

Qatar World Cup: own goal or success for sponsors. Analysis of videos posted on YouTube and audience response

Mundial de Catar: autogol o éxito para los patrocinadores. Análisis de los videos publicados en YouTube y la respuesta de la audiencia

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How to reference this article / Standard Reference.

Pérez-Seoane, J., Corbacho-Valencia, J. M., & Albuín-Penas, J. (2023). Qatar World Cup: own goal or success for sponsors. Analysis of videos posted on YouTube and audience response. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 81, 76-96. <https://www.doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2023-2006>

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The controversies surrounding the World Cup in Qatar have led to the reproach of the sponsoring brands for linking their image with a supposedly irregularly awarded event and under suspicions of human rights violations, held in a country that does not respect women's rights and whose laws collide with the values that are expected of a sports global event. **Methodology:** From a descriptive perspective, the aim is to find out the reputational impact that sponsorship of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) World Cup has had on the collaborating brands through a content analysis of their videos published on YouTube and the response of their audiences. **Results:** Audiovisuals that are among the most viewed of the year and that have not provoked notable reactions among audiences. Their reception tends to be positive without a significant number of criticisms for linking their image to that of the competition. **Discussion:** This circumstance leads us to question the idea, assumed in our society, that sponsorship of the World Cup in Qatar has not been profitable (or, at least, has had negative effects) for the image of the brands that have associated their image

with the event, although it is true that the impact of sponsorship varies depending on the cultural roots for the brand. **Conclusions:** The relevance of the championship is more remarkable than the possible detrimental effects for the brands, which have suffered hardly any negative consequences from sponsoring the event.

Keywords: Sports sponsorship; World Cup; YouTube; Reputation; Sports diplomacy; Soft power; Nation branding.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Las polémicas que han rodeado al Mundial de fútbol de Catar han llevado a reprobar a las marcas patrocinadoras por vincular su imagen con un evento adjudicado de manera supuestamente irregular, fraguado bajo sospechas de vulneración de los derechos humanos y celebrado en un país que no respeta los derechos de la mujer y cuyas leyes colisionan con los valores que se le presuponen a un evento deportivo global. **Metodología:** Desde una óptica descriptiva, se busca conocer el impacto reputacional que ha supuesto el patrocinio de la Copa Mundial de la Federación Internacional de Fútbol Asociación (FIFA) para las marcas colaboradoras a través de un análisis de contenido de sus vídeos publicados en YouTube y la respuesta de sus audiencias. **Resultados:** Audiovisuales que se sitúan entre los más vistos del año y que no han provocado reacciones destacables entre las audiencias. Su acogida tiende a ser positiva sin que se advierta un número significativo de críticas por vincular su imagen a la de la competición. **Discusión:** Esta circunstancia nos lleva a cuestionar la idea, asumida en nuestra sociedad, de que el patrocinio del Mundial de Catar no ha sido rentable (o, al menos, ha tenido efectos negativos) para la imagen de las marcas que han asociado su imagen al evento, aunque es cierto que el impacto del patrocinio oscila en función del arraigo cultural para la marca. **Conclusiones:** La relevancia del campeonato es más destacable que los posibles efectos perjudiciales para las marcas, que apenas han sufrido consecuencias negativas por patrocinar el evento.

Palabras clave: Patrocinio deportivo; Mundial; YouTube; Reputación; Diplomacia deportiva; *Soft power*; *Nation branding*.

1. Introduction

Since Qatar was chosen as the host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup on December 2, 2010, a path full of obstacles began until its celebration in November 2022. For the first time in the history of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), a host was named so far in advance. This designation would be special for a series of reasons that make the 2022 edition a pioneer in various facets that transcend merely football aspects.

To begin with, the celebration schedule was changed due to the climatic conditions, and the tournament was held between November 21 and December 18, 2022, with a duration of 28 days, four less than the usual extension (Youd, 2014, Sofotasiou et al., 2015; Matzarakis and Fröhlich, 2015). The 64 matches were played in eight stadiums with capacities ranging from 44,000 to 88,966 spectators, with 32 participating nations. This amounts to a total of 800 players representing nearly 300 clubs from around the world, whose market value amounts to 12 billion euros (Janosov and Szigeti, 2023).

This is the World Cup with the smallest host country since the first edition of the tournament in 1930 in Uruguay, which has been held every four years since then without interruption except for 1942 and 1946. With just over three million inhabitants, of which 10% are Qatari, an area of 11,586 square meters, and a per capita income close to 65,000 euros (Álvarez-Ossorio and Gutiérrez de Terán, 2022), the Persian Gulf country faced an enormous challenge of organizing the most-watched sports competition

in the world and a transnational showcase intrinsically associated with the values of integrity, ethics, and fair play (Griffin, 2019).

The competition to organize this type of global sporting event is fierce, given the volumes involved: the previous edition in Russia generated an audience of 3.752 billion viewers, and forecasts pointed to profits of over 6.5 billion euros for FIFA alone, representing a 25% increase over 2018 and a 400% increase over the 2002 edition in Korea and Japan (Hernández, 2022). More than a million visitors were expected for the World Cup, which not only posed a challenge in terms of tourism but also in terms of infrastructure, so it even had to acquire cruise ships, tents, and containers to reach the 130,000 rooms needed (Tourinews, 2020).

