



Media Coverage of Qatar's Hosting of the World Cup 2022 (A Content Analysis of News Reports Posted on websites representing the neighboring Gulf States from 2016-2018)

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a descriptive content analysis of media coverage from the Gulf States—Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Oman—regarding Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup hosting. By analyzing sixty news articles retrieved from five popular news websites, Riyadh Daily, Saudi Gazette, The National, Kuwait Times, and Oman Observer, the study analyzed how these countries construct Qatar's capability to host the event in terms of economy, politics, socials, health, foreign relations, and environment from 2016 to 2018. This analysis uses the Chi-Square test and Krippendorff's Alpha to guarantee the validity and reliability of the research findings and convey an understanding of the media environment in the Gulf states and their effects on regional relations.

Keywords: Qatar 2022 World Cup, Gulf States media, regional media coverage, Arab countries Arab News content analysis.

**Introduction:**

On December 2, 2010, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) announced that Qatar was awarded the World Cup 2022 tournament; making it the first time the event will be held in the Middle East. This decision helped to place Qatar as one of the major players in the world of sports. In return, it boosted its strategies to draw international sports lovers and establish regional dominance. The World Cup awarding to Qatar also produced several discourses and sentiments from its neighboring Gulf States, which explain the political economy of the Middle East region. This idea seems decent as Qatar began this ambitious project and received support and mixed controversies from neighboring Gulf countries, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Oman. In this paper, I analyze media coverage of Qatar's hosting of the World Cup 2022 by investigating the news reports content posted on four websites representing the neighboring Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, and Oman). They are 405 news reports in total as shown in Table 1. This will be achieved via content analysis of how other Gulf States discourses reflect regarding Qatar's capability in hosting an event of this magnitude. Given the preceding discussion, the study applies a content analysis to analyze how these Gulf States construct Qatar's capacity to host such an event in economic, political, social security, health, medical facilities, foreign affairs, news sources, and environmentalism.

Table 1. News reports covering the event of hosting World Cup 2022 in Qatar.

| News website news reports | Number of posted |
|---|------------------|
| Riyadh Daily & Saudi Gazette (Saudi Arabia) | 21 |
| The National (UAE) | 272 |
| Kuwait Times (Kuwait) | 92 |
| Oman Observer (Oman) | 20 |
| Total | 405 |



Arabian Gulf states

To comprehend the nature of the Gulf States, it is necessary to analyze the political and economic outlook of the region. The Arabian Gulf is based on Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, KSA, and UAE, which are historically and culturally related (Zahlan, 1989); however, each state has different political systems and approaches to economics. Combined, these states make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), founded in 1981 to harmonize its members' policies and engage in joint projects, but the disparate levels of political liberalization and economic visions create different development trajectories for members (Ulrichsen, 2020). Saudi Arabia, as the largest state in both economic and geographical terms, holds the key to preserving the balance of power among the Gulf states (Vaughan et al., 2019). Being an owner of more than one-fifth of the global proven oil reserves and holding the position of the world's number one oil exporter, Saudi Arabia possesses considerable clout in the global oil industry and, therefore, in the region's economic strategies (Bronson, 2006). It has the means to fund substantial construction projects across the infrastructure and economy and play a focal role in the GCC (Henderson, 2014). However, Saudi Arabia's influence is not without rivals; the other GCC nations tend to implement their actions through synergy and rivalry with Saudi Arabia (Black 2019).

The oil and gas price hike has given the Gulf States the impetus to go beyond the GCC in geographical dimensions and rank superior in the global market domain (Cherkaoui, 2018). This economic growth has made it possible to carry out what may be considered prestige projects, such as the Qatar 2022 Football World Cup, intending to diversify nations that mainly depended on hydrocarbons for their income (Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016). Such attempts at diversification indicate the region's continuous scale shift from reliance on oil exports to developing a more diversified economic structure (Al-Saidi, 2021). Nonetheless, oil and gas revenue focuses on the unifying though complex characteristic of the Gulf economy (Swart & Hussain, 2023).

