

# The Impact of the 2022 FIFA World Cup on the Destination Image of Qatar

---

**Karamanaga, Ajla**

**Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad**

**2023**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **RIT Croatia / RIT Croatia**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:229:290781>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#) / [Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-05-30**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[RIT Croatia Digital repository - Rochester Institute of Technology](#)



# **The Impact of the 2022 FIFA World Cup on the Destination Image of Qatar**

Ajla Karamanaga

RIT Croatia

HSPT. 495 Hospitality Project Planning and Development

Mentor: Rebecca Charry Roje

May 8, 2023

### **Abstract**

The FIFA World Cup international football championship event was held in Qatar in 2022, the first time in history that an Arab and Muslim-majority country hosted this event. The event gave Qatar an unprecedented opportunity to promote its culture, tourist attractions, and traditions on the world stage. To gain insight into how well this opportunity was realized, this study examined the impact of the event on perceptions of Qatar as a travel destination and the overall perception of the country. A questionnaire was completed by 226 participants who self-reported as well-informed about the event. The results suggest the overall perceptions of Qatar after the World Cup as quite mixed, although clear indications of Qatar's strengths and weaknesses as a travel destination are present. Implications for the future of tourism promotion in Qatar are discussed.

*Keywords:* FIFA 2022, World Cup host, Qatar, destination image, tourism, Arab, Muslim

## **The Impact of the 2022 FIFA World Cup on the Destination Image of Qatar**

Tourism and sport have the power to bring people from different cultures and backgrounds together. Visitors can gain a more nuanced understanding of the host country, its people, and its way of life, ultimately breaking down stereotypes and promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Hosting a global sports event such as the FIFA World Cup has a strong potential to influence global attitudes toward a destination and stimulate tourism. The 2022 World Cup was hosted by Qatar, making it the first World Cup event to be held in the Middle East and the first being hosted by an Arabic and majority Muslim country.

The 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup brought unprecedented attention to Qatar both before and during the event. The cup was broadcast globally, with nearly 6 billion engagements and 93.6 million posts seen across all platforms. Around 3.4 million people attended the matches in person. A significant number of visitors came from neighboring countries Saudi Arabia and UAE, as well as long-haul travelers from the US, UK, Germany, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and India (FIFA, 2022).

Qatar is a small country situated on the northeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula, covering a land area of approximately 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> and with a population of 2.7 million. Immigrants and migrants account for roughly 90% of its total population. Qatar's vast oil and natural gas reserves, ranked as the third-largest in the world, have significantly contributed to its remarkable transformation into one of the wealthiest nations in the region. The production and distribution of these resources have built the foundation of the nation's economy. The American Forbes Magazine recognized Qatar as the world's most affluent nation, with the greatest GDP per capita on the planet, a value that is double that of the U.S. (Russo et al., 2022).

## **Arab Countries as Global Tourist Destinations**

In 2019, the Middle East saw a surge in international tourism, with 1.5 billion tourist arrivals, with growth nearly doubling the global average rate of 8 percent (Friefer, 2020).

According to Timothy (2019), in addition to traditional cultural and historic tourist destinations such as the pyramids of Egypt and the ancient city of Petra in Jordan, which have attracted international tourists for centuries, several countries in the Middle East, including the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain, have turned to luxury tourism as a means of promoting economic growth in recent years. These countries have emphasized high-end, luxury forms of tourism such as shopping, medical tourism, sports tourism, mega-events, business tourism, and second-home tourism. To attract visitors, they have built large malls, expensive housing estates, and ultra-luxury apartment complexes, often featuring superlative attractions and structures. A critical aspect of the transformation in the Middle East is the establishment of air transport hubs and international airlines that strive to provide safe and efficient routes. Undoubtedly Qatar Airways, Etihad, and Emirates have become among the world's leading airlines, and their hubs in Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai are some of the busiest transit points on earth. Cruise tourism is a prominent industry in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with four main regions serving as destinations: the Mediterranean Coast, the Nile River, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Gulf (Timothy, 2019). In 2022, Qatar ranked among the top 10 countries in the region for visitor arrivals (World Trade Organization).

