

BEYOND THE PITCH: COMPARATIVE MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FIFA WORLD CUP QATAR 2022 IN THE UK AND EGYPT.

HOW DO NEWSPAPERS IN THE UK AND EGYPT APPROACH AND REPRESENT THE HOSTING OF A SPORTS MEGA-EVENT IN AN ARAB/ISLAMIC/GULF COUNTRY, AND HOW MIGHT THESE APPROACHES AND REPRESENTATIONS POTENTIALLY CONTRIBUTE TO OR INFLUENCE THE SHAPING OF NARRATIVES AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE SURROUNDING THIS EVENT? CASE STUDY ON THE FIFA WORLD CUP QATAR 2022

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Léon Dhaenens

Studentennummer: 01711129

Promotor: Professor Aymon Kreil

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Abstract

While the world focused its attention on the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, which is a pivotal moment in the Arab/Islamic/Gulf region, newspapers from the UK and Egypt presented diverse narratives reflecting their unique socio-cultural and geopolitical context, thereby potentially shaping and influencing public discourse.

This thesis research investigates the central research question: “How do newspapers in the UK and Egypt approach and represent the hosting of a sports mega-event in an Arab/Islamic/Gulf country, and how might these approaches and representations potentially contribute to or influence the shaping of narratives and public discourse surrounding this event?” In doing so, the research puts forward two research questions: 1. How are this World Cup and everything surrounding it being represented in British and Egyptian newspapers, and to what extent do these representations vary between the two nations? 2. How do these representations and approaches vary within each country's media landscape, particularly between progressive and conservative newspapers?

Firstly, this research conducts a purposive sampling of online newspaper articles from four newspapers, being Al Ahram, Al Masry Al Youm, The Times and The Guardian. This is followed by an inductive thematic analysis, which analyses these sampled online newspaper articles by assigning codes to overarching identified themes.

Findings showed that there were differences between British and Egyptian newspapers and between domestic newspapers regarding representation of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. This is attributed to the sociocultural and geopolitical context, with differences within countries being influenced by factors beyond political orientation, such as readers' interests and editorial guidelines. These different representations help influence public discourse and show that newspapers do not only passively reflect on, but also actively shape the social understanding of sporting mega-events such as the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Future research should explore deeper and broader understanding of the coverage of the Qatar World Cup 2022 by gaining more background (internal) information on the newspapers and media landscapes studied. In addition, this hybrid methodology could also potentially serve as a foundation on which future research can build in the academic field, and more specifically in comparative media studies.

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List of abbreviations

AMAY = Al Masry Al Youm

COP = Conference of the Parties

FIFA = Fédération Internationale de Football Association

FWC = FIFA World Cup

GCC = Gulf Cooperation Council

LGBTQ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, +

QFWC = FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022

RQ = Research Question

RSF = Reporters Without Borders

SME = Sports Mega Event

UAE = United Arab Emirates

UK = United Kingdom

Introduction

A. General Background to the Research

The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 (QFWC) was a milestone as the first FIFA World Cup in an Arab/Islamic Gulf country bringing both unique opportunities and challenges.

A1. Sport Mega-Event (SME)

Before addressing the importance of a FWC, and more specifically the QFWC, I consider it important to first gain an understanding of what exactly constitutes an SME. I discuss this using the research of Maennig and Zimbalist (2012), who created their own set of criteria that an event must adhere to in order to qualify as an SME. First these researchers pushed forward a number of quantitative criteria that considered items such as the number of participants, the number of spectators, TV viewing figures, the number of followers through online media and the event's revenue. Second, they also considered qualitative factors such as the infrastructure (airport expansion, construction of metro lines, hotels,...) built for the event, the prestige of this event, which world stars attended the event,... and so on. Besides, Maennig and Zimbalist (2012) add that organizing an SME is characterized by the fact that it has long-term consequences for the host country, such as, for example, the impact of an SME on macroeconomic variables (e.g. employment and (tax) revenue).

In short, it is clear that SMEs should be evaluated according to several complex factors in specific complex contexts (Maennig & Zimbalist, 2012). Considering these complex and variable criteria, I am convinced that the QFWC fulfills the requirements and can be labeled as an SME. Nevertheless, Maennig and Zimbalist (2012) state that the dividing line between mega and ordinary events can be somewhat subjective.

As the concept of an SME has been clarified, I now turn to the most prestigious event within this category: the FIFA World Cup (FWC).

A2. The FIFA World Cup

The FWC, hosted and controlled by the world football association, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), has been arguably the most watched and influential global sporting event in human history (Aladbah, Werder, Watson, & Bell, 2022; Dorsey, J. M., 2023, 24 April; Adelowo,

2022). This is mainly because in today's globalized world, this event is followed by both people attending the event locally and especially mass audiences attending SMEs through various online platforms. This illustrates that the world's most prominent sport, football, which has pervaded all aspects (cultural, political and economic) of people's lives, can unite people and be used as a platform where social phenomena or activism takes place. Thus, an activity that naturally attracts many people becomes something that has a different meaning as different interests are injected into the football narrative. In short, the sport that we know today has got a new face (Larisu, Estrada, Ibnu, Nurmansyah, & Darpin, 2023).

As Maennig and Zimbalist (2012) also argue in their study, the organization of an FWC has significant long-term implications for a country, both socio-economically and politically.

1. In socio-economic impact terms, this is mainly reflected in extensive investment in infrastructure, which is in line with Maennig and Zimbalist's (2012) criteria. For instance, host countries of previous FWCs, such as South Africa (2010) and Russia (2018), have made significant investments in the organization of their FWCs, which has benefited both them and FIFA in terms of recognition and economic impact (Chankuna, 2022). Other socio-economic impacts of organizing an FWC involve urban renewal and development, new business opportunities and job creation. For instance, the 2018 FWC created 315,000 jobs in Russia, reducing unemployment. Furthermore, the favorable aspects for non-host city residents and the necessary public investment in aspects such as tourism and broadcasting infrastructure are key to justifying the cost of organizing an FWC and improving outcomes for stakeholders (Chankuna, 2022).

2. In terms of the political implications involved in an FWC, SMEs of this status are being utilized as a platform and a means to express political views and strengthen diplomatic ties. More specifically, organizing an FWC is often seen as part of the host country's long-term strategy to enhance their "soft power" and thereby to increase their role, influence, success and prestige as a nation-state in the international arena. Host countries of previous FWCs are, of course, perfect examples of this. I will elaborate on "soft power" further in this introduction (Konrad Audenauer Stiftung, 2014).

By now, it has become clear how important an SME like the FWC can be internationally and how such SMEs can impact society and culture, both in its host country and globally.

A3. The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022

Now I come to the case study examined in this thesis, namely the QFWC. The QFWC was the first time an Arab/Islamic/Gulf country organized such a prominent sporting event (Aladbah et al., 2022;

Dorsey, 2023). In doing so, FIFA finally recognized a region that had long been neglected by global sports and confirmed FIFA's ambition to finally make football global. In this respect, FIFA gave Qatar the chance to give itself and the Arab world an identity without the Orientalism so often used to describe the region (Griffin, 2023). As the smallest ever host of an FWC, with just over three million inhabitants, this Gulf country faced a major challenge in hosting this FWC (Pérez-Seoane et al., 2023). Thus, for the QFWC, this Gulf state mobilized an investment budget as much as 20 times larger (\$220 billion) than that of Russia's FWC in 2018. Such immense investments by Qatar include construction works, airport expansion, transport improvements, ... (Aladbah et al., 2022; Dorsey, 2023; Pérez-Seoane et al., 2023). However, these investments were not Qatar's biggest challenge. As such, this FWC brought with it a unique transnational space, one that is inextricably linked to the universal values of 'integrity, ethics and fair play' on which, according to FIFA, the game of football is based. Once Qatar was officially appointed as host of the 2022 FWC, it had to make sure it lived up to these values so that the national identity it wanted to project would be accepted by the international community (Griffin, 2019). Qatar, for its part, therefore had to show that the image it presented to the rest of the world as an open, tolerant and fair society was real (Griffin, 2019). Thus, in certain areas, Qatar had to open up to a different set of values, which certain other parts of the world considered "universal values". This was manifested in issues around, for example, the LGBTQ community, working conditions, alcohol prohibition, ... As such, Qatar tried to push through these changes without sacrificing "the feeling of being Qatari". If Qatar wanted the QFWC to be a success, it would not only be another important moment in the history of football in the years to come. It would also have long-lasting social and cultural consequences for the people of Qatar and their desire to give the world a national identity which is unique in the wider mosaic of Islamic and Arab identities (Griffin, 2019).

It is important to note that there is significant overlap between the Qatari ruling family, the Qatari general government, the country's Qatari sovereign wealth fund and the 2022 Bid Committee (Griffin, 2019). Therefore, the term "Qatar" that I use in this thesis refers to the decision-making apparatus within Qatari society that simultaneously includes the Emir¹ and his immediate family.

Criticisms and Controversies

The hosting of the QFWC was accompanied by a range of criticisms and controversies, which were highlighted in different ways and to varying degrees in different international media. Thus, the QFWC is recalled for exciting games, but also concerns and debates about the suitability of this Arab/Islamic

¹ This is the monarch and head of state of Qatar.

country to host the event due to political, security, religious, social and cultural issues (Aladbah, Werder, Watson, & Bell, 2022; Dorsey, J. M., 2023, 24 April).

1. These issues mainly encompass criticisms and controversies regarding human rights (LGBTQ rights and the conditions of migrant workers) (Dorsey, J. M., 2023, 24 April). The Gulf region relies heavily on migrant workers for economic diversification. The Guardian reported 6,500 migrant worker deaths in the period between the FWC's allocation to Qatar and its actual start (Pattisson, 2021). Along with FIFA, Qatar has developed policies based on OECD guidelines and UNGPs to address human rights, but challenges remain in the areas of social inclusion and labor rights (O'Rourke & Theodoraki, 2022). Critics continue to highlight ongoing injustice, discrimination and exploitation related to the QFWC, with efforts to reduce human rights violations showing mixed results (Al Thani, 2021). Nevertheless, Al-Thawadi² described the QFWC as an opportunity to be a catalyst for positive change (Griffin, 2019).

2. In addition, bribery allegations surrounding the allocation of the FWC 2022 to Qatar became a key point of contention, although hard evidence was never found (Papanikos, 2023).

3. This persistence of Qatar to host the FWC strongly suggests that this FWC was part of a much more elaborate strategy of "soft diplomacy" or "soft power". In its original meaning, "soft power" refers to the ability and capacity to make others want what you want, purely by attracting and persuading the other party (Nye, 2004). Soft power has received increasing attention in international politics and international relations because of its crucial role in shaping public opinion about a country, through its cultural appeal (e.g. sports), political values and diplomacy, rather than coercion or payments. Often, the sports dimension of this strategy of soft power is linked by international media to the more derogatory term "sportswashing", which comes from "sports-based whitewashing (money laundering)". This term can be described as the case where countries use sports (including organizing SMEs) to polish the negative reputation of their domestic policies, such as human rights violations (Al Thani, 2021; Papanikos, 2023; Søyland, 2020). What should be noted here is that the concept of "soft power", and its linked terms such as "nation branding", "public diplomacy" (more positive connotation) and "sportswashing" (negative connotation) are not an analytical concept and thus not measurable. Hence I will not make any absolute uniform statements about it myself in this study. Anyway, the QFWC organization was accused of "sportswashing" by many international critics and media.

² This is the Secretary-General at the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy for the QFWC Local Organizing Committee.

4. Lastly, there were further criticisms and controversies that were central to international coverage, although to a lesser extent than the ones I have just discussed. For example: the timing of the FWC during winter (Pérez-Seoane et al., 2023), the authenticity of fans, the alcohol ban, regional security issues, ... and so on.

Although criticism and controversies dominated international coverage (especially in the West), it is essential to also dig deeper into how the media also (potentially) play their own role in shaping and influencing the overall narrative and global public opinion (regarding the QFWC).

A4. Media Discourse

Media discourse should be seen as "the locus of quite complex and often contradictory processes", as the media function ideologically and entertain people at the same time. In other words, the media keep people informed about relevant social and political issues, while also passively reflecting on and actively contributing to "shifting cultural values and identities" (Stojan, 2023). Dawood (2023) puts it another way and argues that the media, besides providing entertainment, play a fundamental role in evaluating the environment and involving the public. The media creates reality for widespread consumption. This brings up the idea of 'framing', where the media shapes the essence of events through formats and forms ideological or value positions where the media focuses on key symbols, narratives and stereotypes. It matters who these individuals are and what they believe, because reality is created by the choices made by others. As a result, framing is significantly influenced by the worldview of editors. Events that on the one hand can be presented to the general public because of their relevance and on the other hand can be labeled as negative will both receive more publicity (Dawood, 2023). In this regard, besides framing, agenda setting and gatekeeping are means by which the media can shape and influence public discourse.

Research on ideology in contemporary society requires a thorough understanding of the nature and effectiveness of the mass media in producing and disseminating ideology (Dawood, 2023). Stojan (2023) echoes this by arguing that the complexity of media discourse must be taken into account when analyzing it. I believe this can be done by approaching media discourse in different ways, for example, the latent and semantic approach as will be done in this research using inductive thematic analysis (ITA).

Furthermore, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of media language, because language has the ability to represent certain facts and events in a certain way, thus shaping or influencing public discourse. This makes the analysis of media language an important part of research into contemporary

processes of social and cultural change (Stojan, 2023). In particular, English-language news sources influence the global voice, shaping and directing popular perceptions (Dawood, 2023).

Among the vast landscape of media discussions on the QFWC, it is striking how most Western media have placed a particular emphasis on their perception of the Arab/Islamic world (Middle East), and Qatar in particular, highlighting certain Orientalist tendencies.

I think it is important to note here as a researcher that this research, with respect to certain dichotomies that have emerged, runs into certain limitations and biases. For example, during my research, I encountered several times the dichotomy between "West and East" and "Western world versus Arab/Islamic world." While these terms are traditionally used and recognized in many academic and media discussions, they have their limitations because they often misrepresent the complex and nuanced relationships between cultures, countries and regions. More specifically, I think they also unnecessarily differentiate between the UK and Egypt and their ties with Qatar on the other side. Moreover, they can also lead to overgeneralizations, minimizing the complexity of relationships and perceptions between these countries and cultures.

I decided to maintain the presence of these dichotomies for the following reasons:

1. The biggest reason for including these dichotomies in my research is because they were inherent in my research. As such, I encountered them in the existing research of my literature review, but especially in the analyzed online newspaper articles of all four selected newspapers from the UK and Egypt. Because of their prominent role in the data of my research, it was inevitable to include them in this thesis. I would like to add that I myself do not have a clear understanding of how the authors of the online newspaper articles and studies have interpreted these dichotomies as it was also not explained anywhere. That is why, also as the author myself, I do not intend to provide definitions of these dichotomies, but instead allow the reader of this study to interpret them for themselves.
2. With this brief discussion, I want to demonstrate that I recognize both these dichotomies and their pitfalls. In this way, I hope to offer a critical perspective on how these terms are used and understood, and how they may shape and influence the discourse surrounding SMEs such as the QFWC.

Furthermore, it is also important for me to mention here that the incorporation of these dichotomies are just one of many possible lenses through which relations between "West and East" and "Western world versus Arab/Islamic world" can be examined. Its use in this thesis is intended to illuminate a specific aspect of discourse, and not to offer a comprehensive or definitive explanation.

The Orientalist Character of the Western Media

The criticisms and controversies by international critics and media since the allocation of the FWC to Qatar, which have been gathering momentum even in the months following the FWC, reveal the extent of Western prejudice, false moral outrage and, probably most importantly, blatant double standards, at least according to Dawood (2023). In other words, Western media's image of Qatar aligns with racist, Islamophobic, Orientalist narratives about the "backward East" (Sanhaji, 2023; Dawood 2023). It is in this context that Sanhaji (2023) brings up Lefebvre's "abstract space" theory, which suggests that Western media images about the QFWC have been created as the creators imagine them to be, and therefore not as it is in reality (Sanhaji, 2023).

Moreover, the Western media portray Qatar in a negative perspective by highlighting many criticisms, such as human rights violations and alcohol bans, leading to clashes between Western and Eastern norms (Sanhaji, 2023; Dawood, 2023). This simulated Western criticism of Qatar is blatant as it has nothing to do with human rights. It is rather the age-old Orientalism that Western media have reshaped, but for a contemporary audience (Dawood, 2023). This includes reinforcing narratives about the "otherness" of Arab cultures and the colonial narratives associated with them. Although this seems to be the dominant narrative in Western media, Sanhaji (2023) suggests that there are opportunities to change this image.

In this regard, Sanhaji (2023) argues that real interactions, where international visitors/tourists themselves interacted with the QFWC and the host country itself, could challenge these stereotypes, resulting in a better understanding of the Arab world. For example, banning alcohol in Qatar could promote peace among fans and possibly change Western attitudes after the tournament (Sanhaji, 2023). In short, the hosting of the QFWC can be seen as a success and an opportunity to change negative perceptions of Arab countries.

In contrast to these Orientalist-tinged Western media perceptions, the Egyptian (news) media (within the Arab/Islamic community) presented a much more positive narrative, based on a unique and inclusive perspective on the QFWC.

Solidarity and Unity in the Arab Media

In contrast to the negative Orientalist perceptions expressed in the Western media about the organisation of the QFWC, there was rather a very strong sense of positivity within the Egyptian

media landscape, a prominent media landscape within the Arab world. However, I observed this myself as a researcher while conducting this study. This feeling emerges strongly from the Arabic term "العروبة" put forward in the Egyptian newspaper Al Ahram. This term has no official definition, but has to do with a sense of belonging and solidarity based on a shared Arabic language, culture and historical heritage. Since it also has no official translation, I translate it in the rest of this study with the term "Arabicity", leaving room for the reader of this study to make his or her own interpretation of it.

Using this unique background of Western and Arab/Islamic media, the contrast between them becomes clear. This contrast adds to the wider debate on the media's influence on the ultimate legacy of SMEs such as the QFWC, which can have a lasting impact on Qatar's image in the international community. In this context, I must point out a limitation in my research, acknowledging a bias. For instance, I must bear in mind that the dividing line between the West and the Arab world is very complex and cannot be drawn arbitrarily.

Media Influence on Qatar's Legacy

Despite all the international criticism and media controversy surrounding the FWC and associated accusations of "sportswashing", some academics believe that this soft power strategy may have positively influenced the event's legacy in the long run, comparing it to successful FWC hosts such as South Africa (2010) and South Korea (2002). For example, it is argued that the legacy of the QFWC is likely to remain untouched in the long run because Qatar, with FIFA at its side, introduced a new cultural perspective and promoted football in a new region (Papanikos, 2023). For instance, the QFWC was hailed for regional development, peace and welfare (Al Thani, 2021). Moreover, record figures also point to the success of the QFWC, with 1.5 billion viewers for the final and 5 billion interactions, and with the third highest number of spectators in the history of the FWC (Sporza, 2023).

