

The portrayal of non-western sports hosts in International Media: A comparative analysis of BBC, Al Jazeera English, and RT's coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup

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Abstract

This study analyses news coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup by three global news websites – Al Jazeera English (AJE), BBC World News, and RT English – over a period of nine years leading up to the tournament. Except for AJE, which focused on infrastructure development and political issues, the media outlets prioritised critical concerns by highlighting the social problems faced by migrant workers, while local community issues were given less attention. Although migrant workers received substantial media coverage, they were the least cited on all three news websites. Official sources were preferred to unofficial and public sources, and international sources were cited more often than Qatari sources. The most commonly used frame was conflict, whereas the human interest frame was the least utilised. These findings are discussed in light of the debate on the international coverage of hosting mega sport events in non-Western societies.

Keywords

2022 World Cup, framing, sources, international news, migrant workers, national brand image

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Introduction

Hosting large-scale sports events offers national governments a range of political and economic benefits, with valuable opportunities to enhance their soft power by showcasing cultural performances on global platforms, increasing tourism, and enhancing the nation's reputation on an international stage (i.e., Inthorn, 2002; Ahn, 2002; Gratton et al., 2006; Grix, 2016). However, the way people perceive an event and its host destination can be significantly shaped by media coverage (Lepp and Gibson, 2011), and host countries have limited control over how they are depicted in foreign media (Schallhorn, 2019). Studies on international news coverage of sporting events suggest that the media often focus on elements that may contradict event organisers' efforts to improve their image, such as inadequate game preparation and security (Sobral et al., 2022; Mishra, 2013; Zaharopoulos, 2007). This highlights the significant role of culture in shaping the portrayal of non-Western hosts in Western media, with an emphasis on culturally congruent stereotypes such as poverty and poor organisation (Carey and Mason, 2016; Mishra, 2013; Osborne et al., 2016). Studies also highlight that mega sports events can carry reputational risks when the host country is unprepared for intense scrutiny from international media, and that such events can sometimes result in unfavourable long-term consequences for the host city or nation (see, e.g., Chalip, 2005; Dwyer et al., 2000).

Considering the concerns surrounding the portrayal of non-Western hosts in international media, this study aims to analyse news coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup by three global news websites – Al Jazeera English (AJE), BBC World News, and RT English – over a 9-year period leading up to the tournament. Specifically, this study examines how AJE, BBC World News, and RT English framed Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup from 2013 to 2018, focusing on (1) the types of issues covered, (2) the categories of sources employed, (3) the balance between official and unofficial sources, and (4) the news frames adopted by news websites. The frame-building process is known to vary based on conditions, contexts, and journalists (Bruggemann, 2014) and is conceptually related to the use of sources (Entman, 1993). By employing a comparative design, this study examines differences and similarities in the framing of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup by culturally varied media organisations over a 9-year period.

A framing analysis of this major sporting event is not only significant because of Qatar's status as a non-Western country, but also because of the criticism it has faced from governments, media, and rights groups since winning the right to host the 2022 World Cup on 2 December 2010, ranging from doubts about its ability to host a major sporting event due to its small size, climate, and limited football history (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2015) to corruption, treatment of its migrant workforce, and its stance on women's and LGBTQ rights (BBC, 2022; Amnesty International, 2022). While, despite implementation challenges, reforms such as abolishing the kafala and exit permit systems, instituting a minimum wage, and regulating working in heat were positively received internationally (BBC, 2022; AJE, 2022; Pattison, 2020), the criticism and negative coverage have prompted tournament boycotts, diplomatic problems, and the BBC relegating ceremony coverage to secondary streams (AJE, 2022).

Mega sport events and the promotion of national brand image

With the expansion and profitability of sports events, they have become avenues for economic growth, urban development, and enhancing a country's international reputation, enticing both developed and developing nations to host such events (Graef et al., 2019). One of the primary goals for host countries of major sports events involves showcasing themselves as attractive tourist destinations. Consequently, these countries or cities invest considerable efforts in self-promotion, with the media playing a crucial role as a promotional tool (Shin et al., 2016). The hosting of global mega-events may also offer an opportunity to change international perceptions (Hammett, 2011), as they attract attention worldwide, garnering very high audience ratings and extensive media coverage (Tang and Cooper, 2013; Haynes and Boyle, 2017). For developing countries, which are typically portrayed in the media through the lens of warfare, natural disasters, and social injustices (Mishra, 2012), hosting major sporting events can play a pivotal role in transforming negative international perceptions and stereotypes (Pillay and Bass, 2008).

This international media attention also offers host countries a good opportunity to achieve strategic political and marketing goals, such as stimulating national development through investments prior to the events and creating a positive and visible media presence (Gripsrud et al., 2010; Zeng et al., 2012). Hence, hosting mega sporting events can often be seen as a 'strategy of foreign policy to improve the country's power position internationally through what is called "soft power"' (De Almeida et al., 2014: 271).

While extant research indicates that hosting mega sporting events can yield several positive outcomes, including economic growth, infrastructure development, image enhancement, and tourism benefits (Allmers and Maennig, 2009; Shin et al., 2016; Dolles and Söderman, 2008), the hosting of these events is not without issues, as some studies suggest that media outlets tend to prioritise critical concerns and negative narratives during sports coverage, including conflicts and security issues, irrespective of their actual prevalence (Schallhorn, 2019). This significant emphasis on negative stories about foreign countries can be attributed to characteristics of the news such as a tendency towards negativity (Schallhorn, 2019). This means that particularly problematic issues are deemed newsworthy and consequently chosen for publication by journalists (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). Studies have also shown that culture influences framing, particularly of non-Western hosts in Western media (Carey and Mason, 2016; Mishra, 2013; Osborne et al., 2016), resulting in certain stereotypes being emphasised in Western media over other frames that are more favourable to the host destination (Sobral et al., 2022). Accordingly, several studies have found no significant improvements in the host nation's image following mega sporting events (Heslop et al., 2013; Tasci et al., 2019). Consequently, previous studies have suggested that non-Western event hosts face significant challenges in enhancing their images through Western media (Manzenreiter, 2010; Mishra, 2013).

