

Framing the Games: Comparative Analysis of African Online Sports Media and Western Online Sports Media Coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar

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How to cite this paper: Kusi, G. (2026). Framing the Games: Comparative Analysis of African Online Sports Media and Western Online Sports Media Coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 14, 328-347. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2026.145020>

Received: March 30, 2026

Accepted: May 23, 2026

Published: May 26, 2026

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Abstract

This study analyses news coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup by two sports online media—*ESPN.com* and *SuperSport.com* over a period of one year, with a particular focus on the predominantly frames employed, tones adopted and the sources of the news coverage. Using a qualitative content analysis and framing theory, the study examines 40 news articles from the media outlets published between November 1, 2022 and October 31, 2023. The major findings in this research revealed that the media outlets prioritized criticizing human rights violations by highlighting the problems faced by migrant workers and members/supporters of the sexual and gender minorities. In addition, while *ESPN.com* was reliant on their internal journalists for news coverage, *SuperSport.com* heavily relied on other media houses for their publications. Both online media outlets employed negative tones in their reporting of the World Cup with morality as its salient frame.

Keywords

FIFA World Cup 2022, Qatar 2022

1. Introduction

The media acts not only as a means of information dissemination, but also as a fundamental driver in the success and sustainability of sporting events at the global and national levels. Media coverage of global sporting events have grown throughout time, and given host nations opportunities to sell their countries and boost their socio-economic standing by tapping on the global attention that comes

with coverage of such global events (Roche, 2000). Therefore, major events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games have been connected to nationalistic movements when host nations adopt flags, songs, and symbols (Horne, 2004).

Hosting of international sporting events is one of several strategies used by cities and governments to bring about improvements in a places image and recognition (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018). These major events attract media attention; thus, the host nations take advantage of the positive relationship between the media, sporting organizations, the government, and the business world to woo the global audience, attract investors, and create a reputable global brand image (Kiani & Nazari, 2025). This has pushed developed and developing countries to put in bids to host such big events and benefit from media exposure (Choudhary, 2018). Qatar, in bidding and winning the rights to host the 2022 World Cup, probably proposed to benefit from global media coverage of the Muslim State and showcase to the world, not just Qatar, but the entire Gulf region. Moreover, FIFA's goal has always been to create an understanding of different cultures and enhance inclusivity, which media coverage plays a great role in achieving it (FIFA, 2022).

Former FIFA President Sepp Blatter in 2010 just after the balloting for the 2018 and 2022 hosting rights, revealed that, they had decided to take football "to new lands" in an attempt to develop football (*The New York Times*, 2010). It has been a common practice to instrumentalize sport through media to promote a country's image and prestige. However, the way sporting events are presented by the media can have a profound impact on citizens' views regarding issues, such as gender, diplomacy, nationality, and the perceived apt organization of tournaments by certain host countries over others. Therefore, the media's coverage of the World Cup in Qatar is an interesting area of study to explore to understand the extent to which the global media presented Qatar as the host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and the FIFA's agenda in having the World Cup in the Gulf State.

2. Statement of the Problem

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, and individuals heavily rely on media sources to form their understanding of events and phenomena (Cozma & Kozman, 2015). Therefore, media's frame of mega-sports events carries significant implications for the representation and perception of the tournaments: it affects policy decisions, impacts reputations, and shapes narratives surrounding the host country and the tournament itself. Hence, researchers have done numerous studies on media framing of mega-sports events. For example, Jintao (2009) explored Chinese newspaper coverage of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games; Boykoff and Yasuoka (2014) analyzed media coverage of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in the UK and US media; Ozornina and Mannin (2020) examined the image of Russia in the British media during the 2018 FIFA World Cup; and Boykoff (2022) investigated the US media coverage of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games.

Similarly, several studies have been conducted on the framing of the 2022

FIFA World Cup in Qatar. For instance, Mildred (2024) examined the framing of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar by the Western media by adopting a descriptive research design methodology. Daoudi et al. (2025) explored media coverage of the tournament by doing comparative quantitative analysis in *The Guardian Newspaper* and *The New York Times*, and *Aljazeera English* by utilizing a sentiment analysis and topic modeling. Also, Labidi and Al Zo'by (2025) investigated the media narratives of the tournament by *Aljazeera*, *BBC* and *RT* by using post-colonial discursive analysis. Stojan (2023) analyzed media representation of the World Cup in the British and the Croatian newspapers by using critical discourse analysis and textual analysis. Swart and Hussain (2023) through content analysis explored how the Western media constructed Qatar's image in the context of the 2022 FIFA World Cup through the lens of Orientalism/neo-Orientalism. Ali et al. (2026) through a reflexive thematic analysis interrogated how Qatar was represented in *The Guardian* as the host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and Seme and Ong'onda (2023) studied Kenyan newspapers report on the tournament by applying critical discourse analysis, descriptive research design and quantitative method.

