

How Has Sports Diplomacy Contributed To The Growth of Soft Power and Nation-Branding in Qatar ?

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Abstract

Sports diplomacy and soft power has contributed to national branding in Qatar. This paper sought to explore the contributions of sports diplomacy to national branding and soft power in Qatar through qualitative methods, where respondents were recruited purposively. The sample size for this study was seven participants drawn from various sectors and positions in Qatar. Data were collected using interviews and analyzed thematically. Therefore, to realize this aim, the research was anchored on the fundamental questions of using sports diplomacy to achieve national branding, soft power, and promotes human rights. The study further examined criticisms against Qatar during the FIFA World Cup. The research relied on qualitative methods, where respondents were recruited purposively. The sample size for this study was seven participants drawn from various sectors and positions in Qatar. Data were collected using interviews and analyzed thematically. Key findings outlined that sports diplomacy enhances Qatar's attractiveness and image within the global community context. Sports highlight a nation's culture, identity, and ranking internationally. Through sports mega-events like the FIFA World Cup, Qatar has promoted its cohesion, integration, interaction, and togetherness with other countries globally. Sports diplomacy in Qatar has significantly contributed to realizing social, political, and economic ties with the global system. Sports mega-events like the FIFA World Cup influence diplomatic and soft power exercise through greater international visibility. Qatar was able to project its image as a developed, peaceful, and largely stable country in the Middle East region.

Introduction:

For the past decades, Qatar has relied on soft power, the power of the image, information highways, and digital technology, as a more protective and practical than hard power, force, and brutal force in today's globalized world. The Gulf Emirate has chosen to use sports diplomacy for domestic and international purposes, making it one of the primary levers in this process. Therefore, sports play a significant role in Qatar's branding strategy, which combines social, political, and economic activities.¹

Unlike other nations in Middle East, Qatar chooses to use sport as its primary vector and point of differentiation to neutralize its weaknesses in the political sector and become a leader in this sector. The approach has enabled Qatar to achieve strategic branding opportunities for global visibility in national and international sports. In this context, organizing major international events is the first component of Qatar's national branding strategy. Qatar hosted the World Cup, one of the most influential media events in sports history, with over 5 billion viewers world-wide.²

¹ Algan, E., & Kaptan, Y. (2021). Turkey's TV celebrities as cultural envoys: The role of celebrity diplomacy in nation branding and the pursuit of soft power. *Popular Communication*, 19(3), 222-234.

² Antwi-Boateng, O., & Alhashmi, A. A. (2022). The emergence of the United Arab Emirates as a global soft power: Current strategies and future challenges. *Economic and Political Studies*, 10(2), 208-227.

In this article three sets of objectives are presented: 1) To explore the link between sports diplomacy and Qatar's international image improvement using sports mega-events; 2) To find out how sports diplomacy has been utilized to realize soft power in Qatar; and 3) To recommend appropriate ways for strengthening national branding, human rights, and soft power in Qatar

This article provides a foundation for understanding sports diplomacy dynamics, as Qatar practices. In addition, the application of soft power is characterized by some diplomatic challenges, such as policy harmonization and power imbalances. The findings are integral in soliciting positive and realistic approaches to sports diplomacy to support Qatar's international visibility and strategic interests. Moreover, the findings would help stakeholders develop relevant policies to enhance the country's national branding through soft power and sports diplomacy. Stakeholders can compare different factors and approaches to achieve solid, focused sports diplomacy. The findings provide present and future sports scholars interested in sports diplomacy, nation branding, and soft power in entrenching and firming global visibility.

Literature review:

This section presents a literature review on the Article. It examines explicitly and reviews the literature on sports diplomacy, nation branding, soft power, and international relations machinations. The chapter also draws from a wide range of literature to point out the various perspectives on sports diplomacy, nation branding, and soft power in international relations. In addition, the section highlights the gaps in literature and research questions developed from the review.

Qatar and Small State Politics:

As an illustration of a small state involved in sports diplomacy activities, this study focuses on Qatar. According to Kandakkeel ³ and Dubinsky ⁴, Qatar is tiny (in terms of people and landmass) but disproportionally significant in terms of politics and economy. Having long been under the rule of multiple empires, including the Ottoman, Persian, and Portuguese, Qatar has undergone substantial transformation in the previous century. After being a British protectorate, Qatar has been governed by an absolute monarchy since its independence from the United Kingdom. This country is one of the six member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was formed to help provide a stable political and economic environment for regional and national growth.

Similarly, Algan and Kaptan. Rookwood and Adeosun, and Teetzel and Dichter noted that other members of the GCC include Oman, Bahrain, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. The authors emphasize that Qatar is ranked 44th in landmass out of Asia's 51 states, with a total area of 4,416 square miles. Comparably, with 2.6 million people, it ranks in the 45th position of the most populous country across the continent. ⁵

In supporting Algan and Kaptan, Teetzel and Dichter, and Haghirian and Robles-Gil ⁶ state that Blue-collar expatriate workers make up 90% of this community, they have been enticed to the government's growing job opportunities in the recent years. Qatar is one of the wealthiest nations in the world despite its relatively small population and geographical scope. Furthermore, Haghirian and Robles - Gil and Dubinsky ⁷ point out that Qatar's GDP per capita is currently more than twice that of the United States' GDP at £ 96,827.

³ Kandakkeel, I. I. (2020). *Meeting the demands of classic and contemporary – a study on the traditional representations of Qatari heritage in nation branding, with special reference to mainstream logos and social media analysis* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Hamad Bin Khalifa University (Qatar).

⁴ Dubinsky, Y. (2019a). *From soft power to sports diplomacy: A theoretical and conceptual discussion*. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 15, 156-164.

⁵ Lee Ludvigsen, J. A., Rookwood, J., & Parnell, D. (2022). *The sport mega-events of the 2020s: Governance, impacts and controversies*. *Sport in Society*, 25(4), 705-711.

⁶ Haghirian, M., & Robles-Gil, P. (2021). *Soft power and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar: Learning from experiences of past mega-sporting event hosts*. *Tajseer Journal*, 3(2).

⁷ Ibid.

The primary source of these riches is the export of crude oil and liquefied natural gas. Qatar ranks third among the largest distributors of crude oil worldwide and ranks as the largest supplier of liquefied natural gas globally.

