

# Broader, New And Critical Aspects Of Sport Management

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## **Country Branding: An Analysis Of Qatar As Preferred Sports Destination**

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### **Aim of the research paper**

This study aims to analyse how an emerging country like Qatar creates its own brand as preferred sport destination, specifically to become a global sports hub. The authors intend to examine Qatar's potential as a country brand based on sport tourism investment opportunities in and outside Qatar which includes hosting international sporting events. In parallel to Qatar's National Vision 2030 concentrating the four pillars of development (human, social, economic and environment) are analysed. The academic literature of interest is the Sport Value Framework combined with stakeholder approach and Country of Origin theory for sport product and services. Axes of investigation are to what extent Qatar uses its resources to position itself as a country brand for sports, the stakeholders' perception after being globally criticised to host FIFA 2022 World Cup and what Qatar can learn from the other countries' performance, which have established its own brand in the sport industry like France.

### **Theoretical background/literature review**

Country branding focusing on sport needs the engagement of multiple stakeholders. A country brand should be conceptualised, measured and executed at sublevels, such as tourism destination, export source, and cultural centre (Fan, 2010). In the academic literature, factors such as gaining international prestige, achieving national unity and improving the country's infrastructure are emphasised. Qatar is using events to reinvent the image of the nation and position itself as a destination for hosting sport events as well as increasing its profile internationally in addition to gaining a competitive edge regionally in terms of the sport sector (Khodr, 2012). Qatari residents' impact perceptions in hosting the FIFA 2022 World Cup (Al-Emadi, Kaplanidou, Diop, Sagas, Le & Al-Ali Mustafa, 2016) were also examined. Other explanatory factors include economic sustainability, diversification plans, tourism-related policies and social development strategies. Country-of-Origin image, together with sports product category-country associations enables the creation of brands in sport (Gerke, Chanavat, & Benson-Rea, 2014). This study analyses to what extent this concept could be the strategy of Qatar; creating a CoO brand that people will commonly associate with a particular sport product and service. The concept of sport value creation according to Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp (2014) can be useful concept to analyse Qatar's efforts to build a CoO image related to specific sport-product categories and services. The meso-level in the Sports Value Framework explains that value is co-created by stakeholders. This concept can be linked to the stakeholder approach because branding highlights the role of a firm's stakeholders in the brand creation process. Examples of existing CoO brand in sport marketing and sport tourism investments are Qatar Airways (sponsorship), BelN Sports (media), Aspire Zone (sport science/facilities), Burrda (sports gear), which are all established in Qatar.

### **Methodology, research design, and data analysis**

This research uses qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Quantitative data collection is used for macroeconomic analyses. Historical backgrounds are obtained through secondary research using government reports, published international research books, newspaper and journal articles. Qualitative data collection uses semi-structured interviews with political and business leaders as a strong source of information because of their knowledge regarding Qatar's policies and investments related to the sports industry. We include Qatar Olympic Committee, Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, Aspire Zone Foundation, International Centre for Sport Security, International Sport Organizations, Qatar Sport Investment and respective Ministries, to act as country branding enablers. We chose the organizations because engaging multiple stakeholders has importance in cross-sectoral linkages in sports. Interviews in Qatar are based on stakeholder's perspective on leadership performance. Explanatory data from experts in sport industry on how they perceive Qatar as a country brand for sport is significant. Expected outcomes will how Qatar's realises its potential to be recognized as global sports hub.

## Results, discussions, and implications/conclusions

Qatar ranked 63 in Good Country Index 2016, which measures how a country contributes to the common good of humanity, while it was classified as 'status country' in Country Brand Index 2014–2015 which identifies brand development opportunity in perceptions of Culture, Tourism and 'Made In'. A country to be branded as sport preferred destination must be measured on leadership performance of the stakeholders. What Qatar can learn from France as a country brand for sport is its strong legacy in maintaining sporting success globally. For the case of Qatar, success factors include its capability to host international sporting events; promoting sport tourism recognising its own brand products and services; showcasing state of the art facilities, athletes' well-being and awareness of sport as a quality of life; a first of its kind in the Middle East.

## References

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