News coverage of mega sports events: issues, sources and frames

The process of gathering news influences how journalists label and define issues (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). Studies on news coverage of mega sporting events have

demonstrated that the media's portrayal of such events often stems from the combined impact of three elements: issue emphasis, source utilisation, and framing (Gao, 2010; Hammett, 2011; Zeng et al., 2012).

Issues in Sports Media Coverage. Through repeated emphasis on an *issue*, the media can have a significant impact on how audiences perceive the importance of that topic (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). News media outlets frequently choose certain aspects of a story, highlighting or completely neglecting them (Binder, 1993). Extant research on news coverage of sports events suggests that sports journalists adhere to ethical standards similar to those of hard news reporters (Hardin and Zhong, 2010). Moreover, these journalists often play pivotal roles by leveraging their journalistic skills to bring attention to political, social, and economic issues that are frequently intertwined with sports (Harrison and Boehmer, 2020).

For example, Schmidt (2018) found that sports media heavily emphasise social and political matters over actual sporting events. This trend can be attributed to athletes utilising their fame to raise awareness about these issues, prompting sports media to prioritise athletes who advocate for social or political causes in order to fulfil their journalistic responsibility of educating society. Moreover, Gao's (2010) analysis of news coverage by the South China Morning Post and the New York Times during the Beijing Olympics revealed intricate connections between coverage and topics such as human rights, terrorism, protests, Internet censorship, press freedom, and religion. Similarly, Shin et al. (2016) examined how print media portrayed the 17th Asian Games in Incheon in 2014, and highlighted a frequent focus on political and infrastructure development issues.

Studies have shown that international news coverage of sporting events often tends to emphasise negative aspects and criticism of tournament, particularly in emerging economies and developing countries. Examples include security and readiness issues in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games (Zaharopoulos, 2007); crime, safety, development, and poverty in the 2010 South Africa World Cup (Hammett, 2011); and economic, gender, and race inequality in the 2014 World Cup (Graef et al., 2019).

Sources in Coverage of International Sporting Events. In addition to highlighting specific issues in sports news coverage, the use of *news sources* is essential for journalists to gain access to information, support their articles with newsworthy and credible information, and present multiple perspectives. News sources also aid in analysing and interpreting current events, as well as legitimising and defining news (Tuchman, 1978; Reich, 2009). Sources are considered an essential element in news stories as they guide journalists towards specific aspects of the story by revealing certain facts related to the news story or restricting access to other information, thus playing a crucial role in shaping news content (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Journalists' selection of sources also significantly influences the presentation of a news story, as sources typically possess distinct viewpoints on the subject matter (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Consequently, journalists often prioritise citing individuals or organisations of prominence in society, considering their credibility and reliability (Tuchman, 1978).

Research on news coverage of sporting events reveals a variety of prominent sources, including officials, politicians, sportspersons, and representatives of sports organisations.

For example, Shin et al. (2016) found that during the 17th Asian Games in Incheon, officials, politicians, correspondents, sports writers, and supporters were the most frequently cited sources. Rowe (2007) discovered that celebrities, coaches, managers, spokespeople, and sports organisation representatives were commonly cited in Australian sports journalism. Kozman (2017a) highlighted that, in the coverage of steroid use by MLB baseball players, the players themselves, along with sports managers and government officials, were the primary quoted sources. Notably, there has been a growing effort in sports coverage to include perspectives from historically marginalised communities, such as women and LGBT individuals (Lee et al., 2014; Poindexter, 2008).

Framing Sports Competitions. Framing theory holds significant importance in media research, given that framing is an essential component of journalists' daily work routines. According to Bryant and Miron (2004), this theory is utilised as a communication science methodology worldwide. According to Gamson (1992), framing involves identifying and emphasising certain elements of perceived reality in textual content to reinforce the definition of a problem, provide causal explanations, make ethical judgments, and suggest remedies. Tankard (2001) further elaborated that framing is a means of organising news content through contextualisation and highlighting the core of the issue using techniques such as selection, affirmation, exclusion, and clarification.

Put simply, news framing is a process by which specific aspects of information related to a particular subject of communication are highlighted, making the information clearer and more meaningful, and increasing the likelihood that it will be remembered by the audience (Entman, 1993). The power of framing lies in the selection of specific features of reality while neglecting others, which can occur through the repetition or connection of culturally familiar symbols (Entman, 1993). In the context of news content, frames are used to describe, explain, and interpret events, helping audiences form a view of the world that extends beyond their personal experiences (Kee et al., 2010). Previous research has established five commonly used frames in news reporting that have been identified either in combination or individually (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). These five widely recognised news frames are conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality frames (Neuman et al., 1992), along with the attribution of responsibility frame (Iyengar, 1991). To better understand generic frames, it is possible to compare them with issue-specific frames. According to De Vreese et al. (2001), issue-specific frames are related to a specific issue or news event, whereas generic frames can be widely applied to a variety of news topics, even over time and in different cultural contexts.

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

Several sports-related studies have examined media framing in various contexts such as gender (Billings and Angelini, 2007), ethnicity (Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers, 2004), nationalism (Elder et al., 2006), athlete representation and identity (Harris and Clayton, 2002), alcohol and drug use (Lewis and 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 and Jackson, 2004).

According to Kothari (2010), the media frequently frames international news in a way that reflects government actions. Moreover, studies conducted by Gao (2010) and Hayashi et al. (2016) have shed light on how variations in politics, ideology, and political systems across countries contribute to the existence of diverse narratives and representations.

In sports media, various frames dominate coverage, including conflict, human interest, and attribution of responsibility. 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 (2017b) 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.