Whilst it is acknowledged that some studies exist in the literature on the media framing of the coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, no studies have been done with respect to comparative analysis of African media and Western media coverage of the tournament. This study therefore fills the gap in the literature by using framing theory and qualitative content analysis to examine the comparative representation of the coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup by African media sports website vis-à-vis the Western media sports website.

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What were the dominant frames through which the 2022 FIFA World Cup were narrated?
- 2) What are the similarities and differences in the coverage by the selected media houses in terms of tone, and sources cited?

3. Literature Review

The FIFA World Cup

Before the World Cup was launched, the football tournament arranged as part of the Summer Olympics was given the most prestige. But in the 1920s, the game was facing a transition to professionalism that was not consistent with the Olympic spirit. Therefore, the governing body, FIFA, made plans to organize a World Cup. The decision of arranging the first edition was officially declared on May 26, 1928 (Stewart, 1998).

The first official FIFA World Cup was played in Uruguay in 1930, and since then, the tournament has been held every four years (with exceptions for the interruption due to the Second World War). There were, however, unofficial pre-FIFA World Cups already in the late 1800s, in a time when only few national teams existed. Another unofficial "World Cup" arranged before 1930 was Sir Thomas

Lipton Trophy held in 1909 and 1911. Besides that, the Summer Olympic Football competitions would be a mark of which the best nationals were seen before 1930. The Olympic tournaments consisted however, only of amateur teams—the world cup became the “real deal” (Brewin & Williamson, 2014).

Thirteen countries participated in the inaugural tournament held in Uruguay. Fast forward, the last edition of the tournament which was held in 2022 in Qatar had 32 nations involved, the tournament reached over three billion television viewers worldwide and one billion watched the final (FIFA, 2022).

The Media and the FIFA World Cup

The initial media coverage of the World Cup was grounded in print and radio broadcasts. The 1930 FIFA World Cup, held in Uruguay, reached fans primarily through live radio commentary—an innovation of its time. Radio allowed people worldwide to experience the tension and drama of matches, fostering a new era of real-time sports engagement. By the 1950s, radio broadcasts had become indispensable, not just for those unable to attend matches, but for enhancing the communal experience in local cafes and public spaces (Martinez, 2025). Approximately 60 million listeners tuned in during the 1954 World Cup, football’s reach beyond geographical confines.

None of the 1930s tournaments were televised, although all were filmed and the 1938 World Cup finals appeared in cinema newsreels across Europe and Brazil, via shortwave transmission. Elements of internationalization of communications were, therefore embedded from the start of the World Cup (Geraghty, Simpson & Whannel, 1978 as cited in Haynes & Boyle, 2017).

Television emerged as a game-changer during the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland. It was the first tournament where selected matches were televised, albeit in black and white, transforming passive listening into engaging viewing. Televising of the 1966 Football World Cup in England can be considered to be the real turning point in the connection between football and television. Live transmissions in Europe and abroad, new technical devices purposely engineered such as the slow-motion machine, huge economic and human investments, and large audience figures across the globe emerged for the first time during the 1966 World Cup (Chisari, 2006). The TV broadcasting of the tournament can therefore be considered to be the launch pad for the future development of televised football as well as for the globalization of soccer through television.

According to Martinez (2025), color television broadcasts ensured that 600 million people watched the final live during the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. This tournament set as a precedent, showing how visual broadcasting could captivate the imagination of football fans worldwide. With satellite technology, the 1982 World Cup in Spain became the most widely covered in history at that point, reaching an estimated global audience of over 1.7 billion. The 2002 FIFA World Cup in South Korea and Japan was the first to employ high-definition (HD) broadcasting. This innovation delivered crisper images and richer colors, revolutionizing home viewing experiences.

By 2014, streaming technology had taken center stage. The World Cup in Brazil saw unprecedented digital audience engagement, with FIFA reporting that over 280 million fans watched the matches via streaming platforms, indicating a shift towards on-demand viewing. The 2018 World Cup in Russia elevated standards further with the rollout of 4K Ultra-High-Definition broadcasting. Japan's Nhk pioneered 8K broadcast trials during the 2022 Qatar World Cup. This newest advancement in broadcasting delivers a staggering 7680×4320 pixels, promising a viewing experience that mirrors on-field reality (Martinez, 2025).

Framing Theory

Framing assumes how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences. To Gamson (1996), framing means to place emphasis on certain features of the new to denial of others. Whiles, Gitlin (1980: p.6) describes the framing process as: "Frames as principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matter."

