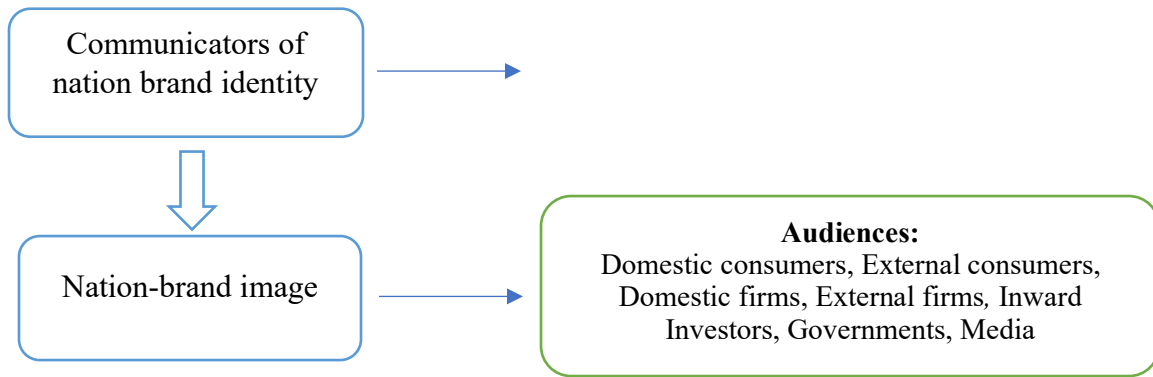
Dinnie (2008) posits that a brand revitalization program may be necessary since a nation-brand image can deteriorate over time. Nation-brands must exhibit specific traits, such as a long-standing heritage, a unique point-of-difference, and under-advertised and under-promoted, for a brand revitalization program to be successful, as compared to product brands (Wansink &

Huffman, 2001 in Dinnie, 2008). In addition, Dinnie (2008) argues that all nation brands can fulfill the long-held heritage and the distinct point-of-differentiation. Further, he argued that given the relatively recent embracing of nation branding by governments around the world, the vast majority of nations are also under-advertised and under-promoted, and are thus capable of undergoing successful revitalization programs.

The conceptual framework of the nation-brand developed by Dinnie (2008) below recognizes the complex and varied aspects of the nation-brand concept. Dinnie (2008) suggests that various nations select particular components and communicators of identity that are best suited to achieving their specific nation-brand goals when creating their nation-brands.

Figure 1.0 Conceptual Model of Nation-Brand Identity and Image





Source: Dinnie (2008)

Demonstrating the multi-faceted nature of the nation-brand construct, the model illustrates the process by which the image of a nation-brand is formed as a result of the nation's brand identity being communicated through various channels (Dinnie, 2008). According to him, key components of nation-brand identity such as language, history, territory, sport, political regime, and so on represent the enduring essence of the nation. The communicators of nation-brand identity are derived from these enduring characteristics, which can manifest as both tangible and intangible elements (Dinnie, 2008). For instance, tourism experience may play an important role in the nation-brand image held by external consumers. His conceptual model also shows “the diverse range of audiences that the nation-brand must address” (Dinnie, 2008; p. 50).

2.2 SME as a way of nation branding

Some of the ways a nation's brand is promoted is through sports mega-events (SMEs). The significant role of sports in modern society, as a highly popular form of entertainment, is characterized by sports mega-events, which necessitate massive investment and are within the capabilities of only select nations to attract and effectively organize (Kobierecki & Pierzgalski,

2022). The rising demand to host large-scale sports events stems from their recognition as valuable promotional prospects for nations, cities, and regions, intended to spur tourism, encourage inward investment, and promote the host locations and the respective nation to a global audience and domestically (Horne, 2017).

Although there are no standardized definitions of what constitutes an SME, sports mega-events are typically characterized as an international sports competition or event that attracts widespread popularity. The Olympic Games, Super Bowl, and FIFA World Cup constitute what may be referred to as Sports Mega Events (SMEs). According to Black (2008 in Grix, 2012), the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup are generally considered sports mega-events, while smaller-scale events like the Commonwealth Games or Pan-American Games are usually regarded as 'second order'.

Roche (2003) defined SMEs as large-scale cultural events with a dramatic character, mass popular appeal, and international significance. Müller (2015 in Kobierecki & Pierzgalski, 2022) posited that visitor appeal, mediated exposure, expenses, and transformative influence are among the dimensions that characterize SMEs. The staging of sports mega-events serves as a vehicle for host nations to project a desired national image to the international community (Schausteck de Almeida et al, 2015).

Some studies have explored the relationship between sports mega-events and nation branding. These studies have mainly sought to examine the contribution of sports mega-events to nation branding. The findings from across the studies show how consistently, sports mega-events are capable of being used to either boost or correct the image of a country – that is, the host nation.

Similar to other developing nations, South Africa faced branding challenges before hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup due to the unfamiliarity of its brand and the possibility of incorrect,

outdated, or stereotyped associations (Knott et al, 2017). Moreover, the effect of the brand “Africa” or the continent’s brand often leads to African nations being linked to similar attributes throughout the continent, including crime, civil war, famine, disease, and corruption (Anholt, 2007 in Knott et al, 2017). In the build-up to the 2010 mega-event, there was increased media attention on the nation, which primarily focused on negative aspects such as inflation, crime, and xenophobic riots (Tomlinson et al., 2009 in Knott et al, 2017). With all these challenges looming over South Africa prior to hosting the first World Cup on the African continent, Knott et al (2017) aimed, in their paper "Sport Mega-Events and Nation Branding," to identify the unique qualities of the 2010 FIFA World Cup and how South Africa strategically leveraged it to fulfill its nation branding aspirations as the host.

South Africa, under the leadership of President Mbeki, embarked on a national branding effort through a public and private partnership to counter the negative image left by apartheid and AIDS (de Vicente, 2004 in Akotia, 2009). This successful initiative led to South Africa winning the bid to host the 2010 World Cup, resulting in a distinctly improved country image and a boost in exports and tourism (Akotia, 2009).

Knott et al (2017) discovered and came to the conclusion that South Africa was a reputable and rising international tourism destination, with its appeal on a global scale, connections and attachments, symbolic status, and soft power from the 2010 FIFA World Cup playing a role in the growth and appeal of its national brand. Knott et al (2017) proposed that while major sporting events offer possibilities for nation branding, the level of these advantages may vary depending on the context of the nation brand, with less well-known, troubled, or still developing brands appearing to benefit the most.

Similar to South Africa, Grix (2012) argued that Germany employed a deliberate leveraging strategy during the 2006 FIFA World Cup to improve its poor international image. He observed that many states have and do instrumentalize sports to promote their country's image or brand so as to gain prestige. He avers that prior to the event, Germany carefully prepared through multiple campaigns aimed at various groups and involving a diverse range of partners from business, government, civil society, culture, and sports. The German strategy employed six methods of leveraging, based on Chalip's 2004 model of leveraging legacies as an organizing principle.

These tactics included: (1) implementing innovative "Fan Zones" that served as a space to create lively street parties and stimulate visitor spending, (2) creating an atmosphere that compelled people to stay in Germany, (3) utilizing a massive media setup serviced by Deutsche Telekom to promote the event and the host country, thus keeping event expenditure within the country, (4) utilizing the "Land of Ideas" campaign to enhance business relations and facilitate other campaigns across diverse actors involved in organizing and promoting the event, (5) employing various campaigns to showcase and advertise the event, and (6) using posters, banners, and other promotions to achieve the aforementioned objectives (Grix, 2012). Grix's model of image leveraging, by way of research methodology, was based on an interpretivist epistemology – that is 'hard interpretivism' (Grix, 2010a in Grix, 2012). By adopting this approach, researchers acknowledge the significance of not only the actors' ideas and beliefs in narrating a sequence of events (such as the commonly held belief among many states that SMEs enhance their international reputation) but also the impact of structures and institutions in shaping these ideas and beliefs (Grix, 2012). He maintains that utilizing a sports mega-event in a systematic and deliberate manner to transform a nation's image is more feasible for countries that have had or still have a negative

national image. This claim is akin to Knott and Jones' (2017) observation that branding through SMEs appears to have the most significant impact on troubled or developing nations.

In a related study, Grix and Houlihan (2013) compared Germany's 2006 FIFA World Cup and the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in London. They contended that the rationale behind a nation's decision to host sports mega-events lies in the potential benefits it can confer on the nation's image. Their research findings indicated a noticeable difference in the sports and soft power strategies of Germany and Britain. Germany adopted a meticulously crafted, adequately financed, and long-term approach to transforming its unfavorable global image, whereas Britain appeared to be relatively unconcerned about exploiting the Olympic Games to augment its seemingly sturdy international reputation (Grix & Houlihan, 2013). By drawing on and analyzing official government documents and newspaper sources written before and after the games, the study revealed that the substantial allocation of resources by Germany towards soft power initiatives can be attributed, to a significant extent, to its reluctance to develop hard power capabilities, particularly military power, in contrast to the UK, which has traditionally accorded greater priority to hard power (Grix & Houlihan, 2013). Although the UK invests considerably in soft power, this tendency is more likely to be driven by a paucity of resources to sustain its military capabilities, rather than a preference for diplomatic strategies (Grix & Houlihan, 2013). Their investigation revealed that this strategic use of the event enabled Germany to effect a positive shift in its image among foreign publics.

Rwanda presents an intriguing case where it did not host a Sport Mega-Event (SME), but instead sought to brand itself through an SME by utilizing an advertising initiative. Voets' study (2021) analyzed the rationale behind Rwanda's decision to sponsor Arsenal, which is among the wealthiest football clubs globally, and employ the "Visit Rwanda" messaging. The promotion of Rwanda as a travel destination and investment hub served to substitute the negative image

associated with the genocide with a portrayal of the country as a more secure and appealing destination (Voets, 2021). Voets, (2021) contended that Rwanda's approach to nation branding resembled more of a corporate strategy aimed at producing a favorable perception and achieving goals, such as luring foreign visitors and investors to the country. He asserts that nation branding may be viewed as a rational consequence of neoliberal policies and globalization, which have facilitated the movement of goods, people, and capital across borders, thereby necessitating nation-states, like Rwanda, to enhance their appeal to foreign entities and investors, with nation branding being one of the effective tools that states utilize to achieve this objective. According to Voets (2021), who brought to bear criticism against Rwanda's approach, a more effective and trustworthy approach to Rwanda's spending on PR-led campaigns may involve prioritizing investments in the country's development, with nation-branding campaigns serving as supplementary measures, such as announcing projects, initiatives, and events, to support an active foreign policy strategy.

Kazakhstan's nation branding endeavor involved leveraging both sports and education. In a study conducted by Fauve (2015), the utilization of both higher education and sports, referred to as "channels of elite and banal nationalism," was analyzed to understand how Kazakhstan promoted its national image. Kazakhstan projected an image of being open, dynamic, and successful by utilizing these tactics, which was in stark contrast to the authoritarian nature of its regime. Fauve (2015) contended that the country leveraged its significant oil revenues to establish the Astana professional cycling team, which quickly became a global leader in the sport, while also hosting the 2010 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Conference. In addition, the country utilized Nazarbayev University to attract renowned Western scholars, positioning itself to compete in the international arena of academic rankings. He noted that individual actors with social capital stemming from their worldwide connections in various domains (such as sports, finance, and academia) played an active role in the process, enabling its

implementation. Through the use of qualitative inquiry methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews, Fauve (2015) provided evidence that Kazakhstan's nation branding was an effort to invest in the international public sphere to promote the country while ignoring the authoritarian nature of its regime (Schlumberger & Burnella, 2010; Vanderhill, 2013 in Fauve, 2015). While Kazakhstan's nation branding endeavor involved leveraging both sports and education, the government's acknowledgment of sports as a crucial strategy highlights the role played by SMEs in promoting national branding.

The collaborative nature of hosting sports mega-events as a tool for nation branding, was highlighted by Li and Feng (2022). Based on their study, they observed that effective nation branding hinges on the synergy between government and non-governmental stakeholders, as well as active participation from citizens. Through the application of a content analysis approach to deconstruct media texts associated with sports mega-events, the researchers examined how China's brand was portrayed and negotiated in the context of football in what they call soccer. Li and Feng (2022) contended that the value of sports nation branding in China is primarily involved in the internally directed political endeavor that intends to restructure national identity to bolster the state's legitimacy and social integration. Their framework enlarges the boundaries of critical investigation on nation branding in the context of identity politics pertaining to sports.

In her research, Guajardo (2016) draws attention to the transformations in Japan's national image and investigates the potential of Japan's branding efforts for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics to establish a lasting legacy for the nation, particularly with regard to the development of human resources. The Tokyo 2020 Olympics served as an opportunity to promote Japan as a nation through its culture and education, furthering the Cool Japan strategy and positioning the country as a provider of solutions to global issues (Guajardo, 2016). Japan's branding concept of Cool Japan emerged in 2002, but it was not until 2005 that the Japanese government actively promoted

it as a nation branding project to enhance cultural diplomacy (Valaskivi, 2013 in Guajardo, 2016). According to Guajardo (2016), a transition from the brand name "Cool Japan" to "Olympic Global Japan" had the potential to facilitate a transformation grounded in individuals' capacity to genuinely act as intermediaries connecting countries, promoting international perspectives and objectives. She suggests that the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games can strengthen the government's efforts in human resource development by utilizing the concept of nation branding. This can lead to the creation of an Olympic legacy that includes a cultural narrative for women and non-nationals and increased representation of both in higher education institutions (Guajardo, 2016). Japan, she noted, has progressed beyond the promotion of pop culture, cuisine, and fashion, and is now aspiring to be recognized as a nation with the capability of providing solutions to complex problems. The implication of this is that the objectives of nation branding are not fixed, but rather, evolve over time.

In the case of Brazil, Ferreira et al.'s (2022) study of the 2016 Olympic Games assessed the impact of hosting sports mega-event on the brand image of a country as a tourist destination, particularly examining the influence of the host city on the country's brand image. Their findings emphasized the crucial role that the host city's image plays in shaping the destination image of the host country. In accordance with Ferreira et al.'s (2022) findings, the host city image of Rio de Janeiro during the 2016 Olympic Games had a positive effect on Brazil's tourist destination image. Both the cognitive and affective image dimensions of Rio as a host city were predictive of Brazil's destination image, but the cognitive image dimensions appeared to have a stronger impact. In a related study, Schallhorn (2019) investigated the shifts in German individuals' perceptions and connections with Brazil, as well as their travel intentions, from the period preceding the 2014 FIFA World Cup to the aftermath of both the World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. By employing a panel survey with three rounds of data collection, Schallhorn (2019) conducted a longitudinal

investigation to examine alterations in television viewers' perceptions of Brazil from the pre-2014 FIFA World Cup period to the post-World Cup and post-2016 Olympic Games hosted by Brazil. The author asserted that the media's impact on viewers' perceptions is likely to be more significant in cases where the audience lacks direct experience and prior knowledge of the host nation, and thus relies on media coverage for information. Schallhorn (2019) discovered that in contrast to previous research suggesting that exposure to televised sporting events leads to more positive associations and perceptions, the positive-to-negative association ratio remained roughly balanced, with some indications of harm to Brazil's image. Schallhorn (2019) posits that despite the emergence of unfavorable impressions, Brazil was successful in capitalizing on the attention of the global media to present itself as an appealing tourist destination, thereby potentially stimulating additional economic activities within the tourism sector. This is in line with earlier studies that underscore the instrumental role of sports mega-events in driving tourism development. Her inference is that host countries will persist in utilizing these global events to garner global recognition and offer viewers a glimpse into their cultural, natural, and tourist highlights, as well as their governmental and social systems. Vasconcelos and Macedo Filho (2019) on the other hand studied the sustainability of the transformation that took place in the city of Natal, Brazil during the 2014 World Cup from the perspective of local public managers. Through the utilization of qualitative, descriptive research that employed semi-structured questions to obtain information from public managers at local and state levels associated with the event, Vasconcelos and Macedo Filho (2019) found that the managers involved concluded that the 2014 World Cup in Natal did not serve sustainability nor leave any sustainable effects. Insufficient planning and inadequate organizational and social participation during the preparation and execution of the event were the reasons for the lack of sustainability (Vasconcelos & Macedo Filho, 2019). Based on the account of the public state managers, the 2014 World Cup mega-event did not bring any significant social

benefits, apart from the construction of the Dunas Arena, the transport complex surrounding it, and the Aluizio Alves International Airport, and was therefore considered unsustainable.

Furthermore, Vasconcelos and Macedo Filho (2019) observed that only the environmental dimension of sustainability was met and that sustainability had not been widely embraced by the identified norms. Specifically, the Dunas Arena was an example of environmental sustainability due to its construction that attempted to reuse all of the material from the demolition of the old state stadium João Machado (Machadão), and its maintenance utilized natural resource reuse mechanisms. A recommendation was made to analyze the sustainability in planning and projects for the realization of other sports mega-events, such as the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. It is worth mentioning that, in relation to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, this SME was hinged on a sustainability strategy described in the history of the FIFA World Cup as “the first sustainability strategy to be developed and delivered jointly by three primary delivery partners for the tournament: FIFA, the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 LLC (Q22) and the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC)” aimed at maximizing the event’s “contribution to people’s well-being, economic development, and environmental protection in the short and long term” (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Sustainability strategy, 2020, p.4).

Beyond the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games, the UEFA European Championship is another example of a sports mega-event although not the size as the World Cup or the Olympic Games. In 2014, Dembek and Wtoch studied how hosting a major sports event, like UEFA Euro 2012, can affect how people see a country. They looked at how the foreign press talked about Poland after it hosted the event. Dembek and Wtoch (2014) conducted a qualitative content analysis of press reports collected by Polish embassies from around the world. They discovered that the firsthand experience of visitors to the event, especially the accredited journalists, could have played a role in transforming the conventional view of Poland as a nation of conservative,

devout Catholic farmers into a perception of Poland as a fast-progressing, ambitious, and contemporary European country. During the initial phase of Dembek and Wtoch's (2014) press report analysis, they found that journalists used pre-existing, imprecise, and historically determined stereotypes.

Dembek and Wtoch (2014) emphasized the need for prospective host countries of sports mega-events to conduct a thorough evaluation of their current global image, to proactively manage possible promotional challenges (such as racism in the case of Poland), and have contingency measures in place. Dembek and Wtoch's (2014) second analysis demonstrated how journalists' direct involvement could potentially alter an established country's image. Poland's hosting of the championship benefited from the "surprise effect," stemming from a disparity between expectations and actuality, and the country's emphasis on the social, logistical, and soft aspects of the sports mega-event (such as volunteer quality and professional support for journalists) rather than significant investment in an expensive promotional campaign proved to be a successful approach (Dembek & Wtoch, 2014). Dembek and Wtoch (2014) suggested that other nations contemplating hosting a sports mega-event and utilizing it as a promotional instrument may regard Poland as a model example. In line with the aim of this research to assess how the 2022 World Cup was utilized as a nation branding initiative to transform Qatar's image, the study will examine, similarly from the first-hand experience of journalists, the views of Ghanaian sports journalists who attended the sports mega-event.

2.2.1 Sports Mega-event and Nation Branding: Qatar

Limited research has been carried out regarding the ended FIFA World Cup 2022, despite certain investigations having been conducted concerning the hosting of SMEs in Qatar.

Research conducted by Theodoropoulou and Alos (2018) investigated the branding strategies employed by Qatar in promoting itself as a sports tourism destination in the virtual semiosphere and linguistic landscape of sporting events. Using a critical approach of multi-modal discourse analysis and social semiotics, they analyzed the promotional multi-modal digital content disseminated by Qatar to introduce its ambitious sports-related initiatives in both English and Arabic versions, with an emphasis on image construction. Theodoropoulou and Alos (2018) found that Qatar uses sports tourism materials as a symbolic market to brand itself and its people for both domestic and international audiences. By doing so, the country has been able to position itself as a rapidly emerging sports tourism destination, with branding that reflects both utopian ideals and the reality of Qatar's recent transformations since winning the bid to host the FIFA World Cup 2022 (Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2018). Søyland and Moriconi (2022) on the other hand presented a descriptive case study of Qatar's sports strategy conducted by analyzing key government documents and media articles. They studied "Qatar's multi-actors sports strategy: Diplomacy, critics and legitimization" and found that Qatar has efficiently used sport as a means of modernization, diplomacy, and soft power, through a strategy based on the participation of national and foreign actors and institutions. This is buttressed in Li and Feng's (2022) study which recognized the collaborative nature of hosting sports mega-events as a tool for nation branding.

Søyland and Moriconi (2022) held that Qatar showed that sports is an effective tool to promote and improve the public image of a country abroad and to generate a favorable political ecosystem to achieve policy goals. They delineated Qatar's effective use of sports and identified four key pillars that underlie its strategy to enhance its attractiveness and soft power. These include: (a) hosting international sports events and constructing world-class sporting facilities; (b) investing in global sports and obtaining global sports broadcasting rights, as well as promoting sports initiatives such as sports integrity; (c) promoting Qatari achievements in elite sports; and

(d) engaging renowned sports personalities (who have either played in the Qatari football league or served as an ambassador for the 2022 FIFA World Cup) to publicly endorse Qatar's political regime and society. They contend that despite Qatar's ambitious sports diplomacy, the nation's growing global attention has drawn heightened scrutiny of its internal policies, leading to significant criticisms of corruption allegations and reports of labor abuses against migrant workers within the country.

Qatar has been accused of sportswashing, a practice whereby sports soft power is deliberately employed to mitigate a tarnished global reputation (Søyland & Moriconi, 2022). The authors observed that Qatar has acquired the ability to manage external criticism and has become adept at securing legitimacy and support from sport governing bodies, international political organizations, and foreign celebrities. In a related twist, Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2013) analyzed the sport place branding strategy of Qatar by examining the relationship between the Qatar Foundation and football club, FC Barcelona. Football has been a key sector in the Qatari's government effort to promote the image of its country worldwide (Ginesta & de San Eugenio, 2013). They argued that the Qatari government displays, *strictu sensu*, a sports place branding strategy – that is, through its connection with sports, particularly football, the government is engaged in a process of rebranding through its positive association with sports. According to Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2013), the recognition of Qatar on the global stage indicates a distinct progression from its relative obscurity among Persian Gulf nations in the early 1990s to its current status as a significant proponent of soft power for the purposes of self-affirmation and international acknowledgment (Riera, 2011 in Ginesta & de San Eugenio, 2013).

Ending, Al-Emadi et al (2022) studied the views and perceptions of Qatar's local residents – nationals and expatriates – regarding the potential social and cultural impacts of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the country prior to the event. Applying the Social Exchange Theory, Al-

Emadi et al (2022) discovered that the majority of Qatar's locals, both nationals and expatriates, had positive perceptions of the social and cultural impacts of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the country. However, they still expressed apprehensions regarding issues such as traffic congestion, pollution, and the potential rise in the cost of living. They asserted that their study examined the perceived social and cultural impacts of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup prior to its occurrence in Qatar; however, they suggested that future research is necessary to investigate the potential impacts of the sports mega event on the local community after the tournament, thereby enabling a comparison of pre-and post-event conditions.

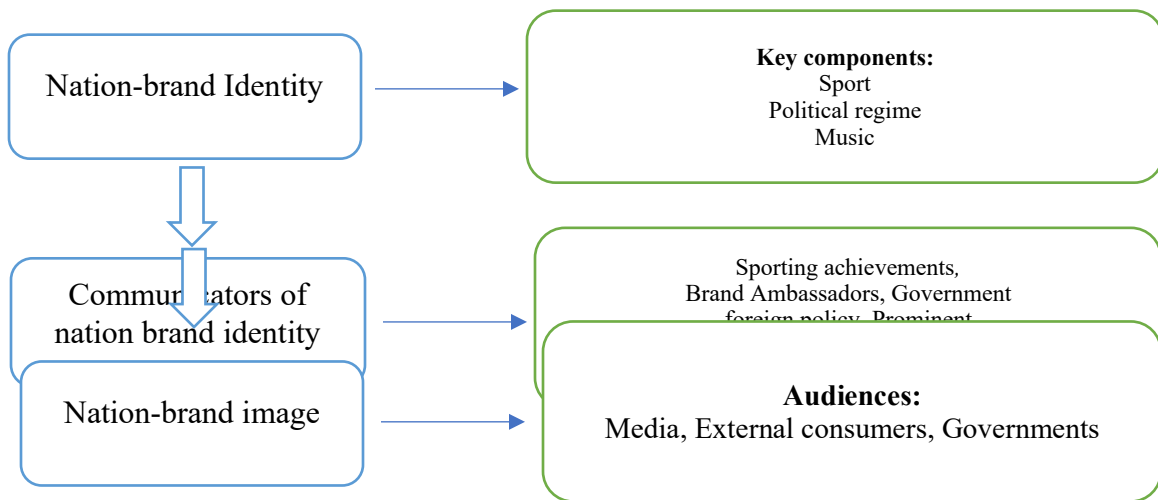
The review of empirical studies above is reviewed within the context of scholarship that have examined the contribution of sports mega-events to nation branding. However, other studies have broadly addressed how SMEs benefit host countries as tools for boosting their international image (Knott et al., 2015; Knott et al., 2016) as well as, building 'soft power' (Crilley et al, 2021; Grix & Kramareva, 2017; Kobierecki & Pierzgalski, 2022; Vierhaus, 2018; Woods & Stokes, 2019) - a concept described as a country's ability to influence global affairs in international politics through its performative attraction (Grix & Lee, 2013; Nye, 2008).