Research questions

This study analyses how AJE, BBC World News, and RT English framed Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup over a period of 8 years. It focuses on the issues covered, sources used, balance between official and unofficial sources, and use of generic frames. Overall, it addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the dominant issues in the news coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup?
- RQ2: What are the main sources used by the three international news websites?
- RQ3: How did AJE, BBC World News, and RT English differ in their use of official and unofficial sources?
- RQ4: How did AJE, BBC World News, and RT English vary in their framing of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup?

Method and sample

This study employs comparative content analysis to examine the news coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup (Berelson, 1952). The data consist of news articles published in AJE, BBC World News, and RT English from June 2013 to May 2021. These three news websites belong to international media networks that represent distinct countries and are significant contributors to global media coverage of sporting events. AJE, launched in 2006, is a state-owned Qatari channel that has established itself as an

international media hub with a diverse range of programs. AJE's sports coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics aimed to promote a shared Arab identity while emphasising nationalism towards nation states (Phillips, 2012). BBC World News is part of the BBC network, founded in 1932, and has gained prominence in sports broadcasting (Haynes, 2016). The BBC's coverage of major sporting events, such as the 1966 FIFA World Cup, has contributed to its standing in sports broadcasting. During the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, the website provided largely positive coverage, with a particular focus on the country's history and diverse ethnic groups (Hoppe, 2011). RT is an international news network that debuted in 2005 and reflects the Kremlin's anti-Western ideology (Elsawah and Howard, 2020). RT's coverage of the 2018 World Cup aimed to present a positive image of Russia and challenge Western criticism and scepticism prior to the event (Crilley et al., 2022).

The selected timeframe extends from 3 years after the announcement of Qatar hosting the tournament to 18 months before the tournament's kick-off. The articles are derived from each news outlet's online archive using 'World Cup 2022' and 'Qatar 2022' as keywords. Articles focusing entirely on players or participating teams were excluded. The final sample yielded 197 articles: 73 from AJE, 70 from the BBC, and 54 from RT. The unit of analysis is a single news article.

Coding

A codebook was developed and divided into four parts: (1) descriptive variables, (2) types of issues covered, (3) sources, and (4) generic frames. As explained below, some of the coding items have been adapted from previous studies.

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 Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup. Based on previous studies (i.e., Shin et al., 2016) which examined the most commonly mentioned issues in the framing of mega sporting events, we measured the presence of the following issues: (1) workers and immigrants, (2) security and safety issues, (3) infrastructure development and quality of life, (4) political issues, (5) positive national image, (6) positive economic impacts, (7) negative economic impacts, (8) traffic and crowding problems, and (9) local community social problems. Given the timeframe of the study, we also measured the presence of issues related to (10) the hosting of the tournament and Covid-19. All the aforementioned issues were measured as binary variables and coded for their presence or absence in each news article.

Sources. Based on previous studies that listed frequently used sources in sports coverage as well as an examination of a random sample of articles published on the three websites, we identified and quantified the use of the following types of sources: (1) officials, (2) politicians, (3) sponsors, (4) organisations, (5) documents and news reports, (6) experts, researchers, and research centres, (7) journalists and media workers, (8) journalists and media workers, (9) legal sources, (10) public figures and sportspeople, (11) anonymous sources, and (12) migrant workers and their families. The sources were

identified through direct or indirect citations, measured as binary variables, and coded for their presence or absence in each news article.

To examine the balance between official and unofficial news sources, the sources were divided into official and unofficial sources. Official sources (i.e., Source 1), include those who represent government institutions, sports federations, official committees, or embassies. The remaining sources (Sources 2–12) were categorised as unofficial because they did not meet these criteria. Excluding migrant workers and their families, who were considered international sources, all other sources were further classified as either local or international, based on whether they represented the Qatari side. Definitions and examples for each of the 12 sources are provided below.

Officials include government institutions, sports federations, official committees, and embassies. *Politicians* include members of political parties, opposition figures, and parliamentarians whose views do not represent the government. *Sponsors* refer to companies and economic figures supporting the World Cup. *Organisations* include civil organisations in the fields of human rights and sustainability. *Documents and news reports* include unofficial and media-circulated information but exclude official or governmental reports. *Experts, researchers, and research centres* refer to independent experts, researchers, or institutions, including academics. *Journalists and media workers* consist of independent journalists who freelance or are affiliated with media institutions, and whose views are independent of governmental entities. *Legal sources* include lawyers representing different parties in cases related to hosting the World Cup. *Public figures and sportspersons* include figures in the sports field, such as Qatari or international coaches or players, including retirees. *Football fans* refer to Qatari or international World Cup supporters. *Anonymous sources* are undisclosed or unnamed sources, regardless of whether they originate locally from Qatar or internationally. *Migrant workers and their families* refer to those working on World Cup projects and related infrastructure in the host cities of the World Cup. These workers hold international nationalities and are considered international sources.

Frames. The coding scheme sought to identify and compare the use of frames in news coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup. Building on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five-frame model, we used the following generic frames in the context of the study: conflict, economic consequences, human interest, morality, and attribution of responsibility (for a discussion, see also Sebastiao and Lemos, 2016; de Vreese et al., 2001; Neuman et al., 1992; Harrison and Boehmer, 2020).

The conflict frame portrays any dispute between competing parties, such as candidates to host the tournament, official and unofficial parties, and countries, or mentions the host country's incompetence and ineligibility to host the tournament. The economic consequences frame refers to financial losses stemming from the huge costs of hosting the tournament and any other potential losses as well as the gains that it may bring to the country. The human interest frame highlights personal event-related stories from residents, ex-pats, project workers and victims, employers, players, journalists, and their families. The morality frame focuses on the compatibility of hosting the World Cup with Islamic principles and traditions and local community ethics. This includes highlighting issues such as the prohibition or sale of alcohol and LGBT issues. The attribution of

responsibility frame discusses the government's responsibility for the completion of World Cup stadiums and projects, costs, workers' safety, and labour laws. All frames were measured as binary variables and coded according to their presence or absence in the news articles.