Framing is an influential way of forming and shaping public opinion. Since its evolution, framing has been widely used in communication research of media content and also studies of relationship between the media and public opinion (de Vreese, 2005). The theory was first put forth by Goffman in 1974 under the title "Frame Analysis". According to Goffman (1974), people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework. Goffman's underlying assumption is that individuals are capable users of these frameworks on a day to day basis, whether they are aware of them or not.

Framing may be considered as a "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label" occurrences or life experiences (Goffman, 1974). This definition was later revised by Entman (1993) to entail a specification of framing as a way of communicating text or message which is purposed to promote certain facets of a "perceived reality" and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation.

The framing theory also stresses that media have the power to shape a story in a positive or negative manner, with the negative portrayals having a stronger influence on the audience than positive portrayals (Billings, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001). The theory recognizes that information can be presented in several ways, and that how it is organized and disseminated through the media impacts how the public understands and uses the information they have been given.

Media Frames

Media frames have the ability to influence public opinion in the way they transfer information from a media source to social and individual awareness (Entman, 1993). These frames serve as the structures through which individuals understand and organize information (Scheufele, 2004). Media framing involves the selection and salience given to various pieces of information, allowing certain attributes to be highlighted and others to be excluded in a communications context (Chyi &

McCombs, 2004; Entman, 1993). Increasing the salience given to certain attributes influences the audiences' personal opinions regarding a given issue by making it more likely they will process and store it to memory (Entman, 1993).

Media frames can be found in four areas of communication process (Entman, 1993). First, frames can be found with information communicators who are influenced by their own frames and schemas when deciding what information to publish and highlight. Secondly, frames can be found in presence or absence of certain attributes within the actual text. The simple placement or repetition of certain frames in a text is enough to increase the likelihood that an individual will store it to memory. The third location in the communication process where frames can be found is with the receiver. Frames can affect the thoughts and insights generated by the public by determining what information they are exposed to and confirming or disconfirming previously stored beliefs. Lastly, today's culture is overwhelmed with frames commonly shared and accepted by the social majority (Entman, 1993).

Many of these frames have been spread throughout society due to the consistent exposure and omission of information in the media. One reason why media frames have become so common within social culture is because they can be found in all levels of communication process. Media producers and editors do not necessarily utilize media frames to purposely pervert or manipulate the public, but instead to concisely and effectively report a story using a limited amount of space (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Members of the media use familiar frames to help the public make sense of the information they are being given (Billings, 2004). Frames allow the media to report a story that requires little or no effort by the public to understand because the consumers automatically identify the commonly used frames, which prevents journalists from having to explain new or unfamiliar information.

Framing Sports Competitions

While framing theory has been extensively applied in media and communication research (de Vreese, 2005), its application in analyzing news coverage of major sports events remains limited. It is typically utilized in a broad sense to complement other primary theories or to examine its relationship with identify issues (Sobral et al., 2022).

Several sports-related studies have examined media framing in various contexts such as gender (Billings & Angelini, 2007; Kusi, 2017), ethnicity (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004), nationalism (Elder et al., 2006), athlete representation and identity (Harris & Clayton, 2002), alcohol and drug use (Lewis & Proffitt, 2012), and the political economy of the media (Zaharopoulos, 2007). Framing analyses have also been expanded to include studies of news media discourse in cities, particularly those investigating the arguments and justifications for cities hosting major sporting events (Scherer & Jackson, 2004).

In sports media, various frames dominate coverage, including conflict, human interest, and attribution of responsibility. For instance, conflict was found to be

the dominant frame in *The New York Times*' coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games (Zaharopoulos, 2007). Similarly, Kozman's (2017) analysis of the steroids issue in baseball highlighted the use of conflict and policy frames. However, studies have also revealed the prevalence of the human-interest frame in sports news, for example, Billings and Angelini (2007) focused on athletes' personal struggles and triumphs in their analysis of news coverage at the 2004 Olympics. In an analysis of newspaper coverage of Sports for Development and Peace programs, Harrison and Boehmer (2020) found that the human-interest frame ranked second in terms of frequency, with the attribution of responsibility frame taking the lead.

Media Tone and News Sourcing

Media tone is defined as the specific attitude, mood, or a flavor a publication or a person employs in their communication. There are several tones of news in the media, which are positive, negative, and neutral, and each carries specific meaning (Lyytimäki et al., 2021 as cited in Ahmad & Al-Zoubi, 2025). The tone of the news is categorized as positive, negative or neutral, as adopted by Ahmad and Al-Zoubi (2025) in their studies. News sources play a significant role in shaping the frames adopted by journalists, as they influence the information and perspectives presented in news stories (Cozma & Kozman, 2015). Source selection is a fundamental component of the final news product, and ascribing information to source other than the reporter is central tenet of modern journalism (Cozma & Kozman, 2015). Sourced material forms the mainstay of news reporting, providing evidence and lending legitimacy and credibility to the story, the news outlet and the journalism profession. In this study, the sources are categorized as insourced or out-sourced. Insourced of news is defined as a situation where a media outlet used their own employees in gathering and production news stories. While, the out-sourced of news is defined as a situation where a media outlet relies on stories/articles from other media houses for their news delivery.