2.3 Conceptual Framework

As indicated in Chapter One, this study will ascertain how Qatar framed or constructed its identity through the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Also, it identifies the nation branding activities/tools used by Qatar in the World Cup. Furthermore, it assesses the effectiveness of utilizing the 2022 World Cup as a nation branding initiative to transform the perception of Qatar among Ghanaian Sports Journalists. In order to fulfill the objectives of this study, a new conceptualization is presented that aims to clarify the key concepts central to the focus of this study.

Dinnie’s (2008) conceptual model of nation-brand identity and image will be the basis for the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual model introduced below will serve as the foundation for this study, aligning with its objectives. It effectively underpins the subject area of this research work illustrating the process by which the image of a nation-brand is formed as a result of the nation's brand identity being communicated through various channels (Dinnie, 2008).

Figure 2.0 Conceptual Framework: Qatar’s 2022 FIFA World Cup Brand Identity and Image



Credit: Dinnie (2008)

The aforementioned concepts will be investigated in the context of Qatar's communication strategies employed to promote its nation brand, particularly in relation to the FIFA World Cup 2022.

2.3.1 Definition of Concepts

Nation-brand Identity: This refers to what Qatar truly is (its essence) or stands for within the context of sports, the place of its political regime (policy-wise), and music visible at the 2022 FIFA World Cup. It represents the enduring essence of the nation (Dinnie, 2008).

Communicators of nation brand identity: This constitutes Qatar’s means of communicating what it stands for with respect to the FIFA World Cup. It can manifest as both

tangible and intangible elements (Dinnie, 2008). It includes the use of its mention of sports achievements, brand ambassadors, government foreign policy, and prominent personalities.

Nation-brand image: This refers to how Qatar is perceived among key audiences of the 2022 FIFA World Cup – that is, the media, external consumers/sports fans, and governments. It represents “the diverse range of audiences that the nation-brand” addresses (Dinnie, 2008; pp. 50).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

A theory inherently provides explanations, clarifying the reasons behind the existence, occurrence, growth, contraction, or other interactions of phenomena (Newsome, 2016). Theories serve as highly valuable tools in academia, enabling us to achieve numerous critical outcomes and objectives within a field of study, including organizing our thoughts and ideas about the world, explaining and illustrating relationships among individuals, groups, and entities, enhancing our predictive capabilities and expectations regarding people, groups, and organizations, and ultimately fostering a deeper understanding of the world (Hambrick, 2007, in Miles, 2012).

The theory of Soft Power and the Image Repair Theory will be used in this study as it will enable the study to put the investigation into its proper perspective, that is, how Qatar utilizes the 2022 FIFA World Cup to rebrand itself amidst the controversies. Also, in Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis’ (2023) systematic literature review of the concept of nation branding, these theories were among the theories that previous scholarships have adopted.

2.4.1 Theory of soft power

Although different but interconnected, military, economic, and power over opinion are the three norms recognized as essential capabilities to exert influence in international politics (Carr, 1941; Nye, 2011b cited in Çevik, 2019). The concept of soft power was first introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990 to explain a nation's ability to influence other countries to achieve the desired

outcome, encompassing anything that induces the target country to align with the sender nation's preferences (Hahm et al. 2023). Nye presented the idea of soft power to improve and clarify our understanding of power in international relations, as Ohnesorge and Owen (2023) established.

According to Nye (1990, p. 167, in Reyaz & Khan, 2023), “If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow”. The key element here is inducement, not enforcement, which is why Nye (2008: 95 in Hahm et al. 2023) asserts that "soft power is attractive power". Nye (2008 in Collins & DeWitt, 2023) further argued that the foundation of a state's soft power “rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others); its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad); and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (p.534). Soft power, which is integral to diplomacy and interconnected with nearly all constructive and progressive foreign affairs strategies, involves the ability to influence other nations by earning their affection and trust, essentially embodying a positive role model (Gallarotti, 2022). Therefore, a state wields considerable soft power capabilities when it can achieve its goals in global affairs because other states are inclined to follow it, admire its values, emulate its example, and aspire to attain its level of prosperity and openness (Nye 2002 in Collins & DeWitt, 2023).

In the strategic transition from relying on 'hard' power to embracing 'soft' power strategies, states have increasingly utilized sports, particularly sports mega-events (SMEs), as versatile diplomatic tools to enhance their global prestige, rehabilitate their often-troubled image, and boost the likelihood of gaining international acceptance (Grix & Brannagan, 2016). According to Skey (2023), Nye's concept has found enthusiastic application in studies of sport, giving rise to three key themes:

1. The hosting of sporting events, notably the Soccer World Cup and Olympics, has been perceived as a high-profile means to enhance a country's reputation and cultivate soft power (Freeman, 2012). Much of this research focuses on the efforts of emerging global/regional powers and non-Western states to elevate their global profiles (Giulianotti, 2015).
2. Reflecting historical Cold War arguments, there is research dedicated to countries' attempts to maximize the success of their representatives at these events (Liu, 2020).
3. It has been observed that sovereign wealth funds and other state-backed financial institutions, particularly in the Middle East, have actively pursued the acquisition of major sporting icons, including Western-based clubs and players, to advance their soft power objectives (Krzyzaniak, 2018).

A significant body of research, according to Woodward (2020, citing Allison and Monnington, 2002; Krueger, 1995; Murray, 2018; Rofe, 2018; and Strenk, 1979), asserts that displays of sporting prowess translate into soft power by indicating the superiority of and bestowing prestige upon a state's social, economic, and political model. He emphasizes that the effective staging of, or strong performances in, SMEs, given their global audience, allows states to harness soft power by using them as a platform to positively influence the preferences of foreign audiences through showcasing appealing aspects of their values, culture, and achievements, as highlighted in the studies conducted by Grix and Brannagan (2016) and Pigman and Rofe (2014) offering crucial insights into how states leverage the soft power potential of sports (Woodward, 2020).

2.4.2 Image Repair Theory

Benoit's image restoration theory, later referred to as image repair theory (IRT), is extensively employed by research scholars (Nekmat et al., 2014, in Onwumechili & Bedeau,

2016). Many studies in the field of sports, social media, and crisis communication have utilized image repair theory (Frederick et al. 2023). According to Onwumechili and Bedeau (2016), typically, organizations do not take action to safeguard their image until they have faced an image attack. Citing Benoit (1995, 2000, 2015), Onwumechili and Bedeau (2016) further note that, “image repair takes place when two conditions exist: (a) an organization is held responsible for an action and (b) the action is considered negative or offensive” (p. 409-410). Hence, these two conditions need to be in place for Qatar to decide to protect its image.

Image repair theory becomes relevant when an individual or organization faces accusations of wrongdoing, resulting in harm to their reputation (Heppell, 2021). Benoit's theory (1995, 2015) outlines five strategies (in Table 1.0 below) accompanied by tactics that can be employed by an organization or an individual to endeavor image repair (Onwumechili & Bedeau, 2016). The image repair theory is recognized as the prevailing framework for assessing crisis communication (Dardis & Haigh, 2009, in Heppell, 2021) as well as providing strategies and techniques for engaging in crisis communication.

Table 1.0 Image Repair Theory

STRATEGY	TECHNIQUE
1. Denial	(a) Dispute the existence of a crisis (b) Shift the blame in terms of responsibility
2. Evading responsibility	(a) Provocation – a response to another wrong (b) Defeasibility – claim a lack of knowledge (c) Excuses – caused by factors beyond their control (d) Justification – claim actions based on good intentions
3. Reducing offensiveness	(a) Bolstering – mitigate negative impact of issue by promoting positive alternative reputation (b) Minimization – imply issue less serious than suggested (c) Differentiation – lessen impact by distinguishing it from something more offensive (d) Transcendence – to place within a broader context and construct a less offensive frame of reference (e) Attack accuser – to limit the impact of the accusation and to question the credibility of the accuser

	(f) Compensation – making an offer to those affected to offset the reputational damage caused
4. Correction action	(a) Initiate change – acknowledge the negativity of the issue and move beyond rhetoric toward substantive action to demonstrate change
5. Accepting responsibility	(a) Apologies – admitting wrongdoing

Source: Benoit (1995, 2015 in Heppell, 2021)

Heppell (2021) argues that strategies considered more effective involve demonstrating corrective action and accepting responsibility through apologies, while those shown to be less effective include denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness. Effective image repair requires that “the strategies used are (1) appropriate for the circumstances – for example, denial is only legitimate if the accusation lacks legitimacy (Coombs, 2006); and (2) consistently applied – that is, select the optimum strategy and stick to it, and remember not to select strategies that are contradictory, such as denial and accepting responsibility, as apologies are not required if the accusation is unfounded” (Benoit and Drew, 1997; Blaney et al., 2002; Lee, 2004; Pace et al., 2010, in Heppell, 2021, p.647). For instance, demonstrating how image repair is used by government officials, Compton and Compton (2022, in Frederick et al. 2023) revealed that following a team’s disappointing season, officials employed attacking accusers, bolstering, and corrective action.

2.5 Summary

The chapter situates the current study within relevant conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature by reviewing extensive research on nation branding through sports.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter pertains to the research methodology employed for the gathering and analysis of data in the current study. The chosen methodology was implemented to attain the pre-established research objective and mitigate any potential issues related to data collection. The principal components of this section in the research endeavor will include the research approach, research design, research methods, total participants, sampling, procedures for data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Approach

A research approach is a plan and procedure for research that spans the steps from broad assumptions to thorough methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It “involves the intersection of philosophical assumptions, designs, and specific methods” (p. 314). Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods are the three main approaches to research. To achieve the research objectives of exploring and discovering an in-depth description of how the 2022 World Cup hosted by Qatar influenced its reputation and image, a qualitative research approach will be adopted. The research problem, purpose, and questions warrant a qualitative approach for gathering and making sense of Qatar’s nation branding through hosting the 2022 World Cup.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research involves an approach aimed at investigating and grasping the significance that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem. The qualitative research approach primarily depends on non-numeric data sources like interviews and observations, as opposed to quantitative research, which utilizes numeric data such as scores and metrics (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Given (2016) further avers that qualitative research is centered on human experiences, perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs, with the goal of exploring these areas in-depth. Qualitative researchers present readers with a contextualized portrayal of various aspects of life, which can hold more significance compared to the numerical focus of quantitative approaches (Dodgson, 2017). In their systematic review, Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis (2023) found that many academic studies related to nation branding tended to be qualitative in nature.

The present study employs a qualitative approach because it seeks to explore the communication strategies Qatar used to brand itself by analyzing the news content of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy's (SC) official website used for the 2022 FIFA World Cup using the method of textual analysis. As Creswell (2013) pointed out, one of the reasons for conducting qualitative research is when an issue or problem needs exploration, especially when the identified variables cannot be easily measured. Therefore, employing the qualitative approach, specifically through the research method of textual analysis, is considered the ideal approach for exploring Qatar's branding in the context of SMEs. Additionally, scant scholarship exists to assess the opinions of sports journalists regarding the impact of the 2022 FIFA World Cup on Qatar's reputation, hence the study seeks to explore the perception of Ghanaian sports journalists on the branding mechanisms deployed by the host country in order to redesign its reputation in the comity of nations. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), when a phenomenon requires exploration

and comprehension due to limited prior research or involvement of an underrepresented sample, it justifies the application of a qualitative approach.

The study employed the qualitative approach with a triangulation approach that incorporated three research methods (that is, textual analysis, policy document analysis, and in-depth interviews) – tools and approaches used to carry out research in order to acquire new information or develop a deeper grasp of a subject (Arya, 2020). The table presented below (**Table 2.0**) aligns the research questions with the chosen research methods. Being an exploratory study, the utilization of triangulation in the present study enables the investigation of the research problem from multiple angles and perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility of the gathered data and facilitating a rigorous study design and implementation (Given, 2016).

Table 2.0 Research Questions with Research Methods

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	METHODS AND SOURCES OF EMPIRICAL DATA	JUSTIFICATION
How did Qatar construct its identity through the 2022 FIFA World Cup?	Textual Analysis: Examine the news content on the news hub of Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy's (SC) website: https://www.qatar2022.qa/en/news Document Analysis of Official policy documents, Official Report.	Triangulation of textual analysis, as well as document analysis, will furnish insights into the identity Qatar constructs through the 2022 FIFA World Cup.
How did Qatar employ nation branding activities/tools in the World Cup?	Textual Analysis: Examine the news content on the news hub of Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy's (SC) website: https://www.qatar2022.qa/en/news Document Analysis of Official policy documents, Official Report.	Through the implementation of triangulation involving content analysis and document analysis, this study will gain valuable insights into Qatar's nation branding activities and tools.
What was the perception Ghanaian Sports Journalists held of Qatar prior to the World Cup?	Semi-structured interviews of 12 GFA delegated sports journalists; 12 Ghanaian Sports Journalists who participated from Ghana.	Triangulation of sports journalists' interviews and document analysis will facilitate thematizing their

	Document Analysis of Official Policy Documents, Official Report.	experiences and drawing out their perceptions of Qatar both before and after the World Cup while assessing the impact of the World Cup as a nation branding tool.
What themes emerge from the experience of sports journalists from their exposure to Qatar through the FIFA World Cup?	Semi-structured interviews of 12 GFA delegated sports journalists; 12 Ghanaian Sports Journalists who participated from Ghana. Document Analysis of Official Policy Documents, Official Report.	Triangulation of sports journalists' interviews and document analysis will facilitate thematizing their experiences and drawing out their perceptions of Qatar both before and after the World Cup while assessing the impact of the World Cup as a nation branding tool.
What perception do Ghanaian Sports Journalists hold of Qatar after the World Cup?	Semi-structured interviews of 12 GFA delegated sports journalists; 12 Ghanaian Sports Journalists who participated from Ghana. Document Analysis of Official Policy Documents, Official Report.	Triangulation of sports journalists' interviews and document analysis will facilitate thematizing their experiences and drawing out their perceptions of Qatar both before and after the World Cup while assessing the impact of the World Cup as a nation branding tool.

Source: Kumi (2023)

The study takes a constructivist or social constructivism worldview. As an approach to qualitative research, constructivism is often combined with interpretivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), research that takes a social constructivist worldview prioritizes a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives, avoiding simplification and instead focusing on complex views. This is achieved by using open-ended questions that enable participants to construct the meaning of a situation through discussions or interactions, with the researcher carefully listening in their natural settings (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). Bhattacharjee (2012) explains that researchers adhere to the interpretivist paradigm, which suggests that the subjective interpretations of participants, obtained through methods like interviewing and reconciling diverse responses, are the most effective means of studying social order. The interpretivist approach possesses significant strength and potential by virtue of its capability to handle and provide meaning to the complexity of what is being studied (Black, 2006) – that is, through a textual and perception analysis, exploring how Qatar used the SME of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to brand itself. As Dinnie (2008) posits, the aim of utilizing these qualitative methods is not to obtain statistically significant data but rather to acquire insights and understanding into the cognitive associations that participants maintain concerning the nation brand.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher not only determines whether to conduct a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods study but also selects a specific research design within these approaches, which offers detailed guidance for the study's procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Research designs, particularly within qualitative research, encompass narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. The research design for this qualitative study is a case study.

3.2.1 Case Study

A case study is an empirical investigation that explores a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life setting, especially when there is uncertainty about the boundary between the subject being examined and its surrounding context (Yin, 2003 in Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). Creswell (2013) adding to the description of a case study defined it as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and

reports), and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 93). The single or specific case identified is the 2022 FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar. Being an intrinsic type of case study, the focus is on the event of the 2022 FIFA World Cup which presents a unique situation (Creswell, 2013) of being hosted in the Middle East for the first time amidst varied controversies. The types of data this study will collect include text, documents, audio-visual digital materials, and interviews as they will help present an in-depth understanding of the case.

3.3 Research Method: Data Collection Method

3.3.1 Textual Analysis

The purpose of this study is to explore how Qatar leveraged the 2022 World Cup, which it hosted, as a branding opportunity. The investigation will focus on the communicative materials of Qatar's Supreme Committee (SC), particularly the news hub on its website. Through textual analysis, the study aims to address the following research questions: **(1)** How did Qatar construct its identity during the 2022 FIFA World Cup? **(2)** How did Qatar employ nation branding activities and tools during the World Cup?

Researchers use textual analysis as a method to study messages across diverse mediums, with data sources encompassing web pages, documents, films, newspapers, paintings, and books (Brennen, 2017; Given, 2008; Smith, 2017). These data forms serve as “the “texts” under study and are used to assess the meanings, values, and messages being sent through them” (Smith 2017, p. 1). Textual analysis entails deconstructing various forms of texts – including television programs, photographs, blogs, magazines, podcasts, architecture, and advertisements - with the aim of examining their operations, construction methods, production of meanings, and the nature of those meanings (Brennen, 2017; Given, 2008).

Textual analysis involves a close examination of either the content and meaning of texts or their structure and discourse, without losing its core purpose (Given, 2008). According to McKee (2011), textual analysis serves as a methodology and a data-gathering process that aids researchers in understanding how members of different cultures and subcultures construct their sense of identity and perceive their place in the world. He argues that it is useful for researchers working in cultural studies, media studies, mass communication, and potentially even sociology and philosophy. It is however worth mentioning that, within the field of communication research, textual analysis, while limited in establishing causality or making predictions, enables researchers to create informed descriptions of texts and their usage by individuals and groups over time (Smith, 2017).

Smith (2017) distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative textual analysis, as illustrated in the **Table 3.0** below, which highlights this differentiation.

Table 3.0 Difference between Qualitative and Quantitative Textual Analysis

QUALITATIVE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS	QUANTITATIVE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizes a variety of theoretical traditions that fall under an interpretive umbrella. Theoretical foundations for textual analysis within communication scholarship draw on symbolic interaction, phenomenology, critical theory (such as race and feminist theories), and ethnography, to name but a few. • Qualitative textual analysis, as described by McKee (2003), aims to uncover how individuals in specific contexts interpret and make sense of their surroundings. This approach acknowledges the diverse ways in which people can interpret and use texts. It falls under interpretive research, focusing on the revelation and experience of meaning, with an emphasis on sense-making, description, and detail. This methodology is commonly applied in studies related to popular culture and news media, where 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on positivist traditions which uses statistics to quantify observations for empirical use. • As part of a positivist epistemology, quantitative approaches to textual analysis deal with objective facts that situate the data as purely observable and value-free. • Quantitative textual analysis is generally deductive, as it applies a theoretical model or assumption to a research study and seeks to prove if it is true or false. • Researchers measure the occurrence of themes or keywords, how themes and keywords are related to one another through semantic grammar, and where they might lie in a larger network

<p>researchers explore how audiences interpret and engage with various media content. Additionally, it is used to examine how individuals and groups use texts to interact with institutions such as the state, the economy, and the family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It takes into account the social context that readers of texts bring to the table. It attempts to link how ways of knowing inform and make sense of what texts offer to various audiences. Although this form of textual analysis moves the research to look beyond the content of the text itself, it offers a bridge for researchers to cross when understanding how texts impact the lives of individuals, groups, and communities in a society. • Often falls within an inductive approach to theory building that differs from quantitative approaches to textual analysis. Rather than begin with a concrete theory and testing variables, qualitative textual analysis uses the ways that individuals and groups make sense of the texts to link those experiences back to the larger structures that make up social life. 	<p>of themes and theme relations (citing Roberts, 2000)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative textual analysis studies generally utilize random or stratified sample sets of data texts (although not always). • Reliability and validity issues are important in quantitative textual analysis. • Positivist textual analysis relies on predefined codes and conceptual frameworks to seek causality, verification, and generalizability. Using extensive codebooks and involving multiple coders allows for standardized and repeatable analysis across the discipline.
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Credit: Smith (2017)

Atkinson and Coffey (2011 in Brennen, 2017), posit texts are believed to “provide traces of a socially constructed reality, which may be understood by considering the words, concepts, ideas, themes, and issues that reside in texts as they are considered within a particular cultural context” (p. 204). Critics of quantitative textual analysis argue that using preset codes, which seek to draw inferences or findings from the data while sacrificing the context of the content, results in a reductionist approach that primarily examines the manifest content of texts—overt and general readings by researchers—while qualitative approaches challenge this practice, contending that quantitative findings may not fully capture an audience's interpretation of the same texts (Smith, 2017).

Textual analysis is frequently employed for the qualitative analysis of communication data (Osei Fordjour, 2022; Savoy, 2015; Sikanku, 2020; Smith, 2017; Sowińska, 2013 in Sikanku,

2022). The current investigation will utilize qualitative textual analysis, as the study acknowledges the necessity of scrutinizing the latent content of Qatar's communication materials within the context of the controversy surrounding its hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Using an inductive and interpretative approach, this method will be used to answer the research questions: (1) How did Qatar construct its identity during the 2022 FIFA World Cup? (2) How did Qatar employ nation branding activities or tools during the World Cup?

The text chosen for analysis in this study is Qatar's SC website, specifically the news stories found in the news hub section of the website. In the case of textual analysis, these are considered pre-existing textual data that have been selected for analysis due to their availability. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), the utilization of pre-existing textual data involves the selection of something that is already (generally) publicly available in written or audiovisual form as the data. Textual analysis is suitable for exploring the text in the news hub because, as a qualitative approach, it will enable the study to deconstruct messages while identifying essential elements or themes (Sikanku, 2022).

Within the context of communication-related studies, textual analysis has been utilized in a number of studies including but not limited to Strauß's (2021) study which investigated op-eds by representatives of major global investment banks, and asset managers (HSBC, Black Rock, Goldman Sachs, UBS, Morgan Stanley) published between 2018 and 2019 in the Financial Times' online website regarding the concept of sustainable finance (SF). The study revealed that while these financial representatives emphasize their commitment to combat climate change through SF in their commentaries, their engagement with SF appears to align more with their individual interests as financial market participants, seeking to capitalize on the prevailing market trends for both reputation and financial gains (Strauß, 2021).

Kempton and DiRusso (2022), employed textual analysis to investigate newspaper narratives of pregnancy during the COVID-19 pandemic, uncovering three recurring themes in newspaper coverage: a reexamination of women's reproductive rights, the spotlight on inequalities within the U.S. healthcare system, and the pervasive uncertainty and fear experienced by pregnant women and women's health professionals. Yoon and Cho (2020) on the other hand, delved into the 75-year evolution of the UN Department of Public Information (DPI), focusing on the dynamics of organizational change. Employing textual analysis of UN documents in conjunction with Grunig and Hunt's four public relations (PR) models, their study traced the UN DPI's transition from an entity primarily engaged in one-way dissemination of objective information to an institution poised to embrace two-way symmetric public relations. Nonetheless, scholarly investigation into the application of textual analysis within the sphere of SMEs and the domain of nation branding remains relatively scarce.

A total of 215 news articles published from April 21, 2021, to December 18, 2022, will be analyzed. This time frame spans from the publication of the first news article until the final day of the 2022 FIFA World Cup when Argentina was crowned the winner. The study chose this period to enable a comprehensive assessment of Qatar's preparations, including the period of the SME itself leading up to the World Cup finals. Information about the World Cup was disseminated through the news hub available on Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy website, which can be accessed at <https://www.qatar2022.qa/en>. This dissemination took place before, during, and after the 2022 FIFA World Cup. However, the focus of this study will be limited to the information disseminated before and during the SME only.