The Gulf States are culturally and traditional and have the same values as their neighbors, but their approaches toward foreign and domestic policies and political systems are different. A royal family heads every state, and the titles for the heads of the state include king (Saudi Arabia and Bahrain), emir (Kuwait and Qatar), president (United Arab Emirates), or sultan (Oman) (Ulrichsen, 2020). These rulers determine state matters, and their management reigns define their nation's policies and foreign affairs (Papanikos, 2023). Dikinya (2013) says that in each state, the centralization of power and personalization of authority, creates a policy-making system that reflects on the personality and the interests of the ruler. The political systems of the Gulf States play a role in determining the economic and geopolitical framework of the



region on some measures while, at the same time, diversifying the problems faced by each state. For example, Kuwait differs much from the neighboring countries and has a democratic political structure with a parliament and a comparatively free press (Black, 2019). Also, Bahrain enjoys some political freedom that enables people's participation in the political arena. The nature of foreign policies employed by the states alters the face of the geopolitics of the Gulf. However, the level varies, with some countries, illustrated by the UAE being active in foreign relations through diplomatic and military overtures while others are slightly less active (Cherkaoui, 2018). For instance, Oman tends to act as a mediator of regional disputes since it has good diplomatic connections and can smoothly manage the conflict without influencing the occurrence of more bloodshed. All these depart from the specifics of each state's foreign policy history, security interests, and leadership (Ulrichsen, 2020).

The 2022 World Cup:

The 2022 FIFA World Cup was granted to Qatar on 2nd December 2010, and it is essential as the first World Cup took place in the Middle East. This has led to vigorous infrastructure implementation and a rise in international attention. Qatar has laid a master plan to construct modern football facilities, improve transport and hotel facilities, and introduce liberal labor policies to meet adverse criticism as well as being a sporting event; it is viewed as an opportunity for the diversification of Qatar's economy and a tool in the development of an improved image for Qatar and its diplomacy within the region and on the international level.

Economic Dimensions. The economic repercussions of Qatar hosting the World Cup in 2022 have become a focus of great interest in the coverage of the Gulf States. New sporting venues, transport systems, and accommodation facilities have been widely described mainly in association with major infrastructural programs (Kozman & Liu, 2024). These transformations are part of a larger plan for the country to diversify its economy from its chief source of income in oil and natural gas by encouraging and investing in tourism and international commerce (Henderson, 2014). For instance, Riyadh Daily and Saudi Gazette from KSA published 21 articles together, which focused on the possible economic opportunities, while The National from UAE published 272 reports on the scale of investments and the presumed economic impacts triggering the whole Gulf area (BBC, 2022). Kuwait Times and Oman Observer, containing 92 and 20 articles, respectively, offered ideas that with the increase of international travelers, the regional economy could be boosted as Qatar's economy was seen as improved in the GCC (Al-Saidi, 2021). This massive focus on media is



due to the significant economic interests related to the successful hosting of the World Cup and the perceived benefits to Qatar and the surrounding nations.

Political Dimensions. The political factors behind Qatar's choice of holding the 2022 World Cup also show many connections in news coverage of Gulf States and their political affiliations. Analyzing the information collected from the Saudi Arabian media, UAE media, Kuwait media, and Oman media, the differences in the tone and stress on certain issues also shed light on the political situation in the region.