Method and Sample

This study employs comparative content analysis to examine the news coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. The data consists of news articles published in *ESPN.com* and *SuperSport.com* from November 2022 to October 2023. *ESPN* is an American basic cable sports broadcasting network and a flagship property of *ESPN Inc.*, it was founded in 1979, and is considered as one of the leading sports channels in the world. It's online portal—*ESPN.com* is the most visited online sports portal in the world with 524.9 million monthly visits (Spangler, 2025).

SuperSport is a South African-based group of television channels carried on *DStv* & *CANAL+* satellite platforms. It was launched in 1986 as part of M-Net channels. It provides sports content in all Sub-Saharan Africa countries. It's online portal—*SuperSport.com* is the leading online sports portal in Africa in terms of traffic and quality content (Oladapo, 2025).

The articles were derived from each news outlet's online archive using "FIFA World Cup 2022" and "Qatar 2022" as key words. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

were used to select the articles. An article was considered as inclusion when it met the following: article written in English language, and article written within the study period and related to the topic. The criteria for excluding an article was as follows: article not written in English language, and article not written within the study period and does not relate to the topic. The initial sample yielded 89 articles; 53 from *ESPN.com* and 36 from *SuperSport.com*. The application of inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in the final sample of 40 articles: 23 from *ESPN.com* and 17 from *SuperSport.com*. This study used paragraphs as the unit of analysis. Framing, and tones were measured at the paragraph level, with records of the number of paragraphs attributed to different tones or framed in specific ways. Each frame was identified by counting the number of paragraphs that exhibited characteristics corresponding to that particular frame (**Table 1**).

For the human right violation frame, paragraphs that reflected maltreatment of migrant workers such as withholding of their salaries, charging workers to change jobs, migrant workers being trapped and exploited and discrimination against the members/supporters of the sexual and gender minorities were tallied. These paragraphs provided personal anecdotes, vignettes, or narratives that offered a deeper understanding of the impact on people's lives, bringing a human face and emotional angle to the presentation of events or issues. Regarding the frame of soft power, paragraphs that diagnosed the causes and solutions to the criticism of Qatar hosting the tournament in the news stories were recorded.

To identify the cost and revenue frame, the focus was placed on paragraphs that suggested financial or economic implications, such as potential losses or gains, expenses costs, or long-term financial impacts associated with the events or issues covered in the news stories. The faded legacy frame captured the absence of potential long-lasting positive impacts or memories associated with the tournament. It was characterized by paragraphs that emphasized how individuals or groups were negatively affected by the events or issues at hand. Lastly, the moral halo frame was identified by counting paragraphs that made moral judgments or placed the events, issues, or problems within the context of moral tenets, prescriptions, or messages. These paragraphs conveyed ethical considerations or evaluations related to the subjected matter.

To assess the treatment of news stories in terms of tones, a comprehensive approach was employed, evaluating the stories at the article level. The determination of whether a story exhibited a positive tone, negative tone or neutral tone was based on the extent to which it is placed on a broader emotional impact context. Tones were classified as positive if they evoke hope, admiration, solutions, achievements, improvements, breakthrough, and happy outcomes. In contrast, tones were classified as negative when they focused on conflict, losses, problems, failure, harmful, or critique. While neutral tone stories describe events without adding value judgements.

Coding

Coding or thematic code is the process of assigning a word or phrase to segment

of data. A codebook was developed and divided in three parts: 1) descriptive variables, 2) types of issues covered, and 3) generic frames.

Descriptive variables: Each news article was assigned a case number and coded for the date of publication, headline, and length of the article (measured in words).

Issues: The coding scheme sought to identify and compare the dominant issues in the news coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Frames: The data obtained for this study were coded into 5 frames and 14 sub-topic categories. All the 14 sub-topic categories have been grouped under the 5 different frames. The following are the frames and their clustered sub-categories:

Human rights violations: e.g. *wage theft, injustice kafala system, sexual and gender minorities, human trafficking.*

Soft Power: e.g. *international recognition, cooperation among other countries.*

Cost and Revenue: e.g. *economic consequences, highest ever gross FIFA World Cup.*

Faded legacy: e.g. *deserted city, abandoned stadia, uncompensated care.*

Moral Halo: *hypocrisy, double standards, racism.*

Human rights violation is the disallowance of the freedom of thought and movement to which all humans legally have a right. This frame refers to maltreatment of migrant workers such as withholding of their salaries, charging workers to change jobs, and migrant workers being trapped and exploited. It also denotes to the discrimination against the members/supporters of sexual and gender minorities. Soft power is the ability of a country to entice others by utilizing their culture, media and foreign policies. This frame refers to an attempt by Qatari authorities to use the tournament to improve the country's image and enhance its relations with other countries. Cost and revenue are the measurement of the total money spent as well as the total income generated from organization of events or services rendered. This frame refers to the amount of money (\$220 billion) Qatar spent on hosting the tournament and the amount of money (\$7.57 billion) FIFA accrued in the organization of the tournament.