What is certain is that the media can have a potential impact on shaping and influencing public discourse, which in turn could influence the legacy of this QFWC and the host country Qatar. In this context, Nye (2008) proposes the media as one of the so-called "arbiters of credibility or legitimacy" between the source of soft power and the recipient of soft power. Here, the media plays the role of an intermediary with great influence, whose position comes with the power to manipulate the outcome (to some extent) to its will and ultimately influence domestic and foreign public opinion. It is naturally assumed that positive coverage abroad will also be positive for domestic politics, which would promote foreign policy success. To increase this likelihood of success, the media deploys various strategies that can change public perception for better or worse. The most common strategies are

'agenda setting' and 'gatekeeping', two concepts I already mentioned and which I will discuss later in this thesis.

This research does not attempt to answer the question of whether (British or Egyptian) media representations and approaches have succeeded in ruining or glorifying the legacy of the QFCW and Qatar. Nevertheless, I found this topic worth discussing because my research also touches heavily on the power of news media, and newspapers in particular, in possibly contributing to the shaping and influencing of public discourse in the context of the QFCW.

A5. Qatar's relations with the UK and Egypt

I will discuss my reasons for choosing the UK and Egypt later in this thesis, based on my discussion of both countries' media landscapes. For now, I will first address the relationships between the challenges, cooperation and mutual influences in relations in recent years between Qatar and the UK on the one hand and between Qatar and Egypt on the other. While these three countries play a role in the current dynamic geopolitical landscape, each is different in terms of their cultural, political and economic contexts.

Qatar-UK Relations

The relationship between the UK and Qatar has existed for more than a century and a half. This relationship, which has become increasingly close in recent decades, covers many different aspects, from historical and political to economic and commercial. For example, the formal relations began in 1970 and are now getting even stronger with the recent 2022 decision to hold annual strategic dialogues (Ulrichsen, 2022; Loft and Garraway, 2023). As such, bilateral relations take place both through formal ties, where governments and embassies actively promote national interests through diplomatic relations with each other, and through informal methods, where interactions take place between royal and ruling families and institutions such as the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (Ulrichsen, 2022; Loft and Garraway, 2023).

Furthermore, the blockade of Qatar, the Brexit and the worldwide pandemic brought both countries into a new situation of geopolitical uncertainty, argues Ulrichsen (2022). This brought about an inconsistent UK foreign policy towards the Gulf states, which manifested itself in complicated negotiations on a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Ulrichsen, 2022), after the UK and Qatar already failed to agree on a free trade agreement, as trade between the two

countries is governed by the World Trade Organisation rules (WTO) (Ulrichsen, 2022). Therefore, the UK decided to turn to this free trade agreement with the GCC for more favorable terms. This agreement will then to some extent determine the next phase of relations between the UK and Qatar (Loft and Garraway, 2023; Ulrichsen, 2022).

Economic relations between the two countries are also strong, which was reflected in the 2022 statistics, which stated that Qatar was the UK's 26th most important trading partner, with a combined trade of £13.4 billion. Such high figures had not been reached since 2013 (Loft and Garraway, 2023; Lawrence & Myers, 2023). Besides these trade statistics between the two countries, the Gulf Strategy Fund (GSF) has also been an indicator of the good economic relations between Qatar and the UK. This UK fund was formed in part to provide financial support to countries in the Gulf, including Qatar, for instance by helping Qatar during its preparations for the QFWC. Apart from that, this fund also served to increase investment opportunities for British companies. What this support to Qatar also entailed was fierce criticism from the British public, who said the British did not want to support a country with poor human rights. The British government countered this criticism by arguing that this funding would not negatively affect human rights in this Gulf state (Loft and Garraway, 2023).

In conclusion, I noted that in recent years these two countries have sought even more to strengthen relations in the areas of defense, education, diplomacy, trade and energy (gas) (Ulrichsen, 2022; Elliott, 2022; Loft and Garraway, 2023; Foreign, C. & D. O., 2023, February 21). This will also manifest itself in future cooperation and mutual growth.

Qatar-Egypt Relations

The consequences of the Arab Spring completely soured ties between Egypt and Qatar. The relations reached their lowest point when the Egyptian army, led by Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, ousted President Mohammed Morsi, who at the time headed the Qatar-backed Muslim Brotherhood (Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2022; Middle East Policy Council, n.d.). Following this coup, Qatar's support for Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood was regarded by the new leadership of the Egyptian state as interfering in Egyptian domestic affairs, causing relations to collapse. Consequently, Abdel Fattah Al Sisi labelled the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization (Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2022).

In 2017, relations between Qatar and Egypt deteriorated even more when Egypt, in a bloc with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, completely cut ties with Qatar this time. Egypt did this because it claimed that Qatar supported terrorism and still interfered in Egyptian domestic affairs. Once Egypt joined this bloc against Qatar, it immediately took action by closing its ports and

airspace to Qatar and banning all Qatari citizens and diplomats from the country (Middle East Policy Council, n.d., Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2022, Reuters, 2022). Following four years of "Cold War", the diplomatic crisis was finally brought to an end with the signing of the Al Ula Declaration in 2021, led by Saudi Arabia and US officials (Reuters, 2023; Middle East Policy Council, n.d.).

Since diplomatic relations between the two countries were restored, Egypt and Qatar have done their best to re-establish unfrozen ties. For instance, each appointed an ambassador to the other's country. In addition, prominent political figures from both countries (presidents, ministers...) already visited each other several times on each other's territory, holding diplomatic talks in order to discuss, for instance, economic cooperation between the countries. In this manner, a considerable number of achievements were made, including the Qatari \$5bn investment in Egypt and three Memorandums of Understanding between the countries (Mancebo, 2022, September 14, 2022; Al Sayed, 2022; Ahram Online, 2023; Reuters, 2022b; Italian Institute of International Political Studies, 2022). For both countries, this rapprochement was primarily due to strategic and economic factors. On the one hand, Egypt needed huge financial support because they were in a serious economic crisis at the time, which was made worse by the war in Ukraine (Reuters, 2022). Qatar on the other hand recognized its opportunities in the Egyptian market. Reflecting strategic motives to restore ties, the Egyptian state acknowledged the value of Qatar's initiatives in the region, while Qatar distanced itself from Islamist groups, which were hostile to the Egyptian government (Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2022).

In short, in spite of poor ties between the two countries following the Arab Spring on the one hand and the diplomatic crisis on the other, relations have greatly improved in recent years. These strong relations were echoed in an article published by Al Ahram during one of the last days of the QFWC, on 15 December. This article was about Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly, who then organized a celebration marking the 50th anniversary of the close and historic diplomatic relations between Egypt and Qatar (Ahram Online, 2022, December 15).

Lastly, I would like to mention that this discussion of Qatar's relationship with both countries covers the period up to 18 January, corresponding to the period I am investigating in this thesis. As such, I noted that during this period under study, Qatar's relations with both Egypt and the UK were strong. In this regard, it would be of interest for future research to also examine coverage of the QFWC by a newspaper from a country which had poor relations with Qatar at that time.

B. Media Scope

For the purpose of this research, I have chosen these four prominent newspapers: The Times and The Guardian from the United Kingdom (UK) (the West) and Al Ahram and Al Masry Al Youm (AMAY) from Egypt (Arab/Islamic world). I selected these four newspapers because, on the one hand, they collectively represent a respected (external) pluralism and, on the other hand, they collectively represent a variety of press freedom, which could yield interesting findings in relation to my research questions. Besides, they also enjoy a very wide readership which extends beyond their country's borders.

Before discussing this, I will explain what I mean by pluralism and media independence, two key factors that help to understand press freedom in the British and Egyptian media landscapes. With regard to “pluralism”, I subscribe to RSF's (2016) definition, which is as follows:

Media pluralism can either mean a plurality of voices, of analyses, of expressed opinions and issues (internal pluralism), or a plurality of media outlets, of types of media (print, radio, TV or digital) and coexistence of private owned media and public service media (external pluralism). (RSF, 2016)

The striking thing about this definition is that media pluralism encompasses both an internal and an external dimension. I will explain it using The Times as an example. In terms of internal pluralism with The Times, I focus on the content of The Times, in terms of the diversity of voices, analyses and opinions within this newspaper. This is key to a representative portrayal of social discussions. In terms of external pluralism, on the other hand, I focus on the position of The Times in the wider UK media landscape. In this regard, I would then consider The Times' position in comparison to other newspapers in order to assess the UK media landscape in terms of diversity (e.g. private and public ownership; print, radio and digital media).

Also regarding “media independence”, I concur with RSF's (n.d.) definition, one that speaks for itself and needs no further explanation. The definition reads as follows: “Measures the degree to which the media are able to function independently of sources of political, governmental, business and religious power and influence.” (RSF, n.d.)

I examined the representations and approaches in British and Egyptian newspapers in relation to the QFCW, and in this context I exposed how media pluralism and independence are reflected in their coverage, considering the unique socio-cultural and geopolitical context in each of these two countries.

B1. Why the UK and Egypt?

The UK

UK news media such as The Guardian, The Times, The BBC and The Independent enjoy a high prestige in the world, giving them a great influence on global public opinion and global public discourse. They are acknowledged worldwide for their prestigious and valued reporting because of their high journalistic standards. This is evident from, among others, an online newspaper article by PressGazette (Majid, 2023) ranking "the Top 50 Most Popular News Websites in the World", in which The Guardian, for instance, is ranked seventh.

However, I was somewhat surprised by certain reviews and controversies, including those about media pluralism in the context of the UK media landscape. I came across two different reports that contrasted sharply with each other. On the one hand, I came across a report by Ofcom (2022) which was positive about the UK media landscape and pointed out the high degree of pluralism. On the other hand, I came across a detailed but critical report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (2023c). The first criticism RSF raises is that in the UK media landscape, there is a high degree of power concentrated in a small number of media companies (News UK, Reach and Daily Mail and General Trust), suggesting a lower degree of pluralism in the media landscape. The second major criticism was even more surprising, as the RSF stated in its report that British journalists are nowadays under threat in terms of press freedom in the UK. The third subsequent criticism was also unexpected, as there has been an increase in lawsuits against journalists and controversial bills, indicating tensions in the political climate and judicial pressure (RSF, 2023c). In spite of this fierce criticism in RSF's report, this same organization ranks the UK twenty-sixth out of 180 in its global ranking in RSF's Press Freedom Index (2023b). In short, despite this fierce criticism from RSF, the UK did score well compared to the rest of the world when it comes to press freedom.

Egypt

I chose Egypt for this research partly because of its prestige and cultural prominence in the Arab (news) media industry. This high prestige stems from the fact that the Egyptian dialect is (one of) the most understood dialects in the Arab world, which in turn stems from the highly influential cultural industry in Egypt. In this way, newspapers like Al Ahram and AMAY manage to shape and influence public discourse in a region encompassing North Africa and the Middle East, and to some extent even beyond.

Over the past seven decades, mass media in Egypt has undergone many changes and challenges. Under the rule of President Nasser, all (news) media were controlled by the Egyptian state, which remained so under the rule of both Sadat and Mubarak, albeit with minor adjustments. Moreover,

since the Egyptian revolution in 2011, the media landscape in Egypt has been characterized by many changes and challenges, mainly related to the digital shift and political unrest (Media Landscapes, n.d.).

The main problem with government newspapers is that there is no competition among newspaper organizations or among reporters. Newspaper organizations use the same and often only source to gather information: the government. This resulted in a status quo position in organizations and brought the national media into a real crisis. Nevertheless, state-run newspapers are still important tools of the regime to propagate its political agenda.

Private newspapers such as Al Masry Al Youm and Al Youm⁷ have gained prominence and influence since the 2011 revolution due to their adaptation to the digital trend and its associated appeal to a larger readership.

Once a traditionally powerful tool for criticizing government abuses, opposition newspapers have been marginalized since the 2011 revolution, partly because of their limited access to government information and financial dependence on the government and partly because of the pressure they face from the government. All these factors have reduced their credibility and influence (Media Landscapes, n.d.). Although I do not investigate opposition newspapers, I thought it was relevant to touch upon them briefly.

Digital developments are forcing a review of the business model of traditional media to respond to different audience needs. Print and broadcast media are trying various restructuring plans, but face major management challenges that are leaving them behind. Both national and private newspapers have been affected by this shift (Media Landscapes, n.d.; Allam, 2018).

While the constitution guarantees and safeguards a free press, a ban on censorship and freedom of expression, there are laws that stifle rather than protect this freedom. The newly established regulatory bodies (2016) should set clear, well-defined rules to ensure proper policy implementation. To limit state intervention, many laws, which directly address press freedom and freedom of expression, need to be revised to allow an environment for an independent media system and limit the power's grip on media performance. But currently, the government is still making efforts to continue to impose its control and media entities are still trying to protect the level of freedom they have achieved (Media Landscapes, n.d.).

As I did with the British media landscape on a global level, I also set out to find out how Egyptian news media, particularly the two newspapers in my research, score in similar rankings, albeit of the Arab world. In this way, I ended up with several rankings, including "Feedspot" (2023), "Industry

Arabic" (2023) and "Forbes Middle East" (Hayek, 2022). Here, Al Ahram and AMAY were rated and ranked as influential newspapers in the Arab world, although slightly lower than expected.

The RSF also released a critical report on the contemporary Egyptian media landscape, ranking the country 166th out of 180 in its "2023 World Press Freedom Index" (2023b), a disastrous ranking when you consider that even at the beginning of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, Egypt ranked a lot higher in terms of press freedom. The report itself was harsher and more critical of Egypt than the UK, but that was to be expected considering Egypt's position on the RSF Index (2023b). First, the RSF also mentions the strong lack of pluralism in the (news) media in its report. This is because not only the Egyptian authorities and intelligence services, but also some influential businessmen exercise direct control over almost all media in Egypt. Second, RSF's report discusses the fact that Egypt has an extremely high number of journalists in prison, one of the highest numbers in the world. Third, RSF's report also discusses journalists in Egypt who are often wrongly accused of terrorism on the one hand and spreading false information on the other. Finally, this RSF report argues that this conservative socio-cultural context and low level of security for journalists have a major impact on how reporting can be done in the Egyptian media landscape (RSF, 2023a).

B2. Why these specific newspapers?

The UK Newspapers

The Times

Founded as early as 1785, this newspaper has been considered one of the most prominent and influential dailies in the UK (for over 150 years), along with The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph (Britannica, 2023; Historic Newspaper, 2021). Moreover, it can be categorized among 'quality' broadsheet newspapers, alongside "The Telegraph" and "The Guardian" (BBC, n.d.).

In terms of The Times' political stance, the newspaper has traditionally been moderately center-right, but supported the Labour Party (center-left) under Tony Blair in the 2001 and 2005 general elections. Yet on 1 May 2010, the Times changed allegiance by officially supporting the Conservative Party (center-right) for the first time in 18 years (Samples, 2021).

As I wanted to investigate more specifically the political orientation of The Times myself, I came across the website of Media Bias Fact Check (2023, 1 July), which is an organization dedicated, among other things, to examining the extent to which newspapers are biased or not. Their report (2023, 1 July) showed, that The Times can be considered a center-right and highly reliable newspaper.

The Guardian

Founded in 1821, this newspaper is today known for its in-depth investigative journalism, independent reporting and liberal views, which makes this newspaper a counterpart to rivals such as The Daily Telegraph and The Times. Moreover, it can be argued that this newspaper is considered a left-leaning voice in the British media landscape (Tsang, 2021; Britannica, 2011).

As I also wanted to examine the political orientation myself more specifically for The Guardian, I looked at both Ad Fontes Media (2023) and AllSides (2022a). Through the media bias rating systems of both organizations, The Guardian was categorized as "left-wing" and recognized as a newspaper with reliable analysis and factual reporting that is quite progressive in attitude, which is in contrast to the conservative stance of The Times.

By now, I am convinced that I made a good choice in terms of newspapers. Firstly, I have chosen two reliable newspapers that on the one hand represent a high degree of external pluralism, as you could argue that both newspapers are at opposite ends of the spectrum of the UK media landscape in terms of ideological perspectives (conservative vs progressive). On the other hand, because of its balanced coverage on the QFWC, I believe The Times possesses a higher degree of internal pluralism than The Guardian. This will become clear in the course of this thesis. Secondly, both newspapers have a huge readership, both for printed newspapers and on the digital platform, which means they can consequently exert a lot of influence on public discourse both nationally and internationally.

The Egyptian Newspapers

Al Ahram

This newspaper (الاهرام: The Pyramids) was founded in Alexandria in 1875 and is considered one of Egypt's oldest newspapers (Britannica, 2010; Youssef, 2012). In 1952, under the rule of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Al Ahram, like all other press, became nationalized, bringing the newspaper under the control of the Egyptian state and instantly becoming the voice of the government (Britannica, 2010).

Today, this newspaper is renowned for its objective coverage of both local and international matters. According to Alashry (2021) and Media Ownership Monitor (n.d.), the newspaper was Egypt's most widely distributed newspaper in 2021, with an approximate daily circulation of 110,000. Today, this newspaper is published in Arabic, English (Ahram Online), French and several dialects. Besides, The Times and The New York Times can be considered the Al Ahram's equivalent for the British and

Americans respectively (Press Translator, n.d.). Regarding Al Ahram's readership, it can be said that the newspaper is often read by government officials, academics and businessmen (Hammoud, 2016). Although more and more independent newspapers are emerging nowadays, some newspapers, including Al Ahram, are still under state control (Youssef, 2012). This often gives Al Ahram the status of a newspaper that on the one hand promotes government ideologies and thus backs the president, and on the other hand filters any criticism or negativity about the Egyptian authorities from its news coverage (Pasha, 2011; Alashry, 2021; Hammoud, 2016). Likewise, Pasha (2011) further argues that Al Ahram falls under the "authoritarian media" category, as he states as follows:

The authoritarian type indicates that journalism is subservient to the interests of the state in maintaining social order and achieving political goals. Saying that Al Ahram is under the authoritarian type implies it avoids criticism to the President, the government policies or officials, and it censors publishing any material that challenges the established order. (Pasha, 2011, p.66)

Al Masry al Youm

This newspaper (المصري اليوم: The Egyptian Today) was founded in 2004 and is considered one of the most prominent newspapers in Egypt (and beyond) on account of its circulation of around 80,000 copies per day (Media Ownership Monitor, n.d.). Unlike Al Ahram, the newspaper can be considered an independent, liberal and reformist newspaper. Furthermore, this newspaper has managed to establish itself as a newspaper with high-quality content, with immense popularity and with the strength to compete with the most widely distributed newspaper in Egypt, Al Ahram (Youssef, 2012; Press Translator, n.d.). Since 2007, AMAY has also had a digital news platform, with an English-language version since 2009 (Media Ownership Monitor, n.d.). Moreover, AMAY was even recognized as "the most influential periodical in Egypt" in 2009 (Press Translator, n.d.).