Gibbs (2018) notes that a prerequisite for truly effective qualitative analysis is efficient, consistent, and systematic data management, which involves careful and complex handling of large amounts of texts, notes, codes, and memos. Therefore, Atlas.ti, a computer-assisted

qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), will facilitate the organizing, grouping, inductive coding, and analysis of the news text, which includes images, text, and videos.

Critics argue that the utilization of software programs in qualitative studies may lead to a potential disconnect between researchers and the data they are studying, emphasizing the reliance on code and retrieval functions of the programs rather than interpretive and analytical approaches when examining the data (Altheide & Schneider, 2013 in Smith 2017). Nonetheless, considering the emphasis on text analysis, where the sample size can often exceed the researcher's capacity, the advantages of computer-assisted textual analysis primarily revolve around its capability to effectively handle and retrieve extensive volumes of data (Smith, 2017). Therefore, given the time frame within which the study should be completed, the choice of Atlas.ti (one of the CAQDAS) possesses the potential of "speed in handling, managing, searching, and displaying data" (Flick, 2018; p. 43).

The study will adopt Altheide and Schneider's (2013 in Smith, 2017) approach to qualitative textual analysis (a specific process for studying texts produced by various media outlets). The five stages of this method are:

- Selecting a problem worth investigating and familiarizing oneself with the process and context of the text's source. In the context of the current study, the problem being investigated is how Qatar branded itself through the 2022 FIFA World Cup amidst the controversies prior to the event. The three documents supplementing the study - Qatar National Vision 2030, FIFA's 2022 FIFA World Cup Bid Report: Qatar, and FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy – provide the research with the opportunity to become acquainted with the context of Qatar's information, as communicated through its website's news hub.

- Review multiple documents related to the research question to determine which categories or variables will guide the data collection. This initial examination of texts helps establish specific themes and frames that shape the selection of texts for the study.
- Coding in this process is reflexive and continually evolving. Pre-established codes, informed by prior engagement with relevant literature, serve as guiding principles in the initial coding stages of a study and are adjusted as the researcher interacts with the texts under examination.
- As the researcher progresses through the process, conceptual refinement and coding contribute to the analysis phase. During this stage, the researcher starts to identify categories and themes that help address the initial problem posed in step (a). The qualitative nature of this phase is retained as the researcher remains focused on understanding meaning and assessing how the themes derived from the texts demonstrate the 'process and character of social life.'
- Compiling findings into a report as the final step of the process.

3.3.2 Interview

Also, the type of data this study will collect is an in-depth interview. An in-depth interview was selected to gather data from sports journalists because it is useful for exploring and understanding perception, making them ideally suited for experience-type research questions as well as construction-type research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Researchers concur that interviewing is an invaluable method for gathering a substantial amount of useful, interesting, relevant, and important information, given the diverse backgrounds and perspectives from which people speak (Brennen, 2017). Interviewing is a professional conversation with the goal of getting participants to talk about their experiences and perspectives, and to capture their language and

concepts, in relation to the topic under study (Kvale, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 1995 in Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Among the three types of interviews (namely, unstructured open-ended conversations, structured, and semi-structured), the present study will employ the use of semi-structured interviews to gather information from the Ghanaian sports journalists - both from those who were in Qatar and those who observed the event from Ghana. The choice of a semi-structured interview is based on the relatively unexplored nature of the case study, which provides “much greater flexibility” (Brennen, 2017, p. 29) in probing for clarity compared to structured interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), the dominant form of qualitative interviews is semi-structured interviews, wherein researchers prepare an interview guide beforehand but maintain flexibility during the interview by not rigidly adhering to the precise wording of questions or the predetermined order in which they are asked. Brennen (2017) avers that qualitative interviewing is strongly influenced by a constructivist theoretical orientation, which views reality as socially constructed. From this perspective, participants are considered significant meaning-makers rather than “passive conduits for retrieving information” (Warren, 2002, p. 83 in Brennen, 2017).

The interview guide for this study is composed of 19 open-ended questions intended to obtain information from journalists who participated in the 2022 FIFA World Cup - both from those who were in Qatar and those who observed the event from Ghana. Due to the busy schedule of the participants to be interviewed, the research will utilize the Zoom App in place of face-to-face qualitative interviews. Brennen (2017) suggests that in situations where conducting face-to-face qualitative interviews is not feasible, researchers can resort to telephone interviews and frequently employ platforms such as FaceTime, video chat, or Skype to facilitate the interviews. The audio data will be transcribed for analysis. These constitute the primary source of data for the study. Also, regarding participants' validation, this study aims to take an additional step by

providing either the recorded, transcribed or analyzed data to the participants. The purpose is to seek confirmation from them about the credibility and acceptability of their accounts (Gibbs, 2018).

3.3.2.1 Interview: Participants

According to FIFA (2022), the FIFA World Cup is “a media phenomenon” whose “success is closely related to the extensive media coverage that it receives” (p. 12). As such, these key informants (that is, journalists) through their adeptness in establishing source connections and crafting narratives of local, regional, or national importance, not only enable audiences to access crucial information (Genovese, 2015 in Perreault & Bell, 2020) but also assume a central role in “producing, reproducing, and amplifying various discourses linked to sports in the modern world” (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; p.7). The participants of this study are Ghanaian sports journalists who participated in the 2022 FIFA World Cup - both those who were in Qatar and those who observed the event from Ghana.

Ghana, a participating nation in the 2022 World Cup, through its football administration body, the Ghana Football Association (GFA) was allocated 12 accreditation slots to be assigned to national media organizations or media representatives (GFA, 2022). These 12 constitute the total rights holders with FIFA accreditation. For non-rights holders, according to information published on FIFA's website, 362 accreditations were awarded to international and domestic non-rights holder journalists and camera operators (FIFA, 2023). It is important to note that the researcher lacks the ability to determine the precise total number of Ghanaian non-rights holders due to the unavailability of relevant information. Therefore, the study will focus on the 12 sports journalists who were granted accreditation by the GFA.

Ethical considerations were followed by obtaining written consent from the GFA for the names and contact information of these 12 sports journalists. The Director of Communications for the GFA responded to the request and shared the names and contact details of the sports journalists with the researcher. The sports journalists comprised of various media formats, including radio, online, TV, print, and photojournalism. As per ethical considerations and to respect the journalists' privacy, the participants' names and contact information will not be mentioned in any part of the study. According to Byrne (2023), to uphold confidentiality, researchers are obliged to ensure that participants cannot be identified based on the provided information and are required to make a contractual commitment to anonymize the data.

Qualitative projects employ nonprobability sampling methods, distinct from quantitative studies that aim to achieve generalizability through formal representative samples for statistical purposes, as qualitative projects prioritize sampling approaches aimed at recruiting individuals and texts that facilitate theoretical and conceptual explanations of the researched topic (Given, 2016; Gill, 2020). For this study, the purposive sampling technique, specifically the total population sampling (TPS), will be employed to interview the 12 journalists allocated a quota by GFA. In this case, according to the Total Population Sampling (TPS) approach, the entire population meets the criteria (i.e., their experience and specific skill set), and the number of cases being investigated is relatively small (Etikan, 2016).

Furthermore, the participation of these sports journalists will be contingent upon either their verbal consent or voluntary completion of an informed consent form. The informed consent form serves as a written document that presents a study's purpose, research activities, potential risks and benefits of participation, and other essential details, serving as the primary means for the research to offer prospective participants the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding their participation (Anderson & Corneli, 2018).

Moreover, in order to collect data from the journalists who remotely participated in the World Cup (i.e., watched it from Ghana), the snowball sampling technique will be utilized to select twelve (12) sports journalists. The study will depend on the current participants (the 12 journalists) to provide recommendations for sports journalists they are acquainted with, who closely followed the event from Ghana. As stated by Gill (2020), snowball sampling or chain sampling involves participants suggesting individuals who may be interested in participating in the study.

The selection of the twelve (12) participants from the recommendations will be determined using the convenience sampling technique, a nonprobability sampling method. In this approach, potential participants voluntarily choose to participate in the research study (Gill, 2020). From those who volunteer, the study will strive for a gender balance of the sports journalists.

The interviews will be transcribed using Adobe Premiere Pro 2023 and converted to text documents. The text documents will be organized, grouped, coded, and analyzed using Microsoft Word. The researcher will be responsible for interpreting the data using thematic analysis. Furthermore, in accordance with research ethics, the transcribed interviews will prioritize anonymity by refraining from disclosing the identity of the participants during the data presentation.

3.3.3 Document Analysis: Policy Document Analysis

The study will employ the data collection method of qualitative document analysis – specifically policy document analysis. A diverse array of items falls under the category of documents, encompassing archival materials, presentations, meeting minutes, agendas, reports tailored for both internal and external audiences, self-study reports, institutional plans, and executive summaries concerning various projects or processes (Bowen, 2009; Hughes & Goodwin, 2014; Prior, 2014 in Billups, 2021). Document analysis is especially relevant in qualitative case

studies, where the goal is to generate detailed and comprehensive descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program (Stake, 1995 in Søyland & Moriconi, 2022).

Conducting document analysis involves a “systematic approach to reviewing and evaluating documents” (Puddester et al, 2023; p. 3). Qualitative document analysis is suitable when the study's objective is to clarify the background and context of a phenomenon, identify aspects warranting deeper investigation, offer supplementary data, or evaluate changes over time (Bowen, 2009 in Puddester et al, 2023). The present study utilizes documents as supplementary data sources, frequently employed in qualitative research designs (Billups, 2021).

A policy is a guiding principle for action, rooted in a belief system that is commonly linked to a specific set of values, often aligned with a political or ideological standpoint (Bell & Stephenson, 2006; Busher, 2006 in Cardno, 2018). Policy document analysis, as a research method, enables the investigation of a policy document's essence, encompassing its underlying factors and internal content, making it particularly suitable for qualitative research endeavors (Cardno, 2018). Its primary benefit lies in the accessibility of documents, typically at minimal or no expense for researchers, as the utilization of documentary data eliminates the requirement for ethical approval to access such readily available information (Cardno, 2018) found on both Qatar and FIFA-related websites, as opposed to data collected from human subjects.

The context for exploring this method is limited in this study to three (3) already existing documents in the English Language: (1) *Qatar National Vision 2030*; (2) *FIFA's 2022 FIFA World Cup Bid Report: Qatar*; and (3) *FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy*. These documents serve as essential resources for Qatar and FIFA's objectives concerning the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Regarding the rationale for the chosen number of documents, the researcher holds the perspective that these selected materials are adequately comprehensive, detailed, pertinent, and

easily accessible (Billups, 2021). These will be examined using the method of thematic analysis. For this study, document analysis will complement textual analysis and interviews as a triangulation method to enhance and validate findings, thereby mitigating the potential impact of biases in the study (Mackieson et al., 2018).

3.4 Total Participants

Providing descriptions of sampling techniques and samples is consistently crucial in academic research (Loseke, 2017). Hence from the above, the pre-determined sample size is twenty-four (24) Ghanaian sports journalists. While there are no specific "rules" for determining sample size, the objective of qualitative sampling is to select a sufficient number of participants and/or observations to gather comprehensive data that facilitates a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Hennink et al., 2019 in Gill, 2020). As per Gill (2020), authors frequently justify sample size by employing the principle of data saturation, which means reaching a point where no new information is acquired from interviews and/or observations (Morse, 1995, as cited in Gill, 2020). On the other hand, in qualitative research, where emphasis is put on rich detail and in-depth knowledge regarding particular occurrences, a small sample size is acceptable (Morgan, 2008; Bryman, 2012). Four (4) to forty (Daymon & Holloway, 2011 in Anani-Bossman & Bruce, 2021) and one (1) to ninety-five (Bryman, 2012) are the sample sizes that have been determined by research.

3.5 Data Analysis and Presentation: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis involves recognizing patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This analysis will be based on the research methods of textual analysis and in-depth interviews which are supplemented by policy document analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiate between two approaches to thematic analysis: a top-down or theoretical approach,

which is guided by specific research questions and/or the analyst's focus, and a bottom-up or inductive approach, which is primarily driven by the data itself (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). With respect to this study, both textual analysis and in-depth interviews will be analyzed using the inductive/bottom-up approach.

The data analysis method of thematic analysis is based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step approach: (1) Becoming familiar with the data (2) Generating initial codes (3) Searching for themes (4) Reviewing themes (5) Defining themes (6) Write-up. **Table 4.0** below explains each step used for the present study. However, it's important to note that the phases are not strictly linear, allowing for movement both forward and backward between them. This flexibility may be especially valuable when working with complex datasets (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Table 4.0 Explaining Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-Step Approach/Framework to Thematic Analysis

Step (1): Becoming familiar with the data	Reading and re-reading the transcripts to become thoroughly acquainted with the entire dataset or data corpus, encompassing all interviews, news stories, and documents. During this phase, it is helpful to take notes and record initial impressions.
Step (2): Generating initial codes	The study employed open coding, which means that pre-established codes were not used; instead, the codes were developed and adjusted as the researcher progressed through the coding process.
Step (3): Searching for themes	Codes are categorized into overarching preliminary themes that appear to convey particular insights about the research question(s). In the context of this study, these themes primarily exhibit a descriptive nature, highlighting patterns in the data that are pertinent to the research question(s).
Step (4): Reviewing themes	Reviewing, modifying, and developing the preliminary themes that were identified in Step 3. Reading the data associated with each theme and considering whether the data really supports it. The next step is to think about whether the themes work in the context of the entire data set. Themes should be coherent and they should be distinct from each other. Things to think about include: • Do the themes make sense? • Does the data support the themes? • Am I trying to fit too much into a theme? • If themes overlap, are they really separate themes? • Are there themes

	within themes (subthemes)? • Are there other themes within the data?
Step (5): Defining themes	This is the final refinement of the themes and the aim is to “...identify the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about.’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). What is the theme saying? If there are subthemes, how do they interact and relate to the main theme? How do the themes relate to each other?
Step (6): Writing-up	Writing up the report.

Source: (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017)

According to Ose (2016), it can be highly advantageous to provide a straightforward method for researchers and students to systematically code and structure interview data using Microsoft Office, which includes widely used applications like Word and Excel. In relation to the present study, whereas Atlas.ti 8 will be used to manage or group the data, Microsoft Excel and Word on the other hand will be used to structure the qualitative data for the study.

The data analysis and interpretation will follow Miles and Huberman's (1994 in Anani-Bossman & Bruce, 2022) three stages of qualitative data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction process, important and recurring themes and patterns will be highlighted, and interpretations will be derived through the identification and clustering of key themes. To demonstrate clearly how this study is grounded in the data collected and interpreted, readers will be provided with evidence in the form of quotations from texts, documents, and interviews. Incorporating quotations, as highlighted by Gibbs (2018), allows the study to immerse readers or reviewers in the settings and the people under study, fostering a closer connection to the data and facilitating a precise demonstration of how the discussed ideas or theories are articulated by the individuals or subject being studied. This study will utilize both direct and paraphrased quotations, ensuring they are presented in their original context while also addressing the research questions.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that in the present day, ethical concerns manifest in various areas, including personal disclosure, the authenticity and credibility of research reports, the roles played by researchers, and matters related to personal privacy. The study was covered by the University of Media, Arts, and Communication – Ghana Institute of Journalism (UniMAC-GIJ) ethical guidelines for social research. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Media, Arts, and Communication – Ghana Institute of Journalism (UniMAC-GIJ) in October 2023 before research commenced. The ethical considerations for the present study include obtaining participants' consent, respecting their privacy, and ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). The use of secondary sources of data, such as pre-existing text in documents and on Qatar's SC website, did not raise any ethical concerns as this information was publicly available. The researcher did not need permission to access these secondary sources, and utilizing the information from them did not pose any risk of harm to individuals.

Before the interviews commenced, all participants were provided with comprehensive information about the consent form, allowing them to make an informed decision regarding their participation in the study. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information they shared, as well as the anonymity of their identities. The study will assign a combination of an alphabet and a number (that is, “SQ1”, “SQ2” “SQ3”, etc.) to anonymize participants. As Creswell (2013) avers, a researcher can protect the anonymity of the informants “by assigning numbers or aliases to individuals” (p. 152). Participants were also informed that all information shared would be used solely for academic purposes. Additionally, prior to conducting any interviews, the study reiterated the details of the consent form to all participants to confirm their willingness to

participate in the study and give them the opportunity to opt-out if they wished. With the participant's permission, each interview session conducted on the Zoom app was recorded.

The researcher communicated to the participants the anticipated interview duration, which ranged from 30 to 45 minutes, including any potential follow-up interviews. This was done out of consideration for the participants, who were busy sports journalism professionals with limited availability for information-gathering sessions at other times. Providing this information was intended to assist participants in making necessary adjustments to their schedules, as well as to coordinate with the study's work plan, ensuring the availability of both interviewer and interviewees. By adhering to this principle, any potential conflicts between the scheduled interviews and participants' work commitments were successfully avoided, thereby preventing any adverse impacts.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), qualitative researchers employ a range of validation strategies to ensure the credibility and rigor of their studies. For this study, credibility was established through the implementation of three validation strategies, including triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and providing rich, detailed descriptions (that is, thick-rich descriptions). As justification, Creswell (2013) recommends using multiple validation strategies regardless of the type of qualitative approach. Therefore, the researcher deems these multiple validation strategies as useful for validating the current case study.

Rich, detailed descriptions in the case of interviews will be achieved by presenting participants' voices under each theme. With respect to textual analysis, rich, detailed descriptions will be achieved by including quotes from news stories traceable in the Excel sheet in the Appendix session. Additionally, quotes from any of the three document sources will be included to

supplement the description of each research question, thereby triangulating the methods of textual analysis and interviews.

The study also pays particular attention to how data will be stored. Creswell (2013) notes the limited attention given in books and articles to the storage of qualitative data. The method of storage aligns with the type of information collected, which can vary depending on the research approach (Creswell, 2013). With respect to the present study, data gathered from interviews and textual analysis will be stored and backed up in a Google Drive accessible to only the researcher to protect the anonymity of participants.

Also, the researcher has effectively maintained a neutral stance within the study, ensuring he has no vested interest in the outcomes. Consequently, the researcher's biases and prejudices are minimized and less likely to influence the study's interpretation and approach (Creswell, 2013). The study adopts Creswell's (2013) criteria for evaluation in what he describes as a "good" (p.218) case study: Is there a clear identification of the "case" or "cases" in the study? Is the "case" (or are the "cases") used to understand a research issue or used because the "case" has (or "cases" have) intrinsic merit? Is there a clear description of the "case"? Are themes identified for the "case"? Are assertions or generalizations made from the "case" analysis? Is the researcher reflexive or self-disclosing about his or her position in the study?

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, an elaborate data collection and analysis procedure is presented. The study, conducted within a qualitative framework, centers on a particular case—the 2022 FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar. Employing an intrinsic case study approach, the primary focus rests on the event itself. Data acquisition involved a triangulation method encompassing textual analysis, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, with specific relevance to the inaugural hosting of the SME in

the Middle East. The gathered information underwent thorough analysis employing a thematic method. Subsequently, the ensuing chapter provides an analysis of the amassed data and a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This study employs textual analysis to examine the branding strategies employed by Qatar, the host country for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, in its efforts to redefine its global reputation. Additionally, it investigates the perspectives of sports journalists on the impact of the 2022 FIFA World Cup on Qatar's international image through in-depth interviews. This chapter presents the research findings, which were analyzed using thematic analysis as the data analysis method for both textual analysis and in-depth interviews. In conjunction with pertinent theories and relevant literature, the study yields valuable insights into Qatar's nation branding as influenced by its

hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Data collection and analysis were guided by the research questions highlighted in Chapter One and Three.

To ensure the preservation of participants' anonymity, the study employed distinct codes for participant identification. The ensuing list enumerates the respective codes assigned to each participant: SQ1, SQ2, SQ3, SQ4, SQ5, and SQ6 for participant 1,2,3,4,5 and 6 sports journalists who provided coverage from Qatar respectively. On the other hand, SG1, SG2, SG3, SG4, SG5, and SG6 for participant 1,2,3,4,5 and 6 sports journalists who provided coverage from Ghana respectively.

In line with Akotia's (2009) assertion, the presence of a one-stop country website or official internet gateway is of paramount importance. This presence plays a crucial role in fostering integration, consistency, and coherence in a country's communication efforts, which are indispensable elements for the success of country branding initiatives (Akotia, 2009). Through the utilization of textual analysis, this study examined 169 news stories published on Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) website from April 21, 2021, to November 20, 2022. The primary aim was to address the following research questions: **(RQ1)** *How did Qatar shape its identity in the context of the 2022 FIFA World Cup?* **(RQ2)** *What nation branding strategies and tools did Qatar employ during the World Cup?*

However, it is worth mentioning that the researcher had initially intended to analyze a total of 215 news articles published between April 21, 2021, and December 18, 2022. This time frame was chosen to encompass the period from the publication of the first news article to the final day of the 2022 FIFA World Cup when Argentina was crowned the winner. The study had selected this timeframe to facilitate a comprehensive assessment of Qatar's preparations, including the period leading up to the World Cup finals. Due to acknowledged time constraints, the study will

be limited solely to news stories published from the first news article up to the first day of the 2022 FIFA World Cup hosted in Qatar.

In-depth interviews were conducted to investigate research questions three (**RQ3**), four (**RQ4**) and five (**RQ5**), which center on the perspectives of Ghanaian sports journalists from the period leading up to Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup until the conclusion of the SME. Both in-depth interviews and textual analysis are supplemented by document analysis as specified in the previous chapter. The presentation will commence with the findings from textual analysis, followed by the insights derived from the in-depth interviews.

4.1. RQ1. How did Qatar construct its identity through the 2022 FIFA World Cup?

Qatar won the bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup amidst various controversies evident in news reports from a number of global news agencies including but not limited to the Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and Agence France-Presse (AFP). These news outlets have been described as the top three global news agencies (Rantanen, 2019 in Adegbola, 2020; Kim, 2020). Criticisms, reported by these news agencies included, among others: corruption allegations (Reuters, 2022); Qatar's treatment of migrant workers, the sale of alcohol, stance towards the LGBTQ+ community (AP, 2022; Krauss, 2022; Reuters, 2022); and environmental concerns (AFP, 2022).

Amidst these controversies, Qatar sought to construct an identity through its biggest SME – that is, the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Using textual analysis for data collection and thematic analysis for data analysis, the study identified five themes related to Qatar's identity construction through the 2022 FIFA World Cup. These themes are (1) The brand message, (2) Use of Technology, (3) Qatar's response to the controversy, (4) The use of entertainment, and (5) Response to Covid-19.

4.1.1 The brand message: First FIFA World Cup in the Middle East, Compact Nature and Sustainable Projects

After winning the bid, Qatar became the second Asian country to host the FIFA World Cup, following the joint hosting by South Korea and Japan in 2002 (Kang, 2022). However, evident in FIFA's 2022 FIFA World Cup Bid Report of Qatar, and the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy document, Qatar crafted an identity that emphasized the significance of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the Middle East for the first time. While Qatar's news hub acknowledged that it was the second Asian host, the primary brand message centered on the historic aspect of hosting the tournament in the Middle East for the first time. The texts below, from the news hub of Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) website emphasize some of these:

"Twenty years have passed since Asia staged the FIFA World Cup™ for the first time. A memorable moment from 2002 was Korea Republic's remarkable run to the semi-finals – joyous memories that few Koreans will ever forget, including Lee Juho, who has lived in Qatar for the past six years. Two decades on, the Asian continent will again host the tournament when Qatar stages the first World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world" (J100: Korea Republic fans are full..., 2022).

"When the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ gets underway on 20 November, it will only be the second time the tournament has been held in Asia. Twenty years ago, co-hosts Japan and Korea Republic became the first Asian countries to stage international football's showpiece event. And this year, in Qatar, Asian pride will be shared again, ...as Qatar stages the first World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world" (J125: Japanese fans are proud..., 2022).

"Ivory Coast legend Yaya Touré is looking forward to a ground-breaking edition of the FIFA World Cup™ in Qatar. It will be the first tournament to be staged in the Middle East and Arab world – and Touré is someone who can appreciate the World Cup's journey to new frontiers..."It will be really important and special because it's going to be the first time that an Arab and Islamic country will host this important competition. For Qatar to be the first Muslim nation to host the World Cup is brilliant. For all players of Islamic faith, it will be more than an honor to be a part of this" (L91: Yaya Touré: Qatar's FIFA..., 2022).