Intercoder Reliability. Coding was performed by two trained coders who are fluent in English. Intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff's alpha, which factors in accidental agreement and is more stringent than percent agreement (Lombard et al., 2002). Both coders were required to code, independently of one another, the same sample of 27 news articles, which represented 15% of the corpus (179 news articles). The intercoder reliability sample was randomly selected from the full sample for each news outlet. This process yielded nine news articles from each news website. All variables had Krippendorff's alpha coefficients higher than 0.8, which is considered appropriate to guarantee fair reliability in content analysis studies (Lombard et al., 2002).

Findings

Main issues in news coverage of FIFA 2022

RQ1 asked, 'What are the dominant issues in news coverage of Qatar hosting the 2022 World Cup?' Figure 1 illustrates that the most frequently mentioned issues across the three international news websites were those related to migrant workers (32.64%), security and safety (31.61%), development infrastructure and quality of life (28.55%), and

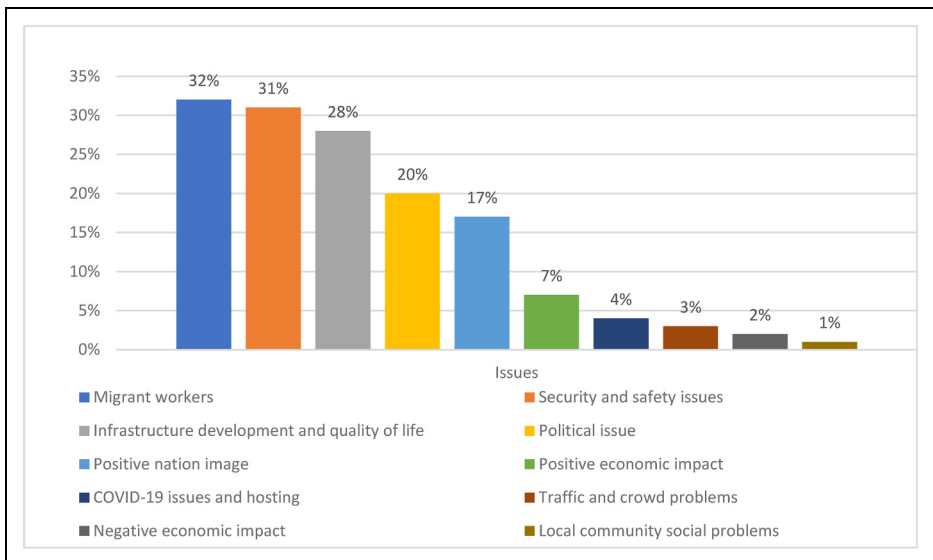


Figure 1. Dominant issues across the news coverage.

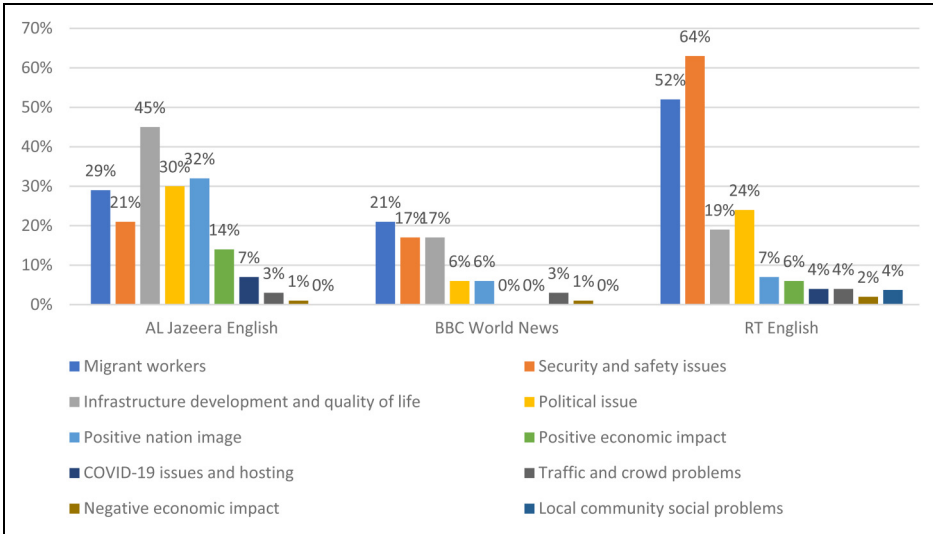


Figure 2. Variation in issues covered per news outlet.

political issues (20.39%). Fewer news articles focused on positive portrayals of the country (17.31%) or positive economic impacts (7.13%). Issues related to the hosting the tournament and Covid-19 were mentioned in 4.7% of articles, while traffic problems and negative economic impacts were discussed in 3.6% and 2.3% of articles, respectively. The least frequently mentioned issues were related to social problems in the local community.

Figure 2 shows variations in the issues covered at the news outlet level. The most frequently covered issues in AJE were developing infrastructure and improving quality of life, with a total of 73 articles (45%), followed by the positive portrayal of the host nation in 23 articles (32%). Political issues were discussed in 22 articles (30%), and issues related to social problems of migrant workers were mentioned in 21 articles (29%). There were fewer news articles focusing on the remaining issues. Specifically, security and safety issues were mentioned in 15 articles (21%), positive economic impacts in 10 articles (14%), hosting the tournament and Covid-19 in 5 articles (7%), and traffic problems in 2 articles (3%). Issues of negative economic impacts came last, as they were mentioned in only one article (1%), whereas local community social problems were completely neglected.

As for BBC World News, the analyses showed that issues of migrant workers were the most frequently mentioned, with a total of 15 articles (21%), followed by security and safety issues and developing infrastructure and improving quality of life and well-being (both 17%). The least covered issues were political issues and positive portrayals of the host nation which were both mentioned in 4 articles (6%), followed by traffic problems that appeared in two articles (3%) and negative economic impacts which were mentioned

in one article (1%). In contrast, none of the news articles focused on positive economic impacts, hosting the tournament and Covid-19, or social problems related to the local community.