In addition, the newspaper is mostly read by Egypt's political and economic elites, in both print and digital form. Also, Youssef (2022) argues that AMAY, representing a "panorama" of opinions, was successful because it focused on the Egyptian (news) media market as a whole and not on one political party, like typical opposition newspapers do. Besides, this newspaper was also not afraid to tackle difficult topics and harnessed the energy of young journalists by encouraging them to produce quality work (Youssef, 2012).

Nevertheless, this newspaper has been facing heavy pressure from the Egyptian authorities, as its reporting is often in opposition to the policies and related interests of the Egyptian state. This, among other things, has already led to the firing of its editor-in-chief in 2018, following its publication of a controversial newspaper article on the presidential elections (Media Ownership Monitor, n.d.).

Being a researcher, I believe it is essential to point out here that this research, like all research, bumps up against certain limitations, and I would also like to acknowledge the biases of my approach that I use in my research. In doing so, I must reveal here that AMAY does not enjoy complete independence, even though it is publicly presented as such. This is due to the Egyptian authorities' constant (partial) control over the press. In case a newspaper is too critical or negative about issues not in line with Egyptian state policy, a strong form of censorship can be imposed. In order to avoid this, newspapers often restrict themselves in publishing their coverage, which manifests itself in self-censorship of coverage. Fortunately, this is only partially the case with AMAY, meaning that this newspaper is still able to counterbalance state-controlled newspapers like Al Ahram. Overall, this implies that despite its existing limitations, AMAY seeks to offer an objective and sometimes critical perspective on certain facts and events (Youssef, 2012).

In short, I confidently chose Al Ahram and AMAY partly because of their contrasting ideologies and partly because of their wide readership. This means I achieved a remarkable degree of external pluralism for my research. Al Ahram, for instance, acts as the voice of the Egyptian state, so it often does report on certain facts and events in a rather prejudiced manner. AMAY, on the other hand, is a relatively independent newspaper that seeks to bring as objective and critical news as possible to its target audience, however this is not always possible due to the pressure it feels from the Egyptian authorities. I assess internal pluralism higher in AMAY than in Al Ahram because Al Ahram reports more one-sidedly in alignment with the policies of the Egyptian authorities, which will become clear in my research.

C. Time Scope

I decided to analyze and discuss online newspaper articles from the period from 20 November 2022 to 18 January 2023. The period before the QFWC (20 October -19 November 2022) provided interesting insights into the preparations for the QFWC. Of course, I also discussed the period during the QFWC (20 November -18 December 2022), focusing on all aspects surrounding the QFWC except the sporting aspects (match reports and the like). Lastly, I studied newspaper articles from the period up to a month after the QFWC (19 December 2022 -18 January 2023) out of interest in reporting on the aftermath and general reflections on the QFWC.

I felt that this time scope was relevant as I believed it would provide me with a more complete picture of the broader narrative put forward by the four newspapers in each of these three phases of the

QFWC. This time scope also ensured that the quantity of articles was large and feasible enough to complete this research.

D. Relevance

This research provides both academic and societal value. From an academic point of view, this research contributes to relevant media studies as it helps to better understand how media, politics and culture interact in different geographical and societal contexts with an event like the QFWC taking place. More specifically, there are two things that set this research apart from all other research in the academic field:

1. I have found no research on how Egypt, an Arab/Islamic country, represents an SME in an Arab/Islamic country in its newspapers.
2. Nor have I found any research comparing the representations of Western and Arab newspapers regarding the organization of an SME.

These are just two examples of findings from my research that have contributed to the academic field. More generally, I mention in my literature review that sometimes I could not find relevant studies closely related to my research topic, which suggests that my research is unique and therefore contributes greatly to the academic field.

In terms of society, this research contributes to the fact that one should be aware of how the media succeed in shaping and influencing public discourse about an SME and its (Arab/Islamic/Gulf) host, potentially affecting cross-cultural and political relations.

E. Research Questions

The following research questions emerged from my central research question i.e. "How do newspapers in the UK and Egypt approach and represent the hosting of a sports mega-event in an Arab/Islamic/Gulf country, and how might these approaches and representations potentially contribute to or influence the shaping of narratives and public discourse surrounding this event: Case Study on the QFWC":

RQ1: How are this SME and everything surrounding it being represented in British and Egyptian newspapers, and to what extent do these representations vary between the two countries?

RQ2: How do these representations and approaches vary within each country's media landscape, particularly between progressive and conservative newspapers?

What is striking about these two research questions is that they seem to relate more to the first part of my central research question (How do media outlets in the UK and Egypt approach and represent the hosting of an SME in an Arab/Islamic/Gulf country?) than to the second part (How might these approaches and representations potentially contribute to or influence the shaping of narratives and public discourse surrounding this event?). The reason for this is that I chose to address the second part rather sporadically and in a less structured way in my research.

F. Overview of the Structure

In Chapter 1, I discuss the relevant existing literature and studies related to my research. In Chapter 2, the methodological framework, I discuss the way I collect and analyze data to reach my conclusions. In Chapter 3, I discuss the actual execution of my research, which consists of purposive sampling followed by inductive thematic analysis (ITA). In Chapter 4, the findings of the research, I interpret and discuss the findings with reference to the two research questions. In Chapter 5, I discuss limitations and boundaries of my research, while at the same time providing recommendations for future research. In the overall conclusion, I sum up the main findings of my research, while answering all my research questions.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

This literature review focuses on two aspects. First, it examines existing research on the approach and representation of SMEs by newspapers from different media landscapes. Second, it examines how these approaches and representations influence and shape public discourse around SMEs.

In line with my research questions, a number of recurring central themes have emerged, based on which I will divide my literature review into three different sections, although there will be some overlap. The following themes that I will discuss in each section are:

2.2.1. Media Representations & Approaches

2.2.2. Shaping and Influencing Public Discourse

2.2.3. Comparing Newspapers

1.2. Body

1.2.1. Media Representations & Approaches

This section of my literature review focuses more specifically on existing research on how (news) media approach the representation of SMEs and how this contributes to shaping and influencing the public discourse around them. More specifically, this section examines existing research on the strategies, approaches and discursive tactics newspapers use in their coverage of SMEs, which is reflected in the content of newspaper articles, selecting particular topics to discuss and choosing framing techniques and language choices.

The first existing study I found relevant in relation to my own research is Stojan's (2023). She compared the British newspaper *The Times* with the Croatian newspaper "Jutarnji List" using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Similar to my research, Stojan (2023) examined how these two newspapers differ in their coverage of the QFWC. Ultimately, Stojan (2023) noted that the biggest differences between these two newspapers are in the national versus international topic proportions and the use of direct vs indirect speech. In addition, she also noted that both newspapers reflected their countries' football values and identity. Although Stojan (2023) does not use the same

methodology as I did in my research, I found this an interesting and relevant study to get an idea of how I should conduct a cross-cultural study³, in relation to the same case study, i.e. the QFWC.

The second study, by Dawood (2023), also directly relates to the QFWC. Dawood (2023) focuses specifically on just one newspaper article from The Guardian. Here, she exposes in a thorough way how The Guardian, by use of specific language, criticized FIFA's choice of Qatar as FWC host. As such, Dawood (2023) observed that the writer of the newspaper article under study legitimized his critical opinion directly and indirectly through quoted comments from authorities and influential characters. The writer made use of generalizations, accusations, words with negative connotations and a contradictory topic of 'homosexuality' in order to persuade the reading public and thus also influence public discourse. The same usage of language was applied in The Guardian newspaper articles I investigated. I found this an interesting study because it gave me an idea of what an in-depth study on framing (of The Guardian) entails and how it deals with semantic features (especially with regard to vocabulary and grammar) of reporting, which I also do in my ITA.

The following two studies I discuss analyzed media coverage of previous SMEs and were conducted by Graeff, Monteiro, Bretherton and Bettine (2018) on the one hand and Monteiro, Bettine, Luis Gutierrez, Pedersen, Williams (2021) on the other. By means of the CDA method, these two similar studies with overlapping researchers investigated how media from different countries succeed in shaping and influencing public perceptions of the 2014 FWC and its host Brazil. The study by Graeff et al. (2018) found that the 2014 FWC in Brazil was generally considered a success, even though concerns were raised about social issues such as violence and inequality. More specifically, Monteiro et al. (2021) pointed out that the characteristics of SMEs can have a strong influence on how the event is perceived by the media, which often leads to a focus on the social problems of the host country. As such, they pointed out that there was a difference between the coverage of the 2014 FWC and the 2016 Olympics, both of which took place in Brazil, but were viewed differently in the media due to the fact that both events had different characteristics. The FWC, for instance, was portrayed more positively than the Olympics, in part because of Brazil's historical ties to football.

I found the two studies just discussed enriching and relevant because, on the one hand, they gave me insight into how the media managed to create a certain perception of an SME and its host. On the other hand, they also gave me insight into the degree to which the characteristics of an SME affect the coverage of a FWC and the associated public discourse.

³ A cross-cultural study compares and analyses differences and similarities between different cultural groups.

In accordance with the study by Monteiro et al (2021), the study by Griffin (2019), which preceded Qatar's QFWC by three years, provided a similar perspective on the organization of the QFWC. As such, Griffin (2019) argues in his study that Qatar itself also has control of how the news media would represent and approach the country and the organization of the QFWC. Therefore, Griffin (2019) concludes his research by stating that Qatar had to find a balance between maintaining its own national identity and opening up to more universal values, such as openness and tolerance. By modifying the characteristics of the event, Qatar could ensure that the international media would form a (more) positive public discourse around the FWC, Griffin (2019) states. On the one hand, I agree that the (news) media influence the public and vice versa. On the other hand, I find it perhaps a bit naive of Griffin (2019) to argue that by partially opening up to universal values, Qatar can positively shape the public discourse that the international media create around Qatar and the QFWC. I believe the criticism towards Qatar is much deeper than just opening up to universal values. As such, I think the criticism towards the country can still be attributed, among other things, to a more deeply embedded Orientalist discourse of the international (Western) media. Still, I found this an interesting perspective by Griffin (2019).

Unfortunately, I could not find any existing research on the representation of an Egyptian or Arab newspaper in relation to the QFWC more specifically, or even in relation to an SME in general. As a result, my research suggests a unique contribution to the academic field. The only research I could find that conducted a framing analysis of an Arabic-language newspaper's coverage of a particular event in an Arab country was the study by Dibas, Rabab'ah and Haider (2022). This study showed that not only newspapers from Western countries but also those from Arab countries sometimes portray each other's countries in a negative way.

I would like to add that in this literature review I did not consider existing research on Arab newspapers' representations of an event organized by a Western country, as this is irrelevant in relation to my research. Next to that, I would also like to add that I did not find any studies, related to my broader research question, that apply the ITA, apart from Barber's study (2022), which I discuss later.

1.2.2. Shaping and Influencing Public Discourse

In this section of my literature review, I investigate how the media shape and influence the public discourse around an SME.

The first study I discuss immediately shows that the media thus really do play a crucial role in shaping a narrative around a major event, with this narrative often reflecting broader socio-political contexts.

In this way, I came across the research of McCombs and Shaw (2017), who put forward the concept of "agenda setting". This notion points to the great influence the media can exert by selectively choosing which news they see as important enough to present to their readership, which entails having incredible power and influence over the public discourse and opinion that comes with it.

Barber (2022) highlights this idea from McCombs and Shaw (2017) and, in his specific research, links the role of newspapers in shaping the narrative surrounding the refugee crisis. Barber (2022) explored in this context, by identifying and analyzing themes that emerged from his ITA (and CDA), how newspapers help in the construction of narratives about "deservingness". In doing so, he highlighted the power of newspapers in the form of agenda-setting, which is consistent with McCombs and Shaw's theory (2017). Barber (2022) thus concludes that media, through their influence, have the power to take on the role of "mediator" between state and society. This concept of agenda-setting can also be easily applied to a particular newspaper's coverage of the QFWC, by pointing out that a newspaper can exercise its power by choosing whether or not a particular issue is significant enough to cover in relation to the QFWC, thereby influencing the public discourse and opinion around it.

Besides this agenda-setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (2017), there are other theories on how the media can shape public opinion on a particular fact or event. These include "framing theory", "priming theory" and "gatekeeping theory". Although I do not discuss these, I just wanted to clarify that I am aware of the existence of multiple approaches to shaping and influencing public discourse.

Moreover, Quintus' (2019) study highlights the power the media has in shaping perceptions of an SME and its legacy, as the media has a strong influence on whether or not the soft power strategies of the host country of that event succeed. For instance, if a newspaper strongly criticizes a host country of an SME, the newspaper can negatively influence public opinion about that host country, thus shattering its soft power strategy. This is in accordance with Nye's (2008) research that I discussed in the introduction, in which he argued that the media act as one of the so-called "arbiters of credibility or legitimacy" between the source of soft power and the recipient of soft power. Next to that, these findings, albeit in more general terms, are confirmed in the study by Dibas, Rabab'ah and Haider (2022), in which they state that the shaping of public perceptions of society depends on media representation.

Baharuddin and Baharuddin (2022) present a different perspective in their study. In fact, they argue that the media can be used not only to disseminate information but also as an instrument for expressing public opinion. Hence, they argue that societies should be wary of people or institutions misusing the media as an instrument or a platform for political and propagandistic purposes.

According to these researchers, this misuse is mostly caused by the elite. I found this interesting in relation to my research because both the British and Egyptian media landscapes are in the hands of the most elite (political) figures, as I mentioned in the introduction.

Whereas the studies discussed in this literature review hardly touch upon the influence of language use in shaping and influencing public opinion, the already mentioned study by Dibas, Rabab'ah and Haider (2022) does so. This study argues, in line with Stojan (2023), that language is not merely a passive, but rather a highly active and ideological tool which can be utilized to shape and convey meaning. Although this sounds vague, the meaning of language will become even clearer later in the semantic parts of my ITA. Dawood's (2023) study, which I previously discussed, also points to the importance of language in shaping and influencing public discourse. More specifically, she argues that English-language sources have even more power and influence on public discourse since English is understood almost everywhere in the world.

Since my research focuses specifically on online newspaper articles, the following study, which highlights the importance of online news media, was also relevant in the context of my research. Dewi, Lande and Efendi (2022) investigated how five online media outlets used different perspectives in their online coverage of PDIP President Megawati's (Indonesia) rejection of a party coalition. Their study showed that online (news) media are institutions that disseminate information products in the form of virtual messages that can influence audiences, thereby playing an important role in political events.

Finally, in this part of my literature review, I discuss the importance of analyzing the absence of certain discourses in (news) media coverage. In other words, when researching a newspaper's coverage of an SME, it is therefore also important to focus on what the newspaper does not communicate to its readership. This can sometimes even be more interesting than what a newspaper does communicate (Monteiro et al., 2021). This is part of the "gatekeeping" model mentioned earlier.

1.2.3. Comparing Newspapers

1.2.3.1. Cross-Cultural Media Comparison

This section of this literature review focuses more specifically on cross-cultural media comparison, as I do in my research between Egyptian (Arab) and British (Western) newspapers. In other words, this existing literature examined how newspapers from different countries/cultures portray and

approach the same event in different ways, due to different factors influenced by differences in regional and cultural contexts.

As was argued in Sakurai's (2017) study, differences in representations in coverage between different countries and cultures can be attributed to differences in cultural proximity, affinity and the influence of powerful countries, which are manifested in more specifically named factors such as language, colonial ties, ethnicity and geographical proximity. On the basis of these factors, the media can play their role in shaping a particular narrative around an event, which in turn also influences the shaping of public opinion. Sakurai (2017) also observed that powerful countries tend to dominate the news media, thereby reinforcing the status quo, whereas less influential countries remain marginalized. This 'gatekeeper' model, which Sakurai pushes forward, centralizes news around a handful of powerful countries, which may lead to a uniform global culture rather than a diverse one.

Furthermore, Idlibi's (2018) study brings up factors related to cultural sensitivities (e.g. religious criticism and sexuality), which explain why newspapers from different countries and cultures differ so much in their coverage of a particular event. She notes that such issues are often omitted in Arab reporting but not in Western reporting, which indicates more conservative attitudes in the Arab world.

The study by Sittar and Mladenčić (2021) discusses cross-cultural media studies from a different perspective. These two researchers established their own methodology to investigate what contextual factors might influence the selection, analysis and dissemination of information. In doing so, the two researchers state that this could be attributed to the difference in cultural norms and values, economic conditions and association between countries. As a result, they state that newspapers from different countries will select different news to publish or will publish the same news in a different way.

1.2.3.2. Comparing Western and Arabic Newspapers

This section differs from the previous one by focusing on the comparison of Western and Arab reporting. As mentioned, I could not find any existing studies comparing the coverage of British and Egyptian newspapers, which means that my research makes a unique contribution to the academic field. More generally, however, I was able to find research comparing the coverage of Western and Arab newspapers. For instance, I found the framing studies by Ramasubramanian and Miles (2018) on the Syrian refugee crisis and by Elyas et al. (2022) on the COVID-19 crisis highly relevant. Both studies comparing Western and Arab news media suggested the idea that geographical, sociocultural and political factors may have an impact on differences in coverage between newspapers from different countries and cultures.

I encountered the same findings in the study by Bhatti et al (2022). They state that culture can play an important extramedial role in shaping media reporting as it reflects national interests, media governance, and local culture.

Summarizing these existing studies, it is my contention that there is a crucial influence of media, language and culture in constructing a narrative around a particular event or crisis, when comparing Western and Arabic (news)media. The shaping of this complex narrative is brought about by the geographical, cultural and political context in which they are created. The purpose the newspaper in question has in mind with this complex story is then, of course, to validate its own local interests and perspectives. For example, the events in the studies I have just discussed (e.g. COVID-19) served as a platform to expose certain issues. Similarly, the QFWC can also be used as a platform to expose issues and thereby shaping public discourse on an SME in an Arab/Islamic/Gulf country.

1.2.3.3.Plurality in Comparative Media Studies

This chapter explores the importance of a high degree of pluralism when conducting comparative media studies. This pluralism, reflected in different social, cultural and political contexts, enables a researcher to gain a better understanding of the broader narrative surrounding a given event. In this discussion, 'pluralism' refers to its external dimension as discussed earlier in its definition (RSF, 2016).

For example, in Stojan's (2023) study that I discussed earlier, I noticed a low degree of pluralism as Stojan only covers one newspaper for the UK and one newspaper for Croatia. In my opinion, per country a researcher needs to include at least two newspapers, which are characterized by a whole range of different features (e.g. conservative and progressive), in order to then generalize the findings, resulting from their coverage, to the whole media landscape of that country. Therefore, I found this to be an important flaw in Stojan's (2023) study.