Sport, Soft Power, and Nation Branding:

Analysis of the main drivers behind nation-states' participation in transnational sports and hosting related events refers to external and internal motivations. According to Haghirian and Robles-Gil and Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi, by participating in transnational sports, Qatar attempt to create a national narrative while hosting sport-related events is one of the factors that influence and make connections across economic divisions and political borders. Power is among the most persistent factors influencing international relations.⁸

In a world where economic and political environments constantly change, states must cooperate across borders due to increased globalization processes and developments. On the other hand, Chadwick et al. (2022), Rookwood and Adeosun (2023), and Grix et al. (2019) contend that conventional "hard power" strategies for influencing relations across national boundaries remain a substantial part of the global political landscape. Hard power refers to coercive methods, usually involving the use of force and financial incentives to affect the policies or actions of other political entities. The observations of Chadwick et al. (2022) are corroborated by Grix et al. (2021), who noted that there has been a decline in the belief that, in international politics, employing force is the only realistic means of achieving objectives. Soft power, as opposed to physical power, is based on luring and co-opting other people to share desires.⁹

Mega-Events in Sports, Nation Branding, and Soft Power:

Sporting mega-events are becoming increasingly important for modern businesses, societies, nations, and athletes. Scholars across multiple disciplines, including tourism, economics, politics, and sociology, have studied these events. For example, Haghirian and Robles-Gil (2021), Kandakkeel (2020), and Næss (2023) provide evidence on mega-events and modernity that greatly enhance the comprehension of the historical and cultural value of these competitions as expressions of popular culture. In this regard, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are placed within the context of tourism, examining their political, economic, and cultural roles. Additionally, Grix et al. (2019) looked at the events' remarkable status due to their enormous scope, dramatic quality, frequency, and global importance - all of which contribute to their enduring mass popularity in modernity - continuing in an era of globalization. As people worldwide show more interest in significant events like the Olympic Games and World Cup, seen through profitable deals and TV contracts, media coverage, and high viewer ratings, small businesses in a hosting country are seen as valuable chances to gain influence through soft power. These purchases may be related to accomplishing goals stated by public diplomacy and nation branding experts. Similarly, Richelieu et al. (2021) and Lee Ludvigsen et al. (2022) contend that large-scale events offer countries significant opportunities to connect with and affect international audiences through public diplomacy. There are potential adverse outcomes in the context of soft power and its association with soft disempowerment. For instance, diplomatic crises within the realm of international relations may emerge. Such cases could harm the reputation of a country.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Chadwick, S., Widdop, P., & Burton, N. (2022). Soft power sports sponsorship – A social network analysis of a new sponsorship form. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 21(2), 196-217.

¹⁰ Richelieu, A., Lin, Y. C., & Leng, H. K. (2021). A typology of countries using place branding through sport. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 1-19.

One of the earliest activities people have engaged in for enjoyment is sport, which involves entertainment and minimizing conflicts. According to Li and Feng, Richelieu ¹¹ et al. and Rofo and Postlethwaite,^{1 2} even if the history of modern sports spectacles began in Ancient Greece, the internationalized sports world of today is far more complicated than before. However, the sport still has a significant influence on public life. Sports have developed into a "truly global" industry that attracts billions of fans, players, and coaches and makes substantial money. The assertions are supported by Rookwood (2019), who pointed out that sports have long been a tool used by governments and those in power to demonstrate authority outside the limits of the game. The concept of sports diplomacy is evident in the way countries politicize sports in the global arena. Similarly, Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi, Lee Ludvigsen et al. ¹³ and Chadwick et al. ¹⁴ noted that a burgeoning area of academic and civic society interest, sports diplomacy uses sport to accomplish specific goals, reduce conflict and animosity, and promote friendly interactions amongst strangers. Sports diplomacy entails the non-state and state players' purposeful and planned use of sporting events, athletes, and sports-related activities to influence public opinion among local and global audiences in a way that reinforces the objectives of the former. Regarding reducing political and social unrest, sports, like high culture, music, and arts, are valuable diplomatic soft power tools.

High-Level Athlete Naturalization:

The naturalization of athletes who were born outside of a state is a practice that is becoming more and more common among nations looking to improve their international standing through sports. According to Lee Ludvigsen et al.¹⁵, naturalization grants citizenship to athletes without apparent connection to the state. High-level athletes' naturalization is a win-win situation for athletes from highly competitive and weaker sporting nations.¹⁶ Naturalization programs, though filled with controversy regarding the alleged commercialization of citizenship, enable states to take advantage of foreign-born elite athletes' accomplishments to boost competitiveness and global prestige by producing medal tables and FIFA world rankings. The observations are supported by Li and Feng (2022), Kramareva and Grix (2021), and Kandakkeel (2020), who reported that elite sportspersons are given an easier route to international competition participation when they play for less competitive nations with underdeveloped domestic sports systems. Naturalizing foreign—born athletes is prevalent in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such as Bahrain and Qatar, which want to draw skilled foreign—born individuals to balance their relatively small native populations. Regarding Qatar, the naturalization of elite athletes illustrates the Emirate's goal to raise its (perceived) athletic talent in international competitions and enhance its reputation worldwide, ultimately acquiring further socio-cultural and economic advantages.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Rofo, J. S., & Postlethwaite, V. (2021). *Scholarship and sports diplomacy: The cases of Japan and the United Kingdom*. *Diplomatica*, 3(2), 363-385.

¹³ Lee Ludvigsen, J. A., Rookwood, J., & Parnell, D. (2022). *The sport mega-events of the 2020s: Governance, impacts and controversies*. *Sport in Society*, 25(4), 705-711.

¹⁴ Chadwick, S., Widdop, P., & Burton, N. (2022). *Soft power sports sponsorship – A social network analysis of a new sponsorship form*. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 21(2), 196-217.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Li, X., & Feng, J. (2022). *Nation branding through the lens of soccer: Using a sports nation branding framework to explore the case of China*. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25(4), 1118-1138.

The literature review has highlighted the attempts by states to tap sports mega—events, including the FIFA World Cup, to realize greater global visibility. As previously discussed, hosting internationally significant sporting events is a crucial component of Qatar's sports diplomacy. Studies, such as Lee Ludvigsen et al. (2022), Kandakkeel (2020), and Haghirian and Robles-Gil (2021), have highlighted that it helps to protect the culture of the Emirate and position itself as a desirable place to hire white—collar workers, a hub for foreign investments, and a desirable travel destination, all of which support the long-term setup of economic diversification.