Out of 54 articles published on the RT English website, 64% (N = 35) were dedicated to safety and security issues, while 28 articles tackled issues of social problems related to migrant workers (52%). Political issues appeared in 13 articles (24%). The least addressed issues were developing infrastructure and improving quality of life (10 articles, 19%), positive portrayal of the host nation (4 articles, 7%), and positive economic impacts (3 articles, 6%). Issues related to hosting the tournament and Covid-19, traffic problems, and local community social problems were each featured in two articles (4%), whereas negative economic impacts appeared only in one article (2%).

Sources of news coverage

RQ2 asked, ‘What are the main sources used by the three international news websites?’ The results illustrated in Figure 3 demonstrate that the most prevalent source across the entire sample was official sources, which were featured in 90% of the articles (N = 177). Documents and news reports were cited in 66 articles (34%); organisations in 48 articles (24%); public figures and sportspersons in 17 articles (9%); experts, researchers, and research centres in 16 articles (8%); and sponsors in 13 articles (7%). Twelve articles (6%) cited legal and anonymous sources. This was followed by football fans who were cited in 10 articles (5%), journalists and media workers in 10 articles (5%), and politicians in 8 articles (4%). The least used sources were migrant workers and their families, cited in only 6 articles (3%).

Looking at these findings per news outlet, Figure 4 reveals that officials were the most used sources in AJE’s news coverage and were cited in 66 articles, representing 90% of

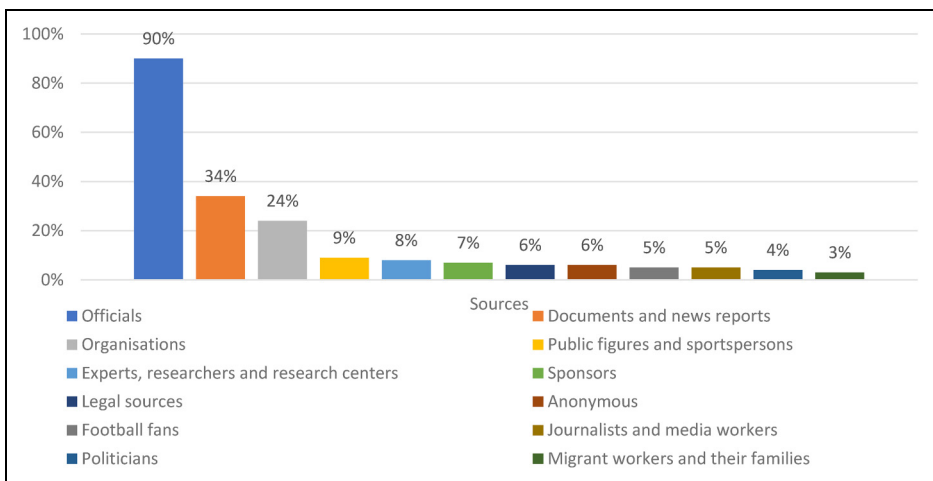


Figure 3. The main sources used across the news coverage.

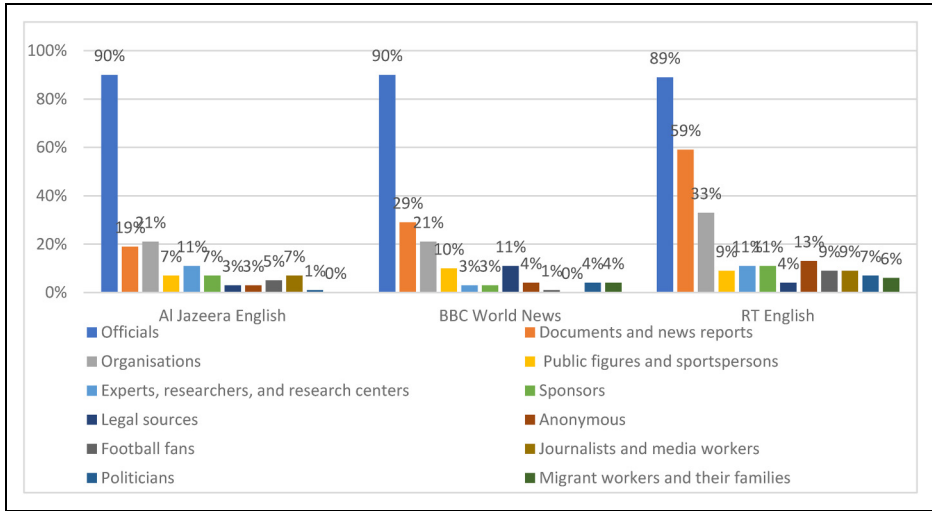


Figure 4. Variation of sources used per news outlet.

the total sample (N = 73). Organisations were the second most cited source in 15 articles (21%), followed by documents and news reports which were cited in 14 articles (19%). The least mentioned sources were experts, researchers, and research centres, as they were used in only 8 articles (11%). Public figures and sportspersons, journalists and media workers, and sponsors were cited equally, with 5 articles for each type of source (7%). Football fans and legal sources were cited in 4 articles (5%) and 2 articles (3%), respectively. The least cited source in AJE’s news coverage was politicians, who were cited in only one article (1%). Migrant workers and their families were not included in any articles.

Official sources were also the most prevalent source in the news coverage by BBC World News (63 out of 70 analysed articles, 90%), followed by documents and news reports which were featured in 20 articles (29%). Organisations were cited in 15 articles (21%), while legal sources were featured in 8 (11%). Fewer news articles included public figures and sportspersons, who appeared in 7 articles (10%), while anonymous sources, politicians, and migrant workers and their families were all cited in 3 articles (4%). Both sponsors and experts, researchers, and research centres were used in only 2 articles (3%). The least cited source in BBC articles was football fans, who appeared in only one article (1%); journalists and media workers were not employed as news sources in any articles.