In addition, religious tourism is also significant for the entire MENA region. One of the five pillars of Islam is performing the Hajj, a religious obligation that requires every Muslim to travel to Mecca at least once in their lifetime subject to their financial capacity. The holiest place for Muslims worldwide is situated in Saudi Arabia, in Al-Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. Yearly, during the hajj

pilgrimage, approximately 2.5 million people across the globe travel there to fulfill their religious obligations. Muslims also visit the Medina region in Saudi Arabia and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem as pilgrimage sites (Timothy, 2019).

### **Perceptions of Islamic Culture**

Although tourism has certainly grown in Middle Eastern Muslim-majority countries, some negative perceptions of Islam and Muslim people persist in some parts of the world. Fear of Islam clarified by Al-Ansi (2022) refers to a negative perception of Islamic teachings, practices, notions, and laws, which is commonly associated with critical issues and crises and often portrayed through media. Examples of such negative associations include labels like "terrorism," "dark ages," or "women's oppression." Following the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the stereotype of Muslims as violent or terrorists grew. Narrative analysis by Waikar (2018) revealed the use of hate speech by former President Donald Trump, labeling Islam as a "global threat" and using phrases like "radical Islam." These policies ultimately led to the temporary prohibition of citizens from multiple Muslim-majority nations from traveling to or visiting the USA (Al-Ansi et al., 2022). In response to the Department of Homeland Security identification of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen as "countries of concern", President Trump's 2017 executive order banned these nationals from entering the US for 90 days. The order claimed that following 9/11, many crimes had been committed by foreign-born people. It also claimed that Islamic State inspired 60 terror attacks in Western nations, including 15 in the US, and that 250 Americans have joined jihadist extremist organizations (Goodman, 2017).

Qatar may be trying to increase its power and influence in the Middle East by supporting radical groups and regimes, even if they are considered dangerous or extreme. (Prosor, 2014). In this case, Qatar has faced criticism for its alleged connections to extremist groups in recent years. As

indicated by Samuel-Azran et al. (2016) during the Arab Spring, Qatar was accused of providing support to the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization that several countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Russia classify as a terrorist group. Qatar has also been implicated in the transfer of funds to other extremist groups, including Al-Qaeda branches in Syria (Samuel-Azran et al., 2016). The branding of Qatar as a "Club Med for terrorists" in an op-ed published in The New York Times in 2014 was not unexpected, given the aforementioned incidents. The officials of Qatar's capital, Doha have given financial support to quantities of money to Gaza over the past few years, allowing Hamas to build its rockets and tunnels. The Emir of Qatar's support was so great that each tunnel and rocket included the inscription: "Made possible through a kind donation from the emir of Qatar." Such actions have contributed to Qatar's negative reputation as a nation that supports extremist groups (Prosor, 2014). Securing the bid to host the 2022 World Cup was seen as an opportunity to counter or obscure that image.

### **Qatar's Rich Sporting Legacy: A Historical Exploration**

Although the World Cup was the largest global sports event hosted by Qatar, it has hosted several noteworthy sport-related events in the past, these include Asian Games in 2006, Asian Football Cup and Pan Arab Games in 2011, as well as Swimming World Cup in 2014, Handball World Cup in 2015, Road Cycling World Cup in 2016 and Gymnastics World Cup in 2018 (Russo et al., 2022; Samuel-Azran et al., 2016). Aspire Academy is Qatar's premier football academy dedicated to training young talent, which attracted many elite clubs worldwide. Additionally, Qatar established a high-profile partnership with FC Barcelona, which enabled Qatar Airways, a company owned by Qatar, to become the main sponsor of the Barcelona jersey. Therefore, it became the world's most prestigious advertising venue after earning a wide reputation (Samuel-Azran et al., 2016). Al Jazeera, a media group based in Qatar, paid \$130 million to purchase the rights to broadcast Ligue

1 games to French viewers (Ganji, 2022). Qatar's sovereign national fund has made various global investments, one of which includes owning the Paris Saint-Germain football team (Russo et al., 2022)

### **Hosting the World Cup 2022: Qatar's Chance to Improve its Reputation and Boost Tourism**

Sport serves as a platform for political and cultural expression, as well as a means for countries to showcase their identity (Amara & Bouandel, 2022). Anderson et al. (2020) remarked that sports tourism has emerged as a major economic segment of tourism in general. The FIFA World Cup is one of the most successful and significant sports events in the world, with an unparalleled impact, a global reach, and universal appeal.

