

Research Article

Evolution of Sustainability and Media Coverage at the 2022 Qatar World Cup: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Sustainability has become a key component of Sports Mega-Events (SME) since its inception in the 1980s and has evolved to include themes around social, economic, and environmental fronts. The 2022 Qatar World Cup is the first to be hosted in the Middle East, which presented a unique opportunity not only for Qatar to demonstrate its culture and heritage globally but also to allow people from around the world to connect with and share the Middle Eastern way of life. However, the event faced consistent criticism from Western media, governments, and NGOs, which became the key global narrative around the World Cup and reflected in the event's sustainability strategy. This study first analyzes the sustainability frameworks of recent SMEs and finds an overwhelming focus on human rights issues in the Qatar World Cup, unlike other contemporary events. To understand this phenomenon, a content analysis of the coverage of the World Cup in major global news agencies found largely negative reporting of the event on issues such as corruption, human rights abuses, and intolerance towards marginalized communities. Applying the framework of Orientalism helps explain this disparity, and the paper furthers some tentative suggestions for governments and sports organizing bodies to adopt a sustainable framework, which is culturally responsive and aware of the needs of countries from the Global South.

Keywords: Sustainability; Mega-Events; World Cup; Qatar; Orientalism

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مقالة بحثية

تطور التنمية المستدامة والتغطية الإعلامية لكأس العالم قطر 2022:
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ملخص

بات عامل التنمية المستدامة عنصرًا رئيسيًا في الأحداث الرياضية الكبرى منذ تأسيسها في ثمانينيات القرن العشرين؛ حيث تطورت لتشمل المواضيع ذات الطابع الاجتماعي والاقتصادي والبيئي. وعُدت بطولة كأس العالم قطر 2022، كأول بطولة تستضيفها منطقة الشرق الأوسط، فرصة مميزة لإظهار قطر ثقافتها وتراثها للعالم، كما سمحت للزوار القادمين إلى قطر من جميع أنحاء العالم بالتعرف على أنماط الحياة في الشرق الأوسط والاستمتاع بأجوائها. ورغم ما واجه قطر من انتقادات حول استضافتها لكأس العالم، سواء من طرف وسائل الإعلام الغربية أو من طرف بعض الحكومات ومنظمات الغربية غير الحكومية، حتى أضحت حديث الساعة، فإن الرد عليها قد تجسد في تبني استراتيجية التنمية المستدامة. وعليه، تعمل هذه الورقة على تحليل أطر التنمية المستدامة للشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة الحديثة، قبل أن تتوصل إلى أن الجزء الأكبر للتغطية الإعلامية كانت مرتكزة على قضايا حقوق الإنسان في كأس العالم في قطر، على عكس الأحداث المعاصرة الأخرى. كما توصلت الدراسة من خلال تحليل محتوى تغطية كأس العالم في وكالات الأنباء العالمية الكبرى إلى تقارير سلبية عن كأس العالم قطر 2022 حول عدة قضايا؛ مثل الفساد وانتهاكات حقوق الإنسان والتعصب تجاه المجتمعات المهمشة. فيما تعتمد الدراسة تطبيق إطار الاستشراق كعامل مساعد في تفسير هذا التفاوت في التغطية الإعلامية لكأس العالم قطر 2022 مقارنة بنظيراتها. وتقدم هذه الورقة بعض الاقتراحات المبدئية للحكومات والهيئات المنظمة للأحداث الرياضية، قصد النظر في اعتمادها بشكل يجعل إطار التنمية المستدامة يستجيب لثقافة الدولة المختلفة واحتياجات بلدان الجنوب أيضًا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التنمية المستدامة، الأحداث الكبرى، كأس العالم، قطر، الاستشراق

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1. Introduction

In December 2010, Qatar was awarded the 2022 FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) World Cup (hereinafter referred as WC22), in what was set to be the first FIFA World Cup to be held in the Middle East, and only the second to be held in the continent of Asia.¹ Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Qatar's bid leader, reflected the excitement over this in Qatar and the wider Middle East with these words: "Thank you for believing in change, for expanding the game, and for giving Qatar a chance. You will be proud of us - and you will be proud of the Middle East. I promise you this."² The event thus held special significance for fans of the global sport of football, as well as the Qatari state, its people, and the wider Middle East region, as hosting a global event like the World Cup provides a unique opportunity to the host nation to showcase its culture and heritage to a global audience.³ However, the lead up to the event was marred with controversy as Qatar was accused, primarily by Western media, of various issues, including corruption in winning the bid, its human rights record particularly on migrant workers, and other criticism of Qatari culture, such as their religious views around certain issues.⁴

In recent times, hosting "Mega-Events" has brought various challenges for the host countries including security challenges, financial risks, and shifting geopolitics. In particular, the increasing importance of sustainability and environmental, social, and governance considerations have taken center stage in determining event success.⁵ Organizing bodies like FIFA and the International Olympic Committee have used sustainability as a key component in their bid evaluations. They have set increasing demands on host countries to design their events around the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For WC22, FIFA's sustainability strategy was focused on 5 main pillars: Human, Social, Economic, Environmental,

1 FIFA, "Russia and Qatar Awarded 2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cups," FIFA.com (2010), at: <https://www.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/2018russia/media-releases/russia-and-qatar-awarded-2018-and-2022-fifa-world-cups-1344698>

2 Ibid.

3 Abel Meza Talavera, Sami G. Al-Ghamdi, and Muammer Koç, "Sustainability in Mega-Events: Beyond Qatar 2022," *Sustainability* 11, No. 22 (2019), p. 6407.

4 Umer Hussain, "Orientalism and Media Coverage of the 2022 Qatar World Cup," *The Society Pages* (September 22, 2021), at: <https://thesocietypages.org/engagingsports/2021/09/22/orientalism-and-media-coverage-of-the-2022-qatar-world-cup/>

5 Judith Mair et al. "Social Impacts of Mega-Events: A Systematic Narrative Review and Research Agenda," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (2021), pp. 1-22.

and Governance. However, the adoption and application of sustainability standards has varied considerably across recent events, and there is a need to understand how these different frameworks are assigned or adopted by different countries and whether they are inclusive and responsive to diverse cultures.

The goal of this work is to demonstrate a level of originality by addressing the evolving sustainability agenda in sports mega-events, particularly in the context of the Qatar World Cup. The emphasis on human rights within the sustainability framework and the analysis of media coverage through the lens of Orientalism. The work's originality is underscored by the integration of interdisciplinary methodologies and the critical examination of cultural responsiveness in sustainability efforts. In achieving this goal, two primary trajectories looked plausible. We showed how mapping the evolution of sustainability trends when it comes to Sports Mega-Events (SME), particularly in relation to the WC22, can be done to capture the similarities and differences in the sustainability framework between the 2014, 2018, and 2022 FIFA World Cups as well as further comparisons with other recent SMEs which allowed us to shed light on the shifting debates in the field. Furthermore, there is a need to understand global media reporting on WC22 and the State of Qatar in the lead up to the World Cup. For this, the framework of Orientalism,⁶ which helps understand if criticism is made in good faith and whether it resulted in shaping the sustainability agenda for the WC22, was used. This approach works in analyzing the case study of Qatar through the lens of the Western media.

To address these issues, two inter-connected research questions were formed. The first inquires about how the sustainability framework for Qatar 2022 compares to the previous two World Cups held in Brazil and Russia and other recent SMEs with correlations on the tendency of a shift and the general lessons about the progress around sustainability at SMEs. The second seeks to know the role of global media in shaping the narrative and discourse around the Qatar World Cup to make better sense of the sustainability agenda of the World Cup through the lens of the Western media's portrayals of the event. The thorough research of these two creates a baseline for understanding the cultural aspects of the global sustainability agenda as it is applied to SMEs. The choice of these research questions are based on identified research gap base on literature review. The first research questions clarify the need for comparison with recent SMEs to glean insights. The second research analyses, the criticisms through the lens of Western media framed as external criticisms of management around SMEs. We are also critical of the

6 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978).

limitations of these questions, which are akin to reliance on public media sources, which might have their own inherent biases. To balance out such biases, we surveyed multiple sources to ensure objectivity and fairness. Our work incorporates a thorough literature review that supports the research questions, theoretical framework, and methodology. It contextualizes the research within the evolution of sustainability in sports mega events, discusses existing frameworks, and justifies the choice of the Orientalism framework for analyzing media coverage.