Moreover, the compact nature of the tournament as well as Qatar's sustainable projects featured prominently in the identity Qatar constructed of itself. The FIFA World Cup 2022, which

was awarded to Qatar in December 2010, was the first FIFA World Cup to be hosted in the Middle East (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Sustainability Strategy, 2020). The Qatar bid envisaged centralizing nearly all crucial event facilities and venues within a relatively compact 60-kilometer radius (FIFA, n.d.). Since the inaugural installment of the FIFA World Cup in 1930, Qatar's hosting has been the most compact (FIFA, 2022; FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Sustainability Strategy, 2020). This was highlighted in a number of the information shared in Qatar's news stories. Below are some select quotes on the compact nature of the tournament:

“Along with hosting the first World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world, Qatar will stage the most compact edition of the tournament in modern history. Sixty-four matches over 28 days will take place in close proximity, with the maximum travel distance between stadiums just 75km” (K3: Green transportation solutions for..., 2021).

“Australia's World Cup exploits since 2006 have taken them to Europe, Africa and South America. Now, Graham Arnold's side are ready to savour the unique experience of a tournament in the Middle East and Arab world for the first time. They will also benefit from participating in the most compact version of the World Cup in modern history, with all the stadiums within an hour's drive of central Doha” (K9: Jubilant Australia looking forward..., 2022).

“...The 31 teams travelling to Qatar will have a Team Base Camp (TBC) to call home at the most compact FIFA World Cup™ since the inaugural instalment in 1930. With no domestic flights required during the tournament, the same top-class facilities will be used throughout the competition. For this edition, therefore, official training sessions the day before matches will also be held at the respective training sites” (K33: Team Base Camp line-up..., 2022).

In addition to the tournament's compact nature, in line with its National Vision 2030, Qatar emphasized its commitment to sustainable projects. Qatar's National Vision is to choose a “development path that carefully balances the interests of the current generation with the interests of future generations” (General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2008; p.5). This is consistent with Knott et al. (2016) who advocated that urban development and regeneration through sport mega-events be considered within a sustainable development framework that considered the nation's strategic developmental objectives. Additionally, the objectives of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy (2020), aimed to optimize the tournament's

impact on the well-being of individuals, economic growth, and environmental preservation, both in the immediate and long-term.

In Qatar's communication materials, it was evident that sustainability was a crucial aspect of the country's strategy for managing waste generated during the SME period and the stadium construction process which received ratings from the Global Sustainability Assessment System. As buttressed by Millington et al. (2022 citing Millington et al., 2018; Giulianotti et al., 2018), sport has been portrayed as a means of sustainable development, with the understanding that sports can contribute to objectives like raising environmental awareness, addressing environmental issues, and promoting environmental protection. Qatar's commitment was reflected in the following statements:

“With the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ fast approaching, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) is aiming to deliver a zero-waste-to-landfill event. The overarching goal is to ensure all the waste generated at stadiums and fan zones is recycled, composted, or converted to green energy. ...Work to deliver this achievement forms a critical part of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Sustainability Strategy...” (M141: Qatar 2022 organisers aim..., 2022).

“Education City Stadium was the first Qatar 2022 tournament venue to achieve a five-star design and build rating from the Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS)” (M104: Education City Stadium: ..., 2022).

“Stadium 974 serves as a pioneer in sustainable stadium development. As well as its legacy potential, the stadium bowl seating avoids the need for air conditioning as it is designed for natural ventilation” (M114: Stadium 974: Qatar's beacon..., 2022).

“From the moment Qatar won the right to host the FIFA World Cup 2022™, the country has prioritized sustainability in the construction of all its infrastructure projects, including eight state-of-the-art stadiums. In order to meet stringent environmental standards in line with FIFA's requirements, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) worked closely with the Gulf Organization for Research & Development (GORD) to have all Qatar 2022 infrastructure projects rated under the Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS). Launched in 2007 as the Qatar Sustainability Assessment System, GORD rebranded it to GSAS to include projects across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2012...In 2014, FIFA approved GSAS as the sustainability rating system to assess all infrastructure built for this year's World Cup” (M119: Legacy in Action: Qatar..., 2022).

4.1.2 Use of technology as a tool

The exploration and implementation of equipping stadiums and training facilities, for the first time, with air conditioning featured prominently in Qatar's identity construction in what it described as "one of the tournament's major success stories." Qatar cultivated an identity that portrayed the Middle Eastern nation as adeptly leveraging technology to its advantage – particularly with its stadium construction and cooling systems.

As noted by Samuel-Azran et al. (2022), there were criticisms with claims that "Qatar acts as a "high-risk" World Cup destination for visiting fans and athletes, in large part due to the state's summer climate, which, in the hottest months, can reach highs of over 40°C" (p. 3). According to FIFA's evaluation report of Qatar's bid, Qatar experiences mild winters and extremely hot, sunny, and humid summers due to its desert climate with long summers and minimal precipitation, resulting in tournament conditions featuring consistently high temperatures, with daytime averages rarely dipping below 37°C and evening temperatures seldom falling below 31°C (FIFA, n.d.). The report further added that "the fact that the competition is planned in June/July, the two hottest months of the year in this region, has to be considered as a potential health risk for players, spectators, officials, and the FIFA family in both open training sites and in stadiums and necessitates the taking of specific precautions (for example hydration schemes, sun shields, ice, cooling mist, cooling breaks)" (p. 24).

Looking at the temperature data for Qatar, Miller (2014) argued that it was easy to understand why the idea of moving the 2022 World Cup from summer to winter proved irresistible. To escape Doha's summer heat, the 2022 FIFA World Cup tournament was rescheduled for November and December (Knecht, 2019). The rescheduling of the tournament did not entirely address the heat conditions, prompting Qatar to announce that, in order to mitigate the heat, all stadiums, training facilities, and outdoor fan zones would be equipped with air conditioning

(Scharfenort, 2012; Ginesta & de San Eugenio, 2013). This is reflected in the statement in the news story below:

“With innovation and sustainability at the heart of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ preparations, cooling technology is one of the tournament’s major success stories. ...With Qatar’s World Cup taking place in November and December, the pressure on cooling systems will be limited, with outside temperatures estimated to be 18-24°C. The technology will, however, allow sporting events to be held all-year-round, in addition to other activities, like shopping and farming. Energy-efficient cooling systems were developed following Qatar’s successful bid for the World Cup, with the technology delivered by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy in collaboration with Qatar University (QU). ... The technology is now fitted in seven of eight Qatar 2022 stadiums, with the only exception Stadium 974, which is fully-demountable and features natural ventilation. Each of the other venue’s cooling technology is different and made to fit its unique design and features. Using solar-powered energy, outside air is cooled and then distributed through grills in the stands and large pitch-side nozzles. The systems use insulation and spot cooling to make them as environmentally-friendly as possible. ... Another advantage of the technology is the fact it is unpatented – meaning businesses and countries can use it to develop similar systems” (N149: Legacy in Action: Qatar’s revolutionary..., 2022).

However, according to Dwyer (2023) while Qatar garnered some positive coverage regarding its "world-class" construction and wealth, its reputation took a significant hit due to concerns over human rights issues and working conditions, ultimately overshadowing any positive messaging.

4.1.3 Qatar’s response to controversy

In the context of politics evolving into a competition of credibility, where winning the narrative holds greater significance in international politics than winning the battle, Qatar's sports strategy attracted significant criticism from rival nations, international media outlets, and human rights organizations (Søyland & Moriconi, 2022). Khaled and Gray (2019) pointed out that securing the hosting rights for the 2022 FIFA World Cup led to an increased dependence on migrant labor for constructing the required infrastructure in the country.

In Qatar, the matter of migrant workers' rights garnered international attention, although advocacy groups had been reporting instances of forced labor, human trafficking, and substandard

living and working conditions for migrant workers well before the 2022 World Cup (Ganji, 2016 in Al Thani, 2021). For instance, a Guardian investigation reported that dozens of Nepalese migrant laborers had died in Qatar with thousands more enduring what they described as “appalling labor abuses” (Pattison, 2013). One year prior to the commencement of the World Cup, Amnesty International published a 48-page report alleging the exploitation of migrant workers involved in the construction of stadiums and infrastructure for the tournament (Magowan, 2021).

Qatar undertook a deliberate effort to articulate its stance on labor-related matters, aiming to emphasize its position in response to concerns regarding its treatment of workers' rights and well-being. The study, in relation to the image repair theory, observed that Qatar employed the strategy of denial – specifically, the technique of disputing the existence of a crisis related to labor-related issues. Instead, Qatar communicated its commitment to the human rights of workers throughout the World Cup preparations and execution. This observation is evident in the following texts from news stories published on Qatar’s Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) website:

“FIFA and the Host Country take their responsibility with respect to workers’ rights very seriously” (F33: Team Base Camp line-up..., 2022).

“...Qatar is ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of every worker on World Cup projects. At a national level, the measures introduced – from a non-discriminatory minimum wage to the reimbursement of recruitment fees paid by workers – are setting new benchmarks across the region and around the world, and have been widely praised by even our fiercest critics” (F36: Hassan Al Thawadi: ‘Qatar..., 2022).

“Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium achieved 23 million work safe hours without a lost time incident from May 2019 to October 2022 – a period which included the peak stage of construction and commissioning activities...Abdulla Al Bishri, Health, Safety & Environment Director, SC, said: “We are very proud of this significant health and safety achievement...As ever, health and safety requirements were prioritized through high-level risk assessments and continuous training...We thank all the workers engaged on this massive project for their outstanding dedication” (F133: Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium..., 2022).

“[H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi, Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy] said: “Our commitment to the human rights of our workers over the last 12 years has been unwavering. Through the labour reforms we have made, we have set the benchmark in this field for the region. The experts have recognized this, and I am happy to see that the World Cup’s legacy is being delivered before the tournament kicks off” (G17: The first World Cup in..., 2022).

Furthermore, according to Al-Ghanim et al (2023), over the past few years, the subject of women's identity has become a matter of controversy in Qatar and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations. The U.S. State Department and human rights organizations have noted that the Qatari legal system discriminates against women regarding their freedom of movement and matters related to marriage, child custody, and inheritance (Debre, 2022). In the context of gender disparity, the findings of a 2022 Human Development Report indicate that Qatar experienced an improvement in its ranking, transitioning from the 44th position in 2020 to the 42nd position in 2021 (Holleis, 2022).

As pointed out by Grix (2012), states with a poor national image find it easier to systematically and purposefully use an SME to change their nation's image. Through hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar constructed an identity in its communication materials that portrayed women as active agents in the country's transformation, addressing controversies surrounding their treatment. By hosting its biggest sports mega-event (SME), Qatar chose to enhance its image concerning controversies surrounding the treatment of women in this Middle Eastern country, positioning itself as an attractive destination for all, particularly women.

This is reflected in the documentation of various female contributors, including but not limited to notable figures such as Moza Al Mohannadi, the Marketing and Communications Director for the Generation Amazing Foundation; Mead Al Emadi, the Director of the FIFA Fan Festival; Maryam Hamad Al Muftah, the Executive Director of ICT Event Operations; and Fatma Al Nuaimi, the Executive Director of Communications & Media. Additionally, it featured Qatari

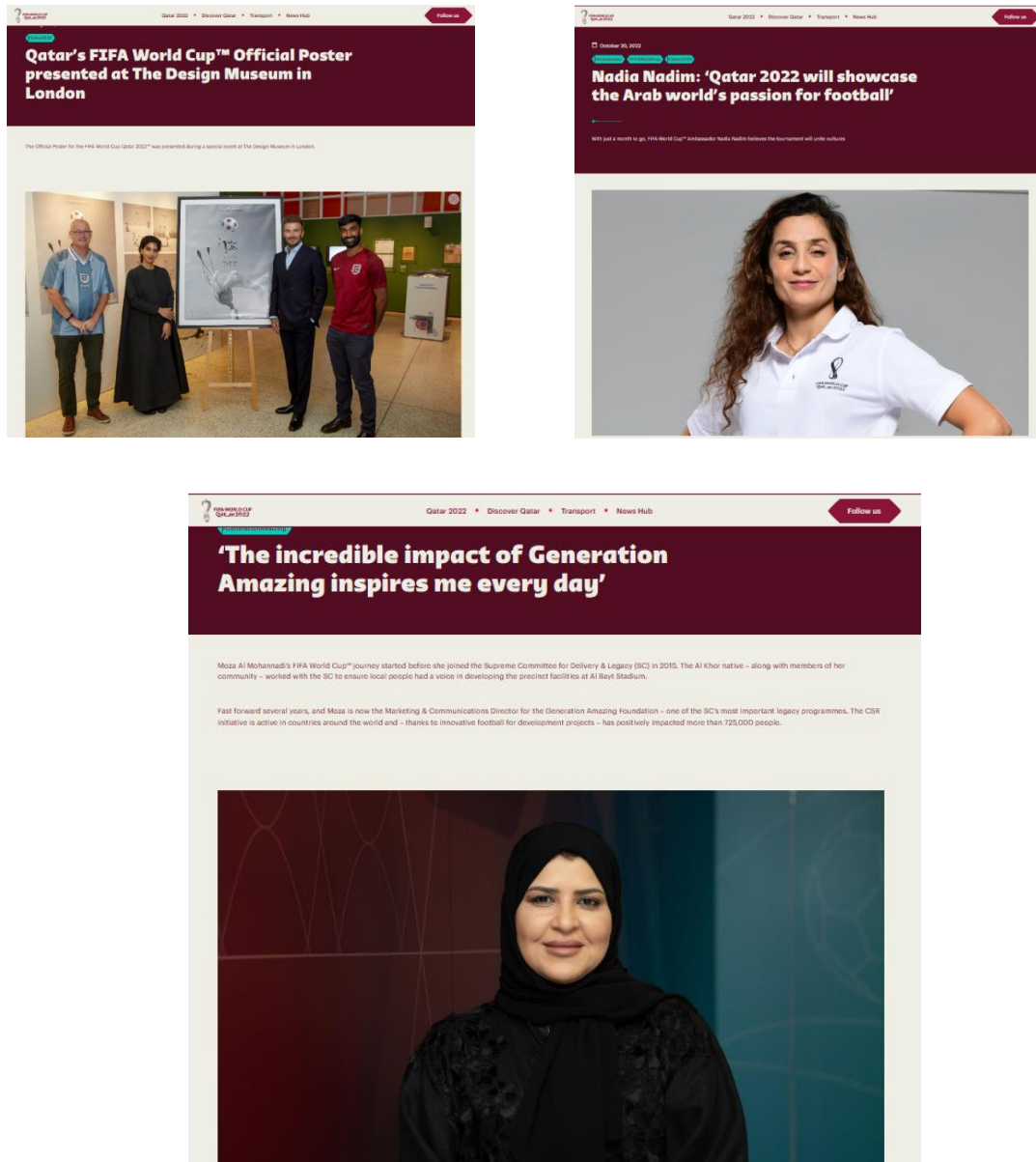
female artist Bouthayna Al Muftah, who designed a series of posters for the tournament; the late British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid, credited with the design of the Al Janoub Stadium – one of the eight stadiums for the tournament; prominent female footballers, namely Nadia Nadim and Sara Essam; and training sessions held for female volunteers. The communication materials were enhanced by images (**Figure 3.0**) of these women wearing either traditional Qatari attire or branded FIFA World Cup T-shirts or Lacoste clothing. This finding appears consistent with the strategy of denial – specifically, the technique of disputing the existence of a crisis related to how women are wrongfully treated in Qatar. The constructed identity of women in Qatar is reflected in the sentences below:

“Female volunteers from Qatar have been taking part in football for development sessions organized by the Generation Amazing Foundation...Generation Amazing’s Marketing & Communications Director, Moza Al Mohannadi, said ...the weekly sessions aim to teach key life skills through football, such as communication, organization, teamwork, and leadership, while promoting inclusivity and gender equality” (H15: Female volunteers benefit from..., 2022).

“Every year on 31 October, people celebrate Zaha Hadid’s birthday by remembering the many contributions the late Iraqi-British architect made to her field. Hadid’s signature style will be on display during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ with Al Janoub Stadium, a 40,000-capacity venue that she designed shortly before her death.” (H128: Younis Mahmoud: ‘All Iraqis..., 2022).

“...H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi, Secretary General, SC and Chairman, Generation Amazing Foundation, said: “ ...Throughout the world, we work with local partners to understand the barriers to entry and the local context in communities that influences gender inequality and unequal access to sport, and we plan our projects considering these community-specific challenges in order to confront these barriers and foster female leadership, ensuring a balanced representation of gender in all of our programmes not only regionally, but globally” (H135: Special all-female edition..., 2022).

Figure 3.0: An example of images with respect to women's representation.



It's worth noting that, in the context of Qatar's use of images to complement their news stories, none of these images were accompanied by captions. The study observed that captions could have reinforced the stories and provided context for the images. Zhang et al. (2022) aver that, news image captioning, a popular and advanced task, requires the creation of image captions that reflect the relevant information contained in news articles. Frequently, it mirrors the particular event as described in the news (Chen & Zhuge, 2020). Without the presence of such captions,

readers are compelled to interpret images subjectively, thereby creating potential for misinterpretation.

Concerns were also raised about the treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in Qatar, where same-sex relationships and the advocacy for such relationships are prohibited, carrying penalties that include fines and even the death penalty (“World Cup 2022: Qatar”, 2022; Cherof, 2022). A Human Rights Watch report documented instances where Qatari security forces arbitrarily arrested LGBTQ+ individuals and subjected them to ill-treatment in detention (Lewis, 2022). Nevertheless, Qatar constructed an identity through its communicative material that portrayed itself as embracing diversity to garner a positive image. This aligns with the argument put forth by Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2013), who contended that the Qatari government's involvement in sports, notably football, is part of a rebranding effort aimed at establishing a positive association with sports. This is evident in the opening ceremony statement and the Sustainability Strategy delivered jointly by FIFA, the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 LLC (Q22), and the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC):

“The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ got underway at Al Bayt Stadium after a stunning opening ceremony featuring His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and His Highness the Father Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. In his address to the crowd during the opening ceremony, His Highness the Amir said: “...Starting from this evening, and for a period of 28 days, we will follow, and with us the whole world, God willing, the great football festival, in this spacious ambiance for human and civilized communications. People of different races, nationalities, faiths, and orientations will gather here in Qatar, and around screens on all continents to share the same exciting moments. How beautiful it is for people to put aside what divides them in order to celebrate their diversity and what brings them together at the same time” (I171: Spectacular Opening Ceremony Signals..., 2022).

“We are also committed to delivering an inclusive FIFA World Cup 2022™ tournament experience that is welcoming, safe and accessible to all participants, attendees and communities in Qatar and around the world. This means taking a firm stance against discrimination of any kind, ensuring that safety and security practices at FIFA World Cup 2022™ sites and events are aligned with international human rights standards and respecting and helping to protect the

rights of media representatives and human rights advocates in relation to the FIFA World Cup 2022™” (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Sustainability Strategy, 2020; p.4).

“To contribute to Qatar’s social development, we will seek to use the FIFA World Cup 2022™ to promote intercultural exchange among parties engaged with the tournament... This means practicing tolerance, benevolence, constructive dialogue and openness toward other cultures. For our part, we at the SC will ensure that everyone will be welcome to come to Qatar during the tournament and take the necessary steps to deliver an inclusive FIFA World Cup 2022™ tournament experience for all participants, attendees and communities in Qatar and around the world” (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Sustainability Strategy, 2020; p.6-7).

Within the context of the image repair theory, citing Benoit (2015), Onwumechili and Bedeau (2016) notes that, “image repair takes place when two conditions exist: (a) an organization is held responsible for an action and (b) the action is considered negative or offensive” (p. 409-410). Qatar, in an effort to protect its image after facing criticism for its approach to creating an inclusive environment where the LGBTQA+ community can coexist with others, aimed to deliver what it described as “an inclusive” sports mega-event (SME) for all participants, attendees, and communities in Qatar and around the world. Qatar sought, through its partnership with FIFA, to organize an all-welcoming SME in conformity with FIFA guidelines therefore disputing the existence of a potential crisis of how the LGBTQA+ community will be received in Qatar during the World Cup. This is consistent with Samuel-Azran et al. (2022) who noted that protests by the gay and lesbian rights movements, which included openly gay Australian soccer player Josh Cavallo expressing his fear of playing in the World Cup, prompted Qatar to allow the display of rainbow flags at the 2022 World Cup.

4.1.4 The use of Entertainment: Sport-related branded entertainment

According to Liebl et al. (2022), sport-related branded entertainment encompasses sports-related content produced or sponsored by a brand during sports events or by athletes and teams they support, which can range from event coverage to showcasing exceptional achievements, distributed across various channels and often co-created or shared by fans. Qatar crafted an identity

that leveraged entertainment to establish itself as an appealing and enjoyable destination for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. This aligns with Grix's (2012) observation during Germany's hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, where a fan-centered and feel-good approach was a central aspect of Germany's leveraging tactics.

Starting with Qatar's largest flagship SME, FIFA's on-site attraction - the FIFA Fan Festival - aimed to offer fresh avenues for fans to celebrate their common love for football and immerse themselves in music, entertainment, local culture, cuisine, games, and lifestyle trends within an authentic festival atmosphere. The fun experience of the tournament was supplemented by the release of FIFA's World Cup Qatar 2022 Official Soundtracks. The texts below reflect these:

“Qatar will host a vast array of cultural and entertainment options for the whole family during this year’s FIFA World Cup™, which will be held from 20 November to 18 December” (O45: Huge number of entertainment..., 2022).

“Arhbo, the new single from the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Official Soundtrack, will be released this week after the video premiered on Friday 19 August on YouTube. Featuring Puerto Rican multiplatinum award-winning superstar Ozuna and French-Congolese rapper Gims, who is the first French-speaking artist to produce and perform a World Cup soundtrack. The Official Soundtrack, spearheaded by the FIFA Sound strategy, will feature more new releases as the tournament’s kick-off approaches. Ozuna and Gims have teamed up with FIFA for the release of Arhbo, the upbeat new single from the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Official Soundtrack. Following global hit Hayya Hayya (Better Together), the second single from the soundtrack will be available on streaming services on Friday 26 August. The video for Arhbo captured the attention of football and music lovers when it premiered on YouTube on Friday” (O56: FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022..., 2022).

“On the eve of the first FIFA World Cup™ in the Middle East and Arab world, the FIFA Fan Festival™ was officially opened at Al Bidda Park. More than 40,000 fans attended the opening, which included DJ sets, a firework display and a thrilling performance of the FIFA Fan Festival anthem Tukoh Taka by Maluma. The FIFA Fan Festival will be open throughout the tournament. It will show every FIFA World Cup match live on giant screens, host world-famous artists and feature a range of food and beverage options...H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi, Secretary General, Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, said: “The FIFA Fan Festival represents everything that is unique, memorable, and special about Qatar’s FIFA World Cup. Every day during the tournament, thousands of fans from across the globe will gather here to meet and enjoy top-class football – all in a stunning setting which features the beautiful Doha Corniche as the backdrop.” Speaking during

the event, FIFA President, Gianni Infantino, said: “This place will be the heart of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. We are proud that you are here. The world is united in Doha for this World Cup and this is thanks to you. This is where you will celebrate every night between now and the 18th of December” (O170: FIFA Fan Festival™ launches..., 2022).

4.1.5 Response to Covid-19

The emergence of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection in 2019 resulted in the postponement of the Paralympic Games and the Tokyo 2020 Olympics until 2021 (Hoang et al., 2020; Dergaa et al. 2022). Amidst the global pandemic, sporting events such as Euro 2020 and Wimbledon were either canceled or postponed, and Qatar officials initially worried about the potential impact on the 2022 FIFA World Cup, despite it being two years away (*DW*, 2020). In November 2022, Qatar continued to report an average of 321 daily COVID-19 cases (Al-Tawfiq et al., 2022), drawing global attention due to the emergence of new variants and concerns about vaccine efficacy during the ongoing pandemic (Colson et al., 2022; Schildgen et al., 2022 in Al-Tawfiq et al., 2022).