The FIFA World Cup aimed to introduce visitors worldwide to what the Emirate offers and bring sports enthusiasts and fans an unforgettable experience in Qatar. For this reason, the Emirate hopes to capitalize on the vast media attention in order to have a permanent window for international promotion.¹⁷

However, the reviewed literature needs to acknowledge that Qatar's initiative to host major events, such as the FIFA World Cup, is not just a marketing tool. The initiative also helped set the Emirate apart from other GCC nations. In this sense, the Emirate's actions might be seen as a tactic to get white-collar professionals the upper hand over international travel investments from highly industrialized civilizations, in addition to assisting it in cultivating goodwill and connections with potential rivals and worldwide allies. The reviewed literature must present the processes and dynamics of sports diplomacy through soft power to enhance

nation branding. The present study addresses these literature gaps by examining different stakeholder perspectives on sports diplomacy, emerging issues, and balancing national interests and global visibility due to sports mega-events.

Materials and Methods:

This section delineates the methods applied to realize the aim regarding the contribution of sports diplomacy to the growth of soft power and nation branding in Qatar. It presents specific qualitative techniques adopted by the theses. Thus extensively discusses the research philosophy, design, approach, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis framework.

The researcher explores subjective data concerning the contribution of sports diplomacy to the growth of soft power and nation-branding in Qatar. As outlined by Bhangu et al. (2023) and Johnson et al. (2020), interpretivism allows researchers to scrutinize and assess datasets from various perspectives, considering experts' ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints. Based on comprehension of the phenomenon studied, the researcher made well-informed decisions.¹⁸ The researcher used the interpretivism paradigm to investigate methodologically the contribution of sports diplomacy to the growth of soft power and nation-branding in Qatar. This paradigm made it easier to investigate many points of view and interpretations, which improved the generation of trustworthy and quality results and conclusions.

¹⁷ Kramareva, N., & Grix, J. (2021). *Understanding public diplomacy, nation branding, and soft power in showcasing places via sports mega-events*. In N. Papadopoulos, & M. Cleveland (Eds.), *Marketing countries, places, and place-associated brands* (pp. 298-318). Edward Elgar Publishing.

¹⁸ Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). *A review of the quality indicators of rigor in qualitative research*. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(1).

As such, through an interpretivism philosophy, this study will seek to understand the world the way it is through subjective experiences that are presented by respondents on the contributions of sports diplomacy to the development of national branding and soft power in Qatar.

The Article aims to assess the contribution of sports diplomacy to the growth of soft power and nation branding in Qatar. In addition, it concentrates on comprehending how Qatar has continuously used sports diplomacy to enhance its international diplomacy. The case study design was selected because it can gather information from the sample of participants at a particular time, giving a snapshot of their perspectives and experiences with sports diplomacy, nation branding, and soft power, as applied in Qatar. By applying qualitative data, this case study technique enables a thorough analysis of the research topic and aims.¹⁹ The objective of the qualitative component, based on the interpretive research philosophy, is to investigate the subjective meanings that workers assign to their working conditions. Participants expressed their ideas and emotions in-depth via semi-structured interviews, offering insightful information on soft power's benefits, difficulties, and motives in the context of nation branding and sports diplomacy.

The current study examined participants' reflections using a case study of Qatar. The study used the case of Qatar to explore the dynamics of sports diplomacy, national branding, and soft power. Therefore, this research was limited to the organization, planning, activities, and

perspectives regarding the FIFA World Cup edition in Qatar. When the term qualitative is used, it highlights the methods, characteristics, and interpretations used in studies that do not involve experimental methods.

This study utilized the purposive sampling technique to create its sample. According to Basias and Pollalis (2018), this method, classified as non-probability sampling, selects participants according to their familiarity with, understanding, and knowledge of a specific study issue. The study participants were selected based on evident connection to the topic under investigation, prior research expertise, policy experiences, and active participation in numerous sports activities.²⁰ The researcher only recruited participants with in-depth knowledge of sports diplomacy, the application of soft power, and nation branding articulation. Swygart—Hobaugh (2019) observed that purposive sampling allows researchers to reach and obtain in-depth data from participants with firsthand experiences. Therefore, the sampling method was appropriate and focused on achieving the stated research questions and providing empirical findings.²¹

In pursuit of its objectives, this study employed in-depth interviews. These in-depth, unstructured, and intimate interviews aimed to gain insights into participants' thoughts, emotions, and opinions regarding a specific research topic. The primary benefit of conducting interviews in person is that it allows for direct and personal communication between interviewers and respondents, which reduces the non-response rate. However, Busetto et al. (2020) state that to

¹⁹ Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2, 1-10.

²⁰ Basias, N., & Pollalis, Y. (2018). Quantitative and qualitative research in business & technology: Justifying a suitable research methodology. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 7, 91-105.

²¹ Swygart-Hobaugh, M. (2019). Bringing method to the madness: An example of integrating social science qualitative research methods into NVivo data analysis software training. *Iassist Quarterly*, 43(2), 1-16.

conduct a successful interview, interviewers must have the necessary skills. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow for more flexibility in the interview process and can lead to conclusions regarding a research topic that was not previously planned. Thus, it is essential to note that the interview may deviate from the predefined goals and objectives of the study.²²

As reported in Qatar, the interview schedule contained four broad research questions on sports diplomacy, soft power, and nation branding. Basias and Pollalis (2018) state that the interview schedule permits participants to provide relevant answers to the issues sought by including clear and unambiguous questions. In conducting the interviews, the researcher probed respondents to get deeper insights into the main questions.²³

The interviews were conducted in a safe and private environment, as Köhler et al. (2022) and Hamilton and Finley (2019) emphasized. Providing security in interview locations allows respondents to answer questions freely without fearing interference from intruders.²⁴ Each interview lasted between 20 and 25 minutes. The interview schedule contains the following questions:

1. How did you feel about Qatar's successful bid to host the World Cup in 2022?
2. Do you believe the hosting of this event was successful?
3. What relationships (internationally) have been cultivated due to hosting the World Cup?
4. What is your response to the criticism that has emerged during the World Cup about Qatar's human rights record?

Findings and Analysis:

The data analysis yielded four broad themes regarding the contributions of sports diplomacy to nation branding and soft power in the context of Qatar. The themes include sports diplomacy and global recognition, successes and challenges associated with events in Qatar, sports diplomacy and nation branding, criticisms, soft power entrenchment, and sports diplomacy. The main themes are extensively elucidated in the following subsections.

Theme 1: Sports Diplomacy and Global Recognition

The theme highlighted the benefits of organizing sporting events like FIFA World in realizing global recognition and attention. Respondents noted that the successful bid and eventual hosting of the FIFA World Cup ushered Qatar to the worldwide stage through carefully crafted social, cultural, technological, and political messages for the international audience. The FIFA World Cup is attended and watched by many people across the globe.