Qatar invested 220 billion euros in the construction and adaptation of the eight stadiums, the expansion of the Hamad international airport, the creation of metro lines, hotels, and other key infrastructures such as roads and recreational areas, multiplying by more than twenty the spending undertaken by Russia in 2018. Similarly, Qatar has invested huge amounts of money in hosting major sporting events (Arab Cup 2021, World Swimming Championships 2014, Handball World Cup 2015, World Cycling Championships 2016, World Gymnastics Championships 2018), as well as international circuits of ATP (tennis), golf, MotoGP, and Formula 1, to top it off with the 2022 World Cup, aspiring to be the best in history (Rookwood, 2019). Beyond the economic benefits for all parties involved, including sponsors, for Qatar, it meant an opportunity - or perhaps the opportunity - to achieve global recognition as a country and spread its culture and heritage, present itself as a tourist reference for businesses, and exhibit its degree of globalization and modernization, given that it was a historical aspiration of the Middle East to host the tournament (Refai et al., 2017). Qatar wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to become an ambassador for the Muslim world and showcase the compatibility of Islam with modernity (Haghirian and Robles-Gil, 2021), but it also had to face setbacks over twelve years stemming from political, legal, and sociocultural aspects that we will explain below.

1.1. Implications of Qatar being chosen as the host of the 2022 World Cup

The host country selection was preceded and accompanied by a series of controversies surrounding the country. Having won over the United States, Australia, South Korea, and Japan, not only were comparisons inevitable but all the shortcomings of both the representative of the Persian Gulf and the selection process were revealed. There were constant suspicions and accusations of corruption, with repeated investigations, especially in the United States and France, which crystallized in, among others, the so-called Qatargate that implicated more than 60 Members of the European Parliament (Vozpópuli, 2022).

In addition, there were alleged bribes to FIFA and its officials, resignations such as that of Joseph Blatter, who even claimed that the selection had been a mistake, and arrests of FIFA executives by the Swiss police and the FBI (McKenzie and Hajihosseini, 2018). With the inevitable exposure of the country, aspects that clashed with the tournament's intrinsic values mentioned above were also disseminated (since FIFA assumes the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in its Statutes in 2016).

Thus, the deplorable working conditions of workers mainly from Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines) and African countries (Kenya, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Sudan) were scrutinized and denounced. In the face of the data provided, which put the number of workers killed during the construction of the necessary infrastructure at 6,500 (The Guardian, 2021), FIFA admitted three deaths related to work for the World Cup and another 36 deaths not related (FIFA, 2021). Amnesty International (2021) even raised the number of deaths in construction work between 2010

and 2019 to 15,021, and the International Labor Organization denounced that there were gaps in data collection by Qatari institutions (Saifi and Anderson, 2021). In any case, the government committed to promoting labor reforms (Ganji, 2016). Another relevant issue was the systematic violation of human rights, oppression based on gender, beliefs, and lifestyle, as well as discrimination against the LGBTI+ community with a marked tendency towards homophobia (Silva et al., 2022), since Qatar is part of the list of 70 countries in the world that criminalize same-sex relationships, as reported by Human Rights Watch (Smallens, 2021).

Regarding freedoms, it is worth mentioning the limited freedom of the press. Several delegations of Western journalists boycotted the World Cup and decided not to attend. Reporters Without Borders (2022) ranks Qatar 119th out of 180 in freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Political parties and unions are prohibited. The country was accused of supporting terrorism through the financing of the Palestinian National Authority, and it should be noted that it does not recognize the state of Israel. From 2017 to 2021, it was subjected to an economic blockade by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt due to a series of diplomatic conflicts (Dorsey, 2018). In terms of infrastructure, doubts were raised about the sustainability of the event, which has been widely debated (Meza et al., 2019; Serdar and Al-Ghamdi, 2021).

The express construction of four new luxury stadiums and the installation of air conditioning systems in the eight tournament venues clashed with the goal of organizing the first carbon-neutral World Cup, with a forecast of surpassing the 2.1 million tons of CO₂ emissions from the 2018 Russia World Cup (Carbon Market Watch, 2022). To avoid the so-called "white elephants" referring to abandoned stadiums after a competition, at least four will be dismantled and donated to emerging countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East to promote sports in these regions (Russo et al., 2022). Continuing with the infrastructure, the exorbitant prices of the scarce accommodations were also criticized, as well as another controversy that was known in advance regarding the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, which was initially prohibited in stadiums or their surroundings. Alcohol consumption was allowed in international hotels and so-called fan villages, but it was later expanded in skyboxes with sky-high prices, so the consumption of alcoholic beverages in public spaces remained prohibited, with the subsequent problem of differentiating fans who consume them and those who do not (Dun, 2014).

In other areas, the host was criticized for the lack of sports culture in general and football culture in particular. The Qatari national team had never qualified for the World Cup, despite football being the country's most popular sport. The existence of football in Qatar is closely linked to globalization processes (Lysa, 2020). The celebration in November and December to avoid the Qatari heat not only affected the sports calendar but also the commercial one. In sports, the influence on the physical performance and mental health of athletes was analyzed (Dergaa et al., 2022), while in the commercial aspect, iconic global dates such as Black Friday and the start of the holiday season were joined, which altered the planning of campaigns.