Officials were also the most frequently used source in the 54 news articles published on the RT website, with 48 articles (89%) citing officials. This was followed by documents and news reports which were cited in 32 articles (59%), and organisations which were featured in 18 articles (33%). The less frequently used news sources were anonymous sources which appeared in 7 articles (13%), while both sponsors and experts, researchers, and research centres were cited in 6 articles (11%). This was

followed by public figures and sportspersons, football fans and journalists and media workers, who were cited in 5 articles (9%) and politicians, who were cited in 7% of the articles (N=4). Migrant workers and their families were cited in only 3 articles (6%). The least cited source in RT’s news coverage was legal sources.

To answer RQ3, which asked, ‘How did AJE, BBC World News, and RT English vary in their use of official and unofficial sources?’, the aforementioned sources were grouped into official and unofficial sources and then classified into local and international categories, as described earlier. Figure 5 illustrates the findings across all news articles published by the three news websites (N = 197) and generally shows that unofficial sources were cited less frequently than official sources. Specifically, the results illustrate that the most prevalent sources were official international sources featured in 146 articles (74%), compared to official Qatari sources cited in 114 articles (58%). Unofficial international sources were cited in 104 articles (53%), whereas unofficial Qatari sources were quoted in 23 articles, accounting for 12% of the total number of articles analysed.

Looking at these results by news outlet, Figure 6 shows that official local sources were cited most frequently in AJE’s news coverage, appearing in 51 articles (70% of the sample). International official sources were cited in 47 articles (46%), while unofficial international sources appeared in 31 articles (42%). The least cited were unofficial local (Qatari) sources, appearing in only 13 articles (18%) out of 73 in the sample. As for the BBC, official international sources were the most frequently used, appearing in 62 articles (89% of a sample size of 70). Official local sources were cited in 33 articles (47%), followed by unofficial international sources in 30 articles (43%). The least used were unofficial Qatari sources, appearing in only three articles (4%) of the 70 analysed. Finally, RT mostly relied on unofficial international sources, as they were used in 80% of the published news articles (N = 43). Official international sources were quoted in 37 articles (69%), followed by official Qatari sources in 30 articles (56%). Similar to AJE and

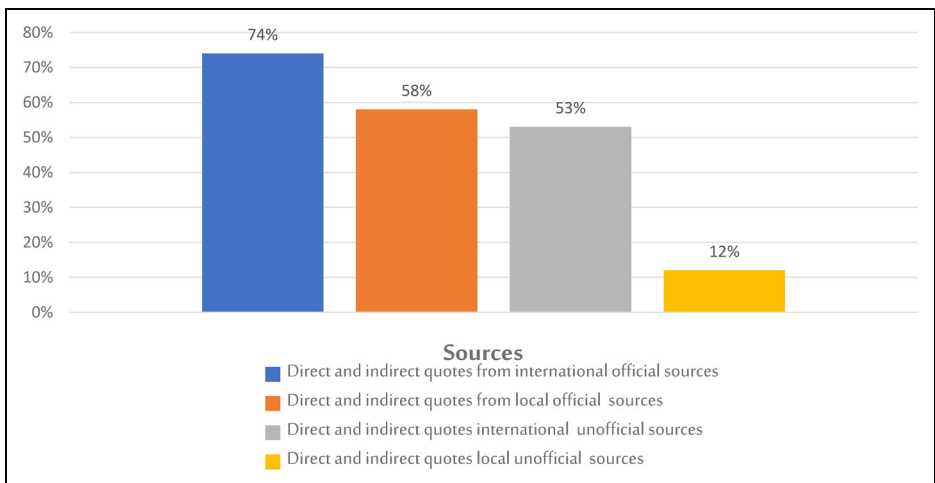


Figure 5. Direct and indirect quotes from official and unofficial sources.

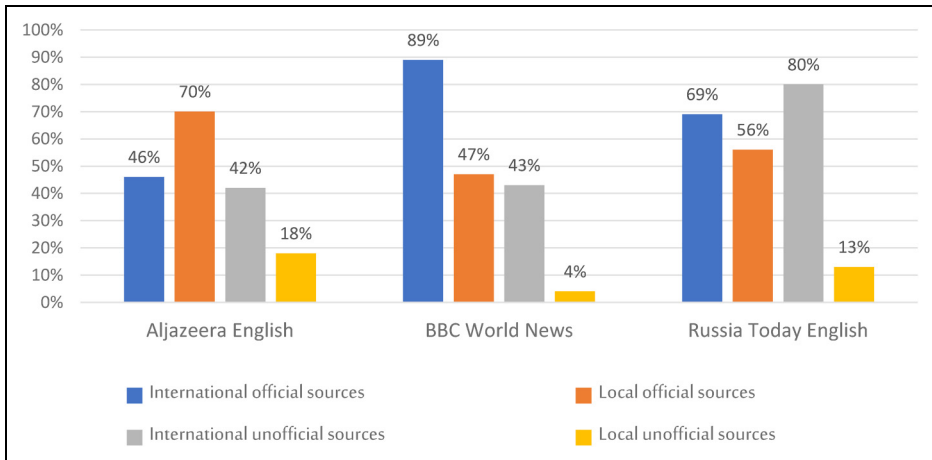


Figure 6. Proportions of official and unofficial sources per news outlet.