The notion of orientalism is the West's common depiction and portrayal of Eastern cultures known as the Orient. While the Orient are those who inhabit the places of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East, orientalism, in the sense of the Western scholarship about the Eastern World, is inextricably tied to the imperialist societies that produced it, which makes much Orientalist work inherently political and servile to power. According to geography, Qatar can be viewed with orientalism as this approach works in analyzing the case study of Qatar as it core aligns with the dispositional views of the western media. This paper demonstrates originality in its approach to examining the sustainability agenda in sports mega-events, offering a unique focus on the Qatar World Cup. Its scientific importance lies in contributing new insights and perspectives to the existing body of literature. The integration of interdisciplinary methodologies adds depth to the research, making it a valuable contribution to the scholarly discourse on SMEs and sustainability.

Further corroboratory work involves a brief background of how sustainability became a critical feature in the hosting and organization of SMEs, followed by a discussion on cultural differences and its role in determining the discourse around the World Cup. The overview of the research agenda in the justification of how the research methodology aids the clarification of the research questions. The creation of two empirical components with each directed towards addressing the aforementioned research questions. A data aggregation process and content analysis of sustainability reports from recent mega sporting events is presented, which helps track the evolution of sustainability efforts at these events. A content analysis of news media coverage of the Qatar World Cup was, however, done to understand the narrative and discourse in global media around the event. In conclusion, the implications of the findings from the empirical sections were discussed for the relevant conclusions to be made.

2. Background

2.1 Sustainability at sports mega-events: an evolution

The issue of sustainability has gained increased prominence in recent decades after the report from Club of Rome which indicated that large-scale change in human consumption and production behavior was needed to avoid impending ecological disaster and for sustainable development of the global human community.⁷ The United Nations (UN) defined sustainable development as "a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations."⁸ Since then, the UN has led the global effort towards the adoption of development goals which are in sync with nature. The first step in this process was taken after the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, which resulted in the *Copenhagen Declaration for Social Development* where the global community agreed on a set of principles for social development based on political, economic, ethical, and spiritual vision with a goal of "enhancing social development and ensuring human well-being for all throughout the world now and into the twenty-first century."⁹ In 2000, this commitment was renewed and formally adopted in the shape of the Millennium Development Goals, which identified eight broad goals for human development primarily focused on health and education and poverty eradication. However, for the first time, environmental sustainability was adopted as one of the eight foundational goals. Finally, in 2015, the United Nations adopted the new human development goals as the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) which highlighted the interconnected nature of development and environmental, social and economic concerns with sustainability at the center of this new agenda.

This growing recognition of sustainability as central to development led to proliferation of its uses and application across a wide variety of industries and institutions including business, construction, energy, social sector, and large-scale events. Along these lines, large or mega-scale sports events (SME) were inherently linked to sustainability due to their scale, visibility, and global impact. The term Mega Events has been described by Roche as "specially constructed

7 Donella H. Meadows and Club of Rome (eds), *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

8 G. H. Brundtland, et al. *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development* (United Nations, New York: 1987).

9 United Nations, *Report of the World Summit for Social Development*, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (New York: United Nations Publication, 1996).

and staged international cultural and sports events" which are "short-lived collective cultural actions which nonetheless have long-lived pre- and post-event social dimensions."¹⁰ The initial wave of sustainability within SMEs started with focus on economic sustainability after large financial losses at the Montreal Olympic Games in 1976 which led to adoption of sustainable economic models resulting in profitable events in Los Angeles Olympic games in 1984 and winter Olympics in Calgary in 1988.¹¹ The next step in the sustainability evolution saw increasing awareness of the environmental effects of SMEs. The 1994 Winter Olympic Games was the first SME which attempted to organize a "green" event, and since then most SME events such as the 2000 Olympics, the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the London 2012 Olympics have included some form of "environmental" analysis and considerations as an important factor in event management.¹²

Another important aspect of the sustainability agenda at SME's has been event legacy and promotion of the host nation's culture which Roche called the "wider socio-economic impacts of mega events."¹³ Even as far as the Copenhagen Declaration in 1995, the idea of sustainable development was rooted in cultural realities and respect for all people. The principle aims of the declaration stated the goals of development were not only based on universal values such as human rights, equality, and respect but also based on "full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds of people."¹⁴ Current literature on this topic has considered aspects such as "legacy",¹⁵ cultural and urban regeneration,¹⁶ tourism,¹⁷ and social responsibility, ethics, and protestors' rights.¹⁸

10 Maurice Roche, "Mega-events, Time and Modernity: On Time Structures in Global Society," *Time & Society*, Vol. 12, Issue. 1 (2003), p. 99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X030120013>

11 Joseph Weiler and Arun Mohan, "The Olympic Games and the Triple Bottom Line of Sustainability: Opportunities and Challenges," *International Journal of Sport and Society*, Vol. 1. No 1 (2010), pp. 187–192.

12 Carl Death, "Greening" the 2010 FIFA World Cup: Environmental Sustainability and the Mega-event in South Africa," *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, vol. 13, No 2 (2011), pp 99–117; A. P. J. Mol, "Sustainability as Global Attractor: The Greening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics," *Global Networks*, vol. 10. No. 4 (2010), pp. 510–528.

13 Maurice Roche, "Mega-Events and Micro-Modernization: On the Sociology of the New Urban Tourism,"

14 United Nations, *Report of the World Summit for Social Development*.

15 Kevin T. Marston, "A Lost Legacy of Fraternity? The Case of European Youth Football," in Richard Holt & Dino Ruta (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Sport and Legacy* (Routledge, 2015), pp. 176-188.

16 Sonia Ferrari & Chito Guala, "Mega-events and their Legacy: Image and Tourism in Genoa, Turin, and Milan," *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2017), pp. 119-137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2015.1037788>

17 Harry Arne Solberg & Holger Preuss, "Major Sport Events and Long-term Tourism Impacts," *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2007), pp. 213-234. DOI: 10.1123/jsm.21.2.213

18 Jill Timms, "The Olympics as a Platform for Protest: A Case Study of the London 2012 'Ethical' Games and the Play Fair Campaign for Workers' Rights," *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (2012), pp. 355-372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2012.667821>

A more recent trend in this debate has been the projection of the host nation's culture and development towards global audiences. For WC22, observers noted the significance of the event in projecting a softer image of Qatar to the Western world. In this view "hosting the World Cup was intended to be ... a 'performative political practice' which would provide Qatar the opportunity to 'attract' other countries by projecting a carefully crafted international image of an open minded, modern society which was also both Muslim and Arab."¹⁹ However, other scholars have cautioned against this approach, noting that football is essentially a European game, and 'by playing international football, countries ... are confirming a social and political map imposed by the First World.'²⁰ In their view, while countries from the Global South can participate in these events which allows them to express themselves in novel ways, the tournament's power structures remain in the hands of Western countries which keep on perpetuating old forms of colonial control on developing countries.

2.2 The role of culture in SME: Self/other dichotomy and Orientalism

The concepts of "self" and "other" have been widely used across the social sciences for making sense of social life, and the concept has been defined as follows: "Social identities are relational; groups typically define themselves in relation to others. This is because identity has little meaning without the "other." So, by defining itself, a group defines others."²¹ Using the concept of "self" and the "other", Edward Said in his seminal work contended that Western countries, academics, and media, i.e., the "Orientalists" looked unfavorably on the Arabs and Muslims, i.e., the "Orient" in order to exert their own dominance and reinforce their own identity.²² In this dichotomy, Arabs or Muslims were viewed as culturally inferior. For Said, "Orientalism" was based on pre-existing notions of the "Orient" which led to specific knowledge production aimed at managing the political, social, and cultural view of these people, with the primary intention of maintaining the domination of the West (p. 3 & 94). Said's work initially focused on historical relationships between the Orient and Orientalists, but he also touched upon contemporary issues, which signified a continuation of this phenomenon including portrayals of Arabs in

19 Thomas R. Griffin, "National Identity, Social Legacy and Qatar 2022: The Cultural Ramifications of FIFA's First Arab World Cup," *Soccer & Society*, Vol. 20, No. 7-8 (2019), p. 1000. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2019.1680499>

20 John Sugden & Alan Tomlinson, "Power and Resistance in the Governance of World Football: Theorizing FIFA's Transnational Impact," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1998), p. 313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019372398022003005>