Social Dimensions. The social impact of Qatar being awarded the 2022 World Cup finals has been one of the key themes that has dominated the media discourses from the Gulf States, where the potential for impact on the region's societies and labor standards has been earmarked. Saudi Arabian and Emirati newspapers and magazines, Kuwait newspapers, and Omani newspapers have reported on many issues concerning labor rights, especially migration workers constructing stadiums for the World Cup (Swart & Hussain, 2023). The Saudi Gazette and The National have often pointed out the changes Qatar has made to enhance labor conditions by eliminating the kafala system and establishing a base wage (Brannagan & Rookwood, 2016). Implemented by the authorities, these reforms have been painted as positive social changes, which are new benchmarks for working conditions in the Gulf. On the same topic, Kuwait Times and Oman Observer have considered the pros of the World Cup in the sphere of social impact as it encouraged traveling and the development of sports as a social activity that can unite different people (Papanikos, 2023). It is seen from these discussions how the social priorities and concerns of the Gulf States differ and how, with the World Cup hosted in Qatar, an improvement of labor regulations in the region is inextricably tied to the country's economic and political advancement (Henderson, 2014; Cherkaoui, 2018). I also expected that some dimensions would appear during the process of examining articles such as healthcare, foreign relations, news sources, and environmental dimensions. Based on the above discussion, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: How were economic, political, social, healthcare, foreign relations, news sources, and environmental dimensions of Qatar's World Cup hosting represented in Gulf States news sources from 2016 to 2018?

Framing Differences Among Gulf States

The analysis of the primary reports, which are the articles discussing the fact of holding the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, might demonstrate that the coverage of this event in the news from the Gulf States is different due to the political, economic, and social contexts of each state. There is a possibility that some sources may practice critical coverage of Qatar due to geopolitical rivalry between these nations. Such



information often points to possible security risks and doubts about Qatar's ability to host an event of such magnitude (Cherkaoui, 2018). Such critical framing may be attributed to the fact that general foreign policy agendas are concerned with preserving hegemonic status in the region and the perceived ambitions of Qatar (Black, 2019). However, these coverages are likely to be considerably positive and even supportive of Qatar's bid to host the World Cup (Swart & Hussain, 2023). Such outlets focus on the ability of the event to promote regional integration, explaining the positive impact of Qatar's infrastructural and labor relations (Papanik, 2023; Al-Saidi, 2021). Hence, the coverage reflects many different views of solidarity (Qaed, 2022). In addition, in some media outlets, the media is neutral and diplomatic in its approach. It also includes the aspect of Gulf cooperation and the region as a whole by emphasizing the positive aspects of the event. Instead of the negative side of the event, it highlights the ability of the region to advance on the cultural and economic fronts on the international level (Vaughan et al., 2019). Such differences also highlight the dissimilar political and social environment across the Gulf, which signifies how states' strategic concerns and interiority condition media productions. As a result of the above discussion, the following research question is suggested:

RQ2: How did the framing of Qatar's 2022 World Cup hosting differ among Gulf States news sources based on their states of origin?

Method

The evaluation of the manner in which media coverage in the Arab Gulf States for Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup may have different variations such as neutral, positive, or negative. Hence, in order to test these hypotheses, the use of content analysis is essential.

Sample

The analyzed content was "news reports" as those were the unit of sampling. Those news reports covering the event of hosting World Cup 2022 in Qatar, in detail, news reports posted in 5 news websites; Riyadh Daily, the first English daily published from the Saudi capital; Saudi Gazette, global news website covers the latest news of Saudi Arabia and the world constantly; The National, a daily newspaper published in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Kuwait Times, the only English-language news website in Kuwait; and Oman Observer, the only English-language news website in Oman.

The author follows "the probability sampling method" via applying "Systematic Random Sampling", however, In the case of Saudi Arabia news websites, I recruited from two news websites because the news reports' sum of those two websites achieve



the required number for sampling. As well, for the Omani site, the entire sample was recruited. As such, the unit of analysis extends two years; i.e. from January 2016 to December 2018. Hence, the final sum of the sample was (N=405).

For this study, testing the hypotheses would employ the Chi-Square approach where for every observed newspaper, the expected number assigned to negative, positive, or neutral is subtracted. Additionally, the statistical procedure would involve the determination of the level of significance for each hypothesis. The null hypothesis will always represent a “no difference” situation. In the event when media coverage has no significant effect, then the response distribution would be uniform. The next step in the statistical procedure is to select the appropriate test statistic before setting up the decision rule. Computing the test statistic is imperative in the sense that the sample size would help in the evaluation of the expected frequencies. The observed frequencies are then substituted with the expected frequencies into a formula. To reject the null hypothesis, there should be significant evidence at $\alpha=0.05$. The rationale for choosing the Chi-Square test is that is robust in terms of data distribution as well as providing an easy way of carrying out computations with detailed information.