In contrast, the previously discussed study by Graeff et al. (2018) did have a high degree of pluralism in terms of newspaper choice, as it examined nine newspapers from four countries and in three languages. This diversity of languages leads to the representation of different perspectives, ideologies and interests, according to Graeff et al. (2018). Other factors indicating this high degree of pluralism are the size of the readership and the interests of newspaper editors. In short, this study represents a broad spectrum of perspectives and ideologies, allowing the findings to be generalized to larger populations.

Furthermore, the study of Ramasubramanian and Miles (2018), which I have already cited, also entails a high degree of pluralism because of its comparison of a large number of Arab and English news sources, which represent a wide variety in terms of distribution, political orientation, ownership and geographical context.

To make a bridge to the next section in this literature review, I briefly discuss the study by Duffy (2013), who achieved a unique degree of pluralism in his comparative media study in the UAE media landscape between both Arabic-language and English-language newspapers. This showed that journalistic cultures within the same national media landscape can differ greatly due to the influence of language and culture.

In short, these existing researches show that it is crucial to achieve a high degree of pluralism when selecting newspapers within one or more media landscapes. This pluralism greatly influences the final findings regarding differences in media coverage of international events.

1.2.3.4. Comparing Domestic Newspapers: Progressive vs. Conservative

I delved into this topic as it relates to my second research question in which I compare the coverage of two newspapers from the same country, in terms of their conservative and progressive views. As such, I am curious about how different newspapers from the same country each approach the same news item differently (due to factors such as political and social orientation) and try to get a grip on the public opinion in the country under study (and even beyond). For instance, as mentioned in my introduction, I have categorized certain newspapers as conservative (Al Ahram and The Times) and as progressive (The Guardian and AMAY). Here, as a researcher, I need to keep in mind that these terms are not uniformly interpreted, but have different meanings in different national contexts.

Since my research concerns the British and Egyptian media landscapes, I am therefore going to discuss studies from these specific contexts to get a better idea of where the biggest differences and similarities are in the coverage of a particular news event.

1.2.3.4.1. British Media Landscape

Barber's study (2022), which I have already discussed in this study, analyzed British coverage of the refugee crisis. In this study, he found that within the UK media landscape, which is globally regarded as having a high degree of pluralism, there is a high degree of (external) fragmentation on the one hand and a lack of internal pluralism on the other. To the outside world, however, it appears that there is a high degree of diversity within the UK media landscape. According to Barber (2022) this lack of

internal pluralism is because British newspapers often align themselves with broad political movements rather than specific political parties. In the context of his research on refugees, Barber (2022) ultimately found that the shaping of narratives within the British newspapers was based on the broader political orientation of the newspapers under study. In this respect, progressive newspapers such as *The Guardian* mainly brought human rights and ethics to the forefront of their coverage, while newspapers such as *The Times* brought out a completely contrasting narrative on this same topic.

1.2.3.4.2. Egyptian Media Landscape

To discuss comparative media studies of the Egyptian media landscape, I draw on three different studies in chronological order to get a picture of the transformation that the Egyptian media landscape underwent as a result of the Egyptian revolution.

First, Khamis (2011) argued in his study that as a result of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, there would be a shift towards a more pluralistic media landscape, focusing heavily on the rise of more oppositional voices. As this research was published in 2011, it can be argued that it relied mainly on the hopes that this revolution created for both Khamis and the Egyptian population (and beyond).

In Mahfouz's (2013) research, in which he analyzed the linguistic structure of the framing of some news stories related to police published in two Egyptian newspapers before January 25 Revolution, it quickly became clear that despite the Egyptian revolution, the Egyptian media landscape was still permeated by the influence of the Egyptian authorities who asserted their interests in a strict manner through the Egyptian news media.

Similarly, Hammoud (2016), in the context of the Egyptian media landscape five years after the start of the revolution, analyzed the main front-page headlines of eight Egyptian newspapers, with different mainstream readerships, reporting a single political news issue. Hammoud (2016) highlighted the manipulative way the Egyptian news media was still used as an instrument of power and control. This was achieved through the use of language and framing to force news on the Egyptian readership (and beyond), which was based on propaganda and political ideologies in line with the Egyptian authorities. These findings were also confirmed in the RSF (2023a) report, that was published roughly seven years later.

In summary, then, it is clear that there is a big difference in the degree of pluralism between the British and Egyptian media landscapes, to the advantage of the British media landscape. Again, I believe I need to take into account that the term 'pluralism' should not be uniformly interpreted, but has different meanings in different national contexts.

1.3. Conclusion

First, this literature review discussed existing research on comparisons between (Western and Arab) news media, highlighting the importance of pluralism between both domestic and foreign media landscapes. Second, the relationship between three main themes emerged strongly from this literature review, i.e. the relationship between SMEs, news coverage and public opinion, whereby news media construct narratives that reflect the socio-cultural and political context. Concerning this, it came out strongly how media, language and culture together shape these narratives about SMEs. In this regard, I believe it is essential to underline my perspective that this narrative construction works both ways, with the news media influencing the public and vice versa. Third, this literature review also gave me a better understanding of the power dynamics, ideologies and discursive strategies used by international news media in representing and approaching SMEs.

Overall, this literature review had two purposes. On the one hand, the existing studies helped me as a researcher to better understand how cross-cultural media studies should be conducted in the context of SMEs. On the other hand, the existing studies which I discussed, showed how important media presentations can be in shaping narratives and influencing public discourse on SMEs.

As such, I have gained sufficient understanding from these existing studies on how to apply this gathered information to my specific case study around the QFWC.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

For this research, I applied two methodologies: Purposive Sampling, followed by an Inductive Thematic Analysis (ITA).

2.1. Purposive Sampling

I would personally describe purposive sampling succinctly as a sampling method in which the researcher chooses specific information-rich cases from data, based on certain criteria.

For my thesis research in the context of analyzing and understanding the approaches and representations of the QFWC by two British and two Egyptian news media, the choice of a purposive sample, I believe, was the best option, emanating from the need to acquire the most relevant and meaningful data with regard to my specific research questions.

2.1.1. Advantages

The first advantage that purposive sampling brings was drawn from the research of Patton (2022), who stated that purposive sampling seeks to identify information-rich cases which can help the researcher better understand certain issues in the context of the research topic. Such cases usually do not need to be generalized to a larger population, but rather should be analyzed in-depth. This statement by Patton (2022) is confirmed in the research of Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) and Maxwell (2013). Using a different phrasing, Maxwell (2013) argues that when conducting a purposive sample, a researcher should focus on the in-depth interpretation, description and explanation of the identified cases to gain a good understanding of the research topic.

The second advantage relates to the freedom and flexibility that purposive sampling entails. Creswell (2013) argues that a researcher, when conducting a purposive sample, must also choose which and how many newspaper articles to include in his/her sample. This indicates a high degree of flexibility and freedom, which is confirmed in the research of Patton (1990) who argues herein that the inductive nature of purposive sampling allows the researcher to adapt to unexpected cases, which could be relevant to the research. I believe this enormous freedom and flexibility in conducting purposive sampling is necessary as well in my research because, in the context of the QFWC, I wanted to filter out all articles related to the pure sporting aspects of the QFWC as they were irrelevant in view of

my research questions. In addition, this freedom and flexibility also helped to create a clear picture of newspaper coverage in the period before, during and after the QFWC, which would allow me to compile a more complete and nuanced picture of the representation of the QFWC by the four examined newspapers.

2.1.2. Disadvantages

First, subjectivity is inherently linked to purposive sampling, which introduces biases that affect the results of the sample. But at the same time, this subjectivity can actually make this methodology more efficient in selecting relevant cases, argues Tongco (2007). In contrast, Cresswell (2013) argues that this inherent subjectivity can lead to skepticism among readers of the study, as they have no idea whether this sample is reliable, since purposive sampling provides few details about the selection process.

Second, Patton (1990) notes that, despite the in-depth insights of information-rich cases that purposive sampling brings along, the findings are (usually) not statistically generalizable to a larger population. In the case of my study, this means that the information on the QFWC from the newspaper articles, which I included in my sample, doesn't necessarily represent the newspaper's full news coverage on this topic. As such, I cannot simply generalize this information.

The third drawback, but also the most obvious one, is that purposive sampling carries the risk that certain crucial cases (online newspaper articles) are not included in the sample due to coincidence or researcher error, when they could have been valuable in answering the research questions of the study (Patton, 1990).

Overall, this methodology enabled me to go deeper into a limited number of newspaper articles. Being familiar with online newspaper articles at this stage of my research, which a purposive sampling naturally entails, made it easier for me to conduct the subsequent ITA.

2.2. Inductive Thematic Analysis (ITA)

I would briefly describe ITA as an inductive methodology that involves the researcher, without prior hypotheses, analyzing data, followed by identifying patterns and eventually themes.

Regarding the difference between an inductive and deductive approach to thematic analysis, Joffe (2012) argues that deductive thematic analysis is built on predetermined theoretical concepts. In

contrast, the ITA, which has an inductive approach, allows themes to emerge from the raw data, with the researcher therefore having no expectations or pre-determined theoretical frameworks prior to their research.

Braun and Clarke (2007, 2012) agree with this description by Joffe (2012) and add that the ITA, although an inductive approach, is also inherently intertwined with deductive thinking. According to them, a research is always influenced by the researcher's pre-existing knowledge, which is influenced by his/her interpretation of the data. In other words, Braun and Clarke (2007, 2012) argue that hundred percent objectivity in conducting an ITA is impossible to achieve because of the intrinsic subjectivity that comes along with it. For instance, in the case of my study, I decided to eliminate all online newspaper articles with irrelevant sporting aspects of the FWC. This divide between sporting and non-sporting aspects can be interpreted differently by different researchers.

In his study, Christou (2023) underlines the importance of what kind of thematic analysis a researcher wants to conduct. For instance, he argues that two approaches are possible. First, a researcher can choose to conduct a rich thematic analysis, which analyzes the entire dataset (all newspaper articles in the sample). Second, the researcher can rather choose to delve deeper into only some of the information that emerges from this dataset (and thus not discuss all the themes). In this second approach, a researcher may choose to go deeper into the semantic approach and/or the latent approach. In the semantic approach, the researcher focuses on the superficial meaning of the dataset, addressing issues such as the use of language in a text. In a latent approach, the researcher delves deeper into underlying ideas, dynamics and ideologies.

For my research, I adopted an ambitious hybrid approach, i.e. a rich thematic description of the entire dataset (as far as possible) in combination with applying semantic and latent approaches to the codes (from the selected news articles of my purposive sample). This approach provided a nuanced analysis that addressed the literal content and the broader context of the online newspaper articles. While this approach is similar to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which like the ITA also discusses semantic and latent elements, there are notable differences, such as the fact that CDA does not classify themes when extracting information from the dataset.

Finally, I would like to mention that to conduct this ITA, I followed Christou's (2023) six-step plan⁴. I sometimes deviated from this and went my own way, as this was sometimes more suitable for my research.

⁴ 1: Familiarization with the Research Data. 2: Generation of Initial Codes. 3: Searching for and Reviewing Themes. 4: Theme Definition. 5: Creating Conceptual Diagrams and Theory-Building. 6: Producing the Final Report (Christou, 2023)

This methodology was chosen mainly because the ITA allowed me to observe patterns in a structured way, on the one hand, and identify and then analyze the main themes from the collected online newspaper articles in my purposive sample, on the other. In this inductive way, the similarities and differences in the coverage of the four newspapers emerged clearly. Additionally, identifying themes also helped uncovering if these four newspapers could potentially contribute to shaping and influencing public discourse around the QFWC.

Chapter 3. Data Analysis

3.1. Data Collection: Purposive Sampling

Using purposive sampling, I collected news coverage from Egyptian and British newspapers about the QFWC.

In terms of time frame, I limited myself to a specific period of intense coverage, namely the period of one month before, during and one month after the QFWC (20 October 2022 - 18 January 2023).

I decided to look for a balance between articles that, on the one hand, gave a general overview of the QFWC, which helped me understand the general tone and approach of each newspaper's coverage. On the other hand, I looked for newspaper articles that went deeper into specific aspects surrounding this QFWC. Since this is a fairly small-scale study and I conducted this research alone, I was in a situation where I was forced to set priorities. As such, I focused primarily on the topics which were most prominent in the news coverage and which seemed most relevant in view of my research questions. As already mentioned, in doing so, I filtered out from my sample the newspaper articles that were (almost) pure football news (match reports and the like), as this information was irrelevant to my research.

In carrying out the purposive sampling method, I went my own way without sticking to any particular firm theory. Thus, I conducted purposive sampling for all four newspapers using my own roadmap, which consists of two "rounds". In the first round, I looked for online newspaper articles that were within the time frame of my research, that seemed interesting to me just by reading the title, and in which pure football news seemed at first glance not to be the (central) focus. I then included this large quantity of newspaper articles in this first round of my sample.

In the second round of my purposive sample, I read all these articles from the first round and eventually chose the online newspaper articles that seemed useful to give me an in-depth insight into each newspaper's coverage of the QFWC, and that seemed most relevant to me in view of my research questions. This is in line with the theories of Patton (2022), Maxwell (2013) and Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011), which I have already discussed in this thesis.

Moreover, in conducting this sample, I was keen to take into account the selection of online newspaper articles which had been published before, during and after the QFWC, as I believed that this would enable me to compile a more complete and nuanced picture of the representation of the FWC by the four examined newspapers.

Lastly, I would also like to mention that I did not include "editorials" or "opinion pieces" in my sample, as this would distort my findings. Thus, by filtering these types of newspaper articles, I was only left with regular newspaper articles.

I will now briefly discuss how I conducted my data collection for each newspaper separately. I did this in the following order: Al Ahram, The Times, AMAY and The Guardian. This order allowed me to get an idea of the differences between the representation of the QFWC from country to country after conducting my sampling for the first two newspapers.

Using Table 1, which can be found in the Appendix, I discuss the most striking key points regarding the results of my purposive sample.

3.1.1. Al Ahram

One striking thing is that when I conducted the purposive sample of Al Ahram's online news coverage, I struggled to find a large number of relevant newspaper articles that were both relevant and not pure football news. This challenge was reflected in the many searches I needed to conduct to arrive at a good first round sample (cf. in Table 1).

After conducting the second round of my purposive sample, I was left with 31 newspaper articles from Al Ahram's coverage. This was more in comparison to the samples of the other three newspapers (cf. Table 1) as Al Ahram's newspaper articles were short in length and I needed to obtain more in-depth information.

3.1.2. The Times

For The Times, I was satisfied with using only one search, as its search filter is well developed. When entering new searches, such as "World Cup Football" for example, I only came across overlapping relevant articles that I had already included in my sample after doing the "World Cup Qatar"-search. Besides, I was also already satisfied with the variety of online newspaper articles, so I did not need to search further. However, it is important to mention that I could not find out how many search results this one search yielded, because The Times' website could only give a one-year time frame (instead of three months). This frame showed that The Times had published about 1,400 articles related to this search. Therefore, I marked this as "N/A"(not available) in Table 1.

What struck me strongly when conducting the second round of my purposive sample of The Times' online newspaper articles, compared to Al Ahram's online newspaper articles, is that these online newspaper articles were, on the one hand, a lot longer and, on the other hand, of a higher level in terms of content quality.

3.1.3 Al Masry Al Youm

As in the case of my Al Ahram sample, for the AMAY sample, I also needed multiple searches to achieve a good sample, for the same reason.

Moreover, conducting AMAY's sample posed an additional challenge because this newspaper's website does not have search filters, so I was unable to search for articles by date, which was inconvenient. Therefore, I decided to enter all my searches in Google Search. For example, "كأس العالم قطر"site:www.almasryalyoum.com" ("World Cup Qatar"). The disadvantage of this is that it was almost impossible to determine how many news articles AMAY listed after entering my searches. Therefore, I marked this as "N/A" in Table 1, as I did for The Times (cf. in Table 1).

Another thing that stood out about AMAY's searches was that the articles I found through this search that were published before and during the QFWC mainly published a lot of irrelevant news (apart from pure football news) about: the time of matches, the open free online channels available to watch the FWC matches and general tips for fans going to Qatar. In short, I had to filter out these irrelevant articles from all the searches of the first round of my sample and focus mainly on checking titles that seemed more relevant to my research. This went very easily given the flexible nature of this kind of sample.

3.1.4 The Guardian

Searching for newspaper articles on The Guardian's website went smoothly. Nevertheless, I used two searches to make sure that all key topics around the QFWC were covered in my sample, so that I could capture as much of the entire discourse around the QFWC, which was relevant to my research.

Coincidentally, as with AMAY, I had to enter my searches via Google Search, as The Guardian's search engine is automatically linked to it. For example, "The Qatar World Cup site:www.theguardian.com". This presented the same problem as the sample for AMAY's articles, in

terms of determining the quantity of articles after entering my search. Therefore, I also marked this here as "N/A in Table 1.

Conclusion

Although the purposive sample is based on the subjectivity of me as a researcher, I still believe that this was the best possible way of collecting newspaper articles for this particular study and its research questions. Besides, the implementation of this methodology went smoothly because of the flexibility it gave me in searching for the best information-rich online newspaper articles. Additionally, I already noticed how differently the QFWC was portrayed by these four newspapers.

Furthermore, for each newspaper I categorized all news articles from the second round to already get a clear overview of which topics (surrounding the FWC) were most prominent in the news coverages under study (cf. Table 1). This was useful because of the chaos, which was created by the big difference in topics between the coverage of the four newspapers, both between countries and within countries. However, there was also overlap here and there. This categorization (cf. in Table 1) had two advantages. First, the overview from this categorization enabled me to avoid including newspaper articles on certain topics in the sample that hardly featured in that particular newspaper's coverage, indicating that these topics were irrelevant. Second, this categorization, which gave me a better understanding of the narrative surrounding the FWC, enabled me to implement the ITA in a better and more structured way.

Overall, I am confident that I have a good and reliable sample for each of the four newspapers, which gave me an in-depth insight into each newspaper's coverage of the QFWC.

3.2. Inductive Thematic Analysis (ITA)

In my chapter on the theoretical framework, I already explained why I chose the ITA as the central methodology for this research. In doing so, I also pointed out that to conduct the ITA, I would follow Christou's (2023) six-step plan in a flexible way, in line with my central research topic and my two research questions.

Phase 1: Familiarization with the Research Data

More specifically, this phase centered around attentively reading the online newspaper articles from my sample in an active and repetitive way, looking for meanings and themes. Since I had already done this during my purposive sampling, I was already quite familiar with these newspaper articles. To achieve this I simultaneously made notes in a separate Word document on each article from each of the four newspapers to write down initial ideas for coding before I started the more formal coding process.