21 Andrew C. Okolie, "Introduction to the Special Issue -- Identity: Now You Don't See It; Now You Do," *Identity*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2003), pp. 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532706XID0301_01

22 Edward W. Said, "Orientalism," p. 27.

television, movies, and literature that viewed them as less cultured, even dangerous.²³

Scholars have employed this framework to understand the reception and coverage of the WC22 in global media discourse. Griffin analyzed media reports published in the British media since Qatar was awarded the World Cup and found that the coverage was mostly biased, exhibiting an ideological Eurocentric view which was far removed from the realities of Qatari culture and experiences of everyday life.²⁴ Many of these accounts insinuated that the reason Qatar won the World Cup bid in the first place was due to their adoption of Western values and culture.²⁵ Others contended that the Western media's narrative setting ability allowed such discourse to proliferate and adopted by other organizations and governments. Writing for the Global Anti-Corruption Blog, Spalding noted that the Western media's fixation on corruption and bribery involved in the Qatar World Cup went against established facts. For example, in 2010, the year Qatar was awarded the World Cup, it ranked as the 19th least corrupt country in the World—ahead of the United States, while an independent report found that there was no bribing involved in the award process.²⁶

Moreover, Hussain argues that the discourse around Qatar was caused by the absence of Arab and Muslim voices in Western media and placed this phenomenon in broader context of latent Islamophobia in popular media when it comes to portrayals of sport and culture in Muslim countries.²⁷ Finally, researchers from Qatar University conducting empirical studies on media reports of Qatar's World Cup noted that most accounts reinforced the "self/other" binary, portraying the West as "enlightened, civilized, and progressive caretakers of liberal values of tolerance, equality, and justice" and Qatar as "timelessly and predictably cruel, incapable, morally primitive and always awaiting Western instruction and rescue."²⁸

23 Ibid., 286-7.

24 T. R. Griffin, "Football in the Hands of the Other: Qatar's World Cup in the British Broadsheet Press." *The Arab World Geographer*, Vol. 20, No. 2-3 (2017), pp. 170-182. <http://arabworldgeographer.org/doi/abs/10.5555/1480-6800.20.2.170>

25 Ibid., p. 176.

26 Andy Spalding, "Guest Post: The Orientalist Criticisms of Qatar's World Cup," *The Global Anticorruption Blog* (February 17, 2022), at: <https://globalanticorruptionblog.com/2022/02/17/guest-post-the-orientalist-criticisms-of-qatars-world-cup/>

27 Umer Hussain.

28 Rwoda Naimi, Najla Al-Naimi, & Larbi Sadiki, "Self-Other Perceptions: "Worlding" in the World Cup," *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*, (January 15, 2018), p. 10, at: https://studies.aljazeera.net/sites/default/files/articles/reports/documents/4e4a42c1f99a47e682e428aa5f59353c_100.pdf

3. Methodology

Our methodology seeks to unlock the definitional and conceptual anomalies in current sustainability efforts applied to SMEs arising from western centric policies, ambiguities in the sustainability goals, and business centrism with the goal of creating a blueprint for future event organizers, global sports bodies, governments, and organizing committees to adopt as a comprehensive framework which is culturally responsive, provides increased support to allow countries from the Global South to host these events, remain careful to the discursive power of the media, and revisit the role of politics in sports.

To answer the research questions, two sequential studies were done as creative wedge in the design, analysis, and interpretation of the methodology. The first study analyzed the official sustainability strategy and final reports from the identified SMEs, while the second analyzed news media coverage on WC22. Both studies involve careful examination and review of text-based data, content analysis as their primary method, which is a research methodology that allows drawing valid inferences from textual data based on a set of procedures.²⁹ It is defined as "a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding."³⁰ This method has been widely used in journalism, media studies, and political communication to analyze generalizations across a set of content such as political speeches, newspapers, archives, and documentary evidence. The use of content analysis is very advantageous as our primary methodology because it can be both quantitative (focused on counting and measuring) and qualitative (focused on interpreting and understanding). In both types, you categorize or "code" words, themes, and concepts within the texts and then analyze the results. This approach is not only reliable and transparent, but it allows data collection independent of the participants, hence reducing friction.

A prominent approach to compare with Orientalism is a more contextually grounded and collaborative method that involves engaging with local perspectives and voices. Orientalism often involves a Eurocentric perspective that may prioritize western interpretations and values. It can reinforce power imbalances by positioning the West as the norm and the East as the "other" to be studied and understood. Orientalist approaches might lead to oversimplified and stereotypical portrayals of cultures in the East. A contextually grounded approach involves actively seeking and incorporating local perspectives, voices, and narratives, giving agency

29 Robert Philip Weber, *Basic Content Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985).

30 Steve Stemler, "An Overview of Content Analysis," *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation*, Vol. 7, No. 17 (2001), p. 1. <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17>

to the people being studied, emphasizes cultural sensitivity and understanding the context, challenging preconceived notions and stereotypes. It encourages collaborative research where scholars work with local researchers, ensuring a more balanced and comprehensive analysis.

The justification for orientalism, however, lies in its historical significance and has shaped the way the West has perceived the East for centuries. Understanding this perspective can provide insights into the roots of certain biases and stereotypes. Studying Orientalism critically can lead to a greater awareness of the impact of colonial histories on contemporary cultural relations. The significant gaps in the literature can be captured by critically examining the sustainability strategies of sports mega-events, particularly the prominence of human rights in the Qatar World Cup. The use of content analysis in studying sustainability reports and media coverage adds scientific light to the exploration of these complex issues. The findings can contribute not only to the understanding of sustainability in sports events but also to broader discussions on cultural responsiveness, media influence, and the potential impact on host nations.

For this research, both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. In addition to content analysis, document analysis will also be employed, which is defined as "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents ... in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge."³¹ Our work cuts across content analysis methods from fields such as media studies, political communication, and cultural studies. This implies that the methodology is suitable for the research questions. The rationale behind choosing a sequential two-study approach is intentional; we believe it will help in highlighting a fair perspective and enhance the depth and breadth of the research to a wider audience. To stay neutral in our interpretation of media content, we adopted a strong ethical awareness of our approach.

Adopting the Orientalism framework is strategic in shaping the discussion of this work. It empirically guides the work towards successfully answering the research questions. It is important to note that the adoption of an Orientalist approach in the cultural study of event management in Qatar can be contentious due to the critiques and ethical concerns associated with it. Orientalism has a historical significance in shaping Western perceptions of the East. Studying events in Qatar through this lens could provide insights into historical interactions, influences, and power dynamics, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the region's cultural evolution. When used critically, it can be seen as a framework for analyzing cultural phenomena, even though researchers may argue that adopting this approach allows them to use established

31 Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2009), p. 27. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>

concepts and theories within the Orientalist tradition to examine event management practices in Qatar. Orientalism may be employed to conduct a comparative analysis between Western and Qatari perspectives on event management. By understanding how these perspectives intersect and diverge, hence fostering cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

3.1 Ethics

The adoption of an Orientalist approach in the cultural study of event management in Qatar raises several ethical concerns, as this approach has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes, reinforcing power imbalances, and neglecting local perspectives. With this in mind, we approached the study of event management in Qatar with a critical awareness of these ethical concerns and actively work to address them. Incorporating local voices, employing a more collaborative research methodology, and challenging stereotypes are essential steps to ensure a more ethical and respectful cultural study.

Our modus operandi in references are based on the context of the subject matter. While similar conversations are based on spared SME events in different places, different times and context. We tried to pull up references based on the similarity of context and topic to have a more holistic conversation. All citations have been properly double-checked to ensure consistency and relevance to this research work. Our data sources sampled data devoid of cultural ties and religious affiliations of researchers and commentators and often prevent objectivity during one-on-one data collection, that is why the content analysis approach was employed. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches helps us ensure fairness in assessment and analysis of the sources. For a topic as polarized and multifaceted as this, there is a need for a dual approach in analysis to ensure balance. Ethical concerns are a function of mindset and due diligence in ensuring the right policies and laws are applied without bridging of privacy or human rights. We adopted open internet sources of data and opinions for this discussion. All researched sources were also properly referenced, and schools of thought properly acknowledged. Ethical considerations should prioritize cultural sensitivity, collaboration with local researchers, and a commitment to challenging stereotypes rather than reinforcing them. Researchers should approach the study of event management in Qatar with an awareness of potential ethical pitfalls associated with Orientalism and actively work to mitigate them by incorporating diverse perspectives, engaging local communities, and adopting methodologies that prioritize respect and mutual understanding.