In 2010 Qatar secured the privilege to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, successfully outbidding other potential host countries like the U.S., Australia, South Korea, and Japan (Russo et al. 2022). Many were surprised when Qatar was chosen to host the event, given several factors such as its desert climate with high summer temperatures, strict alcohol laws, and the fact that it is the smallest country to ever host the event. Additionally, it marks the first time the World Cup would be held in an Arab nation (Dun, 2014).

Over the past decade, there has been a notable rise in the number of international tourists visiting the country. The influx of visitors rose steadily, from 1 million in 2007 to 2.8 million in 2014. It was estimated that by the time of the World Cup, the number would reach 4 million and could climb to 7.4 million by 2030, demonstrating an annual growth rate of nearly 20% (Russo et al. 2022). Mega-sport events, such as the FIFA World Cup, offer a unique opportunity to attract tourists who may not have otherwise considered visiting the host country (Anderson et al., 2020). It is common for mega sporting events to be held in lesser-known locations in order to raise public



awareness of the host nation (Kaplanidou et al., 2016). These events hold great importance in building a positive international image and promoting a desired perception. They also provide a chance for the country to reveal its strengths and values, while also addressing any negative stereotypes that may exist. The ultimate goal of event organizers is to improve visitors' perceptions of the destination both before and after their visit, with the aim of encouraging return visits (Anderson et al., 2020).

It has been suggested that Qatar is utilizing sports events as a means of enhancing its international reputation and promoting itself through public diplomacy and nation branding. This strategy is consistent with the concept of 'soft power', which was introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990. According to Nye, countries engaged in military power activities could improve their global image by simultaneously undertaking actions that appeal to foreign audiences, such as promoting their culture and values and fostering identification with their country's interests. Thus, it may be a means of combating the negative perceptions of the country as a supporter of extremist groups as cited in (Samuel-Azran et al., 2016).

Another similar concern is 'sport washing,' a practice of using sports as a soft power strategy to enhance or deflect attention from a negative political image. This is due to the fact that fans' feelings are so strongly evoked by sports. Fans frequently create close ties with teams and specific athletes, and these connections may be very effectively used by businesses (as major sponsors) and countries (as event hosts) to boost their public image and popularity. As a result, supporters are less likely to criticize a team or its community to protect their sense of identification as loyal fans (Manoli, 2022)

## **World Cup 2022 Controversies**

The World Cup event did not pass without controversy, some of which are related to Shari'a law, which has long acted as the foundation of Islamic society's guiding principles. Dun (2016) noted several reasons why awarding the FIFA 2022 World Cup to Qatar was considered a bold decision that stirred controversy around various issues. Starting with alcohol, which is traditionally prohibited by Islam. It is permitted in Qatar, but its consumption is strongly regulated. Throughout the country, alcoholic beverages are available at numerous luxury five-star hotels, three- and four-star hotels, and leisure clubs. For many fans, alcohol and the sport are inseparable, or a usual part of the match-going experience. Nonetheless, Qatari authorities addressed concerns about the availability of alcohol during the games by assuring that it would be accessible (Dun, 2016).

Laws and cultural attitudes towards homosexuality and gender equality in Qatar have also been heavily criticized in global media, with flogging being used as a punishment for illicit sexual relations. Same-sex relationships are illegal and unmarried people of the opposite sex are prohibited from living together. One should avoid showing affection in public. However, Qatar has stated that all fans will be welcomed during the World Cup although its culture should be respected (Russo et al., 2022). In Muslim culture, it is the responsibility of women to prevent men from having sexual thoughts and attention toward them. Muslim women who adhere to this belief hold that they are responsible for the attention they receive from men, which could harm both sides' standing in the eyes of God. For this reason, women adopt modest dress and behavior in public spaces, including covering their hair and skin, avoiding eye contact, and refraining from actions that may attract male attention (Dun, 2016). Concerning this fact, women attending the event were expected to dress modestly and avoid revealing clothing.

Another controversy surrounding preparations for the World Cup focused on the mistreatment of migrant laborers, particularly those working in the construction sector. The recruitment process for workers in Qatar involved high application fees, false salary promises, and a sponsorship system that often leaves employees in debt. Ongoing labor abuses, including poor working conditions and subhuman living conditions, have resulted in hundreds of deaths at construction sites each year. Approximately 4,800 workers died during the construction of stadiums and other facilities related to the event. Global human rights groups, such as the International Trade Union Confederation and Human Rights Watch, have repeatedly urged Qatar to address dangerous working conditions and unequal labor practices comparable to modern slavery (Dun, 2016).