With the number of COVID-19 cases dropping around the world and in Qatar, the World Cup host eliminated the need for visitors to acquire a negative COVID-19 test before traveling to the Gulf Arab state, reversing its earlier requirement for all World Cup attendees to present proof of a negative COVID-19 test, regardless of their vaccination status, when departing by air or at the border crossing (Mills, 2022). This is highlighted in the text below:

“Fans attending this year’s FIFA World Cup™ are encouraged to familiarize themselves with Qatar’s COVID-19 Travel & Return Policy, which was updated by the Ministry of Public Health on 1 November 2022. Below are the key points for international Hayya Card holders attending the tournament from 20 November to 18 December: [1] Visitors arriving for the FIFA World Cup™ are no longer required to bring proof of a PCR or RAT test certificate before traveling to the State of Qatar. [2] Visitors entering Qatar for the FIFA World Cup™ are not required to pre-register on the EHTERAZ contact tracing mobile application prior to arrival. [3] Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 while in Qatar will be required to isolate in accordance with Ministry of Public Health guidelines. [4] Qatar does not require any traveler to take a COVID-19 test before departing

Qatar. However, travelers should check the requirements of their destination country and follow their specific COVID-19 travel requirements” (P131: COVID-19 Travel & Return..., 2022).

This action established Qatar as a nation actively monitoring global concerns regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, showcasing its dedication to the health and well-being of both its citizens and the global community.

4.2 RQ2. How did Qatar employ nation branding activities/tools in the World Cup?

Nation branding is concerned with shaping a country's image on the international stage and relies on developing a realistic, competitive, and compelling strategy that is supported, enriched, and reinforced through every act of communication (Clarke, 2003; Fan, 2010). It is seen as a potential solution to issues that may affect a nation and is considered both a global phenomenon and a legitimate transnational practice (Lekakis, 2014). By examining Qatar's communication material, the study identified five (5) themes related to nation branding activities used by Qatar: **(1) *The Use of Public Relations-related activities: Media Relations, Employee Relations, Community Relations, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Promotional information;*** **(2) *Communicators of nation brand identity: Use of prominent personality, Government Foreign Policy;*** **(3) *Rights of People with Disability;*** **(4) *Partnership;*** and **(5) *Use of Testimonials.***

4.2.1 The Use of Public Relations-related activities: Media Relations, Employee Relations, Community Relations, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Promotional information.

Nation branding, according to Jordan (2014), works similarly to traditional public relations in that it is a strategy used to influence the public, partners, employees, and other stakeholders to have a particular opinion about the nation-state. Paine (2023) and Dwyer (2023) aver that Qatar's

public relations (PR) objective for the World Cup aimed at debunking the prevailing notion of its insignificance as a small entity in the oil-rich Middle East, endeavoring instead to position itself as a globally renowned hub for business and tourism, comparable to neighboring destinations, such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

The International Public Relations Association (IPRA, 2023) defines public relations “as a decision-making management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organizations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods.” Aronczyk et al. (2017) recognized media relations and sponsorship, campaigns, government relations, and stakeholder relations as some public relations (PR) tools used to organize, stimulate, and manage communication. Themes related to Public Relations activities, including media relations, employee relations, community relations, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and promotional information, emerged from Qatar's communication material. This finding buttresses Aronczyk's (2008 in Jordan, 2014) assertion that nation branding is effectively seen as “a public relations exercise of governments”—a communication strategy that “allows governments to manage and control the image they project to the world” (p. 285-286).

4.2.1.1 Media Relations

One of the most crucial aspects of public relations practice has been and is media relations. (Shaw & White, 2004, in Supa, 2014). Fundamentally, media relations revolve around forging strong and meaningful connections with media professionals through effective communication, collaboration, and the cultivation of trust (Cheng, 2023). Qatar's media relations strategy entailed several key elements including partnering with The Associated Press (AP) to provide broadcast and media facilities to broadcasters, non-rights holders, and non-accredited media. They also launched the Qatar Media Portal, a new digital platform that offered media and broadcasters attending the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 access to a wide range of resources compiled by Qatar

to support their operations during the tournament. Additionally, they opened the Host Country Media Centre (HCMC), which was developed to assist reporters, broadcasters, photographers, and videographers in seamlessly conducting their work while covering both the tournament and Qatar's related events. This is reflected in the texts below:

“The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), ...has signed an agreement with The Associated Press (AP) to deliver the country’s host country broadcast and media facilities to broadcasters, non-rights holders and non-accredited media during the 28-day tournament later this year. ...Al Thawadi said: “We are very pleased to partner with AP on this project, as we aim to offer a seamless experience for broadcast media from across the globe when they arrive in Qatar to cover the 22nd edition of the FIFA World Cup – the first to be held in the Middle East and Arab world. AP’s extensive experience of covering major global events means they are perfectly placed to support both the host country and global broadcasters during their time in Qatar” (Q20: SC signs deal with..., 2022).

“Members of the media who are interested in covering the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ should register for the Qatar Media Portal (QMP)...the innovative digital platform will give journalists, content creators, and broadcasters access to a wide range of resources in order to help them operate at this year’s tournament...the QMP will host exclusive Host Country content and facilitate a range of services, including interview requests with SC and government spokespeople, studio bookings, and media tours. The portal also provides a one-stop-shop for Hayya entry permits and filming/photography permits for all media representatives attending the tournament (both FIFA- and Host Country-Accredited), as well as Host Country media accreditation for non-FIFA-accredited media. Facilitation of hand-carry equipment clearance procedures (excluding drones) is also available via the new portal. Registered users will also be granted access to Qatar’s Host Country video and photography archive, making it an ideal content resource for journalists attending the tournament in Qatar, as well as for those who do not travel but still wish to cover the tournament remotely” (Q107: Deadline for Qatar Media..., 2022).

“The Host Country Media Centre (HCMC) for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ has been officially opened by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC)...the HCMC will help thousands of media professionals cover the tournament ...The HCMC features a vast number of facilities, including a press conference room, studios, hot desks, IT support, photographer services, media lounge and restaurant. The facility will be open for 24 hours a day during the tournament, which will culminate with the final at Lusail Stadium on 18 December. Fatma Al Nuaimi, the SC’s Communications & Media Executive Director, said: “We are delighted to welcome media from across the globe to cover the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world. The Host Country Media Centre has been developed to help reporters, broadcasters, photographers and videographers seamlessly conduct their work while covering both the tournament and everything

Qatar has to offer. We look forward to collaborating closely with media as they cover a unique edition of the FIFA World Cup” (Q160: Qatar opens Host Country..., 2022).

Dembek and Wtoch (2014)’s study of Poland’s strategy hosting the UEFA Euro 2012 bears some similarities to Qatar since according to the researchers, Poland paid attention to the logistical, social, and soft aspects of the SME that immensely enhanced the comfort of the attendees including the professional support for the journalists.

4.2.1.2 Employee Relations

The internal publics of organizations, typically consisting of two categories of personnel – management staff and employees, are among the key elements that contribute to the achievement of the organization's goals and objectives (Ibrahim & Nguru, 2018). Nu Ngoc Ton et al. (2021) aver that internal public relations serve to manage the connection between the organization and its workforce. Employee relations, a fundamental element of organizational performance and sustainability, result in highly committed, motivated, and loyal employees within the organization (Samwel, 2018).

Amidst controversies surrounding its labor practices, Qatar highlighted the contributions of its employees towards the successful organization of the first FIFA World Cup to be hosted in the Middle East. By launching a series called 'Making History,' Qatar focused on its employees' contributions in relation to the SC-led 2022 FIFA World Cup. The featured employees included both women and men, emphasizing their educational backgrounds and roles. This is reflected in the text below:

“...In this new series, Making History, we are focusing on the work of Qatari employees who have played a key role in the SC’s journey. This week, we speak to Faisal Khalid, Ambassador Programme Manager. Faisal, from Al Rayyan, joined the SC in October 2019 after studying abroad and obtaining a degree in accounting. ... “I work as part of the Ambassadors Programme. This encompasses both the Qatar Legacy Ambassadors Programme and the FIFA Ambassadors Programme. I am the focal point for all local and regional ambassadors, including

former Qatar national team players and others from the region, like Ali Al Habsi. A typical day involves coordinating and communicating with FIFA legends and ambassadors. We work with internal teams such as Generation Amazing and Fan Engagement, who sometimes request ambassadors for specific activations. The Ambassador's Programme is responsible for ensuring a seamless collaboration with ambassadors and thinking of creative ways to best showcase them for the benefit of Qatar and the tournament. As we all know, this is the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world, so it's crucial to promote it in the best and most effective way possible through our numerous ambassadors” (R121: ‘Future generations should...., 2022).

“With only weeks to go until the big kick-off, employees at the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) are looking back on over a decade of hard work. As part of a new series, we are featuring Qatari employees who have contributed to the delivery of the first FIFA World Cup™ in the Middle East and Arab world. Today, we speak to Mead Al Emadi, who, since 2012, has worked on a variety of projects at the SC, including community engagement and fan activations. Mead is currently the Director of the FIFA Fan Festival™, which will open to fans on 19 November. Mead holds a degree in computer science from the American University and, in 2016, became the first Qatari to earn the prestigious FIFA Master qualification” (R124: ‘Let us be role models...., 2022).

“In this new series, Making History, we are focusing on the work of Qatari employees who have played a key role in the SC's journey. Our ... [next] interview is with Maryam Hamad Al Muftah, Executive Director, ICT Event Operations. Maryam, from Al Wakrah, joined the SC in 2013 after studying computer engineering at Qatar University and graduating in 2007. She obtained a Master's degree from HEC Paris before joining the SC from Qatar Investment Authority (QIA)... “I currently manage the Information Communications Technology division and lead on all technological aspects of the tournament. When we first won the bid, Qatar announced it would deliver a smart World Cup, so technology became an important part of our infrastructure and crucial for planning a seamless tournament” (R132: ‘Whether you're new or...., 2022).

4.2.1.3 Community Relations

Knott et al. (2016) in the case of the 2014 FIFA World Cup hosted in Brazil have argued that mobilizing local citizens has been overlooked as a significant leveraging potential in SMEs. Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup involved consultations with local communities in both the planning and execution of the first SME hosted in the Middle East. By engaging locals in these preparations, members of the Qatari community not only felt like integral contributors to the SME's success but also had the opportunity to showcase their businesses—a privilege extended exclusively to local enterprises. This is buttressed by Kahraman (2016 in Li & Feng, 2022) who

found that the success of nation branding relies on the collaboration among government and non-governmental actors, including “the people of a nation” (p. 98). Furthermore, Qatar created informative content tailored specifically for Arabic-speaking football enthusiasts in the Middle East. This initiative aimed to highlight the historical significance of hosting the first-ever World Cup in the Middle East.

Additionally, through its collaboration with locals, Qatar aimed to create a welcoming community for everyone, including both locals and foreigners who were to visit the host nation. As highlighted by Richardson and Hinton (2015), fostering strong community relations by providing cultural support, promoting environmental consciousness, and encouraging civic engagement plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for an organization's employees and members and by extension in this case a country's residents and visitors. This, in turn, facilitates the recruitment and retention of high-quality employees (Richardson & Hinton, 2015). Community relations in Qatar's communication material can be cited in the texts below:

“Arabic-speaking football fans from around the world can now enjoy a series of interviews with former players and journalists from across the region. Hosted by Mohammed Saadon Al Kuwari, a widely-renowned sports journalist and Qatar Legacy Ambassador, the Fil Zawya 21 podcast gives listeners the opportunity to learn in-depth about the lives of some of the Arab world's most renowned footballers and media personalities... “With the World Cup coming to the Arab world for the first time, we have always been committed to working with our Arabic-speaking Qatar Legacy Ambassadors to create content that is inspired by this historic moment. Having someone with the pedigree and skills of Mohammed Saadon Al Kuwari on our team means that we can create meaningful and engaging content as we see in Fil Zawya 21,” said Faisal Khalid, Ambassadors Programme Lead, Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy.” (L30: Arabic language podcast tells..., 2022).

“The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) and countrywide stakeholders held a simulation exercise in preparation for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. The exercise was held to practice and improve communication, coordination, and operations integration between countrywide stakeholders ahead of the tournament...Participants were tasked with managing a range of scenarios, including major and minor incidents that could happen during the tournament. They took part in verbal briefings, telephone calls and received written documents.

The aim was to simulate a regular match day in real-time. The objectives of the exercise were to practice joint coordination across the tactical-strategic environment, confirm the routine information flow, including issue escalation, processes, and thresholds, understand common and agreed event plans, and establish clear roles and responsibilities. The simulation will be followed by a full debrief for relevant stakeholders” (S105: SC and stakeholders hold..., 2022).

“Moza Al Mohannadi, the Marketing & Communications Director for the Generation Amazing Foundation... worked with the SC to ensure local people had a voice in developing the precinct facilities at Al Bayt Stadium” (H14: ‘The incredible impact..., 2022).

“Al Khater went on to explain the exhaustive consultation process that each stadium went through, citing Al Janoub Stadium where the community highlighted the need for more green space and leisure activities, all of which have been built into the stadium’s precinct.” (T17: ‘The first World Cup ..., 2022).

4.2.1.4 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Qatar's communication material also underscores its dedication to corporate social responsibility (CSR). As highlighted by Richardson and Hinton (2015), the practice of CSR, which involves utilizing available resources to advance ethically sound outcomes for key stakeholder groups, can be the most powerful tool in the practice of public relations. Qatar's CSR initiatives include a flagship program called 'Generation Amazing,' launched by the SC in 2010. In alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this foundation aims to promote inclusion and gender equality through its football for development programs worldwide, spanning countries such as Qatar, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Uganda. The host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup's CSR initiatives are evident in the following sentences:

“Nasser Al Khori, Executive Director, Generation Amazing, said: “We are proud to partner with Coaches Across Continents to address social issues through the power of football. Our partnership is mutually beneficial and will enhance our football for development curriculum – which is being used across the world to benefit many thousands of children and youth... Generation Amazing - GA operates in alignment with the UN SDGs, promoting inclusion and gender equality through its football for development programme. The programme's unique methodology teaches key life skills, including communication, leadership, teamwork and organization. Since 2010, the programme has reached more than 755,000 youth in

more than ten countries and aims to reach 1 million beneficiaries by the end of this year” (U64: Generation Amazing Foundation..., 2022).

“For more than a decade, the Generation Amazing Foundation has leveraged the power of sport to positively impact people’s lives and create sustainable social development in communities across Qatar and around the world. Launched in 2010 by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy as part of Qatar’s bid for the FIFA World Cup 2022™, Generation Amazing’s football for development outreach and education programmes help support vulnerable and displaced people. The goal is to empower new generations of young leaders to transform their communities and generate positive social development through the creation of sustainable programmes. More than 1 million people in more than 35 countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas have benefitted from the programmes, with long-term partnerships already established with FIFA Foundation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Education Above All, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and CONCACAF, football’s governing body for North, Central America and the Caribbean” (U112: Generation Amazing Foundation..., 2022).

“The Generation Amazing Foundation, a FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ legacy initiative, has launched a new sport and cultural exchange programme ...titled ‘Goal 22: Football, Social Impact and Sustainability’, is a first-of-its-kind youth exchange project that aims to empower young people who are passionate about football. ...Youth from all 32 competing nations at Qatar 2022 will take part in Goal 22, which is being delivered in strategic partnership with the Ministry of Sports and Youth, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Qatar Football Association, Qatar Foundation (QF), Qatar Museums, FIFA Foundation and UNESCO. Sponsors include Qatar Airways, Visit Qatar, Qatar Fund for Development, Qetaifan Projects, QLM Insurance, SDIsports and Hublot. ...Generation Amazing operates in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, promoting inclusion and gender equality in its football for development programme. The programme’s unique methodology teaches life skills, including communication, leadership, teamwork and organization” (U126: Generation Amazing Foundation reaches..., 2022).

Qatar's incorporation of CSR in its SME is consistent with Woods and Stokes (2019), who argued that due to the significant and sometimes adverse effects of sports mega-events on host nations, such as high costs and lasting environmental challenges, event organizers, including the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), employ corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to create positive outcomes while mitigating negative perceptions.

4.2.1.5 Promotional

According to Aronczyk et al. (2017), promotional techniques are employed by corporations, governments, and various organizations to promote items, ideas, and lifestyles considered essential for audiences to adopt. In order to manage their visibility, validity, and connections with stakeholders, organizations of all types are turning more and more to public relations as a stand-alone strategy and an important element in the promotional mix (Aronczyk et al., 2017).

Qatar's promotional activities primarily centered around guiding attendees on how to apply for the Hayya card (a Qatar entry permit) and its associated benefits, ticket sales, and accommodation options for the most compact FIFA World Cup. They also focused on the countdown to the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and the Arab world, security preparations, and a prediction game in which prominent football personalities were asked to predict the winners of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Supported by Aronczyk et al.'s (2017) assertion, these promotional activities can shape people's sense of identity by influencing how they receive, understand, interpret, and respond to information about the SME. The texts below reflect some promotional materials on Qatar's news hub:

“With a total of 1.8 million tournament tickets having been sold already – and with less than five months to go until the big kick-off – fans interested in an unforgettable trip of a lifetime to Qatar are being urged to act swiftly before the coveted seats are snapped up... Aside from the host nation, the top ten countries for ticket sales based on country of residence in the latest sales period include emerging and established football hotbeds such as Canada, England, France, Germany, India, Saudi Arabia, Spain, the UAE, and the USA” (E21: FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022..., 2022).

“The remaining tickets for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ will be available to fans on a first come, first served basis...” With only 139 days to go until the World Cup kicks off, I’m delighted to invite all fans who’ve not secured their tickets, Hayya, and tournament time accommodation to start their simple three-step fan journey to the Middle East’s first-ever FIFA World Cup. Our one-stop-shop accommodation portal provides a wide range of options for fans - including 2 to 5-star hotels, cruise ship hotels, managed apartments and villas, and fan villages - to

satisfy all tastes and budgets. We can't wait to welcome the world to Qatar for what will be a historic tournament," said Nasser Al Khater, Chief Executive Officer of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 LLC" **(E25: Remaining Qatar 2022 tickets..., 2022)**.

"More than 2.45 million tickets have already been sold for this year's FIFA World Cup™ in Qatar. It will be the first edition of the tournament to be held in the Middle East and Arab world – and excitement across the region is palpable. Qatar is set to host the most compact edition of the tournament in modern history. Fans, players, and officials will always be in the thick of the action – with the longest distance between stadiums just 75km" **(E72: Key information for fans..., 2022)**.

"Oman football legend Ali Al Habsi is tipping Argentina to win a third FIFA World Cup™ title in Qatar. The former goalkeeper, who turned out for English clubs Bolton Wanderers, Wigan Athletic, Brighton & Hove Albion and West Bromwich Albion, recently gave his World Cup predictions to the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (see gallery below for full details...Al Habsi, who became the first Arab player to win the FA Cup in 2013, is expecting a strong showing from the usual contenders and believes three African teams will reach the knockout rounds. ...The Qatar Legacy Ambassador believes Argentina and Germany will face each other for the fourth time in a World Cup final – and is tipping Lionel Messi and co to lift the trophy" **(E158: Ali Al Habsi: Argentina..., 2022)**.

4.2.2 Communicators of nation brand identity: Use of prominent personality and

Government Foreign Policy

Dinnie's (2008) previously mentioned conceptual model of nation-brand identity and image illustrates the process by which a nation-brand's image is formed as a result of the nation's brand identity being communicated through various channels. Dinnie (2008) identified branded exports, sporting achievements, the diaspora, marketing communications, brand ambassadors, cultural artifacts, government foreign policy, tourism experiences, and prominent personalities as the components of the communicators of a nation's brand identity.

In the case of Qatar's nation-brand image, the use of prominent personalities (which includes both former and current footballers, sports journalists, and entertainers from both within and outside the Middle East), as well as government foreign policy, was evident in Qatar's activities. Several of these prominent personalities also served as brand ambassadors for the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup.

They included former Australian footballer Tim Cahill, former Saudi football player Al Temyat, former Brazilian player Cafu, former German player Lothar Matthäus, sports journalist Mohammed Saadon Al Kuwari, former England football player David Beckham, former France player Marcel Desailly, former Qatari player Ahmad Kalil, Puerto Rican multiplatinum award-winning superstar Ozuna, French-Congolese rapper Gims, former Cameroonian football player Samuel Eto'o, former Oman goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi, former Iraqi player Younis Mahmoud, former Moroccan player Youssef Safri, Mexico legend Luis Hernandez, Ivory Coast legend Yaya Touré, former Argentina captain Javier Mascherano, footballer Nadia Nadim, Saudi Arabia legend Nawaf Al Temyat, Qatari comedian and presenter Hamad Al Amari, Qatari singer Fahad Al Kubaisi, World and Olympic high jump champion Mutaz Barshim, Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman, and Jung Kook from the Korean supergroup BTS, among others.

Qatar's use of prominent personalities, especially sports stars, is consistent with Søyland and Moriconi (2022), who highlighted the country's engagement with famous sports stars - those who have either played in the Qatari football league or served as ambassadors for the 2022 FIFA World Cup - as one of the four pillars of Qatar's effective utilization of sports to gain attraction and soft power. This is evident in the select text below:

“Having represented Australia at four FIFA World Cup™ tournaments, Tim Cahill understands the importance of the intercontinental play-off matches set to take place in Doha on 13 and 14 June. “I’m a local now here in Qatar. I’ve been lucky to embrace the lifestyle and the culture, the people and the food. I encourage everyone to come and take in the atmosphere, visit the local sites, go to all these amazing stadiums, visit the desert, and enjoy the experience. Playing in those four World Cups, I got to go to four amazing countries and those memories will last with me forever. This is the first time the World Cup is in the Middle East and Arab world – it’s going to be a nice experience. Come and enjoy it” (L4: Tim Cahill: ‘Qualifying for..., 2022).

“The event was organised to celebrate the creativity and cultural significance of the artwork which was designed by Qatari female artist Bouthayna Al Muftah)...A host of special guests attended the London unveiling, including official FIFA World

Cup Qatar 2022™ Ambassador David Beckham... ” (L39: Qatar’s FIFA World Cup™ Official..., 2022).

“Narrated by Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman and featuring Jung Kook from Korean supergroup BTS, the ceremony showcased Qatari culture and heritage while highlighting football’s ability to unite people from different countries and cultures. A host of special guests from Qatar took part in the ceremony, including Ghanim Al Muftah, Dana, and Fahad Al Kubaisi – and they were joined by hundreds of performers and tournament volunteers. The ceremony featured eight distinct parts, culminating with giant jerseys from all 32 participating nations, every mascot in FIFA World Cup history, including the Qatar 2022 version La’eeb, and a huge inflatable emblem. Conceived as a joyous and contemporary one-of-a-kind spectacle with an important unifying message, the ceremony was produced by Executive Artistic Director, Ahmed Al Baker, CEO of Katara Studios, and Artistic Director, Anghela Alo ” (L171: Spectacular opening ceremony..., 2022).

Sport has traditionally served as a resource for governments in the area of public diplomacy, but it is increasingly employed as a pivotal component within a broader and more comprehensive political strategy, referred to as Sport Diplomacy (SD) (Garamvölgyi et al., 2020 in Abdi et al, 2022). With respect to government foreign policy, Qatar efficiently used sport as a means of diplomacy (Søyland & Moriconi, 2022) through its participation in meetings and/or conferences such as the Commonwealth Nations meeting hosted in the UK and Rwanda, the Arab Sports Journalists Forum in Oman, and the Concordia Summit held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. This can be seen to be consistent with Skey (2023) who argued that sport is an “effective diplomatic tool because its social and cultural significance means that it can be used to access key state actors (Qingmin, 2013), target difficult to reach groups (Chehabi, 2001) and engage local/regional (Cha, 2013) and global media audiences (Murray, 2012: 582)” (p. 756). This also corresponds to the findings of Søyland & Moriconi (2022), who observed that Qatar successfully involves foreign actors and institutions in countering external criticism. The excerpts of the news stories below highlight these:

“Al Thawadi was the keynote speaker during a Commonwealth Nations meeting in the UK. The event was held on the sidelines of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and attended by H.E. Jonathan Wilks, the British

Ambassador to Qatar, Nigel Huddleston MP, the UK Minister for Sport, Tourism, Heritage and Civil Society, and Councillor Ian Ward, the Leader of Birmingham City Council” (W36: Hassan Al Thawadi: ‘Qatar..., 2022).

“The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) attended the Commonwealth Games Federation and Commonwealth Sport for Development and Peace roundtable event at the 26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Rwanda.) Generation Amazing is a human and social development initiative active in countries around the world, including Qatar, India, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Myanmar, Argentina, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Uganda. It operates in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, promoting inclusion and gender equality in its football for development programme” (W38: SC participates in Commonwealth..., 2022).