3.2 Study 1

To understand the evolution of sustainability at SMEs, we performed a detailed documentary and content analysis of sustainability reports from recent SME events by FIFA and the International Olympics Committee (IOC). The events included the 2014, 2018, and 2022 FIFA World Cups as well as the summer and winter Olympics immediately held before WC22 to compare with more recent events due to the time lag of 4 years between World Cups while also providing a comparison from another global organizing body for SMEs. The reports were obtained from FIFA and IOC websites and included both the sustainability "strategy" and "final" reports (where available) published before and at the conclusion of these events. Official reports are the most authoritative documents which contain information about the sustainability strategy, frameworks applied, and reporting of results. This is similar to the approach of Tilt³² who mentioned that official reports published by organizations are most frequently used by stakeholders to access information and are widely relied upon.

The purpose here was to understand the larger themes of sustainability at different events which would enable me to compare and contrast these across time and space. While reviewing, the focus remained on two aspects: first, identifying the key themes that underpin the sustainability strategy for the event in question; and second, looking for trends in the content, including prominence, repetition, length, and linguistic aspects. I followed Berg, who mentioned that the unit of analysis can be "words or terms, themes, characters, paragraphs, items, concepts, and semantics."³³

3.3 Study 2

Seven major news agencies from across the world were selected for this study. The first six were from Western countries including the Washington Post (WaPo) from the United States, The Guardian and BBC from the United Kingdom, France24 from France, Deutsche Welle (DW) from Germany, and Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) from Australia. In addition, TRTWorld (TRT) from Turkey was also selected since it presents a non-Western perspective. All these sources are highly respected in their countries of origin as well as globally. The Western newspapers (WaPo, Guardian, BBC, DW, SMH, France24) have similar narratives considered to represent the global liberal discourse, which is the dominant narrative in World

32 Carol Ann Tilt, "The Influence of External Pressure Groups on Corporate Social Disclosure: Some Empirical Evidence," *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1994), pp. 47-72. <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/emerald-publishing/the-influence-of-external-pressure-groups-on-corporate-social-UaFShqkZYy>

33 Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1989), p. 238.

media, while TRT presents an alternate view shaped by the Turkish State’s domestic and foreign policy preferences. The Western newspapers, because of their dominance, are also narrative shapers and policy setters for global organizations such as human rights agencies but are also widely read around the globe making them key shapers of global perceptions on any issues.

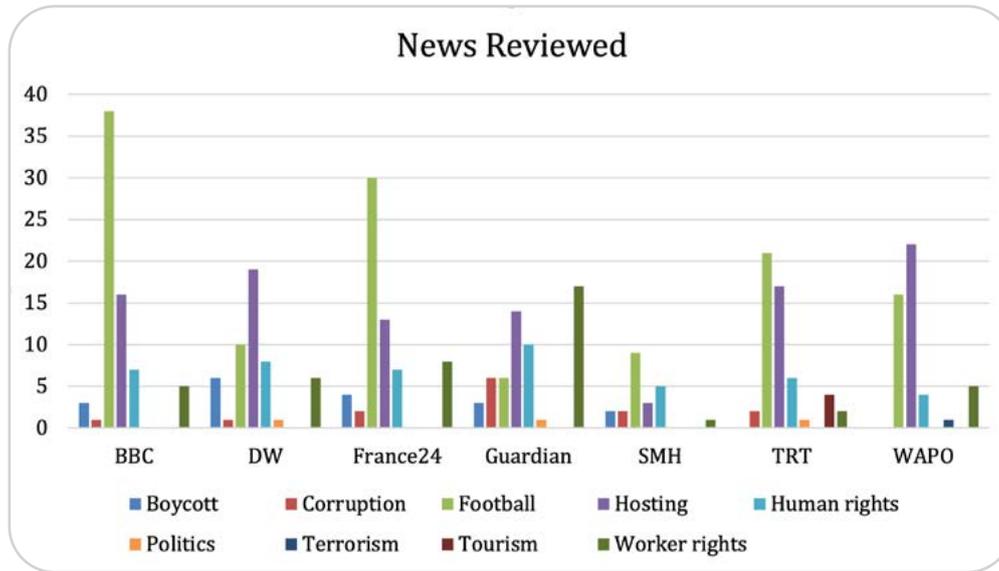


Fig. (1): Qatar World Cup coverage based on News Reviewed (2010-2022)

The articles were selected by way of an advanced search on "Google News" with a timeline starting from the award of the World Cup in December 2010 and finishing in November 2022, just before the commencement of the World Cup as media coverage afterwards was heavily dominated by on the field events. The search terms used were "Qatar World Cup" as well as "Qatar 2022", which returned numerous results that were limited to the extent that repetitions were not selected. The results were then downloaded into excel for analysis and subjected to content analysis separately for each source, before combining the overall results for further analysis.

Since the purpose of the research was capturing dominant narratives, whole articles were not scanned, rather only the "headlines" appearing on the search engine were selected. Previous research has shown how news headlines can have a powerful impact on the way people think or behave about an issue³⁴ as most people are likely to use "heuristics", to make sense of complex

34 Blake C. Andrew, "Media-generated Shortcuts: Do Newspaper Headlines Present Another Roadblock for Low-Information Rationality?" *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2007), pp. 24-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X07299795>

information.³⁵ As such, this was the most appropriate level of analysis to understand the nature of discourse around the Qatar World Cup.

For the quantitative part, there must be a systematic way of categorizing data by classifying larger text into smaller categories.³⁶ To this end, I identified key terms and looked for repetition within the text. An important consideration is to ensure that the coding used by the researcher is replicable, i.e., a different researcher would also code the text similarly rather than drawing separate conclusions due to researcher bias. For this purpose, I used double blind coding, and the results were compared, which had a similarity rate of greater than 90%. Moreover, if one headline had more than one category, they were counted twice, and headlines that did not fit into any of the categories were coded to a "general" category, which in this case was headlines focused on "football" matters, and hence coded as such. A decision was made to code issues related to general "human rights" and "worker rights" separately, as the latter were heavily featured in coverage of the World Cup and were also reflected in the Sustainability strategy document.

For the qualitative part, we focused on key themes within the content and coded them across two metrics: the broad category of topic, which was discussed in the headline, and the "tone" of the message in the headline. Headlines were analyzed and coded into one of the broad categories mentioned above, and then further coded as either "positive," "negative," or "neutral" based on the tone and the "real" meaning of the message. This analysis also looked at the "framing" of the messages in the headlines,³⁷ which views "news texts as consisting of organized symbolic devices that will interact with individual agents' memory for meaning construction." This is helpful in analyzing the underlying meaning in texts and helps understand the purpose of the author and the meaning of the news headline which is intentionally or unintentionally delivered to the reader.³⁸ As such, qualitative content analysis can help uncover hidden meanings which intend to influence public perception of certain events by including or excluding certain information from the discourse around a news story.

Overall, while doing the content analysis, the focus was on understanding the overall narrative in the news headlines selected, identifying larger themes within the data, and placing them in context of the overall coverage of the Qatar World Cup.

35 Doris A. Graber, *Processing Politics: Learning from Television in the Internet Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

36 Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Sage Publications, 2018); Robert Philip Weber.

37 Zhongdang Pan & Gerald M. Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse," *Political Communication*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1993), pp. 55-75. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.1993.9962963

38 Richard Hofstetter, "Content Analysis," in Dan Nimmo & K. R. Sanders (ed) *Handbook of Political Communication* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1981), pp. 529-560.

4. Study 1: Comparing the sustainability frameworks of recent SMEs: Shifting agenda of global sustainability efforts

4.1 Brazil 2014

The 2014 World Cup was the first FIFA World Cup which adopted a comprehensive sustainability strategy. The strategy was based on the recommendations of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 26000 "Social Responsibility" which provides guidance for businesses and organizations who "recognize that respect for society and environment is a critical success factor." The seven organizing principles of social responsibility as envisaged in ISO 26000 also formed the core elements of this strategy including: Organizational Governance; Fair Operating Practices; Consumer Issues; Labor Practices; Human Rights; Community Involvement and Development; and Environment.³⁹ For each of these areas, FIFA defined its CSR Strategic Objectives, which put these in context of events at the World Cup. For example, for the Human Rights component, the CSR objective stated that "Within FIFA's and the LOC's sphere of influence, human rights and the rule of law must be respected including concepts of social justice and fairness." Despite this, the overall sustainability strategy lacked a coherent direction and measurable goals and the exercise only highlighted stand-alone goals without considering them in context of FIFA's global strategy.