The study outlined that the FIFA World Cup contributed significantly to Qatar's development. The responses indicate that holding the FIFA World Cup by Qatar was a huge milestone in all life spheres, including cultural, social, technological, and political development in the global arena. Qatar has a unique culture, and social ties displayed to the world during the FIFA World Cup and beyond. Winning the bid to host the mega event allowed the Arab world and Muslims to gain global representation and appeal because many people watch and attend the World Cup. Moreover, hosting the World Cup is a significant achievement for a nation. In the case of Qatar, it transformed and developed the country in record time.

²² Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C., *How to use and assess qualitative research methods* (Heidelberg, Germany, 2020)

²³ Basias, N., & Pollalis, Y. *Quantitative and qualitative research in business & technology* (Piraeus, Greece, 2018)

²⁴ Köhler, T., Smith, A., & Bhakoo, V. (2022). *Templates in qualitative research methods: Origins, limitations, and new directions*. *Organizational Research Methods*, 25(2), 183-210.

Qatar provided the international community with the World Cup to remember in the Middle East. A country that hosts or wins this competition feels a pride lasting many years. The global exposure that Qatar experienced is crucial to future international engagements, including economic and political policies. Thus, by hosting the World Cup, Qatar has endeavored to build strong economic ties globally to realize positive transformation. Overall, hosting the FIFA World Cup by Qatar improved Qatar's international recognition and visibility. The responses also highlight the FIFA World Cup's potential contributions to strengthening and diversifying the national economy. Therefore, the FIFA World Cup provided an opportunity to promote Arab hospitality and confront negative misconceptions about Muslim nations, such as Islamophobia and terrorism. The FIFA World Cup propelled Qatar into the global limelight, where it showed national culture and advertised itself as a destination of choice.

Theme 2: Successes and Challenges Associated with Event in Qatar

The analysis showed that hosting the FIFA World Cup in Qatar presented mixed reactions from stakeholders concerning whether things were conducted successfully or failed. The responses indicate that despite Qatar's small size and international stature, it successfully hosted the FIFA World Cup. The FIFA World Cup is more than simply a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to host the World Cup. Respondents hail the World Cup in Qatar as the best due to its unique culture, planning, and execution. Moreover, the Qatari government provided adequate security for people attending the mega event. The organization reflected the hospitality of Qatar and, by extension, the Arab world. The stakeholders' reaction to the

FIFA World Cup is documented to highlight the positive achievements of the Middle Eastern nations. As depicted by the responses, memories from the event could shape future interactions by influencing how individuals respond to comparable circumstances. Thus, the FIFA World Cup held in Qatar acted as an inspiration for creating an entirely new national image and success factors. This event alone has significantly affected Qatar by highlighting its culture and fast-tracking socio-economic development.

The responses show that despite minor hitches in ticket acquisition for the various matches, the FIFA World Cup in Qatar succeeded. The planning and execution of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar ushered the country into the international community through various activities accompanied by its unique culture. The Middle East and the entire Arab world were proud of the mega sports event taking place in Qatar. The event helped Qatar and the world to celebrate unity and diversity. The responses indicate that fans worldwide congregated in Qatar to enjoy and appreciate the country's diversity. Qatar's unique culture and magnificent infrastructure attracted many people from different backgrounds. In addition, the tournament's success is shown in how fans from various regions celebrated together regardless of cultural differences. All people were welcome to visit and enjoy life in Qatar while supporting their teams. Furthermore, the responses showed that many people were surprised to learn about Qatar's capability to host the FIFA World Cup by building standard stadiums, hosting many people, and maintaining law and order. The Qatari government dispelled these fears through proper planning, execution, and management of all its security, management, and social apparatus to ensure the event's success. All individuals attending the FIFA World Cup in Qatar enjoyed security, as

traffic and order were maintained. Therefore, based on the responses of these participants, Qatar successfully staged the FIFA World Cup to the satisfaction and excitement of fans worldwide.

Theme 3: Sports Diplomacy and Nation Branding

Sports diplomacy and national branding emerged as the main themes from the analyzed interview transcripts. Participants indicated that the FIFA World Cup played a significant role in fostering Qatar's brand image internationally.

Respondents underscored the significant role played by Qatar in promoting regional peace through sports and diplomacy. The Qatari government strives to realize regional peace by undertaking mechanisms that bring warring countries to find amicable solutions.

The responses show that by hosting the FIFA World Cup, Qatar received significant global appeal due to its unique cultural heritage and natural fauna, fostering cultural, social, and economic integration. The intangible legacy resulting from the image of Qatar is one of the primary factors encouraging bidding for and hosting the FIFA World Cup. Qatar is situated in one of the world's most volatile areas; hosting events showed its ability to ensure national and regional security. The country utilized the World Cup opportunity to strengthen regional peace, as illustrated in its efforts to mediate the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. Although Qatar has a small territory, persistent diplomacy has strengthened international relations. Since hosting the FIFA World Cup, Qatar has been heavily promoting its destination image through event tourism and a plan of significant internal and external expenditures. The nation has developed over time into a center for business and leisure activities in the area, including conferences, festivals, thematic fairs, and sporting events. Beyond this, a significant

portion of a strategy to improve the country's reputation entails substantial investments in high-performance and local sports, allowing the nation to establish the most cutting-edge training facilities.

Furthermore, the connection between sports diplomacy and nation branding was emphasized by study participants. Qatar engaged in several activities before and after the FIFA World Cup to strengthen its brand image globally.

The responses reveal that the FIFA World Cup in Qatar promoted nation branding and displayed the uniqueness of the host nation to the global community. In Qatar, this approach has been strengthened by a policy that involves planning international events to raise regional awareness. Thus, the FIFA World Cup project affected the country and extended well beyond sports. The responses show that the FIFA World Cup was a turning point that permanently placed Qatar and the entire Arab world in the international limelight. The agencies tasked with managing, organizing, and executing the FIFA World Cup and other essential pre- and post-event support infrastructure did commendable work. Therefore, these responses highlight that the FIFA World Cup enhanced Qatar's brand image in international social, economic, technological, political, and cultural realms.

Theme 4: Criticisms, Human Rights, and Sports Diplomacy

The final theme developed from the interview responses was the emerging criticisms, human rights, and sports diplomacy. The respondents in this study pointed out that the planning, organization, and hosting of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar faced some criticisms. Participants emphasize the perspectives despite noting a strong connection between sports diplomacy and soft power elements.