“Executives from the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy attended the Arab Sports Journalists Forum in Oman to discuss the upcoming FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™), ...” (W53: SC delegation visits Oman..., 2022).

“The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) and Concordia have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to share expertise and raise awareness of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ legacy projects. The MoU was signed during this year’s Concordia Summit, which is being held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Among the legacy programmes that will benefit from the collaboration are Generation Amazing, the B4 Development Foundation, and Workers’ Welfare” (W84: SC signs MoU with..., 2022).

The finding supports the concept of soft power, an integral part of diplomacy and a key component in most constructive foreign affairs strategies, where a country can influence others by earning their trust and affection, essentially serving as a positive role model (Gallarotti, 2022). As a reflection of Qatar's increased attractiveness following the hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the country is observed to be coordinating with the United States of America in the ongoing negotiations involving the exchange of women and children between Israel and Palestine (Mills & Al-Mughrabi, 2023).

The World Cup also emphasized the end of diplomatic ties between Qatar and its Arab allies, as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt severed diplomatic relations with Qatar in mid-2017, accusing the country of supporting terrorism—an accusation repeatedly denied by Qatar (Qiblawi & Salem, 2021). News stories highlighted the improved relationship among these Arab countries:

“Fan leaders from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have expressed their excitement ahead of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ during a visit to the host country, where they took a closer look at the stadiums that will host their team’s matches. Speaking from Education City Stadium, which will see the Green Falcons take on Poland on 27 November, Faisal Al Dosari, a Board member with the Saudi National Team Fan Association spoke about his delight with the state of the-art-facility” (X18: ‘We look forward to showcasing..., 2022).

“With less than 100 days to go until the start of the greatest show on Earth, a total of 2.45 million tickets have now been sold. The first FIFA World Cup™ to be held in the Middle East and Arab world will kick off on 20 November, bringing fans from the region and across the world together in a compact and modern setting, with Qatar, the USA, England, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, the UAE, France, Argentina, Brazil and Germany leading the ranking of ticket sales by country of residence” (E21: FIFA World Cup Qatar..., 2022).

" Saudi Arabia legend Nawaf Al Temyat has taken part in six editions of the FIFA World Cup™: three as a player, two as a TV analyst and one as an official with the Saudi Arabian Football Federation. And while all are memorable for different reasons, he is especially excited about the next one in Qatar, which will get underway on 20 November. “The World Cup in Qatar will introduce everyone to the Arab world,” said Al Temyat, who scored 11 goals in 63 appearances for the Green Falcons. “It will showcase our talents and capabilities, and show our youth what can be achieved. Everyone in the region is excited to invite people from across the globe to experience our culture, heritage and the richness of our history.” Al Temyat continued: “The World Cup is about much more than football. It’s an opportunity for us to welcome different cultures and backgrounds, to try different cuisines. It’s also an opportunity to invite the world to learn about us.” (G134: Nawaf Al Temyat: ‘Qatar’s World..., 2022).

4.2.3 Rights of People with Disability

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) aims to change attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities, elevating the movement from perceiving them as passive recipients of charity, medical care, and social protection to recognizing them as rights-bearing individuals capable of asserting these rights, making autonomous decisions informed by their free will, and actively participating in society (United Nations, n.d.). According to Caughey (2021), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities remains the most pioneering strategy for implementing human rights on the national level, as it mandates governments to appoint a Disability Focal Point and establish an Independent Monitoring Mechanism both within and outside the government structure.

Qatar has been a member of the United Nations since 1971 (Government Communications Office, State of Qatar, 2023). Qatar's nation branding activities, as part of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup, brought to the limelight its focus on the rights of people with disabilities. For instance, during the opening ceremony of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar featured a performance in which Oscar-winning actor Morgan Freeman extended a yellow-gloved hand to FIFA World Cup ambassador Ghanim Al Muftah, who has a rare spinal disorder, symbolizing inclusion in a country that had been under international criticism for its human rights record (Fryer, 2022). The texts below significantly highlight Qatar's attention to the rights of people with disabilities:

“Customers can purchase a maximum of six tickets per match and 60 across the entire tournament. Disabled people and people with limited mobility are encouraged to browse the options online and select from a range of dedicated Accessibility Tickets” (Y89: Last-minute sales phase..., 2022).

“Qatar’s hosting of the FIFA World Cup™ is playing a transformative role in making the country more accessible for disabled people. The Accessibility Forum – launched by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) in 2016 – has been at the centre of planning to ensure tournament facilities and wider public infrastructure meet the requirements of the disabled community. ...Ghanimeh Al Taweel believes the FIFA World Cup™ is creating a fundamental shift in the way disability is seen in Qatar. “The accessible infrastructure has led to more disabled people being seen out and about in our communities – on the streets, in workplaces and schools. It means greater integration and a voice at the decision-making table,” said Al Taweel, who is an accessibility researcher. In addition to accessible infrastructure, this year’s FIFA World Cup™ will introduce a range of new features for the disabled community. For the first time, blind and partially sighted fans will be able to listen to audio descriptive commentary in Arabic at World Cup matches. The service is accessible through a mobile application and will be available at all eight stadiums. Sensory rooms will also be offered at different stadiums to provide neuro-divergent fans with the ability to watch matches in a quieter space, equipped with assistive technology and managed by expert staff. The rooms will be installed by the SC and local stakeholders” (Y90: Qatar 2022’s transformative role..., 2022).

“... FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ organizers held a special event to showcase the accessibility features of the tournament. Members of the disabled community and senior leadership from the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) and FIFA took part in the forum, ...and outlined how accessibility has featured centrally in World Cup preparations. Qatar 2022 will feature a number of firsts for disabled fans, including the availability of audio descriptive commentary in Arabic at all matches. Three stadiums will host sensory rooms for fans with sensory access

requirements, while every match venue was built to exacting accessibility standards, including accessible parking, seating, bathrooms, and concession stands. The SC has worked in partnership with FIFA and the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 LLC to prioritize accessibility throughout tournament preparations, in line with the FIFA Sustainability Strategy. ...“From the very beginning of our journey to host this historic tournament, our commitment to accessibility has been unwavering. Not only did we work diligently to see that stadiums and tournament sites met the highest accessibility standards, we also actively involved the disabled community to make sure the World Cup creates a lasting legacy for the disabled community beyond Qatar 2022,” said H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi, Secretary General, SC” (Y142: Accessibility takes centre stage..., 2022).

As evident in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy document, the SME aimed to ensure a seamless fan experience for disabled individuals and those with limited mobility attending the FIFA World Cup 2022. This is evident in the statement below:

“Given that about 15% of the world’s population, or one billion people, experience some form of disability and that many others have special access needs, ensuring that the tournament is accessible for disabled people and people with limited mobility is critical to the inclusivity of the FIFA World Cup 2022™. FIFA has therefore established requirements to ensure that all FIFA World Cup™ sites and events are made accessible to these groups through adapted site design, operational services, and ticketing policies. It has also established detailed guidance to implement such requirements and uses the help of accessibility specialists and monitors to continually enhance the tournament experience of disabled people and people with limited mobility” (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy, 2020; p. 40).

4.2.4 Partnership

Zhou et al. (2021) state that achieving sports event outcomes is a complex task involving the participation of multiple stakeholders. The event organizing committee alone cannot achieve it; instead, it necessitates the cooperative efforts of various stakeholder groups to attain shared objectives (Leopkey & Parent, 2017; O’Brien & Chalip, 2008 cited in Zhou et al., 2021). Partnerships, often referred to as inter-organizational relationships (IORs), are formed as a result of transactions, exchanges, and interactions between two or more organizations that share common interests (Gerke et al., 2018 cited in Zhou et al., 2021). Partnerships with both national and

international organizations emerged as a key component of Qatar’s nation branding activities for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Notable among the partners involved in the SME hosted by Qatar are Ashghal (Qatar’s public works and infrastructure agency), Evolution Sports Qatar, Bloomberg (an international financial data and analysis company), the Associated Press (AP), Josoor Institute (a fellow SC Legacy Programme), Qatar University, the continental governing body for soccer (football) in North America, Central America, and the Caribbean - Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Generations for Peace (GFP - a Jordan-based international NGO). As pointed out by Babiak et al. (2018), sport is inherently collaborative. In the case of Germany and its hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Grix (2012) similarly found that Germany included a wide array of partners from government, business, civil society, culture, and sport. The select texts below highlight some of these partnerships:

“More than 1 million people in more than 35 countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas have benefitted from [the Generation Amazing Foundation], with long-term partnerships already established with FIFA Foundation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Education Above All, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and CONCACAF, football’s governing body for North, Central America and the Caribbean” (V112: Generation Amazing Foundation: ..., 2022).

“...titled ‘Goal 22: Football, Social Impact and Sustainability’, is a first-of-its-kind youth exchange project that aims to empower young people who are passionate about football. ...Youth from all 32 competing nations at Qatar 2022 will take part in Goal 22, which is being delivered in strategic partnership with the Ministry of Sports and Youth, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Qatar Football Association, Qatar Foundation (QF), Qatar Museums, FIFA Foundation and UNESCO. Sponsors include Qatar Airways, Visit Qatar, Qatar Fund for Development, Qetaifan Projects, QLM Insurance, SDIsports and Hublot. ...Generation Amazing operates in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, promoting inclusion and gender equality in its football for development programme.” (V126: Generation Amazing Foundation..., 2022).

“Qatar Central Bank (QCB) held a special event to unveil a FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ commemorative QAR 22 banknote. The event was attended by His

Excellency Sheikh Bandar bin Mohammed bin Saoud Al Thani, QCB Governor, H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi, Secretary General, Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), FIFA President, Gianni Infantino, and other important dignitaries. During his opening speech, Sheikh Bandar said the note celebrates Qatar's hard work and dedication in hosting the first FIFA World Cup™ in the Middle East and Arab world. The governor highlighted the strategic collaboration between QCB, the SC, and FIFA to issue the distinguished and historical commemorative note, that bears the logo mark of this year's FIFA World Cup™ and features Al Bayt Stadium and Lusail Stadium” (V147: Qatar Central Bank unveils..., 2022).

4.2.5 Use of Testimonials

Qatar's nation branding activities also included the use of testimonials to create an image based on the first-hand experiences of people, especially foreigners, who have interacted with Qatari society. These individuals have lived in Qatar for some time period qualifying them to share their first-hand experiences with the world, offering insights distinct from accounts that may be based on hearsay. Representing diverse nationalities, these testimonials aimed to depict Qatar as a preferred destination for people of all backgrounds. Consistent with the theory of soft power, these testimonials were communicated as a way to enhance Qatar's reputation, serving to both attract and induce a global audience. They offered crucial insights into how states leverage the soft power potential of sports. Qatar was portrayed as a safe and welcoming place that embraces diverse cultures. The testimonials included individuals from various countries, including Mexico, Argentina, Portugal, England, Tunisia, Australia, France, South Korea, Costa Rica, Spain, Japan, Uruguay, Cameroon, and Ecuador. The texts below highlight some of these testimonials:

“Yezenia Navarro, social media influencer and mother of three has been an active member of Qatar's Mexican community for the past 11 years), ...”For me, I've learned from many different cultures living in Qatar. I feel that my mind is more open because I have friends from all around the world. I know that when I travel to any other country, I'll have a place to stay, and it's the same for my children. They have grown up in this multicultural country, where they learn to respect and accept other cultures and traditions that are different to our own” (Z26: ‘80,000 seats will not be..., 2022).

“Portuguese Elisabete Reis believes Qatar's mix of modern and traditional will offer fans an exciting array of attractions when they attend this year's FIFA World Cup™. ...The mum-of-three, who has lived in Doha since 2006, cannot wait for the

big kick-off on 21 November. The image and protocol consultant, originally from Lisbon, says fans should expect a safe country and plenty of places to visit, including the desert, outstanding museums, and traditional marketplaces” (Z34: Qatar is very safe..., 2022).

“Fans who attend this year’s FIFA World Cup™ in Qatar will discover a welcoming and hospitable country according to Englishman Steve Mackie, who has lived in Doha for 13 years. “...The first thing to do is offer your hand in friendship because everybody here will take that hand. That’s the type of place Qatar is. The other thing to do is learn about the culture. It is wonderful and hospitable here. As long as you are polite and courteous, and get to know the country and people, you will enjoy your experience here” (Z40: ‘Fans will find Qatar..., 2022).

“Qatar 2022 will be Uruguay’s fourth straight appearance at football’s showpiece event – and one man looking forward to the first FIFA World Cup™ in the Middle East and Arab world is 49-year-old Pablo Sanz-Reherman, who has spent more than 18 months working as an engineer with Qatar gas... “It’s important to learn about the culture – it is obviously different here to many other countries. My advice to people is to plan everything in advance and do some research. I think it’s important to embrace the culture and respect local people. Always try to be flexible, as this will help you enjoy your experience here. Many fans have asked me questions about the tournament. Most ask about accommodation and the best places to stay. The good thing is this tournament is very compact – you will never be far from a hotel, stadium or fan zone during this World Cup” (Z139: ‘It means a lot to Uruguayans..., 2022).

“Cameroonian Boris Adi, who has lived in Abu Hamour for five years, is excited to welcome fans of the Indomitable Lions, as they compete in the finals for the eighth time. Originally from Bamenda in the northwest region of Cameroon, the 29-year-old works as an accountant at West Bay Ice Factory. ... “One noticeable thing is the safety and security. You could have a large sum of money or a valuable watch on you and no one will try to steal them. People here are focused on their jobs. It is very diverse. There are a lot of expats and that’s why the country is so busy.” ... “It’s important to do some research and understand what Qatar is like. People back home ask me many questions about the country. I tell them the best way to answer them all is by visiting. Qatar is very welcoming and people always leave here with a positive impression of the country” (Z152: ‘Cameroon fans will bring..., 2022).

4.3.0. RQ3. What was the perception Ghanaian Sports Journalists held of Qatar prior to the World Cup?

With respect to the study investigating the perception of sports journalists who covered the event in both Qatar and Ghana, the analysis of the in-depth interviews will begin with an

examination of the perception of Ghanaian sports journalists who covered the event in Qatar. This will be followed by an analysis of those who covered the event in Ghana.

As per Gill (2020), authors frequently justify sample size by employing the principle of data saturation, which means reaching a point where no new information is acquired from interviews and/or observations (Morse, 1995, as cited in Gill, 2020). The study acknowledges the limitation of not being able to meet all twelve (12) sports journalists who attended the 2022 FIFA World Cup, due to their unavailability. Six (6) out of the twelve (12) participants were available and constitute those who participated in the in-depth interview. In qualitative research, where emphasis is put on rich detail and in-depth knowledge regarding particular occurrences, a small sample size is acceptable (Morgan, 2008; Bryman, 2012). Four (4) to forty (Daymon & Holloway, 2011 in Anani-Bossman & Bruce, 2021) and one (1) to ninety-five (Bryman, 2012) are the sample sizes that have been determined by research. To progress with the interviews and analysis, it was determined that six participants were sufficient. After interviewing the fifth and sixth participants, no new information emerged, leading the researcher to recognize that data saturation had been reached.

Table 5.0 Demography of Participants (Sports Journalists who reported from Qatar)

NAME/INITIAL	SPORTS JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE	MEDIA ORGANIZATION
SQ1	Has been covering sports events – both local and international - since 2009.	Managing Editor, GhanaWeb
SQ2	Eight years of experience and coverage of multiple African Cup of Nations and World Athletics championships. Has also worked for FIFA, Newzroom Afrika, and SuperSport.	Multimedia Group
SQ3	Has been practicing sports journalism for the past 28 years.	Sports Editor, Daily Graphic and Graphic Sports.
SQ4	Over 8 years of experience.	LondonWorld

SQ5	Has been doing photography since 1999 and Qatar is her fourth World Cup covered.	Freelance (International Sports Photo Journalist)
SQ6	Has been practicing sports journalism for the past 14 years as a broadcast sports journalist. He has experience covering the World Cup, Olympics and African Cup of Nations.	Sports Editor, Multimedia Group

Source: Researcher’s Field Data (Kumi, 2023)

With respect to **Table 5.0** above, the sports journalists interviewed had at least eight years of experience covering both international and local sports events. They all had some level of exposure covering SMEs such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics. With the exception of the freelancer, the sports journalists had a portfolio of either sports editors or editors in their respective media organizations.

4.3.1. Ghanaian Sports Journalists' (who covered the SME from Qatar) Perception of the Country Prior to the World Cup: The study discovered that the participants did not have much knowledge of Qatar prior to the country winning the bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and included recognizing Qatar as a small oil-rich Islamic nation with strict Islamic laws and a strong ambition to host the FIFA World Cup as a means to project itself. This perception is reflected in the following statements:

“To be honest, not much. I mean, I just knew that they were a small country that is very oil-rich, very conservative in their way of life and how they do their things, but obviously not regarded as a big football country or football nation... that it was very strong on its Islamic values and appalls a lot of things that are, if you like, taken lightly in Africa or in the Western world, but they are very conscious of their religion and their way of life in terms of how you can behave in public, consumption of alcohol, the strict policies on fornication, et cetera.” (SQ1).

“Back in 2011, I think at that point, obviously I did not know much about Qatar when they were announced as hosts of the World Cup. That was in 2011. For that part, it’s the truth. But in terms of the World Cup itself, I knew quite a bit about Qatar before I went to the World Cup. Obviously because they were in the news a lot after they won the bid. But also, because in 2019, I was there to cover the world athletics championship. So, I had visited Qatar in 2019 before the World Cup in

2022, so before the World Cup, I had already been to Qatar and I knew a lot about the country as a result of that visit" (SQ2).

"...I'd been there previously about four different times. So, I wasn't surprised. I knew what their big goal was. But I was impressed with what they put together. A small country with resources, with big ambition. And they managed to put together a very exciting World Cup... But I knew this was a country that had previously not hosted the World Cup. The World Cup had not gone there. The Middle East until recently, I mean, was a bit closed, a closed society. But here is Qatar which want to showcase itself as a modern country, as a country open to the world. Yes, they are Islam. It's an Islamic state. But they want to show that they are modern. Islamic as they are, but they still are open to the world." (SQ3).

"Qatar is the smallest country amongst the three most powerful Middle East countries. That is, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and then Qatar. But prior to the World Cup, not many people knew so much about that. It was just a country with probably four million people with a lot of money - a lot of oil" (SQ4).

"Obviously, the first thing, is they are a very rich nation. Yeah, they are a very rich nation, but more so too, the level of strictness we're going to meet there. The Islamic law being in full force and their inability to bend for modern social or urban practices, Qatar was sold out to us as a very strict nation" (SQ5).

"Prior to the events, before the World Cup, obviously, you just know the place of Qatar geographically: where they are, where they are located; it's a Middle Eastern country, or it's a Gulf country. You know about the oil; you know the basics. But then, in order to know the country better and to help with my reporting, I went to Qatar. That is, going from the long term to the short term. In the year of the World Cup, I was there three times before the World Cup itself, just to familiarize myself and to improve on my reporting eventually. So, I went there three times to do three different works and to prepare my team's coverage of the competition... My perception of Qatar was that, obviously, they were rich, they had money. I mean, all the guys along that side have oil revenue, a lot of it. And so Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi, UAE, Kuwait, all these guys, have a lot of oil revenue. So, that is the basics. I mean, the idea is that countries are all trying to use tourism as a way to get out of the trap of relying on oil revenue." (SQ6).

Their statements are consistent with Scharfenort (2012), who avers that while positioning itself as a gateway to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Qatar is the smallest country to host the World Cup since Uruguay (1930). According to Al Thani (2021), Qatar's unique state status stems from its immense wealth, enabling a more extensive global integration than other Middle Eastern countries and thereby granting it disproportionate global economic and political influence despite its small size.

However, some participants noted the controversies surrounding Qatar's labor laws. These observations are evident in the following statements:

“There was a lot of Western agenda, if you like, propaganda about the labor in their country, forced labor, or underpaying the labor force there...” (SQ1).

“But before my first trip to Qatar, they were also in the news for worker manipulation and all these labour issues and maltreatment of immigrants and all these things that were always in the news. Those were things that I constantly dealt with or came across before my first trip to Qatar” (SQ2).

“They had issues with their labor laws. I'm not too sure whether as many years ago, they were part of the ILO” (SQ3).

“One of the controversies about the Kafala system formed a core part of the human rights abuse regime in Qatar. And most people, especially in the West, believe that it does not make them fit to host the community of nations in such important historical and cultural events like the World Cup” (SQ6).

Al Thani's (2021) study, titled "Channeling Soft Power: The Qatar 2022 World Cup, Migrant Workers, and International Image," reflects that in Qatar, the issue of migrant workers' rights has garnered international attention. Advocacy groups have long documented instances of forced labor, human trafficking, and substandard living and working conditions for migrant workers well before the 2022 World Cup (Al Thani, 2021). Talavera et al. (2019 in O'Rourke & Theodoraki, 2022) aver that Qatar confronted the “challenge of social inclusion and human and labor rights equality with persistent accusations of abusive labor practices” (p. 2).

4.4.0. RQ4. What themes emerge from the experience of sports journalists (who covered the SME from Qatar) from their exposure to the country through the FIFA World Cup?

The study identified a number of themes from the participants' experiences in Qatar. These themes have been categorized under six (6) inductively constructed themes: Proximity, Transportation, Convenience, Exhibition of Culture, Flexibility on their Rules, and Technology. These are detailed below:

(I) **Proximity:** The participants acknowledged the uniqueness of the World Cup held in Qatar, highlighting the compact nature of the event. It was confirmed in their responses:

“I don't think there will be another World Cup that is as compact as this ever. I don't think we would have a small country like this, which has the stadiums very close to each other like this. We've never had that before. I don't think we'll have that again. But I think what Qatar has done is to maybe make FIFA think again and say, maybe we should have a World Cup where it is very close-knit and we don't spend a lot of money, you know, flying players around and changing hotels and all of that, which sometimes is not the best for the players themselves. And so that would be the difference” (SQ1).

“I certainly think it's the best World Cup in the history of the competition in terms of fun experience mostly because of its compactness and I can't repeat this point enough. Because the last World Cup in 2018 in Russia, the cities were so far apart from each other. It was more expensive, more stressful and it required a lot of time. In Qatar, everything was in close proximity so it made the experience better for the fans, even for journalists - going from one venue to another to cover two different games in a day, three different games in a day were possible. Not ever in the history of the world cup was it ever possible to do more than two games in a single day. Even in some places it is hard to do more than one game. Qatar made it possible” (SQ2).

“What was exciting about Qatar was that it was what we call a compact World Cup. So, a small country, I mean, dreaming big. They cut down the traveling times. So, within two hours, you could move between two venues” (SQ3).

“...the greatest thing about the World Cup in Qatar was that the number of games you could see no World Cup gave media the chance to do three games in a day. And sometimes we were doing three games in a day. You could do the lunchtime kickoff, do the 7 p.m. kickoff, and then do the late kickoff which was around 10. And the main reason for doing that was the proximity. Doha is quite really the Qatar. Qatar is really Doha, I should say. And you could get from one stadium to another in a very short period. So that was quite unique” (SQ4).

“...it's one of the closest, you know...For the first time in the history of FIFA, they were going to be playing more than one match a day. You know, you could cover more. You, as a photographer, were at liberty to cover, like, what, two matches a day. Yes, because it was all happening in the same city. So, it was being run like an Olympic system” (SQ5).

“Many people didn't think it was possible to host a World Cup with eight stadia in one city but they did it. Qatar broke a record in that space because previously FIFA's own laws, which they broke for Qatar, suggested that I think you need to host this in a minimum of four cities or something like that. Qatar did it in only one. All eight were in one place. So, that was different” (SQ6).

As stipulated in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability strategy (2020) document, the SME was to “have the most geographically compact footprint in the tournament’s history since the inaugural single-stadium edition in 1930, with all stadiums within 50km of the centre of Qatar’s capital city Doha” (p. 9). It further adds that, Qatar’s hosting concept meant that both spectators and players would be spending less time travelling therefore giving them more time to enjoy the tournament (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Sustainability strategy, 2020). This is confirmed in the 2022 FIFA World Cup Fan Guide (2022) which states that, this “special event edition is the first to be held in the Arab world and is the most compact FIFA World Cup ever, where fans can attend at least two matches in one day at the beginning of the tournament” (p. 21). Additionally, according to Reuters (2022), the 64 World Cup matches were played in eight stadiums in Doha, and because of the tournament's singular setting, fans were able to go to multiple games each day that were no more than an hour's drive apart. Qatar's compact SME model appears to provide an advantage to the host city of Doha. Ferreira et al. (2022) who investigated the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, argued that SMEs are intentionally targeted to boost tourism activity within the host city, thereby enhancing a country's image as a tourist destination.