The Sustainability Report for the 2014 World Cup was issued in late 2014 in accordance with the reporting guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). The main report included five sections including: (i) overall strategy; (ii) sustainability including sustainable operations, workplace, sourcing of goods and services, and health and safety; (iii) environmental protection including carbon offsetting, waste management, and transport; (iv) social development including the "football for hope" initiative, and (v) legacy including capacity building and football development.⁴⁰ The final report stated that "the Sustainability Report of the 2014 FIFA World Cup meets the content and quality requirements of the Global Reporting Initiative G3 Version 3.1 Application-Level C+." The core elements in the strategy document from 2013 were included in several of these sections, but they were not aligned in the reporting, and it was difficult to measure the performance along the ISO 26000 standard. Finally, the report also recommended broader stakeholder engagement from an earlier stage to ensure that all relevant issues are highlighted on time. Although the 2014 World Cup sustainability strategy

39 FIFA, "Development and Implementation of the 2014 FIFA World Cup™ Sustainability Strategy," FIFA.com, 2013.

40 FIFA, "Sustainability Report of the 2014 FIFA World Cup Russia."

and report set the groundwork for future events, the overall approach towards sustainability was not integrated as a central element of tournament delivery.

4.2 Russia 2018

The 2018 FIFA World Cup sustainability strategy built on earlier efforts and broadened the scope of its initiatives. The overall sustainability approach was based on the Social, Environmental and Economic elements of sustainability, which is sometimes also referred to as the SEE or EES sustainability framework.⁴¹ These were further divided into nine key issues as following: (i) Health and Safety; (ii) Decent Work and Capacity Building; (iii) Inclusivity and Equality; (iv) Social Development, Healthy Living and Sport Legacy; (v) Green-Building Standards for Stadiums, (vi) Transport, Carbon, Energy and Waste Management; (vii) Risk Mitigation and Biodiversity; Economic pillar: (viii) Ethical Business Practices and (ix) Local Economic Development.⁴² Like 2014, the conceptual foundation was based on ISO 26000, but in addition the "Event Sustainability Management Systems" Standard ISO 20121 (ISO 2012) and AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard were also followed.⁴³ The sustainability strategy also focused on the planning stage much more than the event in 2014. This process started even before the 2014 event was hosted and carried on until the strategy was released in 2015. Moreover, 2018 also set fundamental governing sustainability principles which acted as an overall direction setting for the initiatives. These principles were responsibility, inclusivity, transparency, integrity, and respect. Overall, the 2018 strategy touched on a broader set of issues compared to the 2014 strategy; however, there was still a lack of inter-connectedness, setting of defined goals, and alignment with global sustainability objectives such as the Millennium Development Goals.

The final sustainability report of the event was released in May 2019 based on the new GRI sustainability standards issued in 2016. After briefly covering the planning and execution of the strategy, the report discussed each of the SEE pillars in detail.⁴⁴ However, the nine key issues identified at the planning stage were not systematically revisited, which raises questions about the efficacy of the planning process. The most detailed section was on social development where issues of decent working conditions, anti-discrimination, and press freedom were highlighted prominently; however, concrete steps taken by the authorities were not discussed,

41 Maha Faisal Alsayegh, Rashid A. Rahman, & Saeed Homayoun, "Corporate Economic, Environmental, and Social Sustainability Performance Transformation through ESG Disclosure," *Sustainability* 12, No. 9 (2020), pp. 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su12093910>

42 FIFA, "Sustainability Strategy 2018 FIFA World Cup."

43 Ibid.

44 FIFA, "Sustainability Report of the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia," (Zurich, Switzerland, 2019).

instead focusing on activities like capacity building and training. For example, on decent work, the report highlighted official visits by authorities but did not show what steps actions were taken to address the findings beyond raising them with the government.⁴⁵ Finally, the assurance statement by SGS highlighted fewer departures from reporting standards; however, they still highlighted issues with ex-ante analysis of carbon footprint, and lack of analysis for suppliers and merchandises with regards to social and environmental assessments. Most interestingly, the assurance providers SGS called attention on decent work practices to be applied for the forthcoming World Cup in Qatar, without going into details on the same issue in Russia.

4.3 Qatar 2022

After Russia 2018, the next FIFA event's sustainability strategy underwent an overhaul and Qatar 2022 became the first SME to recognize the centrality of the SDGs by aligning the strategy's goals and objectives to the SDGs.⁴⁶ The overall strategic framework focused on five key pillars of sustainability namely: human, social, economic, environmental, and governance. The human pillar centered on developing human capital while safeguarding workers' rights, and was aligned with SDGs 3, 4, 8 and 10. The social pillar focused on providing an inclusive experience for all, and responded to SDGs 3, 4, 10, 11 and 16. The economic pillar aligned with SDGs 8, 9, 11, 12 and 16, and aimed to re-imagine economic development in the host country and wider region. Environmentally, the event committed to a carbon neutral world cup, and aligned with SDGs 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, and 13. Finally, the governance pillar aimed to set an example of good governance and ethical business, and aligned with SDGs 12 and 16. In total, there are 20 material topics addressed under the pillars and formed the bedrock against which the sustainability performance of the 2022 World Cup was to be measured.

The glaring difference between the WC22 strategy and previous events was the heightened focus on human rights, perhaps driven by the increased focus on this issue ever since Qatar was announced as the host for the World Cup. First, the most prominent pillar of the sustainability strategy was the "Human" pillar, which had a further four objectives centered around improving workers' living and working conditions, transparent and fair recruitment, and providing opportunities for skill development.⁴⁷ It remains to be seen how these issues are reported in the final sustainability report of WC22, but already in the planning stage, there were important

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

substantive steps such as revamping Qatar's labor laws, national technical cooperation program with the International Labour Organization (ILO), and signing a memorandum of understanding with *Building and Wood Workers' International*, the global trade union for construction workers.⁴⁸ In contrast, the 2014 strategy did not specifically mention worker's rights or living conditions in the area of "Labor Practices", focusing only on fair wages and benefits. Similarly, the 2018 strategy grouped worker rights under the "Social" category, and there was only a brief mention of promoting "decent working conditions for stadium construction workers."⁴⁹ Moreover, the final reports from the earlier events also reflected this disparity. For example, the only mention of construction workers in the 2014 final report was about the organizers' regret for the injuries and deaths of workers. In 2018, perhaps due to the increased coverage of stadium workers' rights in Qatar, there was a dedicated section (2.1) on "decent working conditions for construction workers"; however, there were no quantifiable metrics in terms of the steps taken for ameliorating the situation.

4.4 Tokyo 2020

The overall sustainability model of the Tokyo Olympics claimed close alignment with the UN SDG's touching upon 17 of the goals and subordinate targets under these goals. In addition, the games also received certification on the "Event Sustainability Management Systems" standard "ISO 20121" for overall management of the sustainability policy. There were five main themes divided across social, economic, and environmental areas. In order of prominence these were: (i) climate change, aimed at achieving a zero-carbon event; (ii) resource management, aimed at zero-wasting; (iii) natural environment and biodiversity, with a focus on integrating built structures with natural landscape; (iv) human rights, labor and fair business practices, emphasizing diversity and inclusion; and (v) involvement, cooperation, and communications engagement, aimed at leveraging partnerships and equality.⁵⁰ This order of prominence was also reflected in the final report, where climate change and resource management received the most space, whereas the other three themes were covered briefly. In particular, the section on human rights deserves further attention in comparison to the Qatar 2022 report. Here, the focus was largely on issues of diversity and inclusion which comprised diversity of participation,

48 Ibid.

49 FIFA, "Development and Implementation of the 2014 FIFA World Cup™ Sustainability Strategy,"

50 Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, *Sustainability Post Games Report: Tokyo 2020* (Tokyo: Olympic World Library, 2021).

gender equality, negation of able-ism, promotion of LGBTQ, and social activism.⁵¹ Further, the subsection on labor practices only mentioned Covid-19 and flexible and diverse working styles. Importantly, the issue of worker rights including decent working conditions or construction workers, which were so prominent throughout the Qatar 2022 sustainability strategy, were entirely absent.