The responses indicate that the FIFA World Cup in Qatar presented some human rights, as noted by participants. The world, particularly the West, focused on Qatar as the World Cup drew near. The responses reveal that the World Cup in Qatar received significant criticism from different quarters, including the Western media. However, such criticism must be constructive and intended to support sustainable growth and development. The criticism should not be based on a smear campaign. Qatar was mainly blamed for the poor handling of human rights. However, the criticisms coming from the Western media failed to recognize that the power and wealth in Western countries are products of exploitation and colonialism. The criticisms particularly sought to undermine Qatar's social fabric. Evidence from the responses suggests that despite these negative criticisms, Qatar overcame and staged the best FIFA World Cup. The host nation used the opportunity to promote the welfare of its workers to enhance overall national development. In addition, it was the first time the World Cup was held in the Middle East, and a developing nation automatically attracted criticism. The responses show that Qatar implemented policies to minimize human rights issues before the FIFA World Cup. The government and all other stakeholders collaborated with multiple ministries to deal with human rights challenges. The World Cup has been a unifying force, bringing people from different countries and cultures together and promoting a shared identity and community.

Discussion:

This section delineates the discussion of the findings presented in the preceding section. It is organized and structured to discuss holistically the overarching issues in the FIFA World Cup in Qatar by appreciating the role of sports diplomacy

in nation branding and human rights. The following key areas have been addressed: sports diplomacy and national branding, cross-cutting issues, sports diplomacy, and human rights. The planning and staging of the World Cup in Qatar influenced and resulted in far-reaching effects on the culture, economy, technology, social, and political arrangements. Moreover, Qatar is the first Arabic nation to plan for and host the FIFA World Cup. Hosting mega events influences the fundamental structures of a country, including economic, social, and political. Hosting the FIFA World Cup helped Qatar diversify its long-term revenue sources and receive enhanced global visibility.

Sports Diplomacy, Engagements, and Image Enhancement:

Being the first Middle Eastern nation to host the FIFA World Cup, Qatar may view the World Cup as one of the major opportunities to gain international recognition. In addition, Qatar is among the smallest nations, with a short football history, and has hot weather. Organizing a mega event despite the hot weather and winning the championships can pave the way for the country to accomplish its geopolitical objectives. However, in this case, people will question the appropriateness of playing games in the current geopolitical atmosphere. More significantly, this event allowed the country to make every effort to set itself apart from other Middle Eastern Gulf nations by showcasing its resources and favorable image at the massive event to attract highly trained workers from major industrialized states to work in Qatar. These findings are corroborated by Kandakkeel (2020), Dubinsky (2019a), Abdi et al. (2022), Lee Ludvigsen et al. (2022), and Jeong and Grix (2023), who observed that in 2008, Qatar introduced our National Vision 2030 to turn the nation into a vibrant and sustainable knowledge-based economy.

Since then, the country has been putting much effort into developing Qatar's brand and raising its visibility in the international arena. Qatar has achieved this by hosting mega athletic events, diversifying the economy, promoting human and national development, and mediating international conflicts. Through these efforts, the country has strengthened its capacities and established its credibility as a trustworthy global participant and partner.

Qatar's soft power strategy and image branding are closely linked to its investments in international sports. The findings demonstrated how Qatar's prior branding strategy included supporting peaceful conduct of mega sports events. Qatar aims to raise its profile internationally by being affiliated with a globally recognized team such as FC Barcelona. Similarly, Qatar's involvement in international sports is a crucial component of its soft power and sports diplomacy plans. The FIFA World Cup provided the Qatari government with enormous branding and soft power expansion prospects. Qatar is a highly iconic city and well-known for its arts, culture, and architecture. As a result, it is seen as an attractive country by many people worldwide, contributing to its soft power and international reputation. Qatar sought to become more visible state and influential globally by equating itself world's democratic governments.

The findings revealed that Qatar sought to become a hub for regional and global sports events, as in the FIFA World Cup. The nation has invested significantly in sports activities to promote its image as a preferred destination in the Middle East. The Qatari government has developed various infrastructure projects to support mega sports events. Similar observations are reported by Grix et al. (2015), Næss (2023), and

Richelieu et al. (2021), who pointed out that only over 270,000 native Qataris, exist today, making up 10% of the nation's entire population. The remaining immigrants are all from different countries and frequently travel to Qatar for high-paying jobs. The naturalization approach formerly overused in sports has been gradually modified to prioritize local athletes' development. Despite inequality, Qatar might still be considered a relatively wealthy nation. These findings are reinforced by Chadwick et al. (2022)²⁵ and Ganohariti and Dijkhoorn²⁶ who observed that this is conceivable given the stark disparities in pay between Qatari citizens, who make up roughly 10% of the population but account for the majority of wealth, and migrant workers, who make up over 90% of the labor force. Qatar is currently the world's largest construction site. The local government has sought international recognition from Western nations through significant expenditures in infrastructural development. The findings highlighted that the intangible power sources of a nation, its foreign policies (when they are viewed as morally just and lawful), its political ideals (when it upholds them both at home and abroad), and its culture (where it is appealing to others), to elucidate diplomacy, as expressed in the case of Qatar. Then, these resources ought to be marketed in a way that appeals to entire countries, provided through the following three public diplomacy facets in addition to their governments: consistent communication that serves as a sort of national branding effort, planned communication that corresponds with the media, and other opinion leaders. Establishing viable connections with significant figures over an extended period via exchanges, training, conferences, seminars, and media outlets is paramount.

²⁵ Chadwick, S., Widdop, P., & Burton, N. (2022). Soft power sports sponsorship – A social network analysis of a new sponsorship form. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 21(2), 196-217.

²⁶ Ganohariti, R., & Dijkhoorn, E. (2020). Para-and proto-sports diplomacy of contested territories: CONIFA as a platform for football diplomacy. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 15(3), 329-354.

Sports mega—events, such as the FIFA World Cup, have a powerful emotional impact on host nations and fans worldwide. The event helps people to establish close relationships and learn cultural competence. In this regard, sponsors and hosts could leverage these relationships to enhance public perception and appeal. Qatar has employed various means, including lobbying, to gain international visibility through sports diplomacy. The ultimate goal of the Qatari government is to demonstrate leadership in the era of globalization.