Before the event, Qatari authorities claimed that it would be open to everyone regardless of gender, sexual orientation, color, or nationality. While they claim to prioritize the safety of all attendees, they also expect respect for their culture and traditions. Qataris stated that they won't change their culture and religion for a 28-day football tournament (Amara & Boundel, 2022). Public displays of affection and the use of LGBTQ symbols such as rainbow flags were not permitted. Qatari authorities strove to create a compromise between the expectations of residents and international visitors. Alcohol consumption was available in fan zones but not inside the stadiums. Also, licensed pubs and hotels offered alcoholic beverages. The fans were reminded to avoid public drunk behaviors as well (Amara & Bouandel, 2022).

### **Perceptions of Qatar Prior to the World Cup**

Prior to the event, Kaplanidou et al. (2016) explored the relationship between awareness of Qatar's status as a host and perceptions of the country as a tourist destination among American travelers. The results of the study indicate that there is a positive correlation between American travelers' level of awareness about the host country of the 2022 World Cup and their perceptions of various

aspects related to the destination. The study revealed that overall destination image benefits from higher awareness of the world cup event, which leads to a more positive perception as a travel destination, a more positive perception as a country in general, and a higher intention to travel to Qatar. While Kaplanidou et al. (2016) studied perceptions of Qatar before the World Cup event, this study examined the impact of the FIFA 2022 World Cup event on the perception of Qatar as a travel destination and society after the event.

### **Method**

In order to investigate perceptions of Qatar as a tourist destination, this study used a quantitative research approach, collecting data from participants through an online questionnaire. The instrument was adapted from two previously published questionnaires (Kaplanidou et al., 2016; Nadeau 2008). The survey was conducted in the English language. It contained a total of 28 items.

The dependent variable statements were used to test the perception of Qatar in three categories: as a travel destination, the country's overall characteristics, and its performance as the host of the World Cup. The independent variables measured the level of awareness of the World Cup event, level of involvement with the World Cup event, as well as demographics.

The survey questionnaire was divided into 6 sections: level of awareness of the World Cup event (2 items), perception of Qatar as a travel destination (9 items), perception of the country's characteristics (5 items), level of involvement with the World Cup (5 items), perception of Qatar as the World Cup host (2 items) and demographics (4 items). A mixture of questions were asked, 20 were on a 7-point Likert Scale, 5 were multiple choice, and two were open-ended comments:

1. What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Qatar as a tourist destination?

2. Please add your comments on any aspect of the World Cup event that influenced your perceptions of Qatar, either positively or negatively.

The first section was an independent variable, with two Likert scale items about the “Level of Awareness of the FIFA World Cup”. The second section, a dependent variable, asked 9 questions about the level of agreement on the Likert scale with positive statements about tourist amenities and attractions in Qatar, including cultural and historical attractions, accommodation, shopping, personal safety, cleanliness, and hygiene, technology infrastructure, value for money, and food, as well as an optional comment. The third section, a dependent variable, included 5 items about the country’s characteristics including the overall quality of life, human rights and personal freedom, wealth, influence in politics, and environmental awareness. The fourth section, an independent variable, asked 5 questions about participants’ involvement with the FIFA World Cup, including attending the event in person, watching broadcasts of matches, and reading or watching news and commentary related to the event. In the fifth section, a dependent variable measured the level of agreement on a Likert scale with the statement “The 2022 FIFA World Cup event showed Qatar to the world in a positive way”, and invited an open-ended comment. Last, the sixth section asked four demographic questions about gender, age, country of residence, and frequency of travel.

A non-probability convenience sampling method was used. The participants were recruited online through social platforms including LinkedIn, travel agency groups, and university emails. The survey collected data from 226 participants (42% male, 57% female, and 1% nonbinary), from 18 to over 65 years of age. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained. Steps were taken to ensure the confidentiality of individual participants’ responses. Data were analyzed using SPSS software.

## Results

Results from the first independent variable section showed that the majority of the participants reported themselves as highly aware ( $M=6.56$ ,  $SD=1.00$ ) and well-informed ( $M=5.75$ ,  $SD=1.45$ ) about the FIFA World Cup event.