4.5 Beijing 2021

Unlike the Tokyo Olympics, the Winter Games in Beijing did not base their sustainability strategy to the UN SDG's, instead developing their own novel framework with a vision towards "Sustainability for the future" which is reflective of China's unique positioning as a dominant global power which is hesitant to follow the rules set by others. The games did adopt ISO 20121 for establishing and managing its overall sustainability strategy. The framework developed identified the following key themes: (i) Positive environmental impact, which focused on ecological conservation and delivering a low carbon games; (ii) New development for the region, focusing on increasing infrastructure construction and service provision; and (iii) Better life for the people, advocating for promotion of human development and fostering good social atmosphere. Two interesting aspects from the Beijing sustainability framework stand out: the first is China's insistence on developing its own model, rather than following the models developed by the UN which were adopted for both the Qatar and Tokyo events. The second aspect is that despite heavy criticism by the West for its human rights records,⁵² the event organizers did not buckle under pressure by including that as a heavy component of their sustainability framework as we saw earlier with the sustainability framework in the Qatar World Cup.

4.6 Findings: The unequal nature of SME sustainability

In this study, we have seen there has been a marked shift in SMEs sustainability agenda over the last decade. The earliest sustainability strategy from 2014 relied on the "social responsibility" model of ISO 26000, but this approach was not entirely reflected in the final sustainability report of the 2014 event. In 2018, although the strategy document adopted the three pillars of social, economic, and environmental factors, there was no broader integration within larger debates or approaches on sustainability such as the MDGs or the SDGs. In addition to greater alignment

51 Ibid.,70-79.

52 Human Rights Watch, "Beijing Olympics Begin Amid Atrocity Crimes: 243 Global Groups Call for Action on Rights Concerns," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/27/beijing-olympics-begin-amid-atrocity-crimes>

with the United Nation's SDG's, the Qatar World Cup's strategy took a markedly strong stance on human rights, in particular issues related to workers' rights. After considering two other comparable SMEs, the Tokyo and Beijing Olympic games, we saw that this shift and alignment is not present in these events, showing that Qatar's sustainability agenda stands out for its strong position on human and social issues as the main determinant of event sustainability. This can be demonstrated by looking at the frequency of concepts approach, which shows that compared to other events, human rights were the most prominent concept in the WC22 sustainability strategy as shown in Table 1.

Table (1): Repetitions of the term "Human Rights" in Sustainability reports

Sports Mega-Event	Planning stage	Final stage
Brazil 2014	instances 6	instances 10
Russia 2018	instance 1	instances 73
Tokyo 2020	*	*
Beijing 2021	instances 7	instances 2
Qatar 2022	instances 170	*
Reports or data not available*		

Study 2: Media coverage of the Qatar World Cup

5.1 Data and analysis

In total, more than three hundred and sixty-five headlines were analyzed across the seven selected newspapers. These included seventy from the BBC, sixty-four from France24, fifty-seven from the Guardian, fifty-three from TRT, fifty-one from DW, forty-eight from WaPo and twenty-two from SMH. An analysis of the combined results showed that from the total, almost half of the headlines (49%) had a "negative" portrayal of the World Cup, followed by 43% neutral headlines, and only 8% portraying it in a positive light. However, these results are even more skewed when the results from TRT are taken out: from the three hundred twelve headlines published in Western news agencies, 55% were negative, 40% neutral, and only 5% portrayed the event in a positive light. In contrast, 62% of headlines in TRT were neutral, with another 23% positive, and only 15% about issues which could be seen negatively. Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of reporting by newspaper.

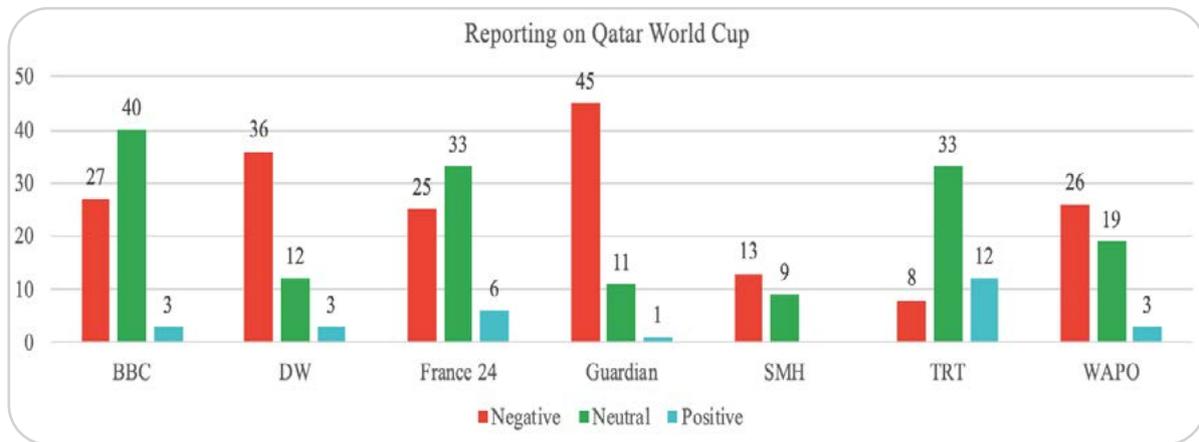


Fig. (2): Qatar World Cup coverage in major global news agencies (2010-2022)

Looking at the themes identified, the most discussed topic was football, which had a total of one hundred thirty headlines. This was followed by headlines related to hosting rights of the World Cup, which was present in one hundred four headlines. The next two on the list were about human rights broadly, with forty-seven entries, such as about rights of LGBT people, and safety of journalists and worker rights, which were mostly related to stories about migrant labor working conditions in Qatar and had forty-four entries. Less discussed topics included headlines on boycotting the World Cup (18), Corruption (14), Tourism (4), Politics (3) and Terrorism (1). A distribution of themes by newspaper is presented in Table 1 below.

Table (2): Themes identified in media coverage of the Qatar World Cup (2010-2022)

Themes	BBC	DW	France24	Guardian	SMH	TRT	WAPO	Total
Boycott	3	6	4	3	2			18
Corruption	1	1	2	6	2	2		14
Football	38	10	30	6	9	21	16	130
Hosting	16	19	13	14	3	17	22	104
Human rights	7	8	7	10	5	6	4	47
Politics				1		1		3
Terrorism							1	1
Tourism						4		4
Worker rights	5	6	8	17	1	2	5	44
Total	70	51	64	57	22	53	48	365

Since discussion of purely football-related topics was expected, this does not merit any further discussion beyond the fact that most of these were neutral headlines covering the qualifications of different teams, or around the scheduling of the World Cup. However, it is worth considering each of the next categories in detail: hosting, human rights, and worker rights.

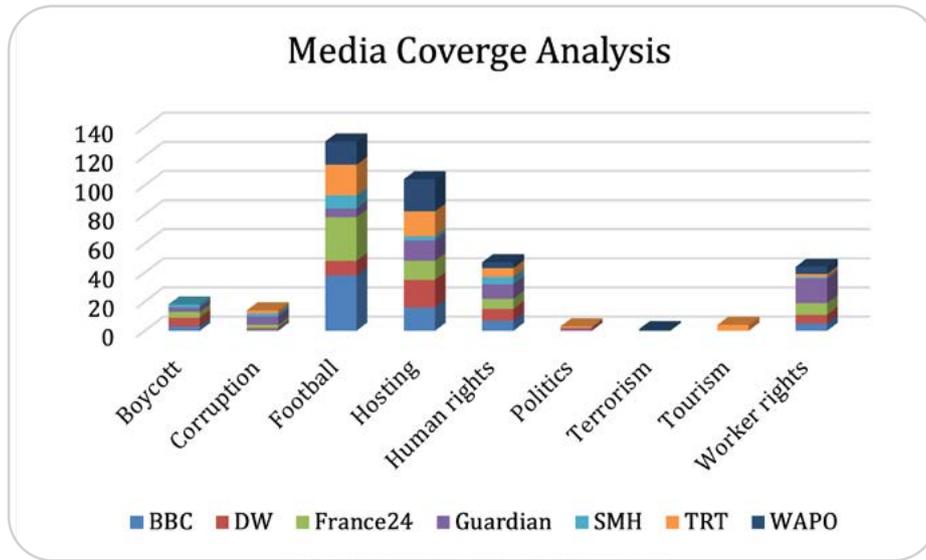


Fig. (3): Media Coverage Analysis of Qatar World Cup (2010-2022)

Under hosting, 65% headlines carried a negative tone from the total. A closer look at the data shows that 66 out of the 68 "negative" headlines came from Western newspapers, with only 2 coming from TRT. However, the headlines coded as "neutral" included 9 out of 19 from TRT, with only 10 coming from the others. Similarly, 6 out of the 17 positively coded headlines were from TRT. The major topics discussed within the "negative" headlines included criticism of awarding Qatar the hosting rights to the World Cup, issues with shifting the World Cup to winter because of Qatar's climate, challenging the claims of carbon neutrality at the World Cup, and pointing that there was a focus on "luxury" while noting Qatar's lack of football "heritage." The "neutral" headlines mostly discussed different matters relating to the investment in the World Cup, headlines about the lead up and issues such as vaccination and travel. Finally, the positive headlines included reduced price tickets, the use of technology and sustainable hosting, globalization, and headlines written in "defense" of the World Cup award to Qatar. These results justify the need for SME to be analyzed. This level of data disparity can only be brought to light under this scheme.