Phase 2: Generation of Initial Codes

In this phase, I started by coding the collected online newspaper articles in more detail, followed by categorizing the resulting data into meaningful themes. This categorization gave me a simplified overview of the articles, allowing me to better focus on their specific features. To avoid missing any aspect, I paid equal attention to each article in my sample. This forced me to delve deeper into the content of each article, which allowed me to inductively identify valuable and relevant elements that could eventually support themes and sub-themes. In summary, coding and organizing data was essential during this phase of my ITA.

Phase 3: Searching for and Reviewing Themes

During this phase, I had to become aware that there is simply no uniformly right or wrong approach for researchers to determine the prevalence of a theme. Furthermore, it was crucial for me to understand exactly what a theme means. I needed to be aware that the relevance, what Christou (2023) describes as 'keyness', of a theme is determined by the extent to which it encompasses an essential aspect of my research questions. In other words, the themes had to be consistent with and an answer to my research questions, as they form the guiding framework of this thesis research.

The third phase of this ITA actually consists of two essential steps: theme search and theme assessment. As I mentioned when discussing the implementation of the purposive sampling, I had already built up a thorough knowledge of the selected online newspaper articles. This gave me a preliminary structured picture of the four newspapers' discourse on the QFWC. Therefore, in this third phase of the ITA, it was easier to look for codes and assign them to specific themes.

As soon as I had searched for the themes, I had to assess them (step 2 of phase 3). Therefore, I re-evaluated and analyzed the specific codes from the collected online newspaper articles that had

already been assigned to themes. To explain how I did this, I now use a theme that was discussed in Al Ahram: "General Perception of the Organization of the QFWC ". For this theme, I paid attention to the consistency and relevance of the codes from the online newspaper articles related to this theme. Finally, after careful evaluation and assessment of the specific codes, I was able to determine that this theme was adequate, relevant and useful for understanding perceptions and evaluations of the QFWC.

In my view, it was also essential to ensure that this ITA did not lead to 'inconclusive analyses', as Christou (2023) puts it. This term implies that themes would be internally inconsistent or have too much overlap. I therefore took great care to avoid such problems by ensuring that all (sub)themes were clearly distinguishable and represented unique aspects of the data. I think it is crucial as a researcher to remind here that this study, like any study, faces some limitations, and I would also like to acknowledge the biases in my approach that I used in my research. In doing so, I must acknowledge that there will always be a certain amount of overlap between the different (sub)themes, something that I believe is inevitable.

Finally, this third phase of the ITA ended when I had gained a thorough understanding of the different themes, their interrelationships and the narrative aspects I wanted to present. Ultimately, I established different themes for each newspaper because of their diverse approach to reporting on the common research topic of the QFWC. After completing the second step from the third phase of Christou's roadmap (2023), I drafted final themes and sub-themes for each newspaper (cf. table of contents).

Phase 4: Theme Definition

With regard to the fourth step from Christou's (2023) roadmap, I followed a two-part process:

Firstly, a comprehensive discussion of each theme, followed by its definition. The first step of this fourth phase of the ITA consisted of an in-depth analysis of the story that highlights each theme. Moreover, as I indicated in my theoretical framework, I will also focus on both the semantic and latent meanings of the ITA in this extended discussion. Throughout this discussion, I firstly made extensive use of direct excerpts⁵ from the newspaper articles, including verbatim quotations (or direct speech), ensuring that my arguments do not appear purely anecdotal, which is in accordance with Christou's (2023) theory. I will call these excerpts 'codes'. From some of the articles in my purposive sample, I did not extract verbatim quotes, nor did I pay specific attention to them at this stage of the

⁵ These excerpts were translated by the author of this thesis.

ITA. Nevertheless, they were very useful in understanding, interpreting and discussing the selected newspapers' online coverage of the QFWC. They are listed in the bibliography.

Secondly, I also discuss how these individual themes relate to each other and to the overarching story I want to convey about these separate four newspapers' coverage of the QFWC.

Furthermore, each time after discussing a theme in detail, I went on to define that theme, as Christou's (2023) second step recommends. Nevertheless, for each article I discuss the definition first, followed by the discussion of the themes, because I think this order makes it easier for the reader to follow.

Lastly, this phase (and this chapter in general) does not refer in-depth to my research questions yet, as I leave this open for the fourth chapter on the discussion and interpretation of my findings.

3.2.1. Al Ahram

Theme 1: General Perception of the Organization of the QFWC

This theme deals with the evaluation of the overall organization of the QFWC, as revealed in the coverage by Al Ahram. A variety of factors are covered, including infrastructure, logistics, security, the reactions of fans and football stars, and the effect of this SME on the international perception of Qatar (and Arabs) in general.

What is remarkable is that literally nothing negative is mentioned regarding the perception of the organization of the QFWC. For example, Al Ahram is positive about Qatar's success in adapting to local conditions, preparing and implementing infrastructure and logistics, and addressing security measures. This is made clear in the following statement in one of the online newspaper articles of Al Ahram:

*The fan areas witness an intense security presence that guarantees a safe experience for all fans and families, as the security personnel focus on ensuring smooth movement, maintaining safety, and providing all aspects of assistance and guidance with a smile that embodies the welcome and joy of receiving Qatar's guests*⁶ (Al Ahram⁷, 2022/ November 25).

⁶ وتشهد مناطق المشجعين حضوراً أمنياً مكثفاً يضمن تجربة آمنة لكل المشجعين والعائلات، حيث ينصب تركيز أفراد الأمن على ضمان سلامة الحركة والحفاظ على السلامة وتقديم كل أوجه المساعدة والإرشاد بابتسامة تجسد الترحيب والبهجة باستقبال ضيوف قطر

⁷ The author was most of the time not mentioned in Al Ahram's online newspaper articles.

Importantly, Al Ahram sees the event as an opportunity for Qatar to prove itself internationally, which is supported by mentioning the high visitor numbers and positive reactions from fans and football stars. Moreover, by promoting an image of Qatar as successful, safe and hospitable, Al Ahram seeks to challenge and positively change prevailing negative stereotypes about the Arab world. This can then lead to a shift in public opinion and attitudes. Al Ahram quoted Jenis Berg, CEO of the Harris County Sports Authority of Houston and a member of the 2026 World Cup Organizing Committee:

Qatar organized a great tournament and succeeded in impressing everyone... I think when Houston and the rest of the American cities host the 2026 tournament, it will be a great challenge to repeat what Qatar has done in organizing at the highest level and with the utmost distinction⁸ (Al Ahram, 2023a, January 8).

As this quote illustrates, this positive vocabulary, which suggests a high regard for Qatar's efforts, helps to form a positive representation of the QFWC. Next to that, Al Ahram uses direct speech, which creates a sense of authenticity and credibility. Moreover, it has more impact if this praise for Qatar comes from an American woman's mouth - an outsider, from the West. By distancing oneself from the person delivering the praise, the praise becomes more persuasive as it comes from this unexpected Western source rather than through indirect speech or from Al Ahram itself.

In short, this theme shows perceptions of Qatar's success and performance as host of the FWC. Compared to the other three newspapers under study, this Egyptian state-run newspaper's coverage of Qatar as a host country is way more positive, which could be interpreted as a form of propaganda, reflecting the strong political relations between Qatar and Egypt, which the Egyptian authorities want to maintain.

Since this positive perception of Qatar seems to be prevalent in all of Al Ahram's coverage, this theme is connected to all of Al Ahram's other seven themes.

Theme 2: Criticism & Controversies surrounding the QFWC

This theme focuses on a wide range of controversies that have emerged surrounding the hosting of the QFWC.

More specifically, these range from concerns about the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, to the treatment of migrant workers. What is striking is that whenever Al Ahram raises the specific issue of

⁸ قطر نظمت بطولة رائعة ونجحت في إبهار الجميع... أعتقد عندما تستضيف هيوستن وبقية المدن الأمريكية بطولة 2026، سيكون التحدي كبير لنكرر ماقامت به قطر من تنظيم على أعلى مستوى وبمنتهى التميز.

migrant workers, it does so only by simultaneously also pointing out the improvements regarding working conditions in Qatar. This becomes clear from this simple example from Al Ahram's coverage: "As for the situation of migrant workers in Qatar, Doha has taken a package of reforms to improve their conditions." (Al Ahram, 2022b, December)⁹. As such, I could find few if any codes within this theme that dealt with human rights criticism, as such codes mainly fell under the third theme, which focuses on refuting criticism. Al Ahram's avoidance and restraint of direct criticism and controversy possibly reflects Egypt's political reality and its relationship with Qatar, as Al Ahram is an Egyptian state-run newspaper. Regarding issues related to the LGBTQ community, the RSF report (2023a) and Idlibi's research (2018) discussed earlier showed that these issues are not in line with the Egyptian state's policies, which is why Al Ahram hardly touches upon this issue.

However, I found two forms of general criticism about the QFCW in the coverage which was not linked to the refutation of it. First, the support of the Dutch national team coach Louis Van Gaal for any fans boycotting the tournament. He said that: "I think they are right to do it because they believe in it, so there is no problem with it" ¹⁰ (Al Ahram, 2022c, November 16). Second, Al Ahram pushes forward an interview with another well-known figure from the world of football, Marco Rose, coach of German football team Leipzig, who says he is not in favor of boycotting the FWC. Instead, Rose welcomes discussions about the problems in Qatar, saying the following:

I think it's good and meaningful that politics, human rights organizations, and also the public are there," Rose said in remarks to the Leipziger Volkszeitung newspaper on Monday. You can stay in touch locally, keep flagging issues, check back on things that have been started..." To interrupt, in the sense of not going there, not communicating, not pointing things out, that means ignoring and looking the other way in my opinion," he said. ¹¹ (Al Ahram, 2022k, November 21).

Although this is only vague criticism, it is nevertheless raised by Al Ahram. This can be interpreted as a reflection of Al Ahram's openness to touch upon criticism of the QFCW, indicating the newspaper's willingness to present different perspectives in spite of the country's general political stance. It is possible that this is an attempt by Al Ahram to emphasize that it remains a reliable and impartial news source.

Next to that this theme also addresses broader controversies, such as the rescheduling of the global football season to avoid the heat of the Qatari summer, as well as criticisms and rebuttals of "hiring" fans. Regarding criticism about rescheduling the global football season, Al Ahram discussed well-

⁹ وبالنسبة لوضع العمالة المهاجرة في قطر، اتخذت الدوحة حزمة إصلاحات لتحسين أوضاعهم.

¹⁰ أعتقد أنهم على حق في فعل ذلك لأنهم يؤمنون به، لذلك لا مشكلة في الأمر
¹¹ وقال روزة في تصريحات لصحيفة "لايبتسجر فولكس تسايتونج" اليوم الاثنين: "أعتقد أنه من الجيد والهادف أن تتواجد هناك السياسة، ومنظمات حقوق الإنسان، وأيضا الجماهير... يمكنك أن تبقى على تواصل محليا، وتستمر في الإشارة للمشكلات، والتحقق من الأمور التي تم البدء بها... وقال: "المقاطعة، بمعنى عدم الذهاب إلى هناك، عدم التواصل، عدم الإشارة إلى الأشياء، هذا يعني التجاهل والنظر في الاتجاه الآخر في رأيي.

known Manchester United footballer Bruno Fernandez' interview with Sky Sports, in which he stated the following: "The World Cup at this time is not the ideal time to play it, for everyone - the kids are in school and people are working"¹² (Al Ahram, 2022a, November 14). Lastly, Al Ahram also discussed the debate about separating politics and sport, using the controversies surrounding the QFWC to discuss broader geopolitical issues. This wide range of topics shows how complex and multifaceted the controversies surrounding the QFWC were.

Overall, this theme contrasts sharply with the first theme as it brings to the surface that Al Ahram, despite the predominantly positive portrayal of the organization of the FWC, also pays attention, albeit to a lesser extent, to the critical aspects of the FWC, especially in the area of human rights. In other words, this Egyptian state-run newspaper is not blindly positive about the event, but strives for a more nuanced portrait that leaves room for different voices and points of view. It is notable however, that Al Ahram, when discussing the criticisms and controversies, tends to go into Qatar and FIFA's measures and reforms to protect them, so to speak.

In terms of semantics, the Arabic codes from the online newspaper articles use a formal, rather official language. This is consistent with the fact that Al Ahram is a state newspaper. Furthermore, it is notable that when Al Ahram refers to criticisms and controversies related to Qatar, it often does so through direct speech. By doing so, the statement gains authenticity and engagement. On the other hand, direct speech can allow the newspaper to refrain from expressing an explicit opinion, thus avoiding subjectivity. The newspaper thus seeks to place full responsibility for the expressed opinions on the individuals quoted in the direct speech. In a media landscape like Egypt's, this method of reporting can be particularly useful.

The public discourse surrounding the QFWC is heavily influenced by Al Ahram's coverage through subtle criticisms, direct third-party speech and balanced or even positive coverage. This choice by Al Ahram to present little direct criticism of the QFWC contributes to the shaping of a more positive narrative about the QFWC, by partially ignoring and/or softening the critical aspects of the event, which is in line with the gatekeeping model discussed earlier.

Theme 3: Self-Assessment & Refutation of Criticism by Qatar and FIFA

This theme represents Al Ahram's coverage on both the proactive steps and the steps during (and after) the FWC that Qatar and FIFA took to achieve three things: to counter outside criticism, to promote a positive perception of the QFWC and lastly to express their pride in their achievements.

¹² كأس العالم في هذه الفترة ليست الوقت المثالي للعبها، للجميع - الأطفال في المدارس فيما الناس يعملون

Qatar, and more specifically the CEO of the QFWC, defends itself in the following way in Al Ahram's coverage:

Al Khater added, "Since the State of Qatar had the honor of hosting the World Cup, there have been continuous attempts for 12 years to distort this tournament," stressing that Qatar will organize an exceptional tournament, and this will appear within a few days.¹³ (Al Ahram, 2022b, November 16).

Furthermore, the president of FIFA Gianni Infantino, also defended the hosting of the QFWC, as was described by Al Ahram:

Whoever visited Qatar discovered that what he knew about this country or was being communicated to him was incorrect, and it was an opportunity for us to communicate together, and this is one of the most important points of legacy related to the World Cup.¹⁴ (Al Ahram, 2022u, December 16).

Another online newspaper article by Al Ahram also discusses FIFA's rebuttal to criticism of the FWC, as seen here:

The host nation came under scrutiny over issues of human rights, treatment of migrant workers and the illegality of homosexuality, while FIFA wrote to all participating countries urging them to focus on football... Qatar rejected the criticism it was subjected to because of the employment situation and human rights in the country, indicating that it had taken a package of reforms related to employment. (2022b, December 19)¹⁵.

In addition, Al Ahram also highlights the sensitive and human side of FIFA, discussing a speech by FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who stated the following:

Every person who dies represents a tragedy for us, the family and everyone. There are people who died during the construction of the stadiums, and the 400 or 500 who died, died naturally while working in the country since 2014 ... We must be careful, so as not to create an impression of something different or give a different picture of reality. We spare no effort to develop legislation and regulations that preserve the safety of workers. (Al Ahram, 2022f, December 16)¹⁶

¹³ وأضاف الخاطر "منذ أن حظيت دولة قطر بشرف استضافة كأس العالم كانت هناك محاولات مستمرة على مدار 12 عاما لتشويه هذه البطولة"، مؤكدا أن قطر سنتظم بطولة استثنائية وسيظهر ذلك خلال أيام قليلة

¹⁴ من زار قطر اكتشف أن ما كان يعلمه عن هذا البلد أو يتم توصيله له غير صحيح، وكانت فرصة لتواصل معاء وهذا من أهم نقاط الإرث المرتبطة بكأس العالم

¹⁵ وتعرضت الدولة المضيفة للتدقيق فيما يتعلق بقضايا حقوق الإنسان ومعاملة العمال المهاجرين و عدم شرعية المثلية الجنسية، فيما كتب الاتحاد الدولي لكرة القدم (فيفا) إلى كل الدول المشاركة في البطولة وحثهم على التركيز على كرة القدم... ورفضت قطر الانتقادات التي تعرضت لها بسبب وضع العمالة وحقوق الإنسان في البلاد، مشيرة إلى أنها أتخذت حزمة من الإصلاحات تتعلق بالعمالة.

¹⁶ كل شخص يتوفى يمثل مأساة لنا وللعائلة وللجميع، هناك أشخاص توفوا أثناء تشييد الملاعب، أما الـ 400 أو الـ 500 الذين توفوا، توفوا بصورة طبيعية أثناء عملهم في منذ عام 2014... يجب أن نتوخى الدقة، حتى لا نخلق انطبعا عن شيء مختلف أو نعطي صورة مختلفة عن الواقع، لا نتدخر جهدا في وضع تشريعات وتنظيمات تحفظ سلامة العاملين

This theme indicates that Al Ahram's coverage of this issue is undoubtedly another reflection of the (improved) relations between Egypt and Qatar, from which arises a desire to portray Qatar and the hosting of the QFWC in a positive light. This is achieved by minimizing criticism (especially regarding human rights) of the FWC and emphasizing the defense of the organizers, thereby the text of these newspaper articles contributes to the normalization of controversies surrounding this SME. As with the previous theme, it is striking that Al Ahram often uses direct language. This ensures authenticity and engagement on the one hand and avoidance of subjectivity on the other. Again, full responsibility for the opinions expressed is placed on those quoted in direct speech. Thus, Al Ahram manages to come across as a newspaper reporting in an objective neutral manner. This points to the power of the media to promote or suppress a particular narrative.

Overall, this theme confirms the strong influence of not only Al Ahram, but especially the Egyptian state, in shaping the public discourse around controversial issues such as the QFWC. This theme goes in dialogue with the previous theme as it answers all the criticisms and controversies surrounding the FWC.

Theme 4: Unity & Inclusiveness during the QFWC

This theme covers aspects related to accessibility for and participation of people with disabilities, contributions of women in football, and fostering unity and cultural exchange.

This theme more specifically highlights how Qatar achieved this inclusivity through, for example, innovations such as the audio description commentary service for the blind and visually impaired (Al Ahram, 2022q, December 7). Furthermore, it features persons with disabilities actively contributing as role models and ambassadors. This is reflected in Al Ahram as follows:

Since the announcement that Qatar won the honor of organizing the 22nd edition of the World Cup, the country has been keen to include the requirements of fans with disabilities in all aspects of planning and operational processes for organizing the tournament, with the active participation of the disabled community across the country.¹⁷ (Al Ahram, 2022o, December 3).