To these problems prior to the World Cup were added a series of controversies during the celebration such as protests from teams like Germany, Belgium, Denmark, France, Wales, England, Norway, the Netherlands, or Switzerland, suspicions of paid Qatari fans from Lebanon, the death of journalist Grant Wahl during the match between the Netherlands and Argentina (December 10), pitch invasions with banners or flags with political messages, among others. Major brands such as Adidas, Coca-Cola, Hyundai, BP, Visa, and Sony also expressed their doubts, but only the latter ultimately withdrew from sponsoring the World Cup.

Given this scenario, the question that underlies this study necessarily arises as to whether brands should associate their image with the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, which has been described by Amnesty

International as the World Cup of Shame and by Gianni Infantino, current president of FIFA, as the best World Cup of all time. To begin to answer this question, we proceed to evaluate the event.

1.2. The World Cup as a showcase for the host and sponsors

Sports sponsorship is a way in which athletes, clubs, and competitions, football-related or not, provide visibility to brands through a not-always-invasive presence in advertising breaks and being present in stadiums, key moments of matches, jerseys, and press conferences, among other locations. Therefore, a mutually beneficial situation is created between sponsor and sponsored, as the former not only finance the latter but also wants to associate its values with those of the latter. There is a mutual multiplier effect, not to mention the tax advantages. Typically, it does not result in negative values and brands are also not reluctant to cancel contracts in the event of serious incidents.

Undoubtedly, football is the quintessential global sport. Its impact on the global GDP reaches 1%, and sports, in general, can boast of minimizing tensions by diverting power struggles to sporting competitions. It is also the biggest generator of advertising recall, even above social and humanitarian sponsorship (Hernández, 2022). These are highly emotional events that attract fans and unite nations around their national teams. Mediabrands Discovery identifies motivational spaces ranging from social enjoyment between family and friends or individuals, as well as those attributes associated with competition, which is why the World Cup is understood as a social activity that provides entertainment (bonding), a show that connects with the passion for football (relish), a competition that helps connect with others and generates a sense of belonging (belong), and the promotion of values with which one identifies (inspire) (Marketingnews, 2022).

The analysis of the World Cup, and in particular the 2022 edition, has been approached from various perspectives such as its economic and tourism impact (Abuzayed, 2013; Kaplanidou et al., 2016; Refai and Heissa, 2017; Mancini et al., 2022), internal perceptions of the population (Al-Emadi et al., 2017; Ishac et al., 2022; Al-Marri, 2023), the influence of the host on the results or even the performance of players on social media. Tadini et al. (2020) observe a growing trend toward the analysis of the social impact of occasional mega-events and periodic hallmark events (p. 34). However, there are very few references to the study of sponsors, except for García-Mirón's work (2012).

The 1998 World Cup in France was dubbed the World Cup of sponsors, with the final contested between the host team sponsored by Adidas and Brazil by Nike. Beyond the sporting aspect, Adidas won the commercial battle. The 2022 edition is marked by the prominence of Chinese brands, which outnumber those from Qatar and the United States in that order.

Another key factor to consider is the evolution of the media ecosystem with new agents such as Twitch or TikTok platforms, streamers, or the prominence of second screens. This implies a more informed audience that is also more demanding, participatory, and willing to be entertained (De Lima-Ruiz and Gutiérrez-Coba, 2018). And it is in this new playing field that brands compete for their presence. Therefore, the World Cup is a historic opportunity to leave a mark, and Qatar was not going to be the exception when it comes to showing its best face through a careful communication and diplomacy strategy. It also has precedents such as China (2008 Olympics), South Africa (2010 World Cup), the United Kingdom (2012 Olympics), Brazil (2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics), Russia (2014 Winter Olympics and 2018 World Cup), as well as Japan (2020 Olympics), all of which were surrounded by controversies.

1.3. Soft power, nation branding, and sports diplomacy

Although the World Cup is the key piece, Qatar has been working on its external image for several decades. Apart from investments in sponsorships of various elite football clubs, stadiums, and airlines, it also has a powerful media conglomerate such as Al Jazeera or the BeIN network, in which, from Qatar, the West was accused of violating human rights, implying that the criticism of their designation is due to racism, Islamophobia, and arrogance because a World Cup is held in an Arab and Muslim country (Haghirian and Robles, 2021).

All of this is part of the so-called soft power, which Nye (1990) defined as the ability of a country to get others to follow or conform to its objectives, as opposed to hard power, which involves more coercive methods. Rookwood (2019) identifies so-called mega-sporting events as a fundamental mechanism for strengthening a nation's soft power, even if they require overcoming previous prejudices or negative associations. Soft power is, therefore, a powerful tool for smaller countries in the context of new international diplomacy based on reputational management.

In this sense, nation branding is a fundamental asset. Anholt (1996) is a pioneer in studies on nation branding and defined the country brand as the most valuable asset to make the invisible visible based on six dimensions: tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and population. These values must be disseminated and strengthened by the respective governments. Qatar defines its brand concept through economic and social evolution, with the sport as a key piece in this rebranding dynamic, so San Eugenio-Vela and Ginesta-Portet (2012) even speak of a process of sports place branding.