The sports entail various aspects that can be employed to assess its potential impact on politics, in addition to the most efficient means of building relationships and promoting a good reputation, spreading information for state and non-state players as asserted by Lee Luvigsen et al. (2022) and Grix et al. (2015). The two significant reasons as stated in present findings highlight the importance of developing policies with full support from governmental companies and non—profit organizations as well as developing diplomatic relationships. Sports are one activity that can reach a larger worldwide on one hand, as the sports industry is a lot more profitable than most industries on the other hand. Qatar hosted the FIFA World Cup deemed most successful in the history of the mega event. However, Richelieu et al. (2021) and Lee Ludvigsen et al. (2022) observed that Qatar has received much criticism from the West resulting due to the tapestry of human issues. It is worth mentioning that China was able to use sports to project an image of itself as a modern power to the world, whereas sports attract a large audience despite confronting a variety of criticism. Nation branding can be enhanced in the host country by utilizing the global audience to the events. The host country is

allowed by a global audience to do national branding and commercial products. Considerably, it is an example of how state increasing national visibility in the international area through diplomacy and soft sport power.^{27, 28}

Sports Mega Events and Diplomatic Nexus:

The present findings show that Qatar has significantly attempted to use sports to promote diplomacy and international relations. As demonstrated by Qatar, there are various observable instances of how sports diplomacy is used in multiple contexts to increase complex power resources and achieve specific national objectives. Qatar has used sports to express its willingness and ability to forge solid global relations for the common good. These findings are corroborated by Taylor et al. (2023), Rookwood and Adeosun (2023), and Rookwood (2019), who observed that Qatar seized the World Cup opportunity to glorify and display its foreign policies to the international community. Despite the small size of Qatar, the government ensured that all individuals attending the mega event were safe and comfortable. Qatar has exploited sports diplomacy to promote and strengthen its security apparatus in a region widely considered unstable and conflict—prone. In addition, Qatar leveraged the FIFA World Cup to realize its diplomatic objectives.

Qatar has attracted foreign countries in this context as it attempts to change its reputation from a threat to international peace. However, Grix and Brannagan (2016), Grix et al. (2019), Haghirian and Robles-Gil (2021), and Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi (2022) pointed out that although Qatar has made considerable progress in strengthening its international diplomacy to

²⁷ Richelieu, A., Lin, Y. C., & Leng, H. K. (2021). A typology of countries using place branding through sport. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 1-19.

²⁸ Lee Ludvigsen, J. A., Rookwood, J., & Parnell, D. (2022). The sport mega-events of the 2020s: Governance, impacts and controversies. *Sport in Society*, 25(4), 705-711.

achieve favorable global outlook in an increasingly competitive international community. The FIFA World Cup is among the most significant and most profitable sports events worldwide, which has an unmatched influence, a global audience, and an attraction for all people. Thus, the interplay between sports and diplomacy continues to be essential in the international arena.

Qatar has employed mega sports events, such as the FIFA World Cup, to enhance its international relations and reinforce international best practices, such as negotiations and observance of international human rights. The emphasis is on shifting from force to attraction and becoming more legitimate, cost—effective, and mighty in international affairs by strategically using its more appealing features. These findings are supported by Rookwood and Adeosun (2023), Næss (2023), Kramareva and Grix (2021), Algan and Kaptan (2021), Lee Ludvigsen et al. (2022), and Teetzel and Dichter (2021), who illustrated four persuasion tools employed by public diplomacy are evident in the context of sports. It is representing a case study about the historical overlapping between the sports and international politics in a wide range area such as diplomacy, ideology, nation branding, and access. In this regards, these findings are consistent with Kandakkeel (2020) and Dubinsky (2019) which explained the reasons why governments rely on international sports to attract enthusiastic audiences. It is recognized that hosting international sports might be less cost compared to media campaigns such as TV or programming networks. Thus it is essential to consider sport diplomacy as a tool of soft power and achieving various kind of other set of goals or agendas like communication, interaction and cooperation.

Sports diplomacy entails using athletic events, sports professionals, and athletes to educate, engage, and create a positive image for audiences

and organizations worldwide. These individuals can also share insights to help their government accomplish its foreign policy objectives. Murray says that if the nation uses sports to supplement its foreign policy, its image will change from insignificance and hermetic to embracing efficacy and innovation. Furthermore, sports and sporting organizations' impact, influence, and attractiveness are growing. The findings are supported by Teetzel and Dichter (2021) and Taylor et al. (2023), who observed that hardly anyone who opposes sports activities. Therefore, sports present an excellent avenue for nations to expand their appeal to people. Cultural or sports exchanges, for example, are examples of soft power overtures from governments that are more likely to engage public opinion than hard power diplomacy. The findings are contradicted by Al Thani (2021) and Chadwick et al. (2022), who argued that it is not automatic that sports diplomacy yield good results without proper planning; the event could be counter-productive if an appropriate international agenda is not pushed by the host nation. The beliefs and perspectives of audiences in the international arena can be dramatically changed if the diplomatic message and image are changed to show confidence in sporting values.

The findings revealed that the country converted other stadiums into community amenities, including hotels, schools, and hospitals. A wide range of water and energy-efficient techniques, including solar energy and reusing air conditioning water, have been used in the construction of the stadiums, which have been constructed using recycled and reused materials wherever possible. Thus, by implementing modular stadium models, Qatar has taken steps to ensure that the World Cup stadiums do not become “white elephants,” a problem that has often arisen in previous World Cups.

These findings are corroborated by Ganohariti and Dijkhoorn (2020), Næss (2023), and Richelieu et al. (2021), who pointed out that by displaying its state-of-the-art stadiums that are more sustainable and incorporate advanced technology, Qatar demonstrates its commitment to adopting sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. This motivates people all over the world to commit to sustainability. Once more, this strategy demonstrates how Qatar uses sports diplomacy to build relationships with other nations. Qatar aims to win over the hearts and minds of people worldwide by concentrating on hosting a sustainable World Cup and giving away portions of their stadiums to other states without access to sports facilities. Qatar also displayed its stadiums and advanced infrastructure to a global audience during the FIFA World Cup.

Human Rights and Sports Diplomacy:

The findings revealed a strong link between sports diplomacy and the enhancement of human rights. The need to respect fundamental human rights is enshrined in international conventions. In this regard, Qatar is bound by these international laws to align its national goals to internally accepted best practices. Qatar, however, is under pressure to demonstrate that its outward portrayal of itself as a liberal and just society is accurate. The findings are supported by Algan and Kaptan (2021), Rookwood and Adeosun (2023), Teetzel and Dichter (2021), Kandakkeel (2020), and Dubinsky (2019a), who reported that aiming towards this objective, reforms like the reorganization of the Kafala system, enhanced migrant worker working conditions, and more female involvement in sports are all actions that will have an influence long after the World Cup is over. Meanwhile, Qatar managed these changes while maintaining its distinct cultural identity. The Qatari government

employed various tactics, including enhancing its diplomatic ties with the international community to successfully hold the FIFA World Cup. However, these findings are contradicted by past studies, such as Wong and Meng-Lewis (2023), Lee Ludvigsen et al. (2022), and Grix et al. (2015) that the Emirate of Qatar is still suspected of using a sophisticated web of regional loyalties, football politics, and alliances to win its place as the World Cup hosting country, even if none of the allegations against it have been proven. Despite these assertions, Qatar lost its legitimacy, which cost it credibility and esteem abroad. Qatar has encountered persistent drawbacks in its continuous efforts to resolve these inequities and improve its global image. To refute these accusations, Qatar used the World Cup to show that it adheres to Western morals and standards of conduct in contrast to its neighbors in the area. In addition, Qatar's main goal to host the World Cup was to engage in political performance as a practice by presenting itself as a modern Muslim Arab community to attract other countries.