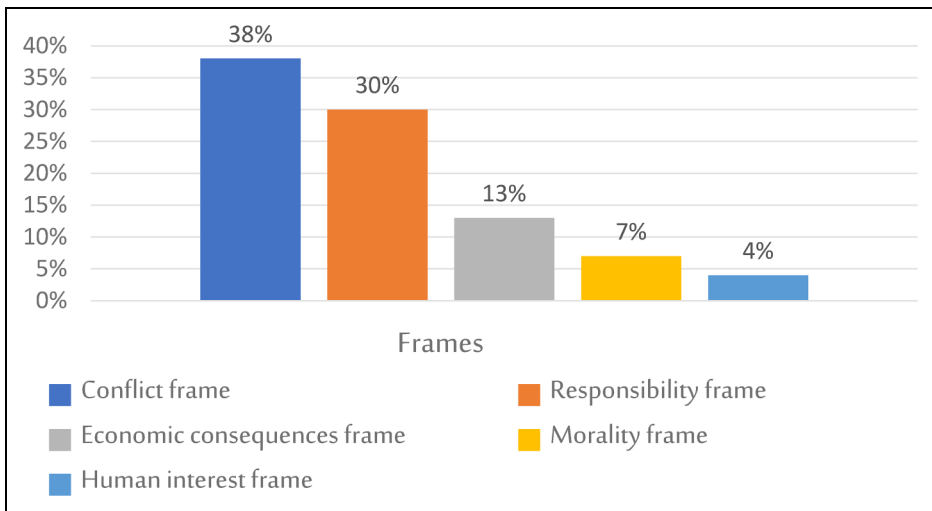


Figure 7. Proportions of generic frames across the news coverage.

the BBC, the least used sources were unofficial local sources, appearing in only seven articles (13%).

Media framing of the 2022 World Cup

RQ4 asked, ‘How did AJE, BBC World News, and RT English vary in their framing of Qatar’s hosting of the 2022 World Cup?’ Five framing variables were coded for analysis. Figure 7

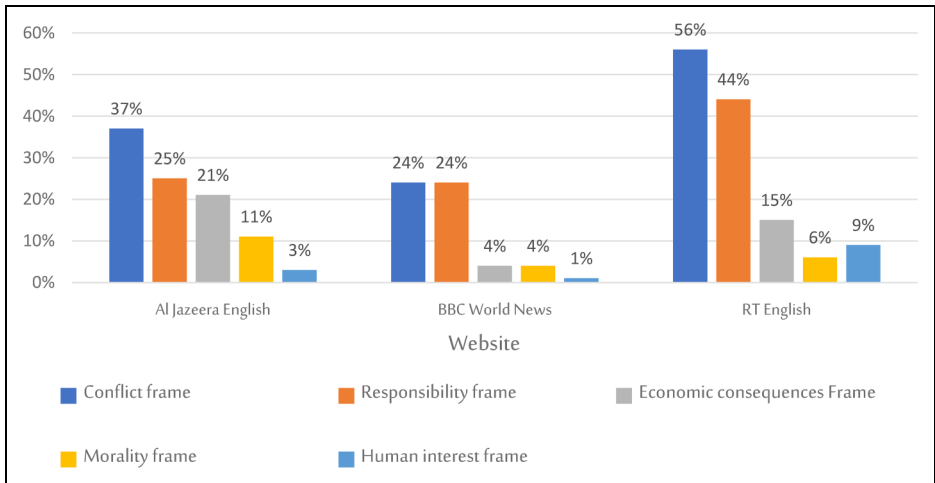


Figure 8. Proportions of generic frames per news outlet.

indicates that the most prevalent news frame across all news outlets was the conflict frame, with 74 of 197 articles (38%) emphasising disputes. The second most dominant frame was the attribution of responsibility which was used in 39 articles (30%). A total of 26 articles (13%) included the economic consequences frame, while 14 (7%) included the morality frame. The least used frame was the human interest frame, with eight articles (4%) emphasising it.

Examining the results by news outlet, Figure 8 shows that the conflict frame is dominant in the news coverage of AJE with a total of 27 articles (37%). The attribution of responsibility frame was the second most utilised, appearing in 18 articles (25%). The economic consequences frame was third, representing 21% of the sample, with 15 articles. The morality frame was fourth with eight articles (11%). The least-used generic frame in AJE’s news coverage was the human interest frame which appeared in only two articles (3%). The dominant frames in BBC coverage were conflict and attribution of responsibility, each appearing in 17 articles and accounting for 24% of the total sample (N = 70). Economic consequences and morality frames were found in three articles, representing 4% of the sample size. The least used frame was the human interest frame, which appeared in only one article (1%). The conflict frame was also the most utilised frame in RT with 30 out of 54 articles (56%) emphasising disputes. The attribution of responsibility frame appeared in 24 articles (44%), followed by the economic consequences frame which was included in eight articles (15%), while only five articles utilised human interest framing (9%). The least utilised frame was the morality frame which appeared in only three articles (6%).

Discussion

The study found that news coverage by the three outlets focused mainly on social problems concerning migrant workers and their safety during Qatar’s hosting of the 2022

World Cup. This aligns with previous research suggesting that journalists prioritise educating society on such issues (Schmidt, 2018). However, there was a lack of coverage regarding social issues within the local community, such as women's rights, equality, social classes, and the impact of the host country's preparations. These topics have been extensively discussed in international news coverage of previous sports tournaments (Graeff et al., 2019; Schmidt, 2018; Shin et al., 2016).

One reason for this discrepancy could be the new laws and changes made by the Qatari government in response to international rights organisations' requests. These actions have increased the focus on social concerns regarding employees in the media (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2015). Certain news outlets such as *The Guardian* have also highlighted specific issues such as worker fatalities in Qatar (Pattison and McIntyre, 2021). This has made it harder for news websites like AJE, BBC, and RT to ignore these topics. Additionally, the protests led by sports teams against worker violations have had an impact on international media coverage. This supports previous research showing that athletes often use their positions to raise awareness about social and political issues, leading news outlets to give significant coverage to these matters and the advocating athletes (Schmidt, 2018).