However, soft power should not be confused with a form of nation branding or country brand management, since the latter is more aimed at increasing the country's presence, while soft power is more aimed at public diplomacy in order to maintain fruitful and lasting cooperation relationships (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018). Xifra reminds us in this regard that "communication as a tool for national construction must be understood as the instrument that builds and maintains relationships, and not only as the channel or means for government communication efforts" (2010, p. 131).

On the other hand, it is appropriate to introduce in this context a term with less academic trajectory, but which is undoubtedly part of Qatar's soft power, such as sports diplomacy. Sobrino defines it as "the use of sports as a tool for public diplomacy to contribute to certain objectives in a structured way beyond possible sporting results" (2014, p. 4). Used strategically, as in this case, "it is a tool that countries can use to achieve their political objectives more efficiently, also allowing others to be more prone to collaboration" (Rodríguez-Vázquez, 2020, p. 928).

It should be noted that there are also voices that insist on differentiating Qatar's use of sports from other precedents such as China or Russia in terms of soft power since the organization of mega-sports events is more a tool to emphasize stability in the Middle East region and employs sports as a vehicle for development (Al-Dosari, 2021).

With only three million inhabitants, Qatar tries to complete the critical mass by incorporating foreign athletes to compete with national teams, always prioritizing the development of local athletes. Another powerful reason for promoting sports is that Qatar has one of the world's highest rates of obesity, especially due to prevailing sedentary lifestyles (Russo et al., 2022). Despite this soft power, Qatar is also an example of soft disempowerment, as global public opinion largely echoed the above-mentioned complaints and irregularities (Griffin, 2019). It is also associated with the practice of sportwashing denounced by Amnesty International in 2018 as an oppressive practice of governments to legitimize their regimes and distract from blatant violations of fundamental rights.

2. Objectives

Starting from the premise that the relevance of the championship itself is more noteworthy than the possible damage caused by scandals or human rights violations, the following research objectives are proposed:

O1: To determine the relevance of the YouTube videos published by the official sponsors of the 2022 FIFA World Cup held in Qatar.

O2: To evaluate the audience's response to the videos about the Qatar 2022 World Cup published on YouTube by the official event sponsors.

O3: To determine any negative effects that the sponsorship of the competition may have had on the sponsoring brands.

O4: To compare the audience response in quantitative and qualitative terms between brands to detect possible differences depending on the cultural roots of the sponsor (Western or Eastern).

Achieving these objectives will allow us to test the hypothesis that (H1) "linking a brand to a global event such as the World Cup provides great visibility and notoriety for the sponsoring companies." Along with this idea, it is worth maintaining that (H2) "the impact of the criticisms of sponsoring brands has been residual," with positive effects being greater than negative ones in terms of audience response. And, being the first World Cup to be held in a Middle Eastern country, it is worth adding that (H3) "the impact of sponsorship in terms of the image is different depending on the cultural roots of the brand".

3. Methodology

In the context of a descriptive scope study, the results obtained from previous studies, largely based on reports and news articles, have been combined with content analysis of videos published on YouTube by official sponsors.

The sample includes a total of 23 brands, divided among eight main sponsors (Adidas, Coca-Cola, Visa, Wanda Group, Hyundai, KIA, Qatar Airways, and Qatar Energy) and 15 local sponsors (Hisense, Claro, Mengniu, The Look Company, Hublot, GWC Logistics, Qatar National Bank, Ooredoo, Byju's, Nubank, Crypto.com, Budweiser, Vivo, Frito-Lays, and McDonald's). Of this list, 14 brands come from companies of Asian origin (60.86%), of which there are six from the Middle East (representing 26.08% of the total and 42.85% of the Asian brands).

The research focuses on the activity of these brands on their global YouTube channels during the year 2022 to carry out content analysis. The selection of this social network is explained because, according to the 2023 Digital Report by We Are Social and Meltwater, it is the second most used network in the world with over 2.5 billion active users, surpassed only by Facebook. On the other hand, video content continues to grow, and more than 90% of Internet users consume videos weekly. Another relevant fact is that over 25% of users consume sports-related videos.

For this study, content analysis has been used as a valid technique "to study any type of communication in an "objective" and systematic way" (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2010, p. 260), combining quantitative and qualitative techniques.

From a quantitative perspective, a descriptive study of the YouTube channels of the different sponsors of the 2022 FIFA World Cup is conducted, taking into account the number of videos published, views, likes, and comments. These variables will allow for an objective presentation of the audience's reaction to the videos from a descriptive point of view, to address the study objectives and to understand the characteristics of the 23 channels that make up the sample. Table 1 summarizes the brands analyzed, the number of videos published on YouTube in 2022, and the number of subscribers they had as of the date the data was obtained (01/30/2023).

The data extraction was carried out through YouTubeData Tools (Rieder, 2015), a web interface that allows researchers to connect to the YouTube API v3 and extract metadata from videos uploaded to the platform. This tool enables researchers to obtain data through different web modules, such as YouTube channel information (creation date, number of subscribers, channel ID, number of videos uploaded, etc.), video lists, publication date, title, description, duration, and user interaction received (views, likes, and comments).

Table 1. Number of subscribers and videos published by sponsoring brands in 2022.