A faded legacy refers to a long-lasting reputation or impact from the past that has lost its relevance over time. It denotes to the deserted places like Lusail City which hosted the final match of the tournament between Argentina and France and abandoned edifices used for the tournament, and the uncompensated care has to do with no compensation for the migrant worker families who lost relatives. Moral halo is a bias where an initial impression of a person or entity's morality causes observers to assume they possess other, unrelated positive traits. This frame refers to uncritical admiration and the excusing of unethical behavior, it borders on issues of morality.

Coding was performed by two trained coders. Coding and categorization of themes were conducted separately between two researchers and discrepancies were discussed after completion to ensure consensus.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff's alpha, which factors in

accidental agreement and is more stringent than percent agreement (Lombard et al., 2022). Each coder was required to code, independently of one another, the same sample of 20 news articles, which represented 50% of the corpus (40 news articles). The intercoder reliability sample was randomly selected from the full sample for each news outlet. The process yielded ten news articles from each news website. All variables had Krippendorff's alpha coefficient higher than 0.8, which is considered appropriate to guarantee fair reliability in content analysis studies (Lombard et al., 2022).

4 Findings

Issues in the coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup

RQ1: What are the dominant frames through which the 2022 FIFA World Cup were narrated?

Table 1. Frequency distribution of online sports media frames on the 2022 FIFA World Cup from November 2022-October 2023.

Frames	<i>ESPN.com</i>	<i>Supersport.com</i>	Overall Total
Human Rights Violations	8 (34.8%)	6 (35.3%)	14 (35%)
Soft Power	5 (21.73%)	4 (23.5%)	9 (22.5%)
Cost and Revenue	4 (17.39%)	3 (17.6%)	7 (17.5%)
Faded Legacy	3 (13.04%)	2 (11.8%)	5 (12.5%)
Moral Halo	3 (13.04%)	2 (11.8 %)	5 (12.5%)
Total	23 (100)	17 (100)	40 (100)

Human Rights Violations

Human rights violations emerged the highest of the five frames used by the online sports portals to cover the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar from November 2022 to October 2023. This theme secured 14 thematic codes with overall percentage of 35% as illustrated in Table 1. *ESPN.com* recorded the highest thematic code in terms of number of frames with 8 out of 14 representing 34.8%, while the *SuperSport.com* had 6 out of 14 representing 35.3%. Human rights violations involve the use of descriptive words and phrases to suggest intimidation against migrant workers, members/supporters of the sexual and gender minorities, and the press. For example, an article published by *ESPN.com* on November 15, 2022 entitled: "Qatar World Cup 2022: Sportswashing, Security and Soccer". Elaborates that: "migrant workers were held in virtual bondage by the kafala system." The article reveals that many of these migrant workers lived in squalor. Their passports had been taken, and they were forced to work in unbearable heat with no recourse to change jobs or return home. Payment was inconsistent and, at times, nonexistent. Similarly, an article by *SuperSport.com* published on November 25, 2022 with the heading: "England fans face stadium ban over crusader costumes in Qatar" highlighted that some Wales fans were prevented from entering stadium for their last

group game against the United States because there were wearing hats with the rainbow colors of the sexual and gender minorities.

Soft Power

The soft power frame appeared as the second highest frame among the five frames employed by the sports news portals. Out of the 9 thematic codes with overall percentage of 22.5% as shown in **Table 1**, the *ESPN.com* produced 5 thematic codes amounting to 21.73% while the *SuperSport.com* also recorded 4 thematic codes representing 23.5%. Qatar used the tournament to improve its image by launching persuasive campaigns through political, moral, and cultural attractions to counter negatives surrounding the country and enhance its relations with other countries. An article by *ESPN.com* published on November 15, 2022 entitled “Qatar World Cup 2022: Sportwashing, security and soccer”. Indicates that: “The hosting of the tournament was the biggest plan to show Qatar to the rest of the world and the main purpose was to help diversify the economy with expanded tourism and lead to more international collaboration.”