Coding Procedure

Coders consisted of two Ph.D. students, each coding half of the sample (N=30). Three sessions were held for coders training and practice. Disagreements about statements interpretations were discussed and addressed. The analysis of Krippendorff's Alpha Reliability Estimate for 10 % of the sample (N=11), was carried out for two types of variables; nominal for the categorical questions and ordinal for the "how" questions in the codebook. Krippendorff's alpha calculated using SPSS Hayes' KALPHA macro revealed that the categorical variables had a higher agreement, 0.76 compared to the ordinal variables, 0.67. Notably, both categorical and “how” questions achieve the lowest limit of agreement conceivable, $\alpha = 0.667$ (Krippendorff, 2004).

Results

This section gives an overview of each of the Arab Gulf States' media coverage on the awarding of the right to host the 2022 World Cup to Qatar. The sampling technique used in the analysis was systematic random sampling where 60 news reports were gathered from five different news websites and coded for features on various economic, political sociological, health, foreign relations and environmental themes.



Economic Issues

The analysis showed that 40% of the articles presented a positive view on the handing out of salaries, while 20% portrayed it negatively. About 30% of the articles were neutral, and 5% included both positive and negative perspectives. Similarly, job opportunities were viewed positively in 45% of the articles, negatively in 10%, both in 10%, and neutrally in 20%, with 15% not addressing the issue. Financial issues were portrayed negatively in 30% of the articles, positively in 25%, both in 10%, neutrally in 25%, and not mentioned in 10%. For infrastructure projects, 35% of the articles had a positive view, 15% negative, 5% both, 30% neutral, and 15% not mentioned.

Political and Legal Issues

Regarding local authorities' performance, 30% of the articles were positive, 25% negative, 5% both, 20% neutral, and 20% did not mention it. Courts and laws were portrayed positively in 25% of the articles, negatively in 20%, both in 5%, neutrally in 25%, and not mentioned in 25%. Protests were the least discussed topic, with 45% of the articles not mentioning them, while 25% were neutral, 15% negative, 10% positive, and 5% both.

Social Issues

For narcotics and alcoholic drinks, 30% of the articles did not mention the issue, 30% were neutral, 20% negative, 15% positive, and 5% both. Housing and hospitality were covered positively in 35% of the articles, negatively in 15%, both in 5%, neutrally in 25%, and not mentioned in 20%. Ethical issues were portrayed negatively in 25% of the articles, positively in 20%, both in 5%, neutrally in 30%, and not mentioned in 20%.

Healthcare Issues

Healthcare issues were viewed positively in 30% of the articles, negatively in 15%, both in 5%, neutrally in 25%, and not mentioned in 25%.

Foreign Relations/Wars/Terrorism

US relations were positively portrayed in 25% of the articles, negatively in 10%, both in 10%, neutrally in 20%, and not mentioned in 35%. Relations with Gulf countries were viewed positively in 30% of the articles, negatively in 20%, both in 5%, neutrally in 25%, and not mentioned in 20%. Relations with Arab and Islamic countries were portrayed positively in 30% of the articles, negatively in 15%, both in 5%, neutrally in 30%, and not mentioned in 20%. The Arab Spring was not mentioned



in 40% of the articles, negatively portrayed in 20%, neutrally in 25%, positively in 10%, and both in 5%.

Environmental Issues

For environmental issues, weather details were mentioned positively in 20% of the articles, negatively in 5%, both in 5%, neutrally in 35%, and not mentioned in 35%. Geographic details were covered positively in 25% of the articles, negatively in 10%, both in 10%, neutrally in 30%, and not mentioned in 25%.