OFFICIAL SPONSORS				
Brand	Country of origin	YouTube channel	Videos 2022	Number of subscribers
Adidas	United States	https://www.youtube.com/@adidas/	56	963.000
Coca-Cola	United States	https://www.youtube.com/@Coca-Cola/	816	39.000.000
Hyundai	South Korea	https://www.youtube.com/@HyundaiWorldwide	156	63.8000
KIA	South Korea	https://www.youtube.com/@KiaWorldwideOfficial/	72	22.5000
Qatar Airways	Quatar	https://www.youtube.com/@qatarairways/	119	373.000
Qatar Energy	Quatar	https://www.youtube.com/@QatarEnergyOfficial	34	5.670
Visa	United States	https://www.youtube.com/@Visa/	24	492.000
Wanda Group	China	https://www.youtube.com/user/dalianwandagroup	0	7.770
LOCAL SPONSORS				
Budweiser	United States	https://www.youtube.com/@budweiserglobal	25	763
Byju's	India	https://www.youtube.com/@byjusclasses/	347	2.100.000
Claro	Mexico	It only has regional channels		
Crypto.com	Singapur	https://www.youtube.com/@CryptoComOfficial	31	91.100
Frito-Lays	United States	https://www.youtube.com/@OfficialFritoLay	77	88.200
GWC Logistics	Quatar	https://www.youtube.com/@GWCLogistics	49	1.830
Hisense	China	https://www.youtube.com/@HisenseInternational/	102	18.000
Hublot	Switzerland	https://www.youtube.com/@hublot	103	40.700
McDonald's	United States	Most of the channel content is hidden		
Mengniu	China	There is no official YouTube channel		
Nubank	Brazil	https://www.youtube.com/@Nubank/	227	1.450.000
Ooredoo	Quatar	https://www.youtube.com/user/OoredooQatar	43	201.000
Qatar National Bank	Quatar	https://www.youtube.com/@QNBGROUP	62	181.000
The Look Company	Quatar	https://www.youtube.com/@TheLookCompanyME	0	63
Vivo	China	https://www.youtube.com/@vivoglobal3759/	78	77.200

Source: Author's own work.

Among the 2,366 videos published, those related to the World Cup have been identified and analyzed for their impact on YouTube in relation to other content by the same brand. Subsequently, the videos about the World Cup with the highest number of views from each account have been selected for qualitative content analysis techniques.

There are 16 videos that have been categorized based on their format, the emotions they evoke, and the reception of the message. To do this, the YouTube video typology proposed by Costa-Sánchez and Túniz-López (2019) has been followed, who classify videos into spot, advertorial, news, corporate videos, micro-videos, statements, news coverage, CSR, branded content, raw footage, interviews, making-of, and other formats. When identifying possible emotions, Dafonte-Gómez et al. (2020) have been consulted, who, based on Dobelet et al. (2007), refer to surprise, joy, sadness, anger, disgust, or fear.

From the point of view of message reception, user reactions to the videos have been analyzed through a systematic random sampling of the first 25 comments on each video. A total of 231 comments have been analyzed, taking into account their length, use of emoticons, number of likes, number of replies, nature of the dialogue generated between the comment and the replies, and the type of comment. To do this, previous methodological contributions have been considered, such as those of Rossetti and Marcusso (2014) or Pokharel and Bhatta (2021), who classify possible user comments on videos posted on this social network as positive, negative, interrogative, imperative, corrective, or within a miscellaneous category.

4. Results

Now we proceed to analyze the results obtained after conducting the content analysis. Firstly, it should be noted that no video related to the World Cup was found on the global YouTube channels of seven sponsors. This could be due to the fact that they have not posted anything (Visa, Wanda Group, The Look Company, or Crypto.com), they have hidden their content (McDonald's), they only have local channels and there is no global channel available for analysis (Claro), or the brand does not have a YouTube channel at all (Mengniu).

4.1. Relevance of the videos published on YouTube

Regarding the relevance of the videos published on YouTube, among the 16 brands that have made their channels visible and have published videos related to the World Cup or their sponsorship of the competition, we find 318 videos, which on average represents 19.71% of the content published by each of them on YouTube. Therefore, one in every five materials created by sponsors on YouTube over the past year is related to the Qatar 2022 World Cup.

This is a significant figure, whose impact is particularly relevant in GWC Logistics (69.39%), Budweiser (56.00%), and Qatar Energy (47.06%). More than half of the videos published on the global account of these three brands are directly related to their sponsorship, as well as the high percentages represented by World Cup videos in Middle Eastern brands such as Qatar Airways (25.21%), Qatar National Bank (17.74%), and Ooredoo (11.63%).

Table 2. Videos published on the analyzed YouTube accounts.

Brand	Total 2022	2022 World Cup total	% of the World Cup-related videos in relation to the channel's content
Adidas	56	4	7,14%
Budweiser	25	14	56,00%
Byju's	347	17	4,90%
Coca-Cola	816	116	14,22%
Frito-Lays	77	3	3,90%
GWC Logistics	49	34	69,39%
Hisense	102	13	12,75%
Hublot	103	3	2,91%
Hyundai	156	17	10,90%
KIA	72	10	13,89%
Nubank	227	17	7,49%
Ooredoo	43	5	11,63%
Qatar Airways	119	30	25,21%
Qatar Energy	34	16	47,06%
Qatar National Bank	62	11	17,74%
Vivo	78	8	10,26%

Source: Author's own work.