Qatar's laws and culture regarding gender equality and homosexuality have also drawn harsh criticism from international media outlets, with flogging being employed as a form of punishment for having extramarital affairs. Living together with unmarried people of the opposing sex is forbidden, and same-sex relationships are illegal. It is not appropriate to display affection in public. Though its culture should be respected, Algan and Kaptan (2021), Lee Ludvigsen et al. (2022), and Teetzel and Dichter (2021) stated that Qatar ensures every fan was made to feel welcome during the World Cup. The findings further revealed that the FIFA World Cup proved successful and a critical turning point in Qatar's history.

The event ushered in a momentous occasion with profound cultural and social ramifications, helping them forge a unique identity within the larger Muslim and Arab nations. The World Cup presented fans from various parts of the world to appreciate Qatar's uniqueness. The organizers and planners emphasized respect for cultural diversity. These findings are corroborated by Chadwick et al. (2022), Rookwood and Adeosun (2023), and Grix et al. (2019), who reported that the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, which oversees the tournament's organization and execution, guarantees that everyone will be accepted, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, religion, color, or nationality. Qatar made every effort to guarantee the security and well-being of all fans. The host nation expected fans worldwide to enjoy and experience the scenes and sites in Qatar. In this context, the FIFA World Cup organizers discouraged any form of discrimination that would taint the image of the country. By reassuring the international community that they have nothing to fear when visiting Qatar as long as they respect the host nation's values and traditions, the strategy helps lessen exaggeration and solves their fears. These findings are reinforced by Taylor et al. (2023), Rookwood and Adeosun (2023), and Rookwood (2019), who observed that the Qatar government used diplomatic approaches to handle issues arising from the conduct of the FIFA World Cup. National dignity and respect were maintained to attract many fans from other countries. Events such as corruption, brought to light by Western media outlets and cast doubt on Qatar's actual worth as a host nation, have also contributed to the decline of Qatar's standing and reputation abroad. Thus, to dispel the unfavorable impression that many Western countries still have of the area, the event's organizers promised

reviews of its domestic laws on human rights, which have taken on a greater significance. Similarly, Al Thani (2021), Chadwick et al. (2022), and Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi (2022) argued that sports have been a significant indicator of progress and development in Asia, particularly in East Asian countries. East Asia's developing nations want to host a significant international athletic event to demonstrate their strength, wealth, and arrival on the world scene. Most countries use sports to educate the world about the value of sports as a diplomatic instrument that can help raise their nation's status. Qatar uses athletics to raise its reputation internationally and serve as a peacemaker to ease tensions with rival countries. The announcement by North and South Korea to form a hockey team for a single woman for the Olympics shows how sports can strengthen ties between countries and bring competing countries closer together, which can also help their icy relationship. Similar findings were presented by Næss (2023) and Kramareva and Grix (2021), who observed that sports, could provide a forum or a platform where countries can reunite after 52 years apart and decide to develop relations. Since leaders of Pakistan and India frequently meet to have conversations and take action to ease ongoing tensions, cricket is a valuable tool for these meetings. In addition, a nation could promote significant political objectives and project a positive image to the world through sports. Ultimately, staging mega-events is not a goal only major developing countries have; small developing countries also aim to achieve this goal. Due to the large number of people attending the big sports event, non-state players also concentrate on it to spread a campaign and increase public and global awareness of the critical circumstances.

Due to its successful bid to host the FIFA World Cup and its favorable position to submit a new bid for the Olympics, Qatar has been using sport as a platform to show its global goals to the rest of the world. Sport provides countries with a platform to engage in a global sports arms race aimed at achieving worldwide recognition through methods different from the use of economic and military power. Following Qatar's successful bid, many people doubted the country hosting significant events because it is among the smallest in the world, has no football history, and has hot weather. The authorities of Qatar view the hosting of the mega tournament as a crucial component of their broader international strategy. The findings are reinforced by Teetzel and Dichter (2021), who observed that hosting the FIFA World Cup boosted its position in the international arena, fostered national unity, and improved their infrastructure. Putting together massive athletic events and funding the achievements of great athletes can be a means of achieving geopolitical objectives and gaining international recognition. In contrast to other countries that have recently made significant investments in the sports sector, Grix, Brannagan, and Houlihan (2015), Grix et al. (2019), Ganohariti and Dijkhoorn (2020), Næss (2023), Richelieu et al. (2021), Wong and Meng-Lewis (2023) reported that like South Africa and Brazil, Qatar is more focused on improving its national security than on becoming a regional powerhouse, which is a role that it already shares with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Major sporting events provide a hosting country with instant access to a global audience

market from which it can display its images and knowledge of its culture and society to people of all countries and share about its cultural, economic, and political power. This increased global audience market is also a sign that a country has emerged as a significant player on the international scene.²⁹

Furthermore, the study's findings show that investing in international sports and participating in these major sports events is essential to Qatar's foreign policy, emphasizing soft power. Soft power is the capacity to use beauty to persuade others to share desires. One has to consider Qatar's sports spending within a broader foreign policy framework. Qatar is well aware that it needs more hard power capabilities to defend the nation from external threats due to its small population and size. In light of this, Qatar has worked hard to establish solid diplomatic ties with other countries. Qatar views itself as a neutral player in the Middle East with positive ties to several states and organizations. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2023) and Grix et al. (2015) pointed out that owing to these positive ties, Qatar frequently mediates regional disagreements and crises to raise its political profile and soft power in the Middle East. Similar to how the World Cup in South Africa gave pride to the entire African continent, the World Cup can make the Muslim world proud. They may elevate their standing in the Middle East in this way.^{30,31} Major sporting events like the World Cup can draw tourists, boost a country's reputation abroad, and change how the public and governments of other countries view them. Qatar demonstrated its nation as a

²⁹ Grix, J., & Brannagan, P. M. (2016). *Of mechanisms and myths: Conceptualising states' "soft power" strategies through sports mega-events*. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 27(2), 251-272.