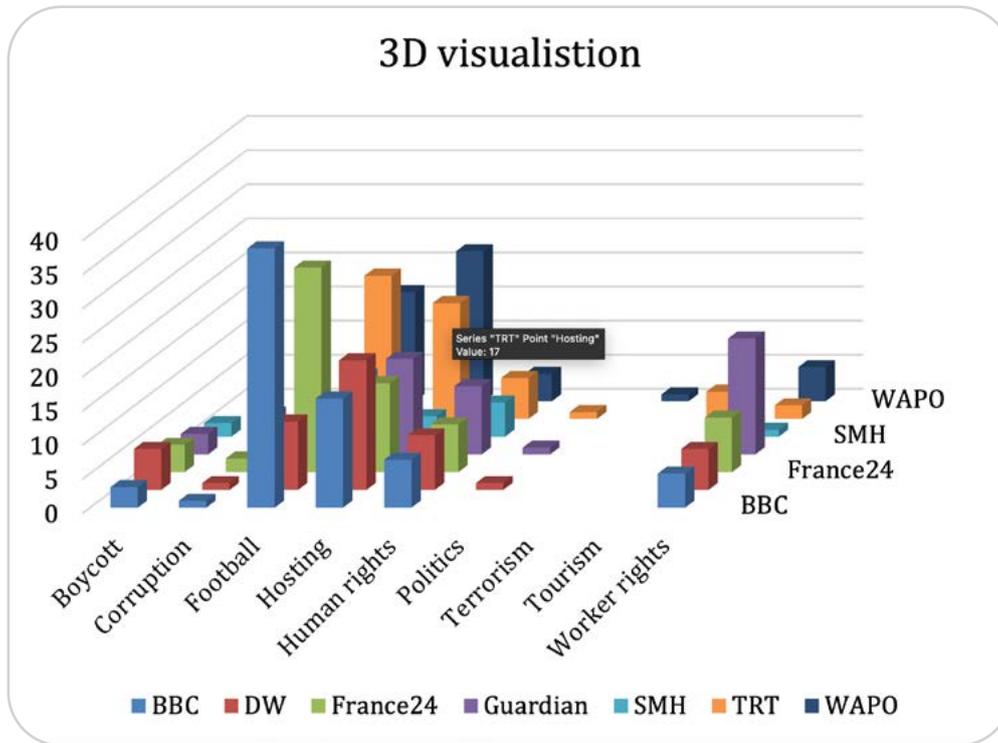


Fig. (4): 3D Visualization of coverage in major global news agencies (2010-2022)

The Human Rights category carried largely negative headlines, with 83% of the total 47 coded as negative. Out of these, 37 were featured in Western newspapers, with the highest amount in the Guardian at 10, while only two were featured in TRT. All five neutral headlines were in Western newspapers, while of the three positive headlines, two were from TRT. The major topics in the negative headlines were about LGBT inclusion and ban on extramarital sex, restrictions on journalists including death of a journalist, and different celebrities and sportspersons distancing themselves from the World Cup. The neutral headlines featured statements from Qatari authorities calling out the "hypocrisy" in the coverage of the World Cup, and some countries dropping certain symbolism from their kits. Finally, the positive headlines included statements including the welcome of transgender fans, and news coverage on the first instance of female referees officiating in a World Cup.

The worker rights category expectedly had the highest percentage of negative headlines, with 84% of the total 44 headlines coded in this manner. Again, 35 out of the negative headlines were featured in the Western newspaper, with only two featured in TRT. There were also six headlines coded as neutral, out of which half were from the Guardian. The Guardian also carried the only headline which was coded as positive. However, this needs to be considered in line with the paper’s excessive focus on the issue, with more than a third of the total negative headlines

being carried by them. In terms of the themes under discussion, most of the negative headlines focused on migrant workers' conditions in Qatar and other related issues such as restrictions on journalists or inadequate pay. The neutral headlines included a discussion of improvement in workers' conditions and reporting about a workplace incident at a stadium. The only positive headline mentioned Qatar's commitment to improving the welfare of workers at the World Cup.

The remaining negative topics included boycott and corruption, with eighteen and fourteen headlines each, all of which were negative. The main topics here centered around various countries, in particular Western European nations such as Germany and Denmark, calling for a boycott of the World Cup, largely due to 'Human Rights' issues. There were also calls for celebrities to boycott performing at the World Cup, and refusal to cover the World Cup in public spaces. On the topic of corruption, the major headlines discussed allegations of bribery, corruption, and crimes in awarding the World Cup to Qatar.

Finally, the neutral and positive headlines, other than those related to football, mostly discussed aspects related to hosting rights and tourism. Of the 17 positive headlines focused on topics such as globalization, completion of public infrastructure programs such as the metro, and the use of future technologies. Importantly, there were also a few positive headlines about the country's Human Rights record, both coming from TRT. The same agency also shared news about tourism and "things" to do during the World Cup, a topic entirely absent from Western discourse.

We have seen the lopsided coverage of the World Cup in global media, which painted a negative picture of the Qatar World Cup even before it started. Qatar was seen from the lens of inappropriate Hosting, Human Rights and Workers' Rights abuses, boycott, and corruption. Positive coverage was disproportionately only featured on TRT, and overall consisted of only 28 of the overall 365 headlines, a meagre 8% of the total.

5. Discussion

The present paper aimed to understand the shift in sustainability agenda over time as it is applied to sports mega-events (SMEs). Using content and documentary analysis, two overarching aims were achieved: first, by doing an analysis of the sustainability reports from SMEs over the last decade, I found that in addition to the broadening and expansion of the overall sustainability agenda, there was a "human rights" turn which was singularly applied to the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar when compared to other recent SMEs. To investigate the reasons behind this exception, the second study performed a content analysis of media reporting on the Qatar World Cup and found mostly negative reporting from media outlets centered around topics of corruption in the hosting rights, human rights abuse, in particular the treatment of construction

workers. Taken together, these findings raise two important questions about the sustainability frameworks and their genealogy, especially the role of media, as they are applied to SMEs.

First, the results from this study show that it is important for global organizations such as FIFA and the IOC to formulate overarching sustainability policies which are culturally sensitive, rather than imposing dominant Western values on countries from the Global South. Going as far back as the Copenhagen declaration,⁵³ cultural expression, and diversity were considered as important aspects of sustainability. However, as this study has shown, the WC22 sustainability framework was treated exceptionally for certain issues, which reflects an ambiguity in the sustainability approach of the organizing committees. For example, the FIFA World Cup in Russia, as well as the Winter Olympics in Beijing, contained less focus on the issue of human rights despite long-standing issues of human rights as they were able to project their global power to shift focus on to environmental and economic issues, which are less controversial.⁵⁴ Similarly, the next FIFA World Cup in 2026 is being hosted by the United States, yet their record on human rights and global geopolitics is not addressed in the sustainability approach for the event.