When focusing on user interaction (Table 3), there is a disparity between statistics. As a general rule, it is possible to argue that World Cup-related videos are among the most viewed by sponsors throughout the year, but they do not necessarily provoke the highest reaction from audiences.

Ten out of the 16 sponsors (62.50%) have received a higher average of views on their FIFA World Cup 2022 videos than on their total content published in 2022. Regarding likes and comments, the results are mixed, with half of the sample receiving more interactions on videos related to this event, while the other half receives a greater number of reactions on different content.

Table 3. Interactions received on YouTube by each sponsor of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Brand	Average views	Wordcup Average views	Average Likes	Average Wordcup Likes	Average Comments	Average comments Wordcup
Adidas	765.529,59	3.242.045,00	2.049,66	15.984,25	157,84	479,50
Coca-Cola	1.704.958,04	1.081.643,63	252,43	182,09	10,22	8,76
Hyundai	2.259.543,06	9.276.005,29	9.308,49	9.865,65	391,37	304,35
KIA	7.014,89	3.993,70	81,01	57,80	5,63	4,80
Qatar Airways	1.503.069,82	1.880.015,30	991,46	2.953,37	101,44	294,33
Qatar Energy	687,56	152,69	12,85	4,13	-	-
Hisense	109.308,43	158.182,38	50,40	37,54	4,54	28,62
Hublot	62.604,78	1.725.248,67	213,37	138,33	4,91	10,67

GWC Logistics	36.304,69	51.587,35	32,00	18,44	1,00	0,76
Qatar National Bank	234.682,42	1.119.334,00	35,84	91,64	-	-
Ooredoo	1.584.814,19	12.230.851,20	12.779,84	107.676,00	525,21	4.445,00
Byju's	347.418,32	106.173,24	1.738,45	6.014,35	37,39	26,76
Nubank	825.189,11	1.302.310,24	2.655,50	447,71	102,45	39,88
Budweiser	25.396,24	7.230,14	103,58	168,36	6,56	8,43
Vivo	13.978,44	1.075,38	108,82	29,63	4,80	1,13
Frito-Lays	129.827,65	2.336.852,67	165,53	1.451,00	36,22	297,00

Source: Authors own work.

Hyundai leads in views throughout the year 2022 with an average of over 2 million views per video published, while Ooredoo receives, on average, a higher number of likes (12,779.84) and comments (525.21). This same brand stands out in all areas of interaction that YouTube offers. With an average of 12,230,851.20 views, 107,676 likes, and 4,445 comments per audiovisual, it stands far apart from the rest

4.2. Characterization of the most viewed World Cup videos on each channel: format and emotions they provoke

To analyze the response of audiences, the videos about the World Cup with the highest number of views have been identified for each channel. On average, these videos occupy the 3.37th position among all the audiovisual content created by the brands in 2022, and ten videos (62.50%) are among the most viewed of the year.

In this case, it is coincidental that the most viewed videos are also among those that have generated the most reactions (on average occupying the 5.87th position in terms of likes and 4.71st position in terms of comments). These data are consistently repeated across all brands (with the exceptions of Qatar Energy in the views ranking, Hublot, Nubank, and Vivo in terms of likes, and Byju's and Nubank in the volume of comments).

Table 4. *Impact of the most viewed YouTube videos of sponsors.*

Brand	Position occupied by the most viewed video about the FIFA World Cup in relation to the rest of the videos published in 2022		
	Number of views	Number of likes	Number of comments
Adidas	2	2	2
Budweiser	2	1	1
Byju's	7	1	24
Coca-Cola	8	9	5
Frito-Lays	1	2	2
GWC Logistics	1	6	1
Hisense	5	6	1

Hublot	1	12	2
Hyundai	1	3	3
KIA	3	3	1
Nubank	3	20	13
Ooredoo	1	1	1
Qatar Airways	2	1	1
Qatar Energy	10	9	Comments disabled
Qatar National Bank	1	1	Comments disabled
Vivo	6	17	9

Source: Author's own work.

Most of the videos with the highest number of views on each sponsor's channel are commercials (62.50%). These are advertising spots related to the World Cup with an average length of 78.25 seconds, although it should be noted that 12 of the 16 videos (75%) have commercial durations of 60 seconds or less.

Branded content is also notable, present in three of the 16 videos, either by creating "official" event songs (Qatar Airways, Ooredoo) or developing a brand-related social project with a relevant figure (Messi and the Indian brand Byju's in the Education For All project). The use of famous personalities in the videos is very prominent. Ten (62.50%) featured recognizable figures for the audience, six of which were from the world of sports (where perhaps the most paradigmatic example is Adidas, whose ad tells the story of a large group of footballers).

Of the other formats mentioned by Costa-Sánchez and Túnuez-López (2019), only one corporate video (Vivo) and two unique pieces classified under the label of "other formats" were detected. Promotions by brands such as Coca-Cola and Hisense were used to give away trips to the World Cup, tickets, and promotional material among their consumers, which explains the high number of views obtained.