It is also worth noting that the term 'شرف' (honor), when describing the FWC together with the host country Qatar, often appeared in the codes of Al Ahram's online newspaper articles. What this suggests is an attempt by Al Ahram to position the QFWC as a source of pride for the entire Arab

¹⁷ ومنذ الإعلان عن فوز قطر بشرف تنظيم النسخة الثانية والعشرين من كأس العالم، حرصت الدولة على تضمين متطلبات المشجعين من ذوي الإعاقة في كافة جوانب التخطيط والعمليات التشغيلية الخاصة بتنظيم البطولة، بمشاركة فاعلة من مجتمع ذوي الإعاقة في أنحاء البلاد.

world. In addition, this theme highlights the historical involvement of women in football, with the first female referees at an FWC leading the match (Al Ahram, 2022n, November 29). Finally, it highlights football's role in promoting unity and cultural exchange by bringing together people of different cultures, backgrounds and affiliations. These initiatives and efforts demonstrate the way the QFWC has helped promote unity and inclusiveness on a global scale. Al Ahram highlights this in its description of the FWC opening ceremony:

The message of the 30-minute concert will be an invitation to the whole world to come to Qatar. It revolves around the rapprochement of all peoples of mankind and overcoming differences through humanity, respect and inclusiveness, as football allows us to come together as one tribe whose planet is the tent in which we live. (Al Ahram, 2022d, November 20) ¹⁸.

Furthermore this focus on cultural exchange is also evident in Al Ahram's coverage of the following statement by Hassan Al Thawadi¹⁹, in the form of a direct speech:

Unifying people of different races, languages and religions, breaking social barriers between them, and bridging the gap between East and West, all of which come within the sustainable legacy of the first edition of the World Cup hosted by the Arab world.²⁰ (Al Ahram, 2022t, December 13).

As a state-run newspaper, Al Ahram's coverage of Qatar's efforts and progress to promote accessibility and inclusiveness indicates first and foremost that this state-run newspaper wants to portray Qatar in a good light with a view to maintaining and even improving diplomatic relations with the country. In this context, Al Ahram seeks to influence the opinion of its Egyptian readership in Qatar's favor by portraying Qatar as a host country to be associated with diversity, innovation, inclusion and cultural exchange.

Second, Al Ahram also places great emphasis on universal themes of humanity and unity, and on the idea of the world coming together in an Arab country. In doing so, Al Ahram seeks to underscore the idea that Arab nations are at the forefront of promoting global unity and cooperation by bridging cultural and political differences, which results in influencing public discourse both in Egypt and in the wider Arab world. This theme of Arab solidarity is particularly reflected in the following theme. In doing so, Al Ahram uses not only words with strong positive connotations, but also metaphors to convince her readership of this idea even more.

¹⁸ وستكون رسالة الحفل الذي يستغرق 30 دقيقة بمثابة دعوة إلى العالم أجمع كي يأتي إلى قطر، وتتمحور حول التقارب بين كل شعوب البشرية والتغلب على الاختلافات من خلال الإنسانية والاحترام والشمولية، حيث أن كرة القدم تسمح لنا بالتقارب كقبيلة واحدة كوكبها هو الخيمة التي نعيش فيها.

¹⁹ The Secretary-General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy for the local organizing committee of the QFWC.

²⁰ توحيد الناس على اختلاف أعراقهم ولغاتهم ودياناتهم، وكسر الحواجز الاجتماعية بينهم، وسد الفجوة بين الشرق والغرب، تأتي كلها ضمن الإرث المستدام لأول نسخة من المونديال يستضيفها العالم العربي

Theme 5: Arabicity

This theme discusses the ways in which the QFWC helped to achieve four things. First, to foster Arab identity and solidarity; second, to highlight Arab achievements worldwide; third, to provide a platform for cultural exchange; and finally, to change the overall perception of the Arab world.

The "Aricity" theme emphasizes that the QFWC played an important role in reviving Arab identity and strengthening Arab solidarity, as exemplified in Al Ahram's coverage by the emergence of "a new feeling of Arabicity". This is clear in the following quote from Al Ahram:

*The new Arabicity that we are looking for is what the masses conveyed when they went out in Qatar to support the Arab players... The unifying Arab identity of our peoples cannot be denied... It is the Arab spirit that cannot be ignored by events or throughout history.*²¹ (Al Ahram, 2022ab, December 28)

Of particular importance here is the Arabic term "العروبة" ("Aricity"), which I already elaborated on in the introduction of this thesis.

Moreover, this SME was a symbolic milestone for Arab countries, where Qatar's success was seen as a success for all Arabs. As such, it reinforced the belief in the ability of Arab countries to host this kind of global event. The QFWC also provided a platform and an opportunity to present Arab hospitality, culture and identity to the world. In this regard, Al Ahram quotes Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, stating:

*In conclusion, we have fulfilled our promise to organize an exceptional tournament from the Arab countries, which provided an opportunity for the peoples of the world to learn about the richness of our culture and the originality of our values.*²² (Al Ahram, 2022w, December 19)

In the same context Al Ahram quotes Barshim, a Qatari Olympic champion, as follows:

*There is no doubt that hosting the football festival in an Arab and Muslim country is a rare opportunity that may not be repeated. I wish all participants to spend wonderful moments in the most important event on the sports scene, as the tournament is an opportunity for them to learn about our culture and the Arab hospitality that we are famous for, and to take a close look at various cultures.*²³ (Al Ahram, 2022d, November 16).

²¹ العروبة الجديدة التي نبحث عنها هي التي ترجمتها الجماهير عندما خرجت في قطر تشجع اللاعبين العرب،... الهوية العربية الجامعة لشعبنا، لا يمكن إنكارها،... إنها الروح العربية التي لا يمكن تجاهلها للأحداث أو عبر التاريخ.

²² ومع الختام نكون أوفينا بوعدنا بتنظيم بطولة استثنائية من بلاد العرب، أتاحت الفرصة لشعوب العالم لتتعرف على ثراء ثقافتنا وأصالة قيمنا

²³ لا شك أن استضافة المهرجان الكروي في دولة عربية ومسلمة يشكل فرصة نادرة قد لا تتكرر، وأتمنى لجميع المشاركين قضاء لحظات رائعة في الحدث الأكثر أهمية على الساحة الرياضية، حيث تعد البطولة فرصة لهم للتعرف على ثقافتنا وكرم الضيافة العربية التي نشتهر بها، وإلقاء نظرة عن قرب على ثقافات متنوعة

These codes show that, despite many of the negative stereotypes and perceptions often presented in the Western media, Al Ahram is keen to report that this SME acts as a platform for promoting Arab culture and identity on the world stage, thereby portraying the Arab world in a positive light. This focus on Arab culture was also achieved, among other things, when the Qatari Emir handed the traditional Arab "bisht"²⁴ to Lionel Messi when receiving the World Cup (Al Ahram, 2022w, December 19). Moreover, the QFWC served as a cultural bridge, using sport to rewrite the narrative of the Arab world and to create new, more positive perceptions, both in the Arab world itself and on the global stage. Furthermore, the QFWC also acted as an expression of Arab unity and solidarity, which was fuelled by the atmosphere of the Arab fans. Al Ahram states as follows: "The Qatar World Cup is another opportunity through which the Arab peoples express their common pulse and their spontaneous joy in any victory."²⁵ (Al Ahram, 2022p, December 6).

The next code from Al Ahram's coverage was eye-catching:

*From the Arabian Sea in the south to Turkey and the Mediterranean Sea in the north, our region had its image at the end of 2022. Shining for the world, whether in Sharm Al Sheikh when the world gathered there in "COP27". Or in Qatar when the world came to play football in the 2022 Qatar World Cup, an event that brought together the Arabs and re-presented Arabicity and its culture in a new spirit.*²⁶ (Al Ahram, 2022ab, December 28)

This code suggests that Al Ahram, as a state-run newspaper, seeks to connect Qatar's success in hosting the QFWC with Egypt's hosting of COP27 (climate summit). On the one hand, this suggests that this Egyptian state-run newspaper is seeking to put Egypt on the same level as Qatar to position itself as a country with a global reputation as well. On the other hand, it suggests that Al Ahram is seeking to use this statement to signal the contemporary global success of the Arab world, of which Egypt and Qatar are at the forefront. This, of course, again reflects the strong Qatar-Egypt relations. In the context of the QFWC, this strong relationship is confirmed in the following code, which quotes Dr. Ashraf Sobhi, the Egyptian Minister of Youth and Sports:

The Minister of Youth and Sports affirmed the depth of relations between the two brotherly countries, expressing his happiness that the sisterly State of Qatar hosted the most important sporting event in the world, pointing out that this is the first

²⁴ a traditional men's cloak

²⁵ ويعتبر مونديال قطر فرصة أخرى تعبر من خلالها الشعوب العربية عن نبضها المشترك وفرحها التلقائي بأي نصر
²⁶ من بحر العرب جنوباً حتى تركيا والبحر المتوسط شمالاً، منطقتنا كانت صورتها في نهاية عام 2022، مشرفة للعالم، سواء في شرم الشيخ عندما اجتمع العالم فيها في "كوب 27"، أم في قطر عندما جاء العالم ليلعب كرة القدم في مونديال قطر 2022، حدث جمع العرب وأعاد إظهار العروبة وثقافتها بروح جديدة،

*time that an Arab country in the Middle East hosts the World Cup.*²⁷ (Al Ahram, 2022f, November 20).

By emphasizing Arab identity and solidarity, showcasing Arab achievements internationally, offering a platform for cultural exchange and seeking to change general perceptions of the Arab world, Al Ahram's representations and approaches in its codes of online newspaper articles help to shape and influence the narratives and public discourse surrounding the QFWC.

In this theme, what stood out more than in the other themes, is that the sentences in the codes discussed contained many adjectives and descriptive phrases. This adds strength to the feeling of "Arabicity" by creating a vivid description that helps the reader gain a deeper, more emotionally invested understanding of the event and its meaning. In fact, these enabled the reader not only to 'see' what is happening, but also to 'feel' what it means. Some examples are "المهرجان الكروي" (the football party), "فرصة نادرة" (a rare opportunity) and "لحظات رائعة" (beautiful moments).

In short, I note that the sense of Arab solidarity in the context of the QFWC emerged both spontaneously and through the influence of the (news) media. This is consistent with what I concluded in my literature review, in which I argued that the narrative constructions, that were put forward about the QFWC, work both ways, with the news media influencing the public and vice versa. Next to that, the relations between Qatar and Egypt were strong at the time of the QFWC, which was reflected in the coverage of this state-run newspaper, which in turn gave additional fuel to the feeling of Arabicity. This makes this theme the common thread running through Al Ahram's coverage, as it surfaces in just about every theme. More specifically, this theme highlights how the QFWC has changed perceptions of the Arab world despite existing controversies. This enhanced Arab identity, stemming from cultural exchange, reverberates across regional borders, making this theme closely related to themes 6 and 7.

Theme 6: Political Impact of the QFWC

This theme revolves around the impact of the QFWC on diplomatic and bilateral relations, political influences on sports coverage and international visibility.

More specifically, this theme highlights the way this SME served as a platform for diplomacy and strengthening bilateral ties, as the talks between President Al Sisi and Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani showed, as stated in Al Ahram as follows:

²⁷ أكد وزير الشباب والرياضة عمق العلاقات بين البلدين الشقيقين، معرباً عن سعادته باستضافة دولة قطر الشقيقة الحدث الرياضي الأهم في العالم، لافتاً إلى أن هذه هي المرة الأولى التي تستضيف فيها دولة عربية في الشرق الأوسط بطولة كأس العالم

For his part, the Emir of the State of Qatar expressed his sincere gratitude and appreciation for the president's attendance at the opening ceremony of the World Cup and his visit as a dear guest to Doha, which would consolidate the strength of the brotherly bilateral relations between the two countries. (Al Ahram, 2022g, November 21)²⁸

Moreover, Al Ahram states the following about the relations between Egypt and Qatar: “Stressing the depth of historical relations between the two brotherly countries... Especially with the positive development witnessed at all levels during the recent period.” (Al Ahram, 2022g, November 21)²⁹. These two codes suggest that the extensive coverage of these "deep historical relations" between Egypt and Qatar in a positive way, again shows that Al Ahram is a state-run newspaper which supports the views and visions of the Egyptian government. Additionally, the second part of the last code indicates, of course, the gradual melting of diplomatic relations between the two countries since the end of the diplomatic crisis in 2021. Overall, I think these codes suggest an implicit attempt to propagate a narrative of unity and solidarity and consolidate improved bilateral relations.

Next to that, this theme highlights Qatar's increased international visibility through the presence of world leaders, next to the Egyptian president Al Sisi, at the QFWC. For example, Al Ahram states:

The opening ceremony will be chaired by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and a number of heads of state and government, including Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman, and the presidents of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas, Algeria Abdel Majeed Tebboune and Rwanda Paul Kagame, are expected to participate. ³⁰ (Al Ahram, 2022g, November 20)

Al Ahram's coverage of the presence of world leaders at the QFWC points to two things. On the one hand, Al Ahram wants to focus on both Al Sisi' presence and the importance of Egypt's participation on the world stage, as the QFWC is seen worldwide as an important international event with prestigious status. On the other hand, I think Al Ahram wants to reiterate how the Arab world is at the center of global attention during the QFWC, thanks to Qatar's hosting. What is also striking here is that Al Ahram does not mention any Western head of state. Is this a coincidence or is there a deeper reason behind it? These kinds of questions are interesting for future research, delving even deeper into the semantic and especially the latent characteristics of certain codes.

In a number of ways, Al Ahram once again contributes to the shaping of the public discourse surrounding the QFWC. First, through the positive portrayal of the meeting between Al Sisi and Al

²⁸ من جانبه، أعرب أمير دولة قطر عن خالص الامتنان والتقدير لحضور الرئيس حفل افتتاح كأس العالم وزيارته ضيفاً عزيزاً على الدوحة، الأمر الذي من شأنه ترسيخ قوة العلاقات الثنائية الأخوية بين البلدين

²⁹ مؤكداً عمق العلاقات التاريخية بين البلدين الشقيقين... بخاصة مع التطور الإيجابي الذي تشهده على جميع الأصعدة خلال الفترة الأخيرة
³⁰ ويترأس حفل الافتتاح أمير قطر الشيخ تميم بن حمد آل ثاني، ومن المنتظر أن يشارك عدد من رؤساء الدول والحكومات بينهم ولي عهد المملكة العربية السعودية الأمير محمد بن سلمان، ورؤساء فلسطين محمود عباس والجزائر عبد المجيد تبون ورواندا بول كاجامي.

Thani, Al Ahram readers are being encouraged to embrace enhanced Arab unity and improved bilateral ties (with Qatar). Second, by including Al Sisi in the presence of world leaders, this Egyptian state-run newspaper is shaping the narrative of international visibility and prestige around the QFWC, wherein Egypt is a significant actor.

I should note here that, while conducting my ITA, only few codes were generated that I could subsequently categorize under this theme. Nonetheless, I felt it was still worth discussing this theme.

Theme 7: Economic Impact of the QFWC

This theme covers the economic implications of hosting the QFWC, not only for the host country but also for the surrounding regions.

More specifically, the Gulf country has invested heavily in this SME, not only because of the direct spending, but also as a strategy to diversify the economy (Ahram, 2022x, December 19). Al Ahram describes this as follows while charting Qatar's future plans:

After failing in its previous nominations to host the 2016, 2020 and 2032 Summer Olympics, Doha, which intends to diversify its gas economy by 2030 through sports and tourism, is considering the idea of running again to host the 2036 edition with the use of the World Cup as a starting point, according to sports officials. (Al Ahram, 2022x, December 19)³¹

This code suggests that SMEs are used as a tool for economic transformation and development.

Al Ahram further mentions in its coverage that Egypt used the FWC to boost tourism by offering discounts and facilities on the one hand and by launching marketing campaigns on the other. Al Ahram was used by the Egyptian state as a way to positively promote its interests in the domestic tourism sector. By doing so, Egypt's opportunities and attractions were brought to the attention of the Egyptian audience and beyond. Initiatives like these also involve Al Ahram encouraging positive public perceptions (Al Sarouji, 2022, November 17).

As with the previous theme, I have to report that few codes were generated during my ITA that I could categorize under this theme. But still, I thought it was worth discussing this theme.

The existence of these themes about the political and economic impact of the FWC, shows that Al Ahram recognizes this impact. The political dimension of the event in Theme 6 adds another layer of complexity, showing that the QFWC is not just a sporting spectacle, but also a strategic opportunity for diplomatic and political dialogues. Discussing the economic impact in Theme 7 of the FWC Al

³¹“بعد فشلها في ترشيحاتها السابقة لاستضافة نسخ الألعاب الأولمبية الصيفية للأعوام 2016 و2020 و2032، تدرس الدوحة التي تعتزم تنويع اقتصاد الغاز بحلول عام 2030 من خلال الرياضة والسياحة، فكرة الترشح مجددا لاستضافة نسخة عام 2036 مع استخدام كأس العالم كنقطة انطلاق، وفقاً لمسؤولين رياضيين”.

Ahram highlights the multifaceted implications of the event, making it a driver for economic growth and diversification.

Theme 8: Qatar's future plans

This theme refers to Qatar's strategies and plans to use the successful hosting of the QFWC for future sporting events and the long-term impact of the tournament on the country's infrastructure.

The focus of this theme is thus on Qatar's aspiring future plans, as Al Ahram states in its coverage: "After the conclusion of the 2022 World Cup in football, the aspiring Qatar seeks to be "a world leader in the field of football"." (Al Ahram, 2022x, December 19) ³² In this code, Al Ahram uses the verb "تسعى" ("to strive for"). By doing so, Al Ahram underlines Qatar's ambition and determination. Additionally, this ambition and determination are reinforced by using "الطامحة" ("aspiring"). Overall, this contribution, which highlights Qatar as an ambitious and future-oriented country, could suggest that Al Ahram wants to portray them in a positive light to boost relations between the two countries. Another important aspect is the future of the stadiums after the event. For instance, Qatar wants to reuse or transform the stadiums, and donate some of the seats to football development projects around the world. However, the issue regarding the fate of the stadiums is still pending. In addition, the country's plans to host more events in the future, such as the Asian Cup in 2023, is also part of this theme (Al Ahram, 2023b, January 15). Highlighting Qatar's future plans, which include reusing stadiums and hosting future events, could be seen as a recognition of the economic benefits such projects can bring. As far as I can see, this fits well with Egypt's own policies at the time the FWC took place. As such, Egypt wanted to emulate Qatar's overall success, as FWC host country and all the future benefits it has brought and will bring, by doing almost exactly the same thing. As such, Egypt, along with Saudi Arabia and Greece, submitted a bid to host the FWC in 2030. This bid was still valid at the time this article was published, but in June 2023, the bid was withdrawn, according to Gale (2023) in an article by GreekReporter.