³⁰ Grix, J., Brannagan, P. M., & Houlihan, B. (2015). *Interrogating states' soft power strategies: A case study of sports mega-events in Brazil and the UK*. *Global Society*, 29(3), 463-479.

³¹ Taylor, T., Burdsey, D., & Jarvis, N. (2023). *A critical review on sport and the Arabian Peninsula—the current state of play and future directions*. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 15(2), 367-383.

rising, modern economic and sporting powerhouse by hosting exceptionally well—organized and spectacular Olympic Games. At the same time, Al Thani (2021) and Chadwick et al. (2022) noted that Germany used the World Cup as public diplomacy to change the world's perception of it as a hostile country to a hospitable and friendly one. This perfectly fits the foreign policy of Qatar of attracting soft power inside the international framework. Qatar hopes to demonstrate its political, economic, and cultural might by hosting the World Cup. If effective, it can enhance their standing as a modern, stable nation in an area where many Westerners consider them backward.

Conclusion :

Research in this study has shown the connection between national branding and sports diplomacy. Through sports, the host nation may display its wealth and resources to the outside world and present an environment conducive to international education and direct foreign contact. Expressing environments and philosophies may attract foreign direct investments and international students. The country might also advertise its top tourist spots to attract many visitors. One of the best examples of how important sports events are for achieving national interests in this international arena is the FIFA World Cup. Qatar created enormous opportunities for the country, as most of its towns underwent transformations that improved their reputation and drew tourists and business. Qatar was disconnected, irrelevant, and isolated until it hosted a single sports event. That event promoted improvement in the country's infrastructure and development; now, it is inventive and successful. Before the FIFA World

Cup, Qatar's reputation was unimportant and was heavily tarnished due to perceived roles in global terrorism. However, the Beijing Olympics significantly contributed to the globalization of the perception of China as a modern, emerging economic superpower. Billions of people worldwide watched the games through various media channels, which allowed Qatar to display performances based on its ancient heritage. This demonstrates how crucial mega sporting events are to any country's ability to advance its interests domestically, attract foreign direct investment, and influence public opinion abroad.

However, politics and sports frequently collide. Politicians and other leaders work harder to leverage sports' advantages to a country to achieve its national interests. In addition, sports have been utilized to influence bilateral and international relationships. History also shows that sports have been used to achieve diplomatic objectives, such as national propaganda, international boycotts, and raising public awareness. Moreover, sports diplomacy can attract and persuade, so it has frequently been utilized as a political and diplomatic instrument. International sports events are also considered an increasingly important channel through which nations present their brands, philosophies, and public image to the world. More significantly, countries have utilized sports to engage, share information, inform, and influence audiences worldwide and to impact international politics and events.

Date collected from participants adequately addressed critical issues link sports and diplomacy in the ever-changing complexion of international relations. The findings revealed that sports events could be enticing as they can arouse strong emotions

³² Al Thani, M. (2021). Channeling soft power: The Qatar 2022 world cup, migrant workers, and international image. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 38(17), 1729-1752.

³³ Chadwick, S., Widdop, P., & Burton, N. (2022). Soft power sports sponsorship – A social network analysis of a new sponsorship form. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 21(2), 196-217.

The Qatari society places a high value on cleanliness, and they have used athletics to display their culture and national image to the rest of the globe. The rest of the world viewed Qatar's positive image and served as an example of true sportsmanship to others, thanks to the millions of viewers. The World Cup serves as a platform that unites people from various countries and provides fans with a fantastic opportunity to learn about and exchange cultures, much like how the Qataris have demonstrated their fantastic culture of cleanliness. Qatar sought to use mega sports events to increase its soft power and project a positive image to the world. When a country shows interest in hosting major events, it is evidence that sports and related events are becoming an essential component of its diplomacy. The pursuit of worldwide recognition and marketing influence has made international sports and sporting mega-events precious assets. Sports mega—events might be utilized to educate the world about soft power in Qatar and attract people globally with sports. The mega sports event was a component of a larger soft power strategy that the country employed to possess both hard and soft power resources.

It is essential to examine the nexus between sports diplomacy and exercise of soft power. Governments and nations have consistently demonstrated how essential sports and athletic events are by focusing significantly on the advantages and power of access to large audiences. In the modern world, a country's foreign policy can be expanded by working with international sports teams or recruiting individual athletes and mending the cold diplomatic ties between them. Moreover, it can be employed to organize sports-based nation-building. It clearly illustrates how diplomacy and sports are connected to enhance international relations between governments and

nations. International sports also provide a variety of avenues for nations to demonstrate their various forms of domination, from individual athletic abilities in competition to displaying or communicating their philosophy regarding a specific political system.

The host nation can also educate global audiences about its economic prosperity through sports, inspire and draw foreign direct investments in international students studying abroad, spread the government's principles, and bring in the foreign public. Because of modern technology, people living in different parts of the world can now know what is happening in other parts, making the world much smaller. Hence, athletic events can potentially draw big crowds to the stadium. Furthermore, thanks to technology, these athletic events also give the hosting country a significant advantage. The three most important things for every country are to entice international students, convince foreign audiences, and encourage foreign direct investments. Significant groups of people in the audience attend sporting events. This is an advantage to the hosting country as it allows them to promote foreign direct investments, international students, and the international public by displaying its economic resources and positive image. The 2008 Beijing Olympics served as an excellent illustration of how China effectively promoted foreign direct investment, international students, and foreign public opinion by displaying its riches and positive image. Through sports, China was able to display itself to the world as a developing country, emerging to become a modern economic powerhouse despite facing much criticism. Furthermore, Qatar used sports to project its legitimacy. Sports are essential for drawing in big audiences, including influential politicians and authorities. Therefore, sports might be the perfect platform for the emerging

nation to fight for political freedom. International sports federations frequently provide nations with the will to become independent nation-states with the opportunity to compete or participate under a flag that may not represent their current level of sovereignty.

Soft power is the capacity to achieve goals by appealing to other countries instead of using force or money. Nations emphasize hosting mega sports events to display their assets and draw in foreign direct investment and tourism by projecting a positive image. In addition to countries cooperating in sports, education, the arts, and media, soft power is seen as having substantial power in recent years. A good example is the way that the various countries represent cultures. Hosting massive sporting events presents numerous opportunities to enhance soft power by showing cultural diversity in various media to draw in tourists. For instance, the FIFA World Cup attracted large global audiences, which helped them increase their soft power. Therefore, one of the most effective ways to reach many people quickly is hosting a mega event and making it successful.

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