An article by *SuperSport.com* published on November 20, 2022, titled: “Saudi crown prince MBS in Qatar for the World Cup opening ceremony”. Reads: “The Saudi crown prince has helped to mend ties between the two countries, with Doha hoping the event will bring various economic benefits which it aims to share with Gulf neighbors. In another article by *SuperSport.com* dated December 18, 2022 with the heading: “Qatar’s 2022 World Cup ends with modest ceremony, titans clash”. States that: “The tournament was part of a carefully built strategy by the tiny but rich state to bolster its global influence”.

Cost and Revenue

The theme of Cost and Revenue placed third out of the five frames used to cover the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Out of the overall total of 7 thematic codes under this theme, the *ESPN.com* recorded 4 thematic codes representing 17.39%, while the *SuperSport.com* scored 3 thematic codes translating into 17.6%. key indicators that allude to the frame of Cost and Revenue include: total cost of the tournament and revenue generated from various sources. A report by the *ESPN.com* on 20 November, 2023 titled: “One year after 2022 FIFA World Cup, what has changed in Qatar”. Reads: “According to FIFA, 3.4 million people attended the games, and the four-year cycle to 2022 was the most lucrative ever, generating \$7.5 billion. No official figure has ever been stated, but reports estimate Qatar spent \$220bn on staging the World Cup”.

A report by the *SuperSport.com* on 20 November, 2023 entitled “Cost and Revenue at the 2022 FIFA World Cup”. States that: “the total cost of the tournament was estimated at \$220 billion, with revenue generated from various sources, including television broadcasting rights, sponsorship, and tourism, reaching approximately \$4.1 billion.”

Faded Legacy

The frame of faded legacy and the frame of moral halo were the least of the five frames used by the sports media outlets. The frame of faded legacy had a total of

5 thematic codes representing 12.5%. The *ESPN.com* recorded 3 thematic codes accounting for 13.04%, while *SuperSport.com* had 2 thematic codes translating into 11.8%. The representation of faded legacy relates to abandoned stadia, deserted edifices, and neglect of the plight of migrant workers.

An article by *ESPN.com* dated 22 November, 2023 entitled: “One year after 2022 FIFA World Cup, what has changed in Qatar?” Reads: “There has been no compensation for the migrant workers families who lost relatives. There were cases where families of workers who died can show paperwork proving their loved ones died on worksite and compensation would be a life changing. But the Qataris say it is blood money and they will not pay. The article also highlighted on abandoned stadia such as Education stadium which is now used for Eid prayers, stadium 974 which was supposed to be dismantled and sent to Africa with the vacated area turned into a waterfront development is still in place, and Lusail stadium which hosted the final match is deemed too special for regular use. The article also describes Lusail City as deserted area with only a handful of tourists present on Lusail Boulevard. Also, another article by *ESPN.com* dated 16 December, 2022 titled “Inside Qatar’s futuristic but unfinished city of Lusail, host of the 2022 World Cup final”. States that: “Much of the city looks like a ghost city.”

A report by *SuperSport.com* dated December 18, 2022 with the heading: “Qatar’s 2022 World Cup ends with modest ceremony, titans clash” . Reads: “In May 2022, coalition of rights groups including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International called on FIFA and Qatar to establish a compensation fund at least equivalent to \$440 million World Cup prize money for workers who suffered abuses or died in Qatar. Neither FIFA nor Qatar agreed to establish the fund. Others, like the UK-based labor rights charity Equidem called for an establishment of independent migrant worker center in Qatar to allow freedom of association and to overhaul the relationship between workers and employers in the Gulf Arab State. Qatar has not yet established such a center.”

Moral Halo

The theme of Moral Halo together with the theme of faded legacy were the least of the five frames. The theme of moral halo had a total of 5 thematic codes indicating 12.5%. The *ESPN.com* recorded the highest number of thematic codes of 3 representing 13.04%, whereas the *SuperSport.com* had 2 thematic codes translating into 11.8%. key indicators that allude to the frame of moral halo include: hypocrisy, racism and double standards. An article published by *ESPN.com* on December 21 entitled “Qataris speak candidly about the 2022 World Cup and what comes next” highlight a divide between those outside the country who want Qatar to be more inclusive and those within who like things as they are, and are determined to cling to the country’s religion and culture. The article indicated that several Qatari people raised issued of hypocrisy and double standards when Germany players covered their mouths in protests over the fact that FIFA banned “One Love” rainbow-colored armbands, it struck a nerve given that pro-Palestine protests in Germany have been banned.

A report by *SuperSport.com* on November 19, 2022 with the heading: “FIFA President Infantino slams Europe’s ‘hypocrisy’ in speech”. Reads: “During the opening news conference in Doha on the eve of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, FIFA President Gianni Infantino launched a scathing attack on what he described as the “hypocrisy” and “racism” from countries he considered to be moralizing over the middle East nation’s human rights record. Telling us all that “today I feel Qatari ... Arab ... African ... other gender identity... disabled ... a migrant worker,” he went on to castigate the West for double standards in focusing on Qatar’s worker abuses, by stating that: “For the actions Europeans have taken over the last 3,000 years, we should be apologizing for the next 3,000 years before giving moral lessons.”