Furthermore, this theme also highlights experts' opinions, as Al Ahram states:

Jean-Lou Chapelier, an expert in the Olympic movement at the University of Lausanne, responded to a question from the Agence France-Presse, saying, 'The International Olympic Committee did not want this at all, and I believe that after the World Cup, it will be exactly the same.' He considered that 'faced with any other nomination, Qatar has no chance,' pointing to the lack of infrastructure, while 'the International Olympic Committee seeks to avoid investments that hinder budgets'

³² "بعد ختام مونديال 2022 في كرة القدم، تسعى قطر الطامحة لأن تكون "رائدة عالميا في مجال"

and wishes to include respect for human rights in the hosting city's contract. ³³ (Al Ahram, 2022x, December 19)

With the words "ليس أمام قطر أي فرصة" ("Qatar has no chance"), this expert expresses his negative stance, in the form of a direct, sharp and unequivocal criticism. In general, this code illustrates a critical view of Qatar's ambitions, highlighting infrastructure limitations and human rights concerns. This suggests that Al Ahram strives for balanced coverage, by asking critical questions about the feasibility and impact of such large-scale ventures alongside all the positive coverage. Due in part to such codes, there is diversity of perspectives in Al Ahram's coverage, which in turn contributes to a nuanced, layered narrative about Qatar's future plans after the FWC. What is striking is that Al Ahram again uses direct language when discussing this criticism, and it does so for the same reasons as discussed earlier.

Overall, this theme highlights the newspaper's willingness to look ahead and show that the QFWC is not a snapshot in time. Al Ahram is thus keen to point out that hosting the FWC is rather part of an ongoing strategy, a springboard for Qatar's global sporting ambitions. This theme succinctly sums up the overarching story and makes one realize that this event is just one chapter in Qatar's long-term journey, with future challenges and responsibilities ahead.

Interestingly, the organization of this SME is seen as very negative in both British newspapers, which accuse Qatar of "sportswashing" in this context. At the same time, Egyptian newspapers only see this as something positive, perhaps reflecting Egypt's enthusiasm to justify its own policies ahead of the FWC 2030 bid.

3.3.2. The Times

As for The Times' coverage, the latent elements, which include the influence of the newspaper's political affiliations on its coverage, are far less prominent. This is because The Times is an independent newspaper, compared to Al Ahram, which is a state-controlled newspaper. As such the analysis of The Times' themes focus more on the semantic elements.

Furthermore, The Times' coverage of the QFWC can be divided into three themes: one criticizing this SME, another refuting this criticism and yet another discussing the political impact of the event in detail. The first two themes ("Criticism and Controversy related to the QFWC" and "Response to and Refutation of Criticism") together form the foundation of The Times' coverage of this SME. The third

³³ قال جان-لو شابيليه، المتخصص في الحركة الأولمبية في جامعة لوزان ردا على سؤال لوكالة فرانس برس "اللجنة الأولمبية الدولية لم تكن ترغب في ذلك على الإطلاق وأعتقد أنه بعد كأس العالم سيكون الأمر نفسه بالضبط. "وأعتبر أنه "في مواجهة أي ترشيح آخر، ليس أمام قطر أي فرصة"، في إشارة إلى الافتقار إلى البنية التحتية، بينما "تبحث اللجنة الأولمبية الدولية عن تجنب الاستثمارات التي تعرقل الميزانيات"، وإدراج احترام حقوق الإنسان في عقد المدينة المضيفة".

theme on political implications is also important, but to a lesser extent, as it also features less prominently in The Times' news coverage. These three themes, and certainly the first two, are intertwined and together form a complex, nuanced narrative, which in turn influences and shapes the public discourse around the FWC. Despite of the balance in this coverage, I must say that the criticism slightly prevails over the refutation.

Theme 1: Criticism and Controversy related to the QFWC

This theme ranges from specific concerns about human rights to broader issues of social inequality and lack of commitment and accountability on the part of the QFWC organizers. The wide range of criticisms puts Qatar at the center of a symbolic battlefield, as illustrated by this code taken from one of The Times' online newspaper articles: "From labor rights to corruption to perhaps the last thing the organizers expected when they were awarded the cup in 2010 — LGBT issues — Qatar has been under attack." (Spencer, 2022b, November 3) The Times' formulation "under attack" gives this code a more powerful connotation of persistent criticism and confrontation. This already gives a first impression of The Times' commitment to human rights and social equality, topics that often occupy a prominent place in its coverage.

The Times is sometimes relentless in its assessment of Qatar's FWC hosting, as seen here in a summarizing code:

After \$200 billion spent and 63 matches played, after a rolling barrage of corruption scandals and a cavalcade of moral outrage over gay rights, migrant workers and environmental damage, after the ridiculous lengths Qatar went to — over more than a decade — so it could host this tournament, what conclusions can we draw from this strangest of World Cups? (Glancy, 2022b, December 19)

This theme accordingly even brings into question the legitimacy of enjoying football in this context, as illustrated by this code:

Were we right to enjoy the football knowing all the pain this tournament had caused? If you still cherished any illusions about what football has become, this tournament surely shattered them. The game remains beautiful, but the world is an ugly one. (Glancy, 2022b, December 19)

As is obvious, these sentences question the ethics of enjoying oneself in the context of football during the FWC. As such, The Times uses the opposites "The game remains beautiful" and "the world is an ugly one" in its description. This comes down harder on readers of this particular online newspaper

article, making them more inclined to think about this moral issue. This code indicates that The Times does not shy away from asking critical questions about football's role in society and the moral dilemmas it raises.

In short, this introduction to The Times's criticism within its coverage of the QFWC's organization is indicative of its position as an influential news medium which on the one hand pursues high journalistic standards and on the other highlights important international controversies.

By using its platform as a globally known newspaper, The Times can trigger a public debate by shedding light on criticisms and controversies surrounding SMEs and their organizers (and other stakeholders), which otherwise might remain underexposed. Next to that, it questions the legitimacy of celebrating football in this context, thereby again shaping public perception and discourse around the FWC.

A. Human Rights Issues

This sub-theme is divided into two sub-sub-themes: "Working conditions" and "LGBTQ". This focus is omnipresent in this theme. In fact, often in The Times' coverage, these two sub-sub-themes are discussed together in the same online newspaper article or even in the same code. For example, this manifests itself in The Times as follows:

Thousands of migrant workers are said to have died while building the seven new stadiums in a country less than half the size of Wales, while international campaigners have raised concerns over the rights of gay people and women, who are effectively treated as second-class citizens. (Kelly, 2022, October 29)

In another online newspaper article by The Times, it goes as follows:

Moreover, there is no equivalence between the severity of abuses in the West and those in Qatar. In Qatar, women must secure permission from a male guardian to marry, get certain jobs, study and travel abroad. LGBT+ Qataris face three to seven years in prison and potentially the death penalty if they are Muslim. The 'honour' killing of LGBTs and women is covered up by the authorities. Racism in Qatar against migrant workers from India and Bangladesh is many times worse than in the UK: they are deprived of all civil and human rights, segregated in overcrowded slum hostels out in the desert, often unpaid for months and the families of the countless people who have died are still waiting for compensation. (The Times, 2022, November 29)

The Times' coverage continues to argue that these criticisms and controversies regarding Qatar are too underexposed. For instance, The Times states:

None of them are talking about human rights. For these nominal football fans, the tournament is little more than a backdrop to gold-flecked life in the 0.1 per cent. For the tiny, vulnerable peninsula of Qatar, the World Cup is an unrivalled opportunity to flaunt its wares, secure its future and nail down its seat at the global top table. (Glancy, 2022a, November 27)

Using the term "0.1 per cent", The Times emphasizes the divide that persists in Qatar between the luxury of this SME on the one hand and the harsh reality of the human rights situation on the other.

The Times further states that this whole discussion of human rights issues highlights the larger problems involved in letting an international SME take place in a country whose rights of some populations remain in strong doubt internationally. I deduce from the codes just discussed that The Times sees itself as an advocate of change and awareness and as a critical watchdog highlighting underexposed issues. Such a description fits The Times' well-known position within the UK media landscape, in which it is not only seen as an influential news source, but also a critical and socially conscious one.

A1. Labour Rights

This sub-sub-theme is focused on the treatment and experiences of migrant workers in Qatar, particularly during preparations for the QFWC.

In spite of the Qatari authorities' claims to have implemented reforms to improve labor rights, its results are mixed. On the one hand, problems are still being faced in terms of wage payment, adequate housing and health and safety risks (Barnes, 2022, November 30). On the other hand, some progress has been made, yet the treatment of migrants is still problematic. Therefore, stricter control and accountability is needed, The Times states in its coverage.

Other online newspaper articles by The Times rather negatively assess Qatar's progress in this context. In the following article, for instance, while acknowledging progress, it is considered insufficient:

If any impression has been made, it has been the reform of the despotic "kafala" employment system, which is a sponsorship scheme primarily used to monitor migrant workers... Yet that has not been universally followed through; it remains a fundamental issue that some workers are still not paid on time and to the contracted amount. (Slot, 2022b, December 19)

A2. LGBTQ community

This sub-sub-theme covers concerns and debates regarding the safety and rights of the LGBTQ+ community throughout this SME.

Qatar's conservative social and legal environment, where homosexuality is officially illegal, stands in contrast to Qatar's promise to foreign visitors in terms of respecting their private lives. In this context, The Times states:

While homosexuality is officially illegal in Qatar, there is normally little intrusion into foreigners' private lives and the authorities have made clear that there will be no laws restricting same-sex couples sharing hotel rooms. However, there has not been an unequivocal guarantee on the issue. (Spencer, 2022a, October 21)

The Times covers these doubts and worries in another code as well:

It remains to be seen how the authorities will react to any LGBTQ+ protests in a country ranked, according to more than one index, as the second-most dangerous nation in the world for the gay community. (Dickinson, 2022a, November 21)

The "remains to be seen" part of this code indicates an element of uncertainty. This suggests that a high degree of ambiguity and unpredictability prevails on the part of the Qatari authorities regarding this issue.

In parallel with this last code, The Times also reported the following: "Human Rights Watch documented six cases of severe and repeated beatings and five of sexual harassment in police custody between 2019 and this year, with those arrested made to attend conversion therapy." (Swan, 2022, October 25)

There are certain words in this code that, on the one hand, have powerful and negative connotations and, on the other, raise images of violence and abuse. I refer to the words "severe", "repeated" and "beatings". Such negative word usage leads to a negative image of the QFWC and its host in public discourse. This is just one example of these particular abuses discussed in The Times' coverage.

With regard to the lives of Qatar's native population, The Times states that the Qatari authorities will definitely intervene here:

It is a simple fact that homosexuality is illegal here, and though the authorities say they have adopted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy for World Cup visitors — what two consenting adults get up to in their hotel room is of no concern to them — that does not apply to locals when the spotlight is off. (Spencer, 2022d, November 18)

Moreover, there's also a controversial and ethical dilemma that surrounds the involvement of celebrities and top athletes in the event, which critics say choose money over human rights. Accordingly, The Times states as follows: "It is incredibly hypocritical for these big celebrities who have made a big deal of supporting LGBT rights to perform at events run by a viciously homophobic dictatorship." (Kelly, 2022, October 29) At the same time however, The Times also elaborates on the need for celebrities to use their platform in this regard:

It’s vital that those of us with influence, including those that are choosing to perform during the event, make clear that they expect Qatari authorities to respect and uphold freedom of assembly and expression and the rights of all, including LGBTQ+ people. (Kelly, 2022, October 29)

Overall, this analysis of the LGBTQ community demonstrates that although the explicit messages in the texts are mainly factual information and events, The Times' underlying messages and themes raise critical questions regarding the issues just discussed. This means that The Times is consistently concerned about the safety and rights of the LGBTQ+ community, which is in line with its traditional role within the UK media landscape as a newspaper that raises issues in society. It should be added, however, that in some codes, The Times' coverage is also characterized by explicitly illustrative and emotion-fuelled language to convince its readership of its views.

B. Other Controversies

B1. Alcohol ban

Concerns have been raised that the alcohol ban, which has been imposed by the Qatari government, is inconsistent with the football culture within which alcohol often plays a prominent role. The Times, on the other hand, also puts forward advantages: “A narrative has gathered around the Qatar World Cup that a lack of booze made it safe and orderly; that women, in particular, felt less threatened than is often the norm at football.” (Dickinson, 2022b, December 16) This code shows that in the midst of

all the criticism, The Times seeks to portray neutral reporting, by also covering more positive sides of the event. Nevertheless, critical aspects still prevail in The Times' coverage.

B2. FIFA Corruption

This addresses the ongoing allegations and denials of corruption within FIFA, especially following the allocation of the 2022 FWC to Qatar. The Times mainly criticizes FIFA, while making Qatar's reputation far from unblemished. The Times phrases this as follows: "Don't kick Qatar — aim your boot at Fifa for sending fans to this dry, dreary hellhole." (Long, 2022, November 19) Here, "Aim your boot", which is an expression with a strong and negative connotation, indicates that criticism or anger should be aimed, in this case at FIFA, thereby sparing Qatar for once. This indicates that The Times is generally critical of corruption in sport and is indifferent to who this corrupt party is. In addition, and more importantly, the choice of the words "dry, dreary hellhole" is striking, pointing to Orientalism in using this kind of negative imagery to perpetuate negative stereotypes about Qatar, and more generally the Arab world. This is consistent with the Orientalist perspective of the Western media that I discussed in my introduction based on the studies of Sanhaji (2023) and Dawood (2023).

More broadly, criticism of the FWC allocation to Qatar comes from both celebrities in the football world and the media. For example, The Times discusses the criticism of Dutch national team coach Louis Van Gaal:

The former Manchester United manager also double-downed on his statement earlier this year that it was "ridiculous" to hold the QFWC, adding that it was "bullshit" for FIFA to claim that it was bringing its showpiece event here in order to develop the game. (Lawton, 2022b, November 16)

What is noticeable are terms such as 'hellhole' and 'bullshit', which give a strong negative connotation to the image of Qatar as a host country on the one hand and FIFA as an organizer on the other, affecting the shaping and influencing of public discourse.

B3. Criticism of the FWC Timing and Place

This relates to the unusual timing of the QFWC, which was being held in December rather than the usual summer months and was intended to avoid the extreme heat during the Qatari summer (Dickinson, 2022a, November 21). A variety of stakeholders, among them players and coaches, have criticized this timing due to the potential impact on players (as regards injuries especially) and the scheduling of the traditional football season. Moreover, there has also been criticism that the amount

of infrastructure created for the event is disproportionate compared to the country's population (Spencer, 2022d, November 18).

B4. Fans

This delves into the experiences and perceptions of fans during the QFWC. For instance, there are concerns and discussions about the "authenticity" of fans. This idea was strongly denied by these fans, according to The Times: "Against the backdrop of reports about fake fans being paid by the host nation to create an atmosphere, these supporters — predominantly expats from India working in Qatar — insisted they were the real deal." (Lawton & Joyce, 2022c, November 16)

Furthermore there were concerns about the presence of "paid" fans, described by The Times as follows: "A group of 40 England fans are being paid by Qatar to attend the World Cup, with instructions to deliver positive messages about the experience, sing certain songs when requested and report critical social media posts." (Lawton, 2022a, November 4) In the context of paid fans, the behavior of Qatari fans and their (lack of) engagement with the QFWC matches also represent many points of controversy. This is described as follows by The Times:

The Qataris are a conservative bunch, so the hosts tried to create a bit of atmosphere at the opening ceremony with a crowd of three or four thousand super fans — reportedly young Lebanese men paid to be here — who wore Qatar shirts and sang under the instruction of four conductors who stood on the inner stadium wall. (Lawton, Northcroft, Slot, Walsh, Winter, Jacob, Aspland, Dickinson, & Rudd, 2022, December 20)

This, as already mentioned, caused consternation, as The Times states as follows: "What nobody anticipated, however, was the absence of so many of the Qataris for the second half, leaving thousands of empty seats. Fifa and the organizers were horrified." (Lawton, Northcroft, Slot, Walsh, Winter, Jacob, Aspland, Dickinson, & Rudd, 2022, December 20) By using the word "horrified", The Times is trying to create a strong emotional shock reaction among its readership, potentially contributing to creating a negative image of Qatari fans and the population in general. Moreover, the general atmosphere of this SME during matches was criticized:

This thinning out of the travelling numbers across most European nations gave the tournament a different, multicultural feel which was refreshing but also meant that the atmosphere for England against France was as flat as I have experienced at any comparable fixture. (Dickinson, 2022b, December 16)

Lastly, there were concerns about the overall experience and costs for fans who were attending the QFWC (Dickinson, 2022b, December 16).

B5. Sportswashing

This focuses on the intentions and consequences of Qatar, to increase their influence and prestige by hosting even more SMEs in the future. In the following code this is discussed in a more neutral and purely informative way, with no real position being taken: "Saudi Arabia is close to announcing its own 2030 World Cup bid, probably as a joint enterprise with Egypt and Greece. Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia also have covetous eyes on the 2036 Olympics." (Ziegler, 2022c, December 16) In some of its online newspaper articles discussing this issue, The Times uses the derogatory non-analytical term "sportswashing", which I already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. For example in the title of one of its newspaper articles: "From denial to disbelief: Qatar's 2022 World Cup is biggest sportswashing coup" (Dickinson, 2022a, November 21)

By hosting such SMEs, Qatar is capable of increasing its international visibility and exhibiting its wealth and influence, while simultaneously facing the cultural and social challenges. While the costs are high, Qatar sees the investment in hosting future SMEs as something valuable for their prestige and global reputation. The Times wonders where these actions lead to:

For all the grandstanding and outrage, though, we know we are going to be back here again — if not in Qatar, then Saudi Arabia or another Gulf state... Yet if sport is to continue returning to the Gulf, as it will do, then conversations need to be had about how we engage... "At a Saudi World Cup, or a Qatari Olympics, or even a LIV Golf event, can we not flip the deal? If you host the world, for the period of the event, you should accept the world's cultures, behaviours and freedoms. (Slot, 2022b, December 19)

In this code, The Times hinted that it believes that if Qatar wants to host such an SME again, it should conform to the world's norms and values. By this, The Times wants to indicate in its coverage that this is not the case regarding the QFWC. By this, The Times is referring to the fact that Qatar needs to resolve its domestic issues, including those related to human rights, before it is allowed to host another SME. What is also interesting is that The Times uses "the world's cultures, behaviours and freedoms". This implies a Western-centric perspective", as if there is one uniform right package regarding norms and values. In other words, the text suggests that Qatar needs to align with the West's presumed ideals, which reflects a subtle form of (Western) Orientalism, as it assumes the superiority of Western values and overlooks the complexities of local contexts/cultural diversity.

Overall, this first theme forms the most important and documented part of the narrative in The Times' coverage of the QFWC. As such, it exposes a whole range of criticisms and concerns, with particular emphasis on human rights issues. While taking this critical stance, The Times emphasizes the ethical and moral responsibilities that organizers (and other stakeholders) of SMEs, and of the QFWC in particular, must take on. While only this theme discusses the criticisms and controversies surrounding this FWC, this critical stance of The Times remains present in both Theme 2 and Theme 3.