Security and safety concerns, in line with previous studies (Zaharopoulos, 2007; Hammett, 2011), were also some of the most highlighted topics. As for COVID-19, despite the global pandemic and widespread lockdowns impacting tournaments and games (Atlas Magazine, 2020), the three news websites largely neglected coverage of these issues. Political issues also received little attention, particularly on the BBC, except for AJE's reporting. This is surprising given the potential impact of both issues on the tournament, especially considering the blockade of Qatar by neighbouring Gulf states and Egypt (June 2017 to January 2021), along with accusations of sponsoring terrorism and demands to close Al-Jazeera (Foreign Policy, 2021).

The findings also showed that the majority of the articles relied on officials as sources, consistent with previous research highlighting the tendency to quote officials due to their reliable and exclusive information on event-related matters (Tuchman, 1978). The second most common sources were documents and news reports, which provided valuable insights into the treatment of migrant workers. The three news sites also roughly equally relied on organisation sources to discuss Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup, given the numerous modifications demanded by international organisations. Interestingly, despite extensive media coverage of migrant worker issues, migrant workers and their families were rarely cited across all three news websites, with AJE completely neglecting them.

Official international sources were the most utilised, while unofficial Qatari sources were the least utilised, comprising only 12%. This is consistent with some of the previous studies discussed earlier (e.g., Shin et al., 2016). The three websites also primarily emphasised opinions and comments from unofficial international sources regarding the tournament's hosting, disregarding the perspectives of unofficial Qatari sources. Despite their relevance to the discussed issues, official Qatari sources were also generally given less weight compared to international voices. This is likely because official international sources have been actively involved in raising issues such as Qatar's eligibility as a host and labour concerns.

Across the three news websites, AJE predominantly used official local sources, BBC mainly relied on official international sources, and RT mostly used unofficial international sources. The proportion of articles from BBC citing official Qatari sources was lower than that of AJE, which quoted them more frequently. In fact, the majority of AJE's articles provided sufficient space for official Qatari sources to address ongoing reforms and preparations for the tournament and respond to reports published about migrant workers.

The study also found that the news coverage mainly used the conflict frame, which aligns with previous research (Zaharopoulos, 2007), indicating that news often takes a conflict-oriented approach. This can be attributed to the World Cup's typical framing as a competition between parties vying to host the major sporting event, with allegations and concerns about Qatar's bid emphasising this perspective. RT had a particularly strong tendency to frame the issue as a conflict between multiple international parties. In contrast, the BBC refrained from describing the event in terms of conflict. This may be due to the website's neglect of official Qatari sources, which are necessary for highlighting the involvement of multiple parties, as noted in previous research (Sebastiao and Lemos, 2016).

Consistent with previous studies (Harrison and Boehmer, 2020), the analysis of the news coverage of the 2022 World Cup across the three websites reveals the frequent utilisation of the attribution of responsibility frame. The most discussed topics centred around migrant worker social issues and security and safety, with the media attributing responsibility for finding solutions to the Qatari government. The economic consequences frame came in third place, with AJE employing it the most. In contrast, despite Qatar's status as an Arab and Muslim nation, news stories were rarely presented using the morality frame, as found in previous research (Kozman, 2017b). Lastly, contrary to earlier research (Harrison and Boehmer, 2020), the selected articles rarely employed the human interest frame, with the BBC using it the least, despite its coverage focusing more on worker-related issues, which did not delve into their personal stories. Overall, both AJE and RT used a wider range of frames across their news coverage compared to BBC which predominantly centred on a limited set of frames.

The study's findings support previous literature indicating media outlets' tendency to prioritise critical concerns when covering mega sports events. Apart from AJE, news coverage of FIFA 2022 does not seem to contribute favourably to enhancing the host country's image. This is evident in the emphasised topics (a focus on migrant workers' social problems and disregarding local issues), chosen sources (emphasising international official sources and neglecting host country and migrant sources), and framing the issue in terms of conflict and responsibility, mainly directed at the Qatari government. These findings raise concerns about media coverage of mega sport events in non-Western countries and shed light on the practices of culturally diverse media organisations in portraying these events. They also highlight the important role of sources and frames in shaping sports media coverage.

The study's findings have significant implications for our understanding of how international news coverage may influence global perceptions of mega sporting events and the nations hosting them. According to several scholars (Inthorn, 2002; Ahn, 2002; Gratton et al., 2006; Grix, 2016), hosting international sports events can provide national governments

with a variety of political and economic benefits, as well as opportunities to improve their soft power and global standing. These events also offer a chance to alter international perceptions, particularly those of non-Western hosts and developing countries, which are often portrayed in the media through the lenses of warfare, natural disasters, and social injustices (Mishra, 2012). However, in line with some previous empirical research, this study shows that the media often spotlights aspects that undermine event organisers' image-enhancement efforts (Sobral et al., 2022; Mishra, 2013; Zaharopoulos, 2007). Rather than emphasising culturally congruent stereotypes like poverty and poor organisation, as shown in previous studies (Carey and Mason, 2016; Mishra, 2013; Osborne et al., 2016), the study findings highlight that social problems related to migrant workers, as well as security and safety concerns, were among the most prominent topics in the news coverage. Along with a focus on conflict and responsibility frames and a notable disregard of official and unofficial sources from the host country, our results echo previous findings that it can be challenging for non-Western sporting events hosts to improve their image through international media (Manzenreiter, 2010; Mishra, 2013). The focus on negative narratives in the news can be attributed to the media's inherent bias towards negativity (Schallhorn, 2019), and studies have also demonstrated the influence of culture on framing, especially when it comes to non-Western hosts in international media (Carey and Mason, 2016; Osborne et al., 2016), perpetuating specific images that overshadow more favourable portrayals of the host destination (Sobral et al., 2022). Hence, further research can be necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various factors that influence today's international news coverage of sporting events. In particular, there is a need for in-depth analysis of how culture influences the portrayal and perception of international sporting events within the global media landscape. By examining how culture interplays with other socio-economic, political, and organisational factors, researchers can provide a more holistic understanding of how culture influences and shapes media representation within the realm of international sports.


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