(II) **Transportation:** Qatar upgraded its transportation system to facilitate the movement of sports attendees during the World Cup.

“I think they've set the bar very high. What they've demonstrated is that no matter how small the country you are, if you plan it well and you execute it and follow through, people can have an exciting time in that one-month period that they are going to spend in your country. I think they did well with their transport system. It was very, very efficient.” (SQ1).

“The transportation system is very effective, the train system there is very effective. I feel like people don't tell a lot of these stories enough. The advancement of Qatar, I feel like people don't project it enough. But for me, I had an absolute blast and I absolutely love that place” (SQ2).

“They had developed a metro or something. Within two hours maximum, you could shuttle between two match venues, free of charge. They made work easier for

journalists. And of course, it cut down a lot. They did the same for fans. It made commuting from venues seamless and relatively easy” (SQ3).

“They literally built a new country because of the World Cup. I remember when I got to Doha for the first game, the hotel, I went into ... it was freshly made that week...What this meant was that everything was incredibly new...The roads had been upgraded. They have three major train lines, the green, yellow, and red lines” (SQ4).

“...Transport was better because it was a smaller, you know, place. Yeah. That was another one, the difference in the coverage for me as a journalist” (SQ6).

Evident in the participants' responses, Qatar delivered on its strategy when it stated prior to the World Cup that the stadiums would be “connected to public transport – either through a nearby Doha Metro station or via shuttle buses – so that the majority of fans and stadium staff could arrive at the venues using public transport” (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainable Stadiums, n.d.; p. 39). This left an impression on the participants. Qatar's attention to transport infrastructure bears some similarities to Grix and Houlihan's (2013) observations in which they noted that Germany, an advanced and wealthy capitalist state hosting the 2006 FIFA World Cup, had an efficient transport infrastructure. They further emphasized that states with an infrastructure already under strain prior to the SME would struggle to cater to millions of extra passengers during the World Cup (Grix & Houlihan, 2013). Qatar successfully prioritized measures to accommodate the World Cup, as evident in the following select textual data:

“One of those national partners is Ashghal, Qatar’s public works and infrastructure agency, which was responsible for delivering modern transportation design and construction. Ashghal used the latest technology and coordination – along with compliance to globally - recognized sustainability measures – to provide solutions for the 22nd host nation of the World Cup” (V3: Green transportation solutions...,2021).

“FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ organizers have released key transport information for residents and visitors ahead of this year’s tournament, which will be held from 20 November to 18 December. The information was announced during a press conference in Doha attended by representatives from the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Transport, Qatar Rail, Mowasalat, and the Public Works Authority (Ashghal).

Below are details of the key announcements: ...” (Q108: Key transport information..., 2022).

(III) **Convenience:** The convenience of the 2022 FIFA World Cup hosted in Qatar emerged as a theme. This was apparent in the smooth visa processing and the ease with which participants could obtain access to everything they desired.

“They did well with even the visa - the granting of visas. We had this something we call the Hayya card. They call it the Hayya card. So once you get that, then you are good to go. You don't have to go through the embassy to get a visa. It was just an app. You enter your details. If you have a match ticket, you enter the match ticket code. If you are a journalist and you have your accreditation, you just enter your accreditation. You have free access to buses. You have free access to the trains. And for me, that is not something that we're used to. We're going to go to America next year also. A lot of people will be turned down because there's not everybody who would pass the rigorous test to get an American visa or a Canadian visa or a Mexican visa” (SQ1).

“The fan ID, they call it the Hayya card, which they issued to every visitor of Qatar during the World Cup, it was supposed to be valid for three months, they extended its validity to the rest of this year, 2023. Anyone that went to the World Cup and has a Hayya card, you can return to Qatar without having to go and look for a VISA. Basically, it has become very accessible to everyone as far as that competition is concerned and visiting that place is concerned. So ultimately, all of these things in my opinion have really opened this country up and it has become very accessible” (SQ2).

“Our Hayya card expired at the end of January 2023. The supporters and others had a shorter expiry date. But after the expiration of the Hayya card, all of us had a message that it's been extended for another one year. We have another one-year visa to Qatar. You need to ensure that you've booked your accommodation” (SQ3).

The convenience of easy access to participate in the World Cup, along with access to essential human needs, has contributed to the participants' favorable disposition towards Qatar. As revealed by Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2014), “Sport, above all football, has been a key sector in which the Qatari government believes in order to promote the image of its country worldwide” (p. 225).

(IV) **Exhibition of Culture:** Contrary to the initial perception that Qatar's restrictions would hinder the exhibition of diverse cultures, the study found that the World Cup provided a platform

for people and nations to showcase their cultural heritage. As commonly understood, the World Cup offers an opportunity for individuals to exhibit their culture, and there were concerns that Qatar's restrictions might impede this. However, participants' feedback revealed that these concerns were unfounded.

“Yes, they may be a small country, had their own values and systems and all of that. But because they want to invite visitors, there are certain things that you need to relax on and be more accommodating of other people and their cultures. Obviously, it doesn't mean you throw your culture away entirely because, yeah, visitors are coming. But I think they eased up a bit, became more friendly” (SQ1).

“We have all these people come to Qatar and spend a full one month there, they would have experienced a lot of all these different cultures, all these different people and it will stay with their society forever. And I think the World Cup has definitely come to make Qatar a bit more open and a bit more liberal and a bit more accepting of different cultures for sure. Because they were a very closed society. But I think after the World Cup, it won't automatically just open them up widely, but it will certainly open them up to a certain extent, for sure” (SQ2).

“And a deliberate effort to showcase Middle Eastern culture. It was very heavy. Though they brought in every culture, they were deliberate in showcasing their culture” (SQ3).

“I also think that what they tried to do was also to exhibit their culture and to prove that the Arab law or the Islamic is not as bad or behind as most of them think. Leading up to the competition, there were a lot of issues with, and if you live in England or mainland Europe, you know that the culture is kind of different from that of the Arabs. For example, they drink, they see drinking as part of their culture, whereas the Arabs see drinking as haram. Another example is the way they dress. The Arabs cover themselves; the women cover themselves. Whereas in Europe, it's kind of easily accessible now in summer. I mean, it'd be interesting to see how people dress in summer because they want to show that they're enjoying it. And sometimes their enjoyment is through their way of dressing. So, the World Cup served as an opportunity for cultures to merge. It's a bridge between modernity, culture, and that was exhibited. Qatar, in its own way, also decided to relax some of the rules” (SQ4).

“There was a conscious, deliberate, invested effort to balance culture. There was the West. There was the color. There was even the physical and there was religious. From the onset, they started sending a message that they are here to welcome the nation. And so be you physically challenged, you are welcome. You are a part of it; You're a black? You're a part of it. A Westerner? You're a part of this. And from the very onset to the very closing day, there was that message of, “You are all welcome here. We are all involved” (SQ5).

“The tagline for Germany 2006 was a time to make friends, believe it or not...If Germany could do this only years ago, it stands to reason why Qatar would also be keen on tapping into that same cultural momentum, you see, to open their citizens to the fact that you know what, we may have a lot of money and we are okay, but there's a whole big world out there, and we want people to come and visit us and see what we have. So, within the one month that we are hosting the World Cup, we better be on our best behavior. And so that's one of the things they accomplished as well.” (SQ6).

The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy (2020) highlights the objective of promoting cultural exchange among the various stakeholders involved in the event, with a focus on enhancing understanding of Qatar's culture as well. Murray (2012 in Søyland & Moriconi, 2022) expresses the viewpoint that sports can serve as a means to forge connections among diverse ethnic and cultural groups, facilitating a mutual understanding and respect by means of shared values. Furthermore, in a study conducted prior to the SME, Al-Emadi et al. (2022) discovered that both Qatari nationals and expatriates generally held positive views regarding the potential social and cultural impacts of Qatar hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

In relation to the theory of soft power, Nye (2008 in Collins & DeWitt, 2023) argued that the foundation of a state's soft power “rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others); its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad); and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (p.534). The study, therefore, notes that Qatar's approach to other cultures contributes to what Nye (2008, as cited in Hahm et al., 2023) has described as the attractive power of soft power, where Qatar portrays an identity of embracing diverse cultures.

(V) **Flexibility on their Rules:** Qatar, often recognized for its numerous rules and restrictions, demonstrated a notable willingness to be flexible and make compromises during the 2022 FIFA World Cup. They made a concerted effort to accommodate individuals from diverse backgrounds. In an increasingly globalized world, Qatar recognized that in line with its Vision 2030, central to its achievement of “dealing effectively and flexibly with the requirements of the age they live in”

was a commitment to “promote tolerance, benevolence, constructive dialogue and openness toward other cultures in the context of its Arab and Islamic identity” (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy, 2020; p. 44). This aspect of flexibility in their rules was mentioned by three participants in this study, highlighting it as a prominent theme. As argued by Lenskyj (2020 in Søyland & Moriconi, 2022) the objective was to rebrand or transform their image as “modern, liberal, and western-friendly” (p. 355), seeking to gain attention through their affiliation with global sports.

“Qatar proved that during that period, you could relax some of your rules in terms of people entering your country and having fun. So I think they really set a benchmark” (SQ1).

“So, I mean, I believe that, apart from people who probably had their prejudices, things were taken care of. Yes, you won't drink alcohol within the stadium, but they made provision for people who want to drink because you also need to respect or be sensitive to the sensibilities of other people. I remember telling some of my colleagues who were pushing those LGBTQ plus agenda, my colleagues from the West, that, look, you need to know that some of your values are not universal. So, you need to respect all those things. But by and large, for a country that had not hosted a competition of that magnitude, I think they did a fairly good thing” (SQ3).

“Qatar, in its own way, also decided to relax some of the rules. So, they relaxed rules on dressing, especially for foreigners. They relaxed even rules on drinking. I mean, don't get me wrong, they still couldn't drink at the stadium, but they put up places where you can go and get your Budweiser, and get your free drinks after if you want to celebrate. So again, a compromise was done” (SQ4).

(VI) **Technology:** At the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar embraced technology in a remarkable way. The extensive utilization of technology throughout the tournament left a lasting impression on the participants. Their positive remarks regarding the integration of technology were particularly noticeable.

“So, you don't have to go through the embassy to get a visa. It was just an app. You enter your details. If you have a match ticket, you enter the match ticket code” (SQ1).

“In terms of infrastructure and legacy, I think they also hosted the greenest World Cup in the history of the competition. I think three or so of their stadiums will be dismantled and shipped abroad to other places. One of their stadiums was built

with 974 shipping containers. That's very sustainable. The air conditions that they fixed in the stadiums were all hydro and solar powered. So, in terms of impact on the environment, fan experience and even financial sustainability, or even legacy wise, Qatar definitely delivered a ten out of ten" (SQ2).

"I look at Germany, it was good, South Africa had a lot of African flavor, It was good for our perspective, Brazil was also great. You see, now it's become a competition to outdo each other. But Russia wasn't bad either. But I think I saw a few new things. A lot more use of technology went into it" (SQ3).

"I think that was brilliant. I think there were technologies that were used that were first time in itself" (SQ4).

"And you see the whole system, for the first time was automated. You have to have a card and it wasn't a human being's position to say you can't come in. You just have to use this card to know if you are in the system" (SQ5).

"...the idea is that Qatar is a deeply traditional nation that is not afraid to embrace the future, to embrace technology, to embrace modernity. In both the opening and the closing ceremony, they juxtapose traditional Qatari element with very high-tech things to paint a picture because they wanted the whole Qatar 2022 experience to tell the world that we [they] are ready for the world..." (SQ6).

A critical assessment of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy document justifies Qatar's utilization of technology, with a prominent focus on its commitment to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through a document analysis, initiatives like the Al Thumama showcase stadium served as a pilot-scale platform for demonstrating sustainable technologies and solutions, there were efforts to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy document, 2020). Also, in its Nation Vision 2030 document, Qatar emphasizes its stance on technology use, stating that "wherever there is an environmental cost to be paid for economic progress, it must be compensated with investments in technologies that help improve the environment" (p. 8).

4.5.0. RQ5. What perception do Ghanaian Sports Journalists (who covered the SME from Qatar) hold of Qatar after the World Cup?

Perception of Qatar after the World Cup: The study sought to understand the perception of the participants after the World Cup. A corroboration of the findings indicates that the participants had a positive impression of Qatar after the event. This confirms Smith's assertion of SMEs being "windows of opportunity" (p. 15) giving host countries the opportunity to rebrand as well as build or promote an image (Anholt, 2007; Florek & Insch, 2011 in Knott & Jones, 2016). This perception is reflected in the statements:

"And I am of the strong conviction that it is because of what Qatar did that Saudi Arabia if you're a football fan, you see what Saudi Arabia is doing now. Buying players, getting Ronaldo, getting Kante, getting Benzema. Because I believe strongly that they saw what the World Cup brand and the hosting of the World Cup did for Qatar's image. I think right now, if you did a negative story about Qatar, people would look at you weirdly. Because if they've gone to that country, they would have a different perception of the country. I mean, how clean it was, how neat it was. And so, I think Qatar has really branded itself. ...But for the World Cup, they probably will still be looking at Qatar in the scope of how the Western media report on them and all the poor reportage on human rights abuses and all of that" (SQ1).

"I think that if anything at all this World Cup would have really changed a lot of people's perceptions about this country. I had an absolutely great time. The things that stood out for me were the proximity of the stadiums, the atmosphere that it created, the togetherness of the people that came there and the overall image of Qatar because now I feel like Qatar is a place where I would be able to go and visit on like a regular tourist visit just like many people go to Dubai. I feel like I can make such a trip to Doha. It's a really beautiful city, very well planned, very small and they're very liberal now. Like there are a lot of things you can do in Qatar that people always thought or believed that you couldn't do. Like drinking alcohol. You can drink alcohol in a lot of closed places in Qatar. You cannot just be walking around and drinking it, obviously. But where else do they do that? Even if you do that in Ghana, people will think that you're being irresponsible." (SQ2).

"For me, listening to, talking to ordinary fans, monitoring what happened, and then the feedback from ordinary fans who travel, it was something they enjoyed. Working as a journalist, actually, they made life easy for us" (SQ3).

"There were a lot of social and cultural impacts. Like I said to you, there are people now that I know in England who are thinking of relocating to Qatar. That said, the World Cup was held around December. It was the first time we had a World Cup

at that time. And we had different cultures in there. I remember in the night, there was a place called Souq Waqif. It's a market. So Souq in Arabic means market. So maybe market of Waqif. And in the night, there were dancing competitions and you'd see a lot of English people and Germans and U.S. who would go there just to see how the Arabs spend their evenings. That's cultural. In England, most evenings are spent in the pub drinking with friends. But basically, you see them clustered around the table eating together or enjoying the music together. And you'd be rest assured that people who saw that would take that kind of culture back to their countries. And you'd be rest assured that people who saw that and were really interested in that would want to go back there with their friends” (SQ4).

“I found it beautiful that Qatar sat down and saw that it's the fastest way to get them onto the world map - to get people. I heard of Qatar in 2008, when I was then working with the Angolan governments on the 2010 AFCON. That was how far back Qatar started its campaign so the people really knew what they were about...They used a very...accepted medium - football...And there are people beyond Accra, there are people who will forever tell stories because their fathers went into Qatar and made so much money and brought it back. These are things we don't know. We are looking at the big picture...There are people I met from Tekyiman, from Wenchi - Ghanaian drivers in Qatar. They were employed to come and drive from very indigenous towns...So, Qatar...in some...20 years to come, this Qatar event has changed the lives of people in our villages...But you see, this is the beautiful untold story of our game. And this is how powerful football is. And I think it's beautiful that Qatar really saw it and chanced on it” (SQ5).

“Of course, nobody takes the world cup to not brand itself. The number one reason why every country these days hosts a global championship is to change the perception of the world about them in a specific way. I told you about Germany wanting to make friends. Qatar also wanted to announce itself as an open country and ready for business. Russia the same; Russia basically wanted to tell the world that's not whom we have been told we are. In doing that rightly or wrongly, Russia and Qatar have been accused wrongly for using the world cup for sports-washing - using an event to burnish a certain image of yourself that is not accurate. They used it greatly to enhance their image” (SQ6).

The 2022 FIFA World Cup left a positive impression on Qatar, despite the controversies that surrounded the nation, prior to the tournament. Notwithstanding being smaller geographically, relative to its neighboring states; Saudi Arabia and Iran, Qatar is known for being one of the oil-rich countries and has aggressively worked to raise its worldwide prominence in order to safeguard its own future (Al Thani, 2021). As Søyland and Moriconi (2022) articulated, Qatar has successfully utilized sports as a catalyst for development and soft power, adeptly navigating criticism, and leveraging the legitimacy conferred by sport's governing bodies and international

political organizations to solidify its action plan. This observation aligns with the findings of Dembek and Wtoch (2014), who, in their analysis of Poland's hosting of the UEFA Euro 2012, argued that firsthand experiences of journalists have the potential to reshape a country's established image.

4.6.0. Participants: Sports Journalists who reported from Ghana

Table 6.0 Demography of Participants (Sports Journalists who reported from Ghana)

NAME/INITIAL	SPORTS JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE	MEDIA ORGANIZATION
SG1	Has been practicing sports journalism for the past 10 years. An executive member of the Sports Writers Association of Ghana (SWAG).	Global Media Alliance, Happy FM and ETV Ghana
SG2	A freelancer who has been into sports journalism since 2017.	Freelancer
SG3	Has been practicing sports journalism for the past 10 years and has worked with Daily Guide before transitioning to new location.	Ghanareport.com
SG4	Has been a sports broadcast journalist since 2015.	Class FM, Class Media Group
SG5	Has been a sports journalist since 2015.	News Africa Guide
SG6	Has been practicing sports journalism for the past four years.	Multimedia Group

Source: Researcher's Field Data (Kumi, 2023)

The study as mentioned, also employed the use of semi-structured interviews to gather information from Ghanaian sports journalists who observed the event from Ghana. Using the snowball sampling technique, the study selected six (6) sports journalists based on the recommendations of the six (6) out of the twelve (12) sports journalists who were in Qatar on the ticket of the GFA as right holders. **Table 6.0** above represents the demography of sports journalists who followed the World Cup proceedings from Ghana. All participants hinted that they have had

some level of experience covering international sports events – which included the FIFA World Cup and the African Cup of Nations (AFCON). They included two females and four males.

4.6.1. Ghanaian Sports Journalists' (who covered the SME from Ghana) Perception of Qatar

Prior to the World Cup: The study observed that similar to the sports journalists who covered the event from Qatar, the participants did not have much knowledge of Qatar prior to the country winning the bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup but for one of them who due to a relative staying in Qatar knew about the Middle-Eastern country. The response of this participant is reflected in the statement below:

“Well, so I was a bit fortunate because my senior brother lives and works in Qatar. So, I had known about them in regards to a family member living there. But besides that, I didn't know a lot about Qatar in terms of their capacity, even with the World Cup, for me, I didn't even think it was possible in the first place” (SG1).

However, generally, all the participants were very much aware of some of the controversies (such as human rights, alcohol intake, bribery allegations, and rights of women) surrounding Qatar's hosting of the World Cup evident in the extracts below:

“So, I had known about them in regards to a family member living there. But besides that, I didn't know a lot about Qatar in terms of their capacity, even with the World Cup, for me, I didn't even think it was possible in the first place. And matters were even made worse when the Western media started their campaign about human rights issues, sports washing and all that. Then I became more curious in learning about them and their capacity to host the World Cup and their plans; I got to know about their plans in using sports to lift the image of their country” (SG1).

“Okay prior to the World Cup, I didn't know much about Qatar. I won't lie and I just know they said it's a nice country. They said, and I have never been there, they have money and all that...Not allowing your girlfriend. I think that is what I heard. Yes, I heard that one. We all know how Arabs are. I won't say there is no one who is a purist but, in a way, you see them in a particular way. We know that if there is something to be allowed in Ghana maybe Qatar won't allow it because it is Qatar” (SG2).

“I heard of the country and all that but not much...I think prior to the World Cup, the one that was all over I think it was a mere speculation. Around saying that you

need to only come there with your wife. I think I remember one time I was asking my friend that, look so when you're going to Qatar, do you need a certificate to prove that whoever you are going with is legally married to the person because they frown on fornication and adultery and all those stuffs. So, I think that was what was all over and also with alcohol intake. Yes, because they are strict with their rules” (SG3).

“So, I knew Qatar was predominantly Muslim Country, I knew Qatar was a highly advanced country. I knew Qatar not to be a sports nation; I knew Qatar not to be specifically a football nation. I knew Qatar to have issues with human rights and women's rights” (SG4).

“Before the World Cup bidding, I knew not much about them. Right after they won the bid, there came a lot of controversies. There were allegations that they bought the World Cup. The United States [of America] had to investigate why they couldn't win the World Cup [bid] but Qatar won. This point is where an expose' came out that there were a lot of bribery allegations involving the Heads of the governing body which is FIFA” (SG5).

“Prior to the World Cup, in the football circles, if you are talking about countries pertaining to football, Qatar is not one of them. There isn't even one in Asia, not to talk of the Arabian countries. So, my idea about Qatar is just an Islamic country that is wealthy; and they are quite strict and have draconian laws with regards to the way they treat citizens” (SG6).

4.6.2. RQ4. What themes emerge from the experience of sports journalists (who covered the SME from Ghana) from their exposure to Qatar through the FIFA World Cup?

The study identified two major themes from the participants' experience observing the SME from Ghana. These two (2) inductively constructed themes are: Exhibition of Culture, and Stadia. A Shift in the World Cup Schedule also emerged as a point by some participants. These are detailed below:

(I) Exhibition of Culture: Through Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, participants recognized that it created the avenue to explore the culture of the country as well as how Qatar was open to other cultures. This is evident in the statements below:

“We got to know them as a people. We got to learn about their tradition and culture. For instance, right before the World Cup, we had a program called 30 Minutes Magazine Show for the World Cup where we previewed all games, cities, venues, and what influenced the architecture of Stadia and all that. We got to know the cities better; we got to know the culture of the people better. So, for a lot of people who had never heard of Qatar before, through this World Cup, got to know about

Qatar; to know about their religion, their food, the history of the country, and that's what football and sport gives you. So, we got to know a lot more of Qatar and its people than ordinarily we would know” (SG1).

“I think that the opening ceremony, it was strong message they sent to the world because it talks about togetherness like nobody - it doesn't matter color, whether you are disabled or whatever, like we are all one people. It spoke about unity, it emphasized unity and also looking at the artist they brought in to perform in the opening ceremony and all that. It was great. I think it was really nice. We weren't expecting that Qatar will feature Davido to perform, the celebrities that came to sing and all that. So, they really put in a whole lot and I think the opening and then the final ceremony, it became the talk of social media for days even after the whole world cup ended” (SG2).

“The display of their culture was key. The opening ceremony did just that and got people excited...You are selling your country to the world when you host such tournaments” (SG3).

“It [the opening and closing ceremony] was huge and they brought some of the world's best musicians in the form of Africans, BTS, and some top musicians from Europe to tell the rest of the world that, hey we are not too rigid, not socially or culturally constipated. We are actually ready to accommodate and assimilate and change to suit the rest of the world” (SG4).

“I see it [the opening and closing ceremony] as something that should push your country up there; to show the culture of your country. Now when we came to Qatar, I was so much impressed with how they could come up with this. They were flexing their muscles in terms of innovation, culture, and technology and finances in the opening and closing ceremony” (SG5).

“Qatar is predominantly a Muslim country so their constitution more than half of it is about Islamic principles. And Islam is something that is seen by the world as more or less like a barbaric religion. You can talk about Boko Haram and what have you. And Islam is a religion that has been viewed as having strict laws because there are constant talks about if you are caught for any case you are going to be lashed 100; you don't drink alcohol, and you don't go partying. All these laws are being seen by the world as strict and Islam is seen as a religion limiting entertainment...When you watch the opening ceremony of the World Cup there was this art, I can't recall his name [referencing Morgan Freeman with a crippled person. The demonstration was very easy to understand that human beings will be accommodated everywhere, irrespective of your race, irrespective of the country you come from. Let me say their culture is not against anybody who has a different belief okay. So, I think it has really influenced people from there - people begin to understand that the Qatari culture, stemming from an Islam viewpoint, is not hostile after all” (SG6).