### Tourist Attributes

Overall, respondents' perceptions of specific aspects of Qatar's tourist offer were slightly positive, with the notable exception of value for money. Table 1 shows the evaluation of eight tourist attributes. The data analysis shows the highest level of agreement with the aspect of well-developed technology infrastructure, followed by shopping opportunities, quality accommodation, and cleanliness and hygiene. The only tourist destination attribute which received a notable level of disagreement was value for money.

Table 1

#### *Perception of Qatar as a Tourist Destination*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Well-developed technology infrastructure	5.43	1.30
Good shopping opportunities	5.32	1.37
Quality accommodation	5.05	1.52
High level of cleanliness and hygiene	5.02	1.46
High level of personal safety	4.62	1.74
Appealing local food	4.62	1.33
Interesting historical and cultural attractions	4.38	1.50
Overall, I consider Qatar to be an attractive travel destination	4.14	1.87
Good value for money	3.66	1.45

Notably, the statement "Overall, I consider Qatar to be an attractive travel destination" was one of the key highlights of the questionnaire and an important indicator of how participants perceived

Qatar as a travel destination. Yet, responses were generally neutral. Despite the participants showing some positive perceptions of the tourist attributes, opinions on this statement were mixed, expressing both some very positive and some very negative views as indicated by the relatively high standard deviation.

Further analysis showed some significant correlations between participants' ratings of "Overall, I consider Qatar to be an attractive travel destination" and some specific tourist attributes. The strongest positive correlations were seen in historical and cultural attractions ( $r=0.629^{**}$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) personal safety ( $r=0.506^{**}$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), value for money ( $r=0.558^{**}$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and local food ( $r=0.551^{**}$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). These results indicate that participants who rated Qatar to have historical and cultural attractions, safe, fair pricing, and appealing local food were more likely to rate it as an attractive travel destination.

### Country Characteristics

Table 2 shows the evaluation of five statements describing the country characteristics of Qatar. The strongest perception of Qatar as a country was wealth, followed by overall quality of life. Perceptions of Qatar's role in world politics were neutral, while environmental awareness, human rights, and personal freedom were perceived negatively.

Table 2

*Perception of Qatar's country characteristics*

Variable	Mean	SD
Wealth	5.77	1.33
Quality of life	4.69	1.56
Role in world politics	4.20	1.40
Environmental responsibility	3.66	1.62
Human rights and personal freedoms	2.75	1.64

The statement “The 2022 FIFA World Cup event showed Qatar to the world in a positive way” was another highlight of the questionnaire but again had quite a neutral score ( $M=4.09$ ). It is important because it showcases whether the event successfully promoted Qatar in a positive way to the world.

Additionally, significant correlations were found between participants' ratings of Qatar's country characteristics and their perception of the country as a tourist destination. There was a significant positive correlation between the overall quality of life and participants' perceptions of “Overall, I see Qatar as an attractive tourist destination” ( $r = 0.548^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

There was observed a strong positive correlation between human rights and participants' perceptions of “Overall, I see Qatar as an attractive tourist destination” ( $r=0.552^{**}$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Moreover, a significant positive correlation ( $r=0.563^{**}$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) between participants' views on human rights and their perception towards the “The FIFA World Cup showed Qatar in a positive way” statement. Participants who had a positive level of agreement on human rights were more likely to consider Qatar as an attractive tourist destination and the World Cup as a positive way of promoting Qatar.

There was a significant positive correlation between participants' ratings of environment awareness and their perceptions of “Overall, I see Qatar as an attractive tourist destination” ( $r = 0.540^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and there was also a significant positive correlation between environmental awareness and participants' perception towards the statement "The FIFA World Cup showed Qatar in a positive way" ( $r = 0.503^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as well.



Finally, the analysis showed a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.581^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between participants' perceptions of Qatar as an attractive travel destination and their perception of the World Cup as a positive event.

### **Influence of Gender**

According to the statistical analysis, age had no significant effect on the results. However, gender was found to have an influence on respondents' perception towards the two following statements from both dependent variable sections. Women reported higher agreement with the statement "Qatar offers interesting historical and cultural attractions" ( $M=4.64$ ) than men ( $M=4.02$ ). In addition, men showed a stronger perception of Qatar associated with wealth ( $M=6.09$ ) than women ( $M= 5.53$ ).