The vast majority of the videos convey positive emotions, in line with the brands' intention to associate themselves with a global event that brings them visibility. Ten out of the 16 most viewed videos (62.50%) convey surprise, and five convey joy (31.25%), without any videos conveying the other emotions mentioned by Dafonte-Gómez et al. (2020) such as sadness, anger, disgust, or fear. Only Hyundai's spot for the World Cup stands out, which appeals to the involvement of the audience in making the world more sustainable.

More than a feeling, involvement is a territory where sponsoring brands want to position themselves with their videos. It is a concept that they want to convey to the audiences and project their communication from, allowing them to establish an emotional bond with them (Yongwoog et al., 2022), and that, in this study, is manifested in three ways: those companies that appeal to universal values (Hyundai and sustainability, KIA and inspiration, Adidas and family, or Budweiser and diversity), those that appeal to patriotism (a strange value, which acquires meaning when associated with Arab brands such as Qatar Energy, GWC Logistics or Ooredoo), or those that choose not to convey any particular territory and simply highlight their status as a sponsor as a differential value (Qatar Airways, Hublot, Qatar National Bank, Byju's, Nubank, Vivo or Frito-Lays).

4.3. Impact of sponsorship for brand image purposes

Through a systematic random sampling, the first 25 comments made on each of the videos have been selected. 231 posts that allow evaluating the audience response and identifying possible effects or criticisms that the brands may have received for associating their image with the World Cup.

Table 5. *Characterization of the sample on which a qualitative content analysis has been carried out.*

Brand	Total comments	Analyzed comments	% on total comments	Average words	Emoticons	Likes	Answers
Adidas	1.284	25	1,95%	12,4	13	6.718	13
Budweiser	89	25	28,09%	15,0	15	183	23
Byju's	43	25	58,14%	5,3	14	15.736	0
Coca-Cola	73	25	34,25%	13,9	3	10	32
Frito-Lays	6	6	100%	4,0	2	1	0
GWC Logistics	2	2	100%	1,0	1	1	0
Hisense	1	1	100%	1,0	1	0	0
Hublot	6	6	100%	16,8	4	11	1
Hyundai	363	25	6,89%	19,0	14	1.615	7
KIA	22	22	100%	9,2	5	24	12
Nubank	12	12	100%	4,3	3	8	0
Ooredoo	22.745	25	0,11%	21,8	15	10.491	337
Qatar Airways	7.460	25	0,34%	22,4	15	6.729	189
Qatar Energy	This account has comments disabled, so the analysis was not possible						
Qatar National Bank	This account has comments disabled, so the analysis was not possible						
Vivo	7	7	100%	27,0	2	3	0

Source: Author's own work.

The messages, for the most part, consist of short phrases (14.36 words on average) and almost half of them use emoticons to reinforce the idea conveyed in the message (46.32%). The 231 comments received 41,530 likes, although it should be noted that 95.53% of these recognitions are concentrated in five channels (Adidas, Qatar Airways, Ooredoo, and Byju's) and that the brands with the best like-to-comment ratio are, in this order, Byju's, Adidas, and Hyundai. In total, there are 614 responses to the comments, which means that each comment generates a dialogue with 2.65 new contributions.

If we combine the comments with the responses, we can say that the majority of the conversations revolve around the video (53.25%), with direct and inconsequential observations about what is shown. Along with these, suggestions for something in particular or related to the video are recorded (11.69%), celebrations and expressions of joy (9.96%), strictly sporting discussions (9.96%), brand criticism (whether for their sponsorship of the World Cup or for reasons unrelated to this circumstance, 7.79%), humorous comments (4.76%), or moderation of controversies (0.87%), among others (1.73%).

The vast majority of the comments are positive in nature (75.76%), with only 24 negative messages (10.39%) of which only 13 are related to the sponsorship of the FIFA World Cup. Therefore, only

5.62% of the comments have been identified where a brand is reprimanded for linking its image to the Qatar 2022 World Cup.

Following Pokharel and Bhatta's (2021) classification, we could also refer to four other types of comments: interrogative comments in which questions are asked of the brand (in the study, 9.52% of cases), imperatives (urging or requesting something from the sender, 10.82%), or corrective comments (reproving or correcting something, 3.90%). Along with these, it would be possible to talk about "others", among which inconsequential gossip or promotions from third parties that usually sneak into comments on pieces with a high number of views to take advantage of their impact abound. In the case at hand, 60 comments would fit under this label (25.97% of those analyzed), including 51 inconsequential gossip comments, seven humorous comments, and two promotions from third parties.

4.4. Differences in audience response based on the cultural roots of the sponsors

However, the data varies depending on the origin of the sponsor in question. A differentiated analysis of the comments received by Western and Asian brands provides us with indications that sponsorship has been much more beneficial for the latter, which receive more favorable comments than Western brands, which are somewhat more criticized (without reaching very significant levels). If we focus on the comments harvested by Middle Eastern brands, there are arguments to support that the reception has been clearly positive from the audiences.

Table 6. Differences depending on the cultural roots of the brands.