According to Qatar's local organizing committee, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the FIFA World Cup is to build bridges between cultures and people as well as, inspire innovation while accelerating positive social transformation (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022

Sustainability Strategy, 2020). As noted by the Chairman of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 LLC and Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, Hassan Al Thawadi, “For Qatar and the Middle East, the region’s first FIFA World Cup is a vital platform for exchange between locals and people from all over the world, for enhancing understanding of the culture of Qatar and the region and for showcasing what our part of the world has to offer.” (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy, 2020, p.6).

(II) **Stadia:** Qatar’s infrastructure – by way of its stadia construction made an impression on the Ghanaian sports journalists who covered the event from Ghana. The participants had fond memories of Qatar’s Stadium 974 which was built from recycled shipping containers. Participants experience of Qatar’s stadia from covering the World Cup from Ghana can be noted below:

“Following the world cup from here and covering from here, for me, it was much more fun. It was much more interesting, the football was great, but the atmosphere they created in the various stadia, the architecture they used, the designs, the plan and the whole stadium they built was also added to that fun experience. And even for us watching at home, we enjoyed the World Cup better” (SG1).

“I realized after covering the game that, most people who went to Qatar did not come back right after. They stayed for a while. Some were now touring the country to make us know what Qatar had. It included how a stadium was created with containers and later dismantled everything and said they were going to ship it to countries - which was an interesting thing to do” (SG2).

“Actually, it was well planned; the planning was done very well. to talk of even the temporary stadiums that were put up, the guys really did well” (SG3).

“And I just remember something about their infrastructure; I do not know if it was a rumour, but that some of the stadiums were put up using containers that are dismantled. I heard that some countries have bid for it and were also to assemble it and use it as their own. So, you see the smart thing they did? They are really smart” (SG4).

“They just beat almost everybody’s imaginations with their stadia, air-conditions, organization - the proper organization of the tournament - it beat the imagination of everyone and that is by far I have seen from 2006 to 2022 and that is the best world cup” (SG5).

However, another theme that emerged was a shift in the World Cup schedule due to the weather condition in Qatar. Two of the participants noted:

“This World Cup was different because this is the first time, we were playing a World Cup in November-December so it was different” (SG1).

“...so prior to the World Cup, there were issues of human rights abuse, rumors of migrants being used as cheap labour and all of that, there were issues of the fact that they even had to change the date move it from summer to November-December, because of the weather conditions in Qatar” (SG4).

4.6.3. RQ5. What perception do Ghanaian Sports Journalists (who covered the SME from Ghana) hold of Qatar after the World Cup?

Perception of Qatar after the World Cup: Similar to the Ghanaian sports journalists who covered the event from Qatar, the study sought to also understand the perception of the participants who covered the event from Ghana after the World Cup. A corroboration of the findings indicates that, just like those who had direct contact with Qatar, the participants who did not have a direct contact with Qatar also had a positive impression of the Middle Eastern country after the event.

This is highlighted in the statements below:

“I think that this is a very interesting question because before the World Cup, the narrative was more of the negatives - whether they indeed will be able to pull it off. Gay right issues and human rights issues became the centre of the conversation. What people did not focus on is the Qataris and their ability to pull it off. And because of how well planned the event was, they blew me away. If you ask whether it met my expectations, it exceeded expectations. I think that for me, it's now the standard of World Cup and for many good reasons, because Qatar is a very small country, you can actually watch much more games than the usual World Cup. The infrastructure was properly built, modern, the fun engagement and fun experience was better. Everything about the World Cup; the organisation of it, the Metro Transport Services was better, how they treated journalists with and without accreditation was better. So overall, if you asked me in terms of expectations, they far out exceeded expectations. They far outdid themselves. And for me, they're now the standard of any major world sports event. Qatar, for me, is the standard” (SG1).

“I think they are nothing of what we thought of and now it makes me feel that Qatar is a place that I could even go there to seek opportunities in my career or something else - seek a job that does not have to deal with my footballing career or something. Now, my perception about Qatar has changed because initially I thought it was a no-nonsense country and you cannot go there. But they made us feel that when you come to Qatar you can feel at home just like you own country and then whatever people are saying is not true. Just come and have a feel of the country, come and experience it yourself. So now I see Qatar to be like a good country, an interesting one” (SG2).

“Trust me, it has. Back then if someone has recommended that I go to Qatar for a vacation or something I wouldn't. I think I would have tried elsewhere. We want to chill, and if you're going to a state that is so strict with regard to rules and all that - the perception that you have about them - you wouldn't want to go but to me after the World Cup and what I saw with their fans and they were happy, it has really done good. It has changed my perception, trust me” (SG3).

“Yes, but not entirely. It has especially when it comes to hospitality and funny enough when it comes to architecture, and infrastructure. I knew Qatar was up there. I'm talking about their hotels, and other buildings. In my mind, I thought that because they were in that Gulf region and they being Muslim dominated their architectural design might be very traditional but no, they were actually highly advanced and quite creative with it. So, I think when it comes to architecture, when it comes to infrastructure, when it comes to hospitality, when it comes to security, when it comes to friendliness and whether or not they have fun, I think they did. Because I remember - I keep missing whether it was opening or the closing ceremony - when they brought up musicians from their own country, female musicians who actually had fun on stage, I realized that they equally have a very thriving and vibrant entertainment industry. So, all in all, I think it comes back to them raising their social game. It has but the only thing that has not really changed, because I am yet to really experience [I plan on travelling there very soon] is the issue of human rights because I'm big on women's rights okay, and education and all that. So, I want to see for myself whether indeed there are still no issues of human rights abuse and migrant workers still being used as cheap labour” (SG4).

“I think the World Cup has changed almost everything about Qatar. People see Qatar differently and have different ideas about them now. And as a matter of fact, people are okay with Qatar not being friendly to LGBT. Everybody is ok with whatever they do because of the World Cup. It has changed everything; it has negated every bad perception everybody had in their head. The western media, what they were looking for they never had it” (SG5).

“If I'm to form an opinion about Qatar now after the World Cup, previously, the thought was that Qatar is an Arabian country, wealthy, they have strict rules. How about now? I will not say they are a football nation because for you to become a football nation you have to be consistent and prove beyond reasonable doubt that you are so Qatar is not a football nation. But Qatar is a country that has the prospect of becoming a football nation. They are a country that in a few years time, they will become a force to be reckoned with, in Asia, and of course in the world at large” (SG6).

Similar to Grix & Houlihan (2013) who mobilized Nye's concept of 'soft power' in the case of investigating Germany's hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, it can be argued that Qatar has successfully altered its image among foreign publics – in this case Ghanaian sports journalists. Schallhorn (2019) notes that where audience have no direct experience and little knowledge of the host nation, the media's influence on the perception of people is expected to be particularly high.

Sports journalists who relied on media reports for the 2022 FIFA World Cup developed a changed perception of Qatar. In the case of Qatar, both Ghanaian sports journalists who reported from Qatar and those in Ghana had a positively altered perception of the country. As the first-ever FIFA World Cup hosted in the Middle East, the 2022 event provided an opportune moment to dispel negative stereotypes associated with Qatar.

4.7. Summary

Supported by relevant literature, this chapter presents the findings and discussions related to the research questions of the study. The case study aimed to examine Qatar's nation branding approach through its hosting of the 2022 World Cup as a means of transforming its reputation. The examination of Qatar's communicative materials revealed a deliberate effort to enhance its image through the hosting of its largest SME – namely, the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Furthermore, a perception analysis confirms that Qatar used the SME as a tool to transform the public's perception (in this case, Ghanaian sports journalists' perception) of itself. The findings align with the theory of soft power, indicating that Qatar in the 2022 FIFA World Cup has effectively harnessed “the attractive power” (Nye, 2008: 95, in Hahm et al. 2023) of the concept of soft power through its culture, political values, and foreign policies. Additionally, with respect to the image repair theory, Qatar harnessed the FIFA World Cup to address the controversies that turned to marred its reputation prior to hosting the event.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter concentrated on analyzing and interpreting the research results. This chapter, on the other hand, offers a summary of the study and the conclusions drawn from these findings. The study has yielded various findings and analyses concerning Qatar's utilization of the 2022 FIFA World Cup as a nation branding tool. Within this chapter, the study summarizes the key issues arising from the research, draws appropriate conclusions, and provides recommendations for utilizing SMEs in nation branding. Additionally, it highlights the study's limitations and suggests potential areas for further research.

5.1 Summary

The study sought to explore the communication strategies Qatar used to brand itself by analyzing the news content of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy's (SC) official website used for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Additionally, the study sought to explore the perception of Ghanaian sports journalists on the host country's reputation through hosting its biggest SME.

Data was drawn from multiple sources, specifically through the use of textual analysis, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The Image Repair theory and the Soft Power theory

formed the theoretical foundation of the research and helped to properly contextualize the study. The study's findings are summarized below.

5.2 Main Findings

To begin with, the unit of analysis for the textual data included both text and images. In the context of Qatar's use of images to complement their news stories, the study found that none of these images were accompanied by captions. The study observed that captions could have reinforced the stories as well as, provided context for the images used. Readers were often left to interpret the images attached to news stories on their own. In the case of Qatar's news stories, captions could have been used to emphasize key aspects of the stories or to educate readers about the individuals featured in the images.

Moving on to the research objectives, the first objective of the study sought to explore how Qatar constructed its identity through the 2022 FIFA World Cup amidst the controversies of corruption allegations, its treatment of migrant workers, the sale of alcohol, and its stance towards the LGBTQ+ community. Using textual analysis for data collection and thematic analysis for data analysis, the study identified five themes related to Qatar's identity construction through the 2022 FIFA World Cup. These themes were (1) The brand message, (2) Qatar's response to the controversy, (3) The use of entertainment, (4) Technology, and (5) Response to Covid-19.

Qatar made a deliberate effort to clarify its stance on labor-related matters, aiming to underscore its position in response to concerns about the treatment of workers' rights and well-being. Qatar held its stance, as well as FIFA's, on labor issues in high regard, arguing that health and safety, along with fair wages for workers, were top priorities in hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Within the context of image repair theory, this approach can be viewed as a form of denial, where Qatar disputes the existence of a crisis related to labor issues. Qatar neither recognizes the challenges with labor issues nor admits wrongdoing.

Qatar indirectly, without explicitly stating it, disputed the existence of the crisis but rather announced steps addressing the controversies surrounding its treatment of workers through initiatives such as workers' welfare reform and also appreciating the dedication of all workers involved in the 2022 FIFA World Cup projects. For instance, Hassan Al Thawadi, the Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), was cited in the textual data regarding the treatment of workers as saying, "...[we]... are setting new benchmarks across the region and around the world and have been widely praised by even our fiercest critics."

Additionally, Qatar constructed an identity that portrayed women as active agents in hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup, rather than relegating them to the alleged passive roles they had played in the country's transformation. Women were seen as being at the forefront of Qatar's hosting of the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East thereby correcting public perception of how women are treated in the Middle East. These women either held positions in the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) or worked in other sectors of the Qatari society. This addressed controversies surrounding the treatment of workers and employed a strategy of denial within the context of image repair theory. Qatar is seen disputing the existence of a crisis related to how women are treated in Qatari society.

Moreover, in Qatar, where same-sex relationships and the advocacy for such relationships were prohibited, with penalties including fines and even the death penalty, the country crafted an identity that projected an image of embracing diversity to cultivate a positive reputation during the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The Qatari government promoted an inclusive event, leveraging the World Cup to rebrand itself and establish a positive association by recognizing and celebrating "people of different races, nationalities, faiths, and orientations." Now that the SME has ended, it is unclear what Qatar's position is regarding the LGBTQ+ community after the event.

Furthermore, Qatar constructed a distinctive identity through its brand message. Upon winning the bid, Qatar became the second Asian country to host the FIFA World Cup, following the joint hosting by South Korea and Japan in 2002. Qatar crafted an identity that accentuated the significance of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the Middle East for the first time. While acknowledging its status as the second Asian host, Qatar's primary brand message revolved around the historic milestone of hosting the tournament in the Middle East for the first time.

In alignment with its brand message, the compact format of the tournament, along with Qatar's sustainable projects, played a prominent role in the identity that Qatar established for itself. Notably, Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup has been the most compact since the inaugural tournament in 1930. This aspect stood out as a key highlight in both the textual and perception analyses of Qatar's identity. Qatar also crafted an identity that leveraged entertainment to establish itself as an appealing and enjoyable destination for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

To add-on, Qatar crafted an identity that showcased the nation's adept use of technology, especially in its stadium construction and cooling systems. The FIFA World Cup is typically held in June and July every four years. However, due to the hot weather conditions in Qatar, the tournament was rescheduled to November. Even with the rescheduling, the heat remained a concern, leading Qatar to announce for the first time in World Cup history the installation of air conditioning in all stadiums, training facilities, and outdoor fan zones to mitigate the heat. This aspect was a standout feature in both textual and perception analyses of the identity Qatar developed.

Qatar also addressed the global COVID-19 pandemic, which had led to the postponement of SMEs like the Olympic Games in Japan. Qatar demonstrated sensitivity to the pandemic by focusing on it at a time when worldwide cases were declining. As the number of COVID-19 cases decreased both globally and in Qatar, the World Cup host removed the requirement for visitors to

provide a negative COVID-19 test before traveling to the Gulf Arab state. This decision reversed its earlier mandate for all World Cup attendees to present proof of a negative COVID-19 test, regardless of their vaccination status, when departing by air or at the border crossing. This established Qatar as a country that actively monitored global concerns related to the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrating its commitment to the health and well-being of both its citizens and the global community.

With respect to the second objective, the study sought to investigate how Qatar employed nation branding activities/tools in the World Cup. By examining Qatar's communication material, the study identified five (5) themes related to nation branding activities used by Qatar: (1) The Use of Public Relations-related activities: Media Relations, Employee Relations, Stakeholder Relations (including Coordination with Local People), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Campaign; (2) Elements of Dinnie's (2008) Communicators of nation brand identity: Use of prominent personality, Government Foreign Policy; (3) Rights of People with Disability; (4) Partnership; and (5) Use of Testimonials. These activities positioned Qatar in the limelight as a country that uses sports to create a positive identity for the unique SME hosted in the Middle East for the first time.

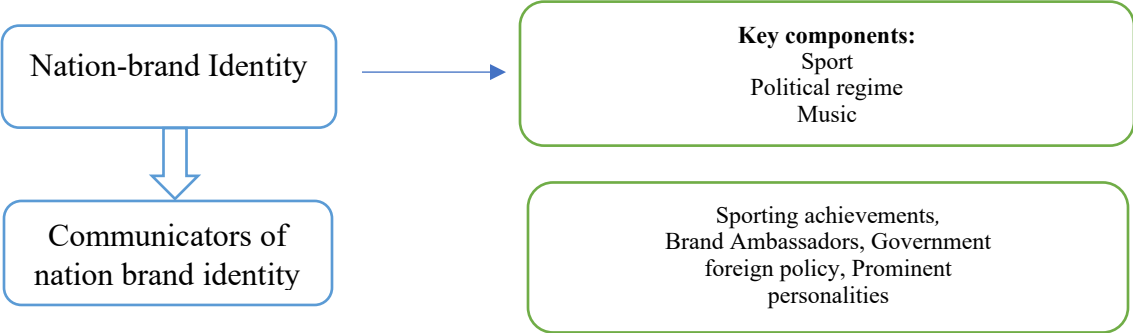
The study also examined the perception of Qatar among key stakeholders in SMEs, specifically sports journalists. Through in-depth interviews, data was collected from sports journalists who covered the World Cup in both Qatar and Ghana. This aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Qatar's nation branding from the perspective of those who had direct contact with the host country, as well as those who relied on media communication to form impressions about the SME. During interviews with Ghanaian journalists, the study found that, prior to the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Ghanaian sports journalists were not aware of Qatar as a sport nation, even though it had hosted several international events, such as the 2019 ANOC World

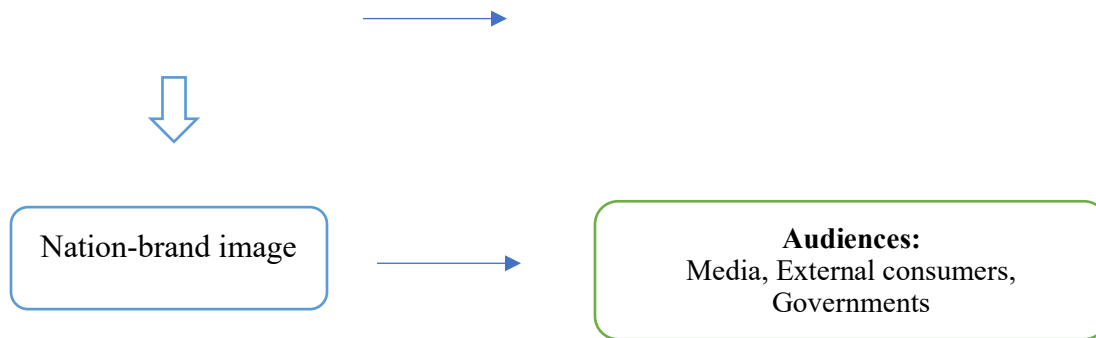
Beach Games and the 2021 Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) Formula One World Championship. By hosting its most significant SME, the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar successfully positioned itself as one of the countries in the history of the World Cup capable of hosting such events.

According to Ghanaian sports journalists, Qatar has effectively used sports to present a different image from what was portrayed in Western media, making it a preferred destination for tourism and employment for some individuals. Due to the unfamiliar nature of Qatar's brand, which was associated with controversies prior to the World Cup, Qatar effectively utilized sports as an instrument to dispel what may now be termed as misconceptions about its image. This was deliberately achieved through its communication materials and the organization of a historic SME in world history.

Qatar successfully altered its image among foreign publics – in this case Ghanaian sports journalists – who now have a positively altered perception of the country. Based on Dinnie's (2008) Conceptual Model of Nation-Brand Identity and Image, it can be concluded that Qatar, by choosing sports and utilizing its political structure and entertainment, especially music, as key components of its nation-brand identity, has received a favorable response among Ghanaian sports journalists due to its successful hosting of a unique FIFA World Cup. Qatar employed brand ambassadors, foreign policy, and prominent personalities as communicators of its nation-brand identity.

Figure 2.0 Conceptual Framework: Qatar’s 2022 FIFA World Cup Brand Identity and Image





Credit: Dinnie (2008)

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for further studies

Despite its findings, this study has limitations. First, the small sample size and the use of a qualitative design prevent the results from being generalized. Future studies should consider a larger sample size and expand participation to other audiences of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, such as sports enthusiasts. Moreover, conducting a survey with a larger sample size would allow for more generalizable results.

Additionally, due to time constraints, the study concerning textual data was limited to news stories published up until the opening ceremony of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Future studies may concentrate on news stories published from the opening ceremony to the closing ceremony. Other studies can also explore the textual data within the same news hub after the World Cup to explore the identity Qatar constructs after the SME.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the research questions, objectives, findings, discussions, and conclusions of the research in the area of Sports Mega-events (SMEs) being used by nations for branding:

1. The current study employed textual analysis to explore Qatar's communication materials on a website to ascertain how it branded itself through the SME. However, future research could

consider conducting a rhetorical analysis of the same textual data to thoroughly explore how Qatar sought to persuade its audience and for what purpose. This approach will help to uncover the persuasive elements in Qatar's communication materials as it seeks to brand itself through the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

2. Hosting Sports Mega-Events (SMEs) is a capital-intensive venture. Therefore, a country like Ghana, if it ever plans to host one, should develop a well-thought-out strategy for maximizing the hosting of such events in a sustainable manner. The objective of bidding to host such events should be based on the availability of funds that the nation can allocate as part of its tourism promotion efforts. While the FIFA World Cup has been hosted in Africa before, with South Africa hosting in 2010, Ghana's branding message for its first FIFA World Cup can emphasize its status as the first-ever Sports Mega-Event (SME) in West Africa highlighting the unique characteristics of the region. It can also be mentioned that it is the second FIFA World Cup hosted on the African continent.

3. Akotia (2009) has noted that branding is a contributing factor to the ever-increasing economic gap between developing and developed countries, making it imperative for nations such as Ghana to strategically manage their brand, ensuring meticulous stewardship of existing perceptions and the harmonious integration of diverse components to create a distinctive and cohesive identity. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a brand audit to understand how the global community perceives Ghana. By hosting 'second order' Sports Mega-Events (SMEs) such as the World Beach Games, Ghana can position itself as a potential international sporting events destination, leveraging the tourists it will attract and the skilled labor it can bring into the country.

4. Considering the role that public relation plays in both branding and rebranding a country, the government of Ghana should be seen as continuously tapping into the expertise of PR

professionals in the country in consultation with the Ministry of Tourism. This collaboration can help manage the country's image in a sustainable way. Initiatives like 'Year of Return' and 'Back to the Return' should actively involve local communities so as to instill a sense of ownership among the Ghanaian populace. They should see themselves as active agents in Ghana's image development and management.

5. If Ghana is to win a bid to host a Sports Mega-Event (SME), there should be a well-built and well-managed website for global and local audiences to access up-to-date information on the SME's unique characteristics and the country's offerings. This will promote consistent communication. Other government ministries and departments related to the SME bid can also have links on this website.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS (SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW)

UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION - GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM (UNIMAC-GIJ)

TOPIC: SPORTS MEGA EVENTS AND NATION BRANDING: A TEXTUAL AND PERCEPTION ANALYSIS OF QATAR'S IMAGE THROUGH THE 2022 WORLD CUP

This research work adheres to stringent ethical considerations and as such, as a participant, you are assured of the confidentiality of the information you provide herein. The researcher is a student of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication - Ghana Institute of Journalism pursuing an MPhil in Strategic Public Relations Management.

Your response as a participant contributes to the advancement of knowledge in academia. Thank you.

QUESTIONS FOR SPORTS JOURNALISTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE WORLD CUP

Section 1: Background and Professional Experience

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself and your role as a sports journalist?
2. How long have you been covering sports, and what is your experience in reporting on international events like the FIFA World Cup?
3. Have you previously covered the FIFA World Cup tournaments? If yes, which ones?

Section 2: Perception of Qatar as a Nation Branding Initiative

1. What did you know about Qatar prior to the event?
2. Have you had any prior interactions or experiences related to Qatar prior to the event? Please elaborate.
3. How would you describe your perception of Qatar prior to the World Cup?
4. Looking back at the Qatar 2022 World Cup, what do you think were the most significant moments or stories that emerged from the event?
5. In your opinion, did the Qatar 2022 World Cup live up to expectations, and why or why not?
6. How did the media coverage of the Qatar 2022 World Cup differ from your expectations, and how do you think it influenced public perception of the event?
7. Looking back, what kind of stories or angles do you think were overlooked or underreported in the media coverage of the Qatar 2022 World Cup?
8. What was your impression of the social and cultural impact of the Qatar 2022 World Cup on the country?
9. How do you think the Qatar 2022 World Cup compares to previous World Cup events in terms of legacy, impact, and media coverage?
10. Looking forward, what lessons do you think can be learned from the Qatar 2022 World Cup in terms of event organization?
11. In your opinion, what will be the lasting impact of the Qatar 2022 World Cup on international sports events, and how will it shape future tournaments?
12. What is your understanding of the concept of "nation branding"?
13. In your opinion, how significant is the 2022 FIFA World Cup as a nation branding initiative for Qatar?
14. What specific efforts or initiatives have you observed from Qatar to enhance its image and reputation through the 2022 FIFA World Cup?
15. What factors do you believe contribute to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Qatar's nation branding initiatives through the FIFA World Cup?

Opening and Closing Ceremony

16. Looking back at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Qatar 2022 World Cup, what were your overall impressions of the events?
17. What were the key elements of the opening and closing ceremonies that stood out to you, and why?
18. How did the opening and closing ceremonies compare to previous World Cup events in terms of spectacle, creativity, and cultural representation?

19. Is there anything else you would like to say or any kind of final thoughts or anything you would like to follow up on that I haven't asked you?

APPENDIX II

CODES FROM NEWS STORIES



My codes for
Textual Analysis (Ob