### **Attendance at the World Cup**

Furthermore, our analysis revealed a statistically significant correlation between attendance at the World Cup and perceptions of personal safety, cleanliness, and hygiene. Individuals who had traveled to Qatar or had family and friends travel to Qatar to attend the World Cup expressed a more positive perception of the level of personal safety ( $M= 4.96$ ) than those who did not ( $M= 4.25$ ). Similarly, for cleanliness and hygiene aspects of the country, the mean was higher among those who attended or had a connection with travelers ( $M= 5.22$ ) than those who did not ( $M= 4.78$ ).

### **Open-ended Comments**

Out of 226 participants, 117 participants chose to leave a comment on the first open-ended question and 75 on the second open-ended optional comment. Comments were analyzed according to keywords and classified as positive, negative, or neutral.

In response to the first open-ended question, “What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Qatar as a tourist destination?”, perceptions were about evenly divided; (33.3%) were positive, (35%) were neutral, and (30.8%) were negative.

The analysis of responses to the second open-ended question, "Please add your comments on any aspect of the World Cup event that influenced your perceptions of Qatar, either positively or negatively," revealed a majority of negative comments (56%), while positive (22.6%) and neutral (21.4%) responses were about equal.

The most common positive comment themes were grouped into three categories: tourism, culture and religion, and development. Under the tourism category participants mostly mentioned: Qatar Airways, architecture, and hospitality. In the culture and religion category, some participants admired: Islamic values, traditional clothing, and food. Participants associated the development of Qatar with luxury, modernity, and high technology. Some directly quoted positive comments included: “locals were very friendly”, “high level of safety” and “best World Cup ever”.

The most negative comments were related to human rights issues, including workers’ abuse, women’s rights, and LGBTQ rights, among other strict rules. Some directly quoted negative comments included: “rigorous rules for supporters”, “extreme heat and expensive prices” and “modern slavery”.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of Qatar after having hosted the 2022 FIFA World Cup. In contrast to Kaplanidou et al. (2016) whose study found that higher awareness of Qatar’s World Cup host status led to more positive perceptions of the country as a tourist destination, this research did not yield clear results. Even though participants reported generally

high levels of awareness of Qatar's host status, awareness did not necessarily translate into a clear positive or negative perception of Qatar. Results were inconclusive with a significant number of neutral responses and high SD values. These results suggest that the World Cup had a range of both positive and negative effects on perceptions of the country as a tourist destination and as a whole. Participants' responses varied widely and may be influenced by other factors not measured in this study. Although this event offered a unique opportunity to showcase Qatar's culture, people, traditions, and attractions to a global audience, it may have been only partially successful, while several underlying problems and concerns were also revealed.

Moving forward, as Qatar continues to seek to develop its tourism, it has to address and improve certain political and social aspects. Of particular concern is the perception of human rights violations and lack of value for money. These concerns were not only obvious from the level of agreement with some questions but also from the open-ended comments. Interestingly, responders had diverse attitudes towards Qatar's image with some highlighting positive aspects such as hotels, event organization, beaches, climate, and security. Others, however, highlighted negative features such as strict rules, limited freedom, alcohol ban, LGBTQ+ rights, women's oppression, and overpricing. Thus, there were both positive and negative associations for most of the attributes studied. Perceptions seem to be highly individual.

The people who traveled to Qatar for the event found it to be much cleaner, hygienic, and safer than they had expected and probably exceeded their expectations. This presents a hidden strength for Qatar and they could utilize this to draw in more travelers. These perceptions were formed only through travel and direct experience with the country and not through media promotion or word of mouth. Qatar could more actively promote its level of safety and cleanliness as well as encourage visitors to share their positive experiences via word-of-mouth, social media, or online

reviews in order to spread awareness that would give a realistic and trustworthy picture of what the country has to offer.

Furthermore, since women appeared to have a more positive perception of Qatar's historical and cultural attractions than men, Qatar can more actively target female visitors with promotions of its historical and cultural attractions, as well as consider creative ways to appeal to male travelers. Using innovative marketing strategies that highlight Qatar's historical and cultural attractions will create higher awareness among both genders and persuade them to explore its rich cultural heritage.

The research findings make it clear that Qatar as a travel destination has some strengths that should be promoted more. But it is also essential to recognize and deal with the unfavorable assumptions that are already in place. The Qatari government and people should focus on improving other aspects that negatively affected their destination image and people's perceptions. The treatment of workers in the country is one of the most urgent issues, which has been a source of worry for many human rights organizations. The Qatari people and government must take measures to guarantee the protection of all workers' rights and welfare as well as the application of fair labor laws.