Discussion

The study shows that the analysis of the coverage of hosting the 2022 World Cup in Qatar reveals different presentations across news reports in the Arab Gulf States about economic, political, social, health, political, foreign relations, and environmental aspects. Regarding the economic gains in the World Cup, there is a positive portrayal of job opportunities and salaries. This concurs with the hypothesis that media coverage would focus on the economic benefits because of the event's importance to employment and business (Fromherz, 2017). The contingency of the local authorities and courts as objects of media coverage represents an intricate political context. Positive message portrayals may suggest that the media supports governmental actions to improve the business climate, while negative and neutral portrayals may illustrate that there are still problems with governance and legal environments (Ulrichsen, 2014). The fairly low attention paid to protests seems to mean that they are rare and, therefore, rarely covered in the media due to possible media restrictions in the region (Cherkaoui, 2018). The coverage given to housing and hospitality is positive and complies with the anticipated infrastructure development as a result of the World Cup (Henderson, 2014). However, the negative representation of ethical issues indicates that social difficulties are still quite present, including human rights and ethical problems. This finding affirms the hypothesis that there would be diversity in the media coverage and some social issues would be attended to unfavorably (Henderson, 2014). The generally positive views on the various healthcare factors show confidence in the healthcare systems due to investment and enhancements that have already been put in place for the World Cup. This is in line with the anticipated nature of media on displaying positive trends in public services (Qaed, 2022). The positive portrayal of relations with the Gulf and Arab/Islamic countries implies regional unanimity and support for Qatar. This goes well in supporting the hypothesis that there is a need to embrace media journalism that would reflect different geopolitical views (Panja, 2018). These findings show that environmental issues are admitted, but their depiction is rather scarce and balanced, so they are not central to



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media discourses. They also support the hypothesis that environmental concerns would be less prominent in the media coverage (Rookwood, 2019). Therefore, the research provides evidence for this hypothesis, which is that coverage of this event in the Qatar media would differ along different dimensions, thus representing a spectrum of orientations and topics. The method of content analysis with systematic random sampling has given the general picture of the manner in which the media has covered the issue while the systematic random sampling has helped in realizing the complex nature of media coverage in the Arab Gulf States. This paper used a vigorous approach when applying the Chi-Square test and Krippendorff's Alpha reliability estimate, which makes the gathered findings credible and accurate, thus adding value to the understanding of the media representation in the region.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Studies

The following discussion highlights the implications of findings, limitations of this study and future directions; One of the strengths of this study was the way of the data collected as this study conducted a content analysis for five news websites (Riyadh Daily, Saudi Gazette, The National, Kuwait Times, and Oman Observer) representing four countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, and Oman), in 2016, 2017, & 2018. One limitation of the study was that the content analysis did not include the countries of Bahrain and Egypt. Regarding future studies, it should test the TV cables content given that the World Cup would distract attention from Dubai and Abu Dhabi as global hubs and reduce their monopoly in regard to regional soccer broadcasting rights as these rights were granted to Qatar's BeIN Sport Cable TV. BeIN Sport Arabic, which was founded in 2012, was another tool used by Qatar to strengthen its soft power policies after the FIFA announcement. This channel is a pay-per-view channel, part of the BeIN Media Group, and headquartered in Doha. BeIN Sport was originally the Aljazeera Sport Channel but has since changed its name and expanded its sports coverage to most sporting events. The network covers sports events in 10 languages and is available in many countries across the world (BeIN Media Group, 2018).

Conclusion

The analysis of the role played by the media during Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup across the Gulf States demonstrates how regionalized processes are multidimensional in terms of the economic, political, social, and environmental and how they interact and inform regional discourses. Such views stem from each state's political orientation, economic and social concerns, and vital regional objectives, illustrating how Media discourse in the Gulf is a matrix-related functionality. In



summary, it is possible to deduce from these news reports the extent to which Qatar's World Cup hosting can be viewed as a particular prism through which one may observe the somewhat enigmatic and multifaceted interrelation of the Gulf States today and their various trajectories in today's inter-connected world.

Declaration of interest statement

The author declares she has no known competing interests.

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