Manifested feeling	Western brands		Asian brands		Middle Eastern brands	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Positive	54	40,30%	121	66,85%	52	81,25%
Negative	19	14,18%	5	2,76%	0	0,00%
Interrogative	17	12,69%	5	2,76%	0	0,00%
Imperative	13	9,70%	12	6,63%	0	0,00%
Corrective	9	6,72%	0	0,00%	0	0,00%
Others	22	16,42%	38	20,99%	12	18,75%
Comment themes						
Comments on the video	36	36,36%	87	65,91%	37	71,15%
Celebration	9	9,09%	14	10,61%	12	23,08%
Humor	8	8,08%	3	2,27%	0	0,00%
Sports-related	15	15,15%	8	6,06%	2	3,85%
Suggestions to the brand	16	16,16%	11	8,33%	0	0,00%
Criticism to the brand	12	12,12%	6	4,55%	0	0,00%
Controversy moderation	1	1,01%	1	0,76%	1	1,92%
Others	2	2,02%	2	1,52%	0	0,00%
	99	100,00%	132	100,00%	52	100,00%

Source: Author's own work (2022).

The same happens when analyzing the themes addressed in the comments and conversations generated as a result of them. In the Middle Eastern brands, only what is appreciated in the image is referred to (71.15% of their comments) or what it means for a country like Qatar to host a World Cup is celebrated (23.08%). It is worth noting, in this regard, that these brands had produced significant audiovisual content linked to the World Cup on their YouTube accounts and that a good part of the Qatari sponsors appealed to patriotism as an advertising appeal.

The dialogues established around the videos of the Asian brands follow this same trend, with comments on the audiovisual (65.91%) predominating, followed by celebration (10.61%). Suggestions to the brand (8.33%), sports comments (6.06%), and the first criticisms (six, 4.55% of the conversations, although it is worth specifying that four of them refer to service failures and are not related to the World Cup) are added. Percentages vary considerably in Western brands, where only 36.36% of users comment on the videos, with suggestions to the brand (16.16%), sports appreciations (15.15%), and also criticisms of the brand (12.12%, all of them for associating their image with the World Cup).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the impact generated by the videos published on the 2022 Qatar World Cup (O1) shows that one in five videos posted by sponsors on YouTube throughout 2022 is related to the competition and that these videos have been more viewed than others published during that period. Therefore, the sponsorship range has allowed companies to produce many videos about the championship and reach more audience than they do with other audiovisual content.

Among the most viewed productions are commercial spots of varying durations. A format that Costa-Sánchez and Tüñez-López (2019) already placed among the most used by companies on this social network. Narratively, positive messages are conveyed, and in many cases, famous figures are used to increase their virality (Dafonte-Gómez et al., 2020). As a whole, these videos have enjoyed great relevance in terms of audience thanks to the emotional connection established with them in the manner expressed by Hernández (2022).

However, this impact is not reflected in reactions such as liking or commenting. The analysis of user response (O2) shows a positive reception of the videos, with normal levels of likes and generated conversations. The conversations focused on commenting on the shown video, starting inconsequential gossip, making some sports rallying cries, or uttering phrases of joy and celebration about the championship. It is difficult to identify the negative effects that the sponsorship of the competition may have had on the sponsoring brands (O3), as little more than 5.5% criticize a brand for linking its image to Qatar 2022.

The response is not homogeneous, as there are differences depending on the country of origin and cultural roots of each sponsor (O4). Being the first World Cup held in a Middle Eastern country, it is logical that the videos produced by Qatari and even Asian brands are the best-rated. Arab brands, which produce a significant number of audiovisuals that appeal to patriotism and national pride for hosting a World Cup, are the ones that published the highest number of videos and also receive the best comments (using communication for national construction as Xifra, 2010 pointed out). The response to videos published by Western brands is less emphatic, among which direct criticism is recorded for collaborating with the controversial championship, although in an insignificant number.

At this point, it is possible to argue that sponsor brands have achieved high levels of visibility by linking themselves to this event, with criticism received by audiences about their association with the controversial tournament being residual. This expected conclusion aligns with Rookwood's (2019)

reflection that mega sports events contribute to the consolidation of a nation's soft power, and in the case of the FIFA World Cup 2022, it leads us to reflect on the extraordinary resilience of a country that has remained steadfast in its purpose of organizing this event, which has been a success despite the difficulties.

With all this, the fixed hypotheses are validated: (H1) "linking a brand to a global event such as the World Cup provides great visibility and notoriety to sponsor companies", as there is evidence that sponsorship has allowed them to generate a wide range of audiovisual production linked to their brand with which they have obtained high audiences. The second hypothesis (H2) "the impact of criticism on sponsor brands have been residual" is also proven, as this is a very small percentage according to the analysis of comments on videos published by brands. Regarding the third hypothesis (H3) "the impact of sponsorship on the image is different depending on the cultural roots of the brand", it also seems to be corroborated, being clearly positive for brands from the host country, quite favorable for Asian brands, and somewhat more questionable for Western brands.

However, limiting the analysis to YouTube or the descriptive nature of this work poses limitations to the research, as it does not allow for more profound assertions, such as considering that the sponsorship of the Qatar World Cup has been positive, or even profitable, for the collaborating brands. In the future, possible correlational or explanatory studies are opened up that allow the formulation of this hypothesis from different points of view, as well as those that analyze the negative reputational effects that exist in other controversial sports sponsorships, such as Formula 1 or brands that associate with famous athletes who engage in reprehensible behavior.

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