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences in coverage by the selected media houses in terms of tone and sources cited?

Table 2. Tone of voice used in reference to the coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Category	<i>ESPN.com</i>	<i>SuperSport.com</i>	Total
Negative	10	7	17
Positive	6	5	11
Neutral	7	5	12
Total	23	17	40

Negative Tone

The total number of codes for this tone was 10 for *ESPN.com*, and 7 for *SuperSport.com*. Some excerpts from the media outlets with respect to this tone include: An article written by *ESPN.com* dated November 15, 2022 titled: “Qatar World Cup 2022: Sportswashing, Security and Soccer.” Reads: “The most popular sporting event on the planet was headed to a tiny Persian Gulf State lacking a prevalent soccer culture and with torrid summer heat, minimal infrastructure and concerns about the country’s track record with human rights that seemingly should have served as immediate disqualifiers.” In the abstract above, the negative tone is pronounced with the assertion that Qatar is too small with unbearable climatic conditions to host the World Cup. By employing such utterances, the media outfit is helping to project the negative tone that was used by the former FIFA President Sepp Blatter just some few days to the start of the tournament in which he stated that awarding the tournament to Qatar was a mistake (**Table 2**).

SuperSport.com also adds to this negative with the extract below from their publication made on December 15, 2022 from an article entitled “Nepali groups urge FIFA to ‘make things right’ for migrant worker.” States that: “More than three dozen Nepali civil society groups on Thursday called on FIFA President Gianni Infantino to ‘stop looking the other way’ while migrant workers are denied compensation after being trapped and exploited in Qatar.” By using the phrases “trapped” and “exploited” the negative tone rears its head in that it connotes a

situation in which the migrant workers in Qatar were subjected to slavery.

Positive Tone

The number of codes for this tone was 11 – 6 for *ESPN.com* and 5 for *SuperSport.com*. This suggests that the media outfits, irrespective of the negative tone presented with regards to the coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, there were instances in which they presented the country in some good light due to some perceived relevance of their actions. For instance, an extract from *ESPN.com* article dated November 22, 2023, with the heading: “One year after 2022 FIFA World Cup, what has changed in Qatar”. States that: “There were more goals scored (172) than at any previous World Cup. 3.4 million people attended the games, and the four-year cycle to 2022 was the most lucrative ever, generating \$7.5 billion. *ESPN.com* comments in the extract above shows that Qatar undeniably put on an impressive show despite some shortcomings.

An article published by *SuperSport.com* on 15 November, 2022 with the heading: “World Cup 2022 Qatar stadiums: guide to Doha venues for FIFA tournament.” Reads: “Eight stadiums in Doha will host 64 matches at the World Cup and the unique nature of the tournament, which is being held in one location, allows fans to attend more than one game a day, the venues a maximum of one hour’s drive from each other. Considering the scorching climate, the stadiums are powered by solar panel farms and earned four and five stars from the Global Sustainability Assessment System. The design of the stadiums reflects Qatar’s history and culture, with each stadium having a capacity of at least 40,000 fans.” *SuperSport.com* per this article indicates that for Qatar deciding to honor all the matches in one city—the first ever to happen, will enable fans to watch more matches without hustles and bustles. And also, the Local Organizing Committee in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the fans provided cooling systems in every stadium.

Neutral Tone

Scholars suggest that, in performing the duties of the journalist, journalist should do so in an accurate and objective way (Boudana, 2011), suggesting the need for them to adopt the neutral tone. In this regard, news reportage which is seen to be neutral should be politically and ideologically independent, and the reportage should not aim to influence behavior (Weber, 2016). This is because, by choosing how to interpret and how to present information, the media can actively shape the public’s perception of reality. This therefore means that the media not only reports the news but makes the news (Solkin, 2022).

The total number of codes for this variable was 7 for *ESPN.com*. and 5 for *SuperSport.com*. *ESPN.com* demonstrates this neutral tone dated November 1, 2022, titled: “New *ESPNE60* Examines Controversy Surrounding Qatar’s World Cup”. Reads: “As reported in the program, independent reports that an estimated 6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar since it was awarded the World Cup. All in a country that by most metrics is one of the world’s richest and is reportedly spending \$220 billion to build stadiums and infrastructure for the World Cup.” In the

extract above, the writer skillfully and carefully sticks to the issues without employing sentiments. In that case, the reporter succeeded in ensuring that he led the readers into appreciating the salient issues on migrant workers and the economic level of Qatar. *SuperSport.com* also demonstrates this neutral tone below in an article published on December 10, 2022, with the heading: “US sports reporter dies after collapsing at Qatar World Cup”. States that: “One of America’s leading football reporters, who made headlines at the Qatar World Cup for wearing a rainbow shirt, died on Friday while covering the quarterfinals in Doha. Wahl was detained on 21 November by security staff for showing support for sexual and gender minorities in a country where other gender identity relationship is outlawed.” In the extract above, the article suggests the neutral tone by sticking to the reporting routine which demands that the writer only states the facts. By this neutral tone, the writer stated the detention and the reason behind it.