Importantly, these findings raise questions about the definitions and conceptual boundaries and inclusivity of the concepts of "sustainability" and "sustainable" developments. The assertion that voices from the "South" are subordinated to a discourse which is essentially "Northern" finds support from my findings, reflecting a need for a more democratized and discursive sustainable agenda which gives importance to the concerns of people from the developing world and countries hoping to host future SME events.⁵⁵ Further, the ambiguity in event sustainability strategies also raises questions about the efficacy of these efforts. Our findings indicate that locally embedded strategies would be best placed to promote sustainability in the face of competing worldviews of various stakeholders.⁵⁶ Further, the focus on human rights as the most prominent topic for the Qatar World Cup sustainability framework might have made more "business" sense by pleasing various stakeholders rather than improving sustainability outcomes.⁵⁷

53 United Nations, *Report of the World Summit for Social Development*.

54 Marc O. Jones, "How Western Press Coverage of Qatar World Cup 2022 Descended into Hypocrisy and Orientalist Caricatures," *The New Arab* (February 19, 24), at: <https://www.newarab.com/opinion/uk-press-coverage-qatar-2022-hypocrisy-and-orientalism>

55 Delyse Springett, "Editorial: Critical Perspectives on Sustainable Development," *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2013), pp. 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1556>

56 Nancy E. Landrum & Brian Ohsowski, "Identifying Worldviews on Corporate Sustainability: A Content Analysis of Corporate Sustainability Reports," *Business Strategy and the Environment*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2018), pp. 128-151. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1989>

57 Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, "Corporate Social Responsibility: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2008), pp. 51-79; Nigel Roome, "Looking Back, Thinking Forward: Distinguishing Between Weak and Strong Sustainability," in P.

Second, the media's coverage of Qatar centered on some specific issues, which scholars have tied to long held orientalist views in the Western World.⁵⁸ As a result of this, the legacy of the World Cup was tainted, making it difficult for Qatar to project a soft image around the world. Consider the example of workers' rights: since the event was announced, the Qatari government has taken concrete steps to implement widespread labor reforms across different sectors including raising the minimum wage, opening new visa centers, ease in applying for exit permits, ability to change jobs unilaterally, and ability to work flexible hours.⁵⁹ These unprecedented steps are the first of their kind in the region yet reporting around Qatar continued to paint a negative picture without highlighting the positive changes as a lasting legacy of the World Cup. These sentiments were reflected in the statements of the Emir of Qatar, who mentioned the "double standards" behind the media campaign, and FIFA President Gianni Infantino, who questioned the "hypocrisy" and "racism" underlying the coverage of the World Cup while also mentioning that such accounts missed historical context and remained agnostic to late developing countries' cultures.⁶⁰

Based on the above, this study offers the following recommendations which should inform future sustainability efforts at SMEs:

1. There is a need to clearly define what sustainability entails when it comes to hosting SMEs.
2. Governing organizations such as FIFA and IOC should formulate comprehensive sustainability agendas which are culturally responsive as envisaged in the Copenhagen Declaration rather than the same rules applied across different cultures.
3. Hosting countries in the Global South should be provided with the required support from international organizations, such as the collaboration between ILO and the Qatar government which led to improved outcomes for workers in Qatar.

Bansal and A. Hoffman (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Business and the Natural Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 620–629. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199584451.003.0034>

58 Thomas R. Griffin.

59 International Labour Organization, "22 Progress Report on the Technical Cooperation Programme between the Government of Qatar and the ILO" (Qatar: November 2022), at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/---ilo-qatar/documents/publication/wcms_859839.pdf; Mustafa Qadri, "Qatar Labour Reforms Ahead of the FIFA 2022 World Cup," *Business and Human Rights Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2022), pp. 319-325. <https://doi.org/10.1017/bhj.2022.14>

60 Alistair Mills, "Qatar Faced Unprecedented Criticism over Hosting World Cup, Emir Says," *Reuters*, (2012), at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/qatar-faced-unprecedented-criticism-host-country-world-cup-emir-says-2022-10-25>; James Olley, "World Cup: FIFA President Infantino Slams Europe's 'Hypocrisy' in Speech," *ESPN.com* (November 19, 2022), at: <https://www.espn.com/soccer/fifa-world-cup/story/4806508/world-cup-fifa-president-infantino-slams-europe-hypocrisy-in-astonishing-speech>

4. Media reporting on certain issues should not dictate how sustainability policies are enacted, especially when it comes to countries who do not have the ability to project soft power in the same way that major countries are able to do.
5. The alignment with the UN's SDGs is a positive step in the right direction as far as SME sustainability is concerned. However, the non-political aspect of international sports provides a rare opportunity to find commonalities between different cultures and promote issues of common interest, including environmental and economic issues. Governing organizations and governments should rethink how convergence on these issues can be achieved.

7. Conclusion

The sustainability agenda at Sports Mega-Events has evolved considerably since its inception in the 1980s and 90s. Starting with the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, FIFA adopted a comprehensive sustainability strategy for its events which was further expanded in the events in Russia and Qatar, a trend also seen in recent events held by the IOC. However, a content analysis of sustainability reports revealed that these concepts are not uniformly applied. In particular, the event in Qatar stood out from other event sustainability strategies due to the substantially higher role of Human Rights as the main pillar of its sustainability strategy. When considered with existing literature, this revealed fissures in the sustainability agenda emanating from a Western point of view while being agnostic to the culture and realities of the host country. To follow up, a content analysis of international media coverage of Qatar revealed overwhelmingly negative coverage centered on topics of corruption, human rights, and workers' rights abuse while other topics such as the event's legacy, tourism, or larger sustainability efforts were not mentioned prominently. Applying the framework of Orientalism, this coverage showed a value divide where pre-existing beliefs about the Arab World were used to cast a negative shadow on the event, which also found its way into the sustainability strategy adopted by FIFA and the local organizing committee.

While researchers might argue that adopting an Orientalist approach allows them to confront and challenge stereotypes embedded in Western perceptions. By critically examining these stereotypes, they could contribute to dispelling misconceptions and fostering a more accurate and respectful representation of Qatar's event management practices. Advocates might argue that an Orientalist approach can be employed to recognize the intersection and complexity of cultural identities in Qatar. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of cultural practices, researchers may aim to avoid oversimplification and provide a more nuanced analysis. It's crucial to also emphasize that while these justifications are presented for discussion, the use

of Orientalism in contemporary cultural studies is often criticized for perpetuating power imbalances, essentializing cultures, and neglecting local perspectives. Strategies for achieving is suggestion for further exploration of this study.

A comparative analysis of the four world cup events reveals that, when two other comparable SMEs—the Olympic games in Beijing and Tokyo—are considered, we find that this shift and alignment is absent from these events. This indicates that Qatar's sustainability agenda stands out due to its emphasis on social and human rights as the primary factor influencing the sustainability of events. Examining the frequency of topics in the sustainability report serves as one way to illustrate this.

The real-world application is reflected in an overhaul call to action based on the recommendations from this work. When considered with existing literature, this revealed fissures in the sustainability agenda emanating from a Western point of view while being agnostic to the culture and realities of the host country. To follow up, a content analysis of international media coverage of Qatar revealed overwhelmingly negative coverage centered on topics of corruption, human rights, and workers' rights abuse, while other topics such as the event's legacy, tourism, or larger sustainability efforts were not mentioned prominently. Applying the framework of Orientalism, this coverage showed a value divide where pre-existing beliefs about the Arab World were used to cast a negative shadow on the event, which also found its way into the sustainability strategy adopted by FIFA and the local organizing committee. (Annexure 1: List of newspaper headlines analyzed).⁶¹

This work also creates a practical awareness to the sustainability issue in those countries bidding for world cups. For Arab countries, it sets the stage on existing knowledge on media perception and helps them formulate strategies for managing future events. In recent times, hosting "Mega-Events" has brought various challenges for the host countries including security challenges, financial risks, and shifting geopolitics. Further research directions would be how lessons from WC22 will affect future chances of SMEs in Qatar and future development in its sustainability definitions and analysis process.

According to Qatar's bid leader for WC22, his comments on the WC22 events were positive, inspiring and all geared towards justifying Qatar's ability to host the event. This makes their representative optimistic about Qatar and their ability to host SMEs and showed their willingness to ensure SME success. As global debates unfold, this perspective is seen across

61 <https://2h.ae/LFhB>

spectrums by the advocates of Qatar. The findings, however, highlight the definitional and conceptual anomalies in current sustainability efforts applied to SMEs arising from Western centric policies, ambiguities in the sustainability goals, and business centrism. For future events, global sports bodies, governments, and organizing committees should focus on clarifying the definition of sustainability, adopt a comprehensive framework that is culturally responsive, and provide increased support to allow countries from the Global South to host these events, remain careful to the discursive power of the media, and revisit the role of politics in sports.

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