Qatar faces a delicate challenge when it comes to LGBTQ acceptance due to the tension between its cultural beliefs and some visitors' expectations. While respecting Qatar's cultural and religious values, it is critical to find a balance that doesn't exclude or discriminate against any visitor group. The country can find methods to create a welcoming atmosphere for all visitors to enhance its destination image and draw more tourists. This requires the ability to maintain a strong sense of identity and tradition while being open to evolving and adapting in response to changing social customs and expectations.

Despite Qatar's reputation as a luxury destination, its high prices may discourage visitors. This poses a challenge for Qatar's tourism industry since cost-conscious traveling has become in recent years. A luxurious reputation must be balanced with a notion of value for money. Qatar should find ways to maintain its status as a high-end travel destination while still ensuring that visitors receive good value for their money and remain competitive in price.

One of the limitations of this research was the use of non-probability convenience sampling which may not accurately represent the general population. Therefore, for future research, it would be beneficial to utilize a more representative and more targeted sample of participants.

To explore this topic further, future research could be conducted on the correlation between the perception of human rights issues and the intention to travel to a country. This can allow a deeper understanding of how human rights issues impact tourism and can help Qatar develop effective strategies to promote tourism. Also, it would be valuable to explore the relationship between safety and cleanliness perceptions and the intention to travel. Moreover, the research could explore case studies of other Muslim countries that follow Sharia law and investigate how they have managed to adapt to the needs and expectations of foreign visitors. Further research in these areas would help the tourism industry in Qatar understand the concerns of travelers and enhance its appeal as a travel destination.

## References

- Al-Ansi, A., Chua, B.L., Kim Ch.S., Yoon, H., Han, H. (2022) Islamophobia: Differences across Western and Eastern community residents toward welcoming Muslim tourists. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*. Vol. 51, pp. 439-450.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.04.018>
- Amara, M and Bouandel, Y. (2022). The 2022 FIFA World Cup, between Soccer and Faith – English version. *Observatoire international du religieux*.  
<https://obsreligion.cnrs.fr/bulletin/the-2022-fifa-world-cup-between-soccer-and-faith-english-version/>
- Anderson, S., Bengtsson, L., & Svensson, A. (2020). Mega-sport football events' influence on destination images: A study of the 2016 UEFA EU Football Championship in France, the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia, and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. *Elsevier Ltd*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100536>
- Dun, S. (2014). No beer, no way! Football fan identity enactment won't mix with Muslim beliefs in the Qatar 2022 World Cup. *Research Gate*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2014.925256>
- Friefer. R. (2020). The Middle East leads international tourism arrivals in 2019. *Hospitality News Middle East*. <https://www.hospitalitynewsmag.com/the-middle-east-leads-international-tourism-arrivals-in-2019/>
- Goodman, J. (2017). US travel ban: Why these seven countries?. *BBC News*.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38798588>
- Kaplanidou, K., Al-Emadi, A., Triantafyllidis, M.S., & Diop, A. (2016). Qatar World Cup 2022: Awareness of the Event and its Impact on Destination and Country Character Perceptions

- in the US Tourism Market. *Tourism Review International*. Vol. 20, pp. 143-153.  
<https://doi.org/10.3727/154427216X14724915340125>
- Manoli, A.E. (2022). World Cup 2022: Qatar is accused of ‘sportswashing’ but do the fans really care?. *The Conversation*. <https://rb.gy/x0goi>
- Nadeau, J., Heslop, L., O’Reilly N., & Luk, P. (2008). Destination in a country image context. *Annals of Tourism Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2007.06.012>
- Russo, E., Figueira, A., Swart, K., Mataruna-Dos-Santos, L.J. (2022). Diamond of the Desert: The Case Study of Qatar’s 2022 FIFA World Cup. *Research Gate*.  
<https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.28.2.12>
- Samuel-Azran, T., Yarchi, M., Galily, Y., Tamir, I. (2016). Promoting Terror or Sport? The Case of Qatar’s International Image. *Sage Journals*  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216632841>
- Timothy, D.J. (2019). Tourism Trends in the MENA Region. *IE.Med*.  
<https://www.iemed.org/publication/tourism-trends-in-the-mena-region/>
- Waiker, P. (2018). Reading Islamophobia in Hegemonic Neoliberalism Through a Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's Narratives. Taylor & Francis Online.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2018.1466490>