Sources Cited by the Selected Media Outlets

Another area that was used to determine the differences and similarities in the coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar was that of sources. Since news is a social construct, source selection is important in shaping the news narrative of a given story. In the context of this study, sources refer to where the media outlets obtained their information—whether from their own reporters (insourced), or outsourced from different media house(s).

Table 3. Sources of news by the media outlets.

Category	<i>ESPN.com</i>	<i>SuperSport.com</i>	Total
Insourced	23	4	27
Outsourced	0	13	13
Total	23	17	40

From **Table 3**, all the articles (23) obtained from *ESPN.com* relied on their own journalists/reporters to give coverage of the news about Qatar’s hosting the tournament. On the contrary, most of the articles from *SuperSport.com* on the 2022 FIFA World Cup were outsourced (13), and they were predominantly obtained from *Reuters* and *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*, only few (4) were written by their own reporters/journalists.

5. Discussion

The study revealed that news coverage by the two media outlets focused mainly on social problems concerning human rights issues—violations against migrant workers, and the members/supporters of the sexual and gender minorities during Qatar’s hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. This aligns with previous research suggesting that journalists prioritize educating society on such issues (Schmidt, 2018). Political issue also gained a strong attention. For example, soft power, in line with previous study by Labidi and Zo’by (2025) was a highly highlighted

theme. This is not surprising given the potential impact of issues before the tournament, especially considering the blockade of Qatar by neighboring Gulf states and Egypt, along with accusations of sponsoring terrorists and demands to close Al-Jazeera (Josua, 2021). In 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates accused Qatar of supporting terrorists. The situation caused a political crisis in the region and raised concerns about the tournament. In response to international criticism, Qatar used the hosting of the tournament to build its influence in the region and strengthen its political standing. Therefore, the hosting of the tournament became opportunity for Qatar to build its credibility; deflect attention from these issues; and reinforce its political integrity in the region and across the globe.

Cost and revenue issues, in line with previous study (Bonsu, 2025), was a fairly highlighted theme. The articles want to ascertain the impact of economic challenges the country might face after spending so much money in the hosting of the tournament. The themes of faded legacy and moral halo were the least cited themes. These themes have not been captured in any prior studies that I have reviewed. They were derived inductively from the sample taken. The articles on faded legacy focused on failure of Qatar to capitalized on hosting of the tournament to create an ever-lasting positive influence or “footprints” which previous host countries of the tournament have done. On the theme of moral halo, the articles espoused on comments from certain individuals or groups on some biased moral accusations of Qatar.

The findings also showed that, the hosting of the World Cup in Qatar had more negative tones than positive tones, with morality being the most salient frame shared among the news outlets. This aligns with the study conducted by Ahmad and Al-Zoubi (2025). *ESPN.com* had more negative tones than *SuperSport.com*. Negative tones and different frames highlighted in this study may suggest the influential role of a news organization’s media agenda in shaping public discourse on a nation or group. Also, it was revealed that while *SuperSport.com* was reliant on other media houses for their publications, *ESPN.com* relied on their own journalists/reporters for the coverage of their news. This affirms (Augustyniak, 2019) assertion that journalists from the West perceive their roles and values differently to their non-Western counterparts. Hence, the findings from this section suggest that Western journalists rely on their on their own sources more than other types of sources due to values practiced, which differ from the non-Western journalists.

Moreover, media outlets in Africa reliance on Western news agencies for coverage is driven by a combination of historical, economic, and structural factors. This is often termed as post-colonial media dependency or the “neo-colonial” model of information flow. Research shows that lack of global or specialized coverage, the need for speed during breaking news, and financial constraints limit African media capacity to deploy correspondents, making it cheaper to lift stories from foreign wires like *Reuters*, *AP* or *AFP* (Omotoso, 2018). Hence, it is not surprising that *SuperSport.com* outsourced most of their news from *Reuters* and

AFP. While, *ESPN.com* relied on their correspondence for the coverage of the tournament.

Comparatively, there is a degree of convergence in the coverage of the stories from *SuperSport.com* and *ESPN.com*. However, there is some significant differences that exist in tone, and framing of the stories. The reason could be that African media and Western media differ in terms of their styles in presentation of news coverage. Besides, Western media does not have the same style of presenting news coverage, although they often share similar foundational journalism standards.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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