By now, what seems to be a constant is that The Times is shaping public perception and discourse surrounding the event by addressing these critiques and controversies, and thereby encouraging dialogue about it.

Theme 2: The Response to and Refutation of Criticism

This theme relates to the various responses and refutations which have appeared in The Times in the wake of the criticism and controversies concerning the QFWC.

These reactions and refutations highlight a wide range of perspectives, varying from defending Qatar's approach to issues to questioning critics about their own hypocrisy and selective anger. For example, The Times states that Qatar feels it has been betrayed or treated unfairly by the international community because of fierce and possibly selective criticism of their hosting of the QFWC. This is expressed as follows by The Times: "The Qataris were taken aback by the ferocity of the criticism. Resentment over perceived hypocrisy and selective outrage will linger for years." (Glancy, 2022b, December 19) At the center of this discussion are issues of human rights, social inequality and change in social norms and values. In this regard, Qatar has to defend its own policies while criticizing Western societies. In this way, The Times quotes a Qatari official as saying: "The claims were not brought to our attention until they were first reported in the media. If Human Rights Watch had contacted us, we would have been able to disprove the allegations." (Swan, 2022, October 25) This code exposes the feeling of betrayal and frustration among the QFWC organizers. More specifically, this feeling was caused by the lack of direct communication and opportunity to refute the allegations.

Despite all the criticism, The Times also raises positive aspects about the QFWC, saying, for instance, that allocating the QFWC to a country like Qatar also brings benefits: "One of the real successes of this World Cup has been the vast multicultural crowds, the proof that big sports events should indeed be shared around the world better." (Slot, 2022b, December 19)

The Times seeks a balance between critical analysis and impartial reporting in its coverage and recognizes that much of the media coverage of Qatar and the hosting of the QFWC is unnecessarily negative and claims that it may even be laced with hypocrisy. That is why The Times not only provides a platform for criticism of the QFWC but also for its refutation. Hence, what follows is a discussion of two online newspaper articles published by The Times (taken from my sample) that refute criticisms. I start with the article by Hassan Al Thawadi³⁴, followed by the article by former England footballer John Barnes.

Hassan Al Thawadi

Al Thawadi begins his article by stating the following:

This World Cup is probably the most written and commented on, even before a ball has been kicked... It is deeply regrettable that much of this commentary has veered into an acceptance of misinformation, rejection of nuance and depth, and often underpinned by racist tropes based on long-held prejudices and stereotypes of the Middle East and Arab world. (Al Thawadi, 2022, November 17)

Al Thawadi's choice of words in his article indicates his disappointment with the one-sided, Orientalist and unsubtle coverage of the QFWC. Al Thawadi adds a few more arguments to strengthen his position:

In spite of those who believe Qatar and the Arab world are unfit or undeserving to play host, the facts suggest people disagree: 97 per cent of tickets are sold. The UK is among the top five markets of those sales. (Al Thawadi, 2022, November 17)

These statements make it clear that there is thus global interest in and acceptance of the event, despite a high level of opposition. For instance, the QFWC is considered a historically important event for Qatar, and a symbol of their quest for global recognition and economic diversification. In this context, The Times states: "Finally, you learn about Qatar's pivot to being a country that wants to be on the world stage and secure a post-petrol wealth legacy." (Al Thawadi, 2022, November 17) Lastly, Al Thawadi states that the QFWC is emphasized as an opportunity for progress and change, and football is regarded as a connecting factor between East and West.

³⁴ The Secretary-General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy of the QFWC.

John Barnes

The discussion of the following newspaper article, written by John Barnes, shows that the response to and rebuttal of criticism is not only coming from Qatar. First and foremost, Barnes states that he is against boycotting The QFWC, arguing:

How would we like it if African TV stations, pundits and journalists came to a World Cup in England and highlighted injustices towards black people, the lack of black managers, abuse of black players, and worse, the treatment of black people in the inner cities by the authorities? How would we like it if they demanded change and made calls to boycott matches, and for the World Cup to be taken off England, while residing at our top hotels and eating at our finest restaurants? How dare they?! (Barnes, 2022, November 30)

In short, Barnes argues that the West should also look into its own affairs: "So while discrimination is enshrined in Qatari law, discrimination is also enshrined in British society and culture. Lots of black people are stopped, searched and detained just because they are black." (Barnes, 2022, November 30)

Furthermore, Barnes looks at Qatar's progress on migrant workers' rights with a more optimistic lens. He states:

Since Qatar was awarded the tournament, things have changed, and progress has been made on the human rights of migrant workers. While there is still a long way to go, the situation is streets ahead of where they were ten years ago — with improvements in housing, facilities and wages... As we know from experience in this country, true change takes time. (Barnes, 2022, November 30)

Regarding LGBTQ+ rights, Barnes states the following: "It's worth repeating that I wholeheartedly condemn Qatar's anti-gay laws but I believe that visitors should still adhere to them even as they oppose them." (Barnes, 2022, November 30) Touching on these LGBTQ+ rights, Barnes contends that the British should be self-reflective, instead of accusing Qatar of all sorts of things:

Qatar's treatment of the LGBTQ+ community is harder to reconcile, but we are quick to forget that homosexuality was illegal in our country not so long ago (until 1967), and same-sex marriages were outlawed in our recent history. (Barnes, 2022, November 30)

Accordingly, Barnes adds:

Homosexuality is illegal in many African countries too — though it should be said lots of anti-gay laws in former colonies are old British laws implemented by us — so should these countries also be banned from taking part in World Cups? (Barnes, 2022, November 30)

Furthermore, Barnes also questions the sincerity of the support for the LGBTQ+ community in Qatar:

Support for the LGBTQ+ community in Qatar is commendable, but I don't remember any support in the mainstream media before the World Cup was awarded to Qatar... Indeed, how many of the pundits, journalists and footballers who are now there and highlighting these injustices have shown their support for disenfranchised Qataris before the World Cup was granted? How many will continue the fight after the World Cup is over? (Barnes, 2022, November 30)

Barnes finishes by stating that, drawing criticism from those who claim to be in Qatar to "teach" and "learn" their "superior" ways, this is a continuation of a damaging and orientalist European narrative of "improving the lives of inferiors". In short Barnes puts it as follows: "It is European arrogance to ignore the laws of the host nation and think we know better." (Barnes, 2022, November 30) In conclusion, Barnes argues that if we demand that people accept our countries' laws, regardless of whether they agree with them or not, we must do the same in other countries.

What is striking in the codes from Barnes' online newspaper article is his frequent use of contrast, through the use of 'us', the West (the UK) and 'them', the East (countries like Qatar and Africa). Doing so, he reinforces his arguments about double standards for different countries. Additionally, Barnes also uses rhetorical questions ("How would we like it if...?" "How dare they?!"). in order to encourage the reader to think and engage in self-reflection. Barnes' text also contains highly charged, and perhaps controversial, terms such as "superior" and "European arrogance", indicating a strong criticism of Western attitudes towards other cultures, thereby evoking images not only of colonialism and Eurocentrism, but especially of Orientalism.

In short, the use of language from Barnes' article adds to his argument and convinces the reader of the double standards and hypocrisy in the Western approach to the QFWC.

What struck me about this theme is that these codes/articles just discussed criticized the selective outrage of the Western (news) media and critics, implicitly pointing here to a high degree of Orientalism in the Western news media's coverage of the QFWC. The two articles underline that Western critics and news media on the one hand tend to make criticism of and problems in Eastern

countries bigger than they really are, while refusing to admit that there are similar (societal) problems in their own countries. On the other hand, these critics and (news) media hardly discuss or write about the positive aspects from these Eastern countries.

From my analysis of this theme, it is clear that The Times is trying to position itself as an impartial, critical, nuanced and quality newspaper that is not blind to highlight positivity surrounding this SME and thus looks beyond the negative aspects. In this respect, The Times' acknowledgment, that media coverage around the QFWC may at times be unnecessarily negative and hypocritical, is closely intertwined with Theme 1, as it forms the response to it. In this way, a dialogue is built around this theme that reflects the dynamic and complex interaction between criticism and its refutation, in which it is difficult to make a unequivocal, uniformly correct judgment about the ethical and moral issues raised by the QFWC. What makes Theme 2 particularly interesting is that The Times also provides its platform to the defense of criticism by both a prominent Qatari official and a British compatriot.

As for the public discourse surrounding the QFWC, my analysis shows that it was heavily influenced by The Times' coverage by providing a balanced platform for both criticism and rebuttal. This encourages deeper debate on topics such as power dynamics, Orientalism and cultural values and norms. Moreover, in this way, The Times gets people thinking about questions related to double standards, which in turn also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the whole discourse around this SME.

Theme 3: Political Impact of the QFWC

In order to discuss this theme, it is worth looking at how hosting the QFWC has enabled Qatar to position itself as a key player in international diplomacy and at how the event has been utilized to highlight tensions in the Gulf region. While politics was less addressed in The Times' news coverage, I considered it important and relevant enough to accommodate it in a separate discussed theme.

This theme highlights that the organization of the QFWC is a geopolitical and diplomatic tool for this Gulf country to consolidate its position at the global stage. The Times states this as follows:

This is where the real rewards of the tournament are to be found for Qatar: affirming their role at the heart of international diplomacy, becoming a magnet for global wealth and a convenor of Middle Eastern interests. (Glancy, 2022b, November 27)

By using words like “key”, “magnet” and “convenor”, this code shows that The Times acknowledges Qatar's strategic use of hosting an SME like the QFWC. In addition, this code also shows that there is indeed a strong link between sport, politics and economic prosperity.

In parallel, one of The Times' articles brings questions to the surface about Qatar's role and actions on the world stage, especially regarding its support for Islamist causes. "Is any of this true?" is the key question in this article, referring to Qatar's claims of being a friend of Western countries, seeking peace and mutual tolerance and investing heavily in Western economies. Quoting the "Policy Exchange report", which has found "many reasons to suggest it is not true", citing, among other activities, "records of massive Qatari payments to the Al Qaeda-linked Jabhat Al Nusra in Syria". Meanwhile, the Times closes its article by asserting that if Qatar's strategy is to "export trouble to avoid trouble at home", then Western countries are entitled to question whether this is the behavior of a true friend and to "defend what we see as our national interest". (Jenkins, 2022, November 20) This debate, in turn, can easily be linked to the allegations of “sportswashing”, which I already discussed in the first theme.

Overall, this theme points out that The Times makes it clear in its coverage about the QFWC that it is not blind for how Qatar is strengthening its geopolitical position on the world stage by hosting this FWC. However, The Times is at the same time critical for the problems this poses, thereby reaching back to the first theme through its implicit criticism of how Qatar used this SME to promote its global political and diplomatic reputation and standing.

In other words, the takeaway, which emerges from this third theme from The Times' coverage, is that the QFWC has brought very visible tensions to the surface regarding the relationship between sport, politics and ethics. This keeps readers of this newspaper critical of the role and impact of SMEs in its wider social, political and economic contexts.

To conclude this analysis of The Times, I would like to discuss three more things that struck me. First, I noted that, consistent with its position within the wider UK media landscape, The Times has produced a nuanced, critical and complex story about the QFWC. Second, The Times makes it clear to its readership that, when it comes to the story about the organization of a high-level SME like the QFWC and everything around it, there is no ethical right or wrong answer that can be considered unequivocally right. This brings me to the third point, in which I argue that through this coverage of the QFWC, The Times has highlighted the interplay between sport, politics, media and ethics within certain broader cross-border social, political and economic contexts.

3.3.3. Al Masry Al Youm

Theme 1: Criticism & Controversies surrounding the QFWC

This theme is divided into two sub-themes: one is the discussion of criticisms and controversies regarding LGBTQ+-rights and the other is the discussion of more specific criticisms and controversies.

The emphasis of this theme is focused specifically on the critical approach to the QFWC by various stakeholders, whether in terms of general criticism regarding the rights of migrant workers and, for the most part, regarding the rights of the LGBTQ community, as the concern about migrant workers is surprisingly barely addressed in this newspaper. AMAY summarizes the main criticisms and controversies as follows:

With the start of the most expensive World Cup ever approaching, Qatar finds itself facing a growing torrent of criticism and attacks, due to issues ranging from the emirate's hot climate and its conservative society, to its record in the field of human rights and freedoms.” (Al Masry Al Youm, 2022a, October 26)³⁵

Regarding human rights in Qatar, AMAY discusses this topic generally and briefly, as follows: "The Western media repeatedly criticized the State of Qatar in conjunction with its preparation for the World Cup, due to its record in human rights, especially workers' rights and gay rights." ³⁶(Alaa, 2022, December 29). Furthermore, AMAY quotes well-known figures from the football world to touch upon these criticisms:

For his part, the coach of the German national team, Hans Flick, said in a statement before the tournament, "If it comes to human rights, then Qatar does not deserve to host the 2022 World Cup, because it is about humanity and not anything else".³⁷ (Alaa, 2022, December 29).

One thing that soon became clear about this code, and the codes that will follow from this theme, is that AMAY's online newspaper articles take a relatively critical stance towards the hosting of the QFWC. This criticism can be seen in the broader context of AMAY's relative independence from Egyptian authorities, suggesting that this newspaper represents Egypt's good relations with Qatar to

³⁵ ومع اقتراب موعد صافرة انطلاق المونديال الأكثر تكلفة على الإطلاق، تجد قطر نفسها أمام سيل متعاضم من الانتقادات والهجمات، بسبب مواضيع تتراوح من مناخ الإمارة الحارّ ومجتمعها المحافظ، إلى سجلها في مجال حقوق الإنسان والحريات ³⁶ وتكرر انتقاد الإعلام الغربي لدولة قطر بالتزامن مع تحضيرها للمونديال وذلك بسبب سجلها في حقوق الإنسان وخاصة حقوق العمال وحقوق المثليين ³⁷ من جانبه، خرج المدير الفني للمنتخب الألماني هانز فليك في تصريح قبل البطولة قائلاً: «إذا تعلق الأمر بحقوق الإنسان، فإن قطر لا تستحق استضافة كأس العالم 2022، لأن الأمر يتعلق بالإنسانية وليس أي شيء آخر.»

a lesser extent (than the state-run newspaper Al Ahram) in its coverage. Nevertheless, as already mentioned in my introduction, AMAY has to watch out for too critical reporting, which could otherwise lead to severe sanctions from the Egyptian government, such as suspension of the newspaper or heavy degree of censorship. Hence, the independence, which Al AMAY enjoys, should only be considered relative.

1. Criticism & Controversies regarding LGBTQ+ Rights

The issues around LGBTQ rights are focused on the controversies and actions related to expressing support for the LGBTQ community (for example, regarding the "One Love" armband) during this SME. Before the World Cup started, AMAY was already writing about it:

*Amr Adeeb (journalist): "There are a number of teams intending to put signs in support of homosexuality, and it would not be strange to see the rainbow flag in any match." He commented: "If two homosexuals decide to practice any habit in the street, what will happen... this World Cup is impassable."*³⁸ (Abdulmomen, 2022, November 18).

But also during the World Cup AMAY wrote about this specific issue, as well as FIFA's response to it:

*A joint statement stated that the countries that were planning to wear the multi-colored "One Love" armband for the LGBTQ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) in the FIFA World Cup competitions in Qatar, retracted this matter amid fears of imposing sanctions on it by the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA).*³⁹ (Wael Abbas Wakalat, 2022, November 21).

In this context AMAY delves even deeper into FIFA's role as a regulatory body, through its decision-making and regulatory processes that affect the discussions and protests surrounding the tournament. It is stated as follows: "But now it ('One Love-campaign') confirmed: "FIFA has been very clear that it will impose sporting sanctions if our captains wear armbands on the field."⁴⁰ (Wael Abbas Wakalat, 2022, November 21).

³⁸، وتابع عمرو أديب أن «هناك عددًا من المنتخبات تنوي وضع إشارات مؤيدة للمثلية الجنسية، ولن يكون غريبًا أن نشاهد علم الرينبو في أي مباراة»، معلقًا: «لو اتنين مثليين قرروا يمارسوا أي عادة في الشارع هيجصل إيه.. هذا الكأس مش سالك».

³⁹ ذكر بيان مشترك أن الدول التي كانت تخطط لارتداء قادة منتخباتها شارة «وان لاف» متعددة الألوان الخاصة بمجتمع الميم (المثليات والمثليين ومزدوجي الميل الجنسي والمتحولين جنسيا) في منافسات بطولة كأس العالم لكرة القدم بقطر، تراجعت عن هذا الامر وسط مخاوف من توقيع عقوبات عليها من قبل الاتحاد الدولي لكرة القدم (فيفا).

⁴⁰، ولكنها أكدت حاليا: «فيفا كان واضحا للغاية بأنه سيوقع عقوبات رياضية إذا ارتدى قادة منتخبنا الشارات في أرض الملعب».

What is clear is that the codes discussed focus specifically on issues around LGBTQ rights, such as the "One Love" armband and FIFA's response to it. This focus can be interpreted as an attempt to highlight minority rights and freedom of expression. By doing so, AMAY implicitly criticizes Qatar and FIFA. This is quite a brave choice, looking back to the discussed RSF report (2023a), in which it was stated that issues relating to the rights of homosexuals are particularly sensitive and the media that report on them can be accused of publishing material that "violates the country's moral code".

What is striking is that in its reporting, when it criticizes the QFWC's organization, AMAY does so carefully using certain strategies. For instance, she often does so indirectly through direct speech for two different reasons. On the one hand, this enables the newspaper to distance itself more from the criticism being made, since all attention goes to the person or institution making that statement. On the other hand, this allows for the authenticity of the statement, enhances the reader's involvement and reinforces the credibility and emotional impact of the story. Relevant examples include "... تكرر من جانبه، خرج المدير الفني للمنتخب " ("The Western media repeatedly criticized...") or "...الألماني هانز فليك في تصريح statement..." ("For his part, German national team coach Hans Flick said in a statement...") Another strategy, which is more obvious, is that when reporting on criticism, AMAY simply reports as neutrally as possible without taking any particular stance.

2. *More Specific Criticisms & Controversies*

A. Fans

This focuses on criticism of the "authenticity" of attending fans. AMAY discusses this as follows:

And a report by the Associated Press stated that many of the fans who gathered wearing the shirts of these teams were from India, which is known for its great passion for cricket, and which has never participated in the FIFA World Cup finals.

⁴¹ (Ramadan, 2022c, November 16).

Next to that it focuses on the fact that some fans may be paid for attending the event and for posting online positive messages about the QFWC and Qatar itself. In the same online newspaper article, AMAY discusses this as follows:

The agency indicated that the tournament organizers are paying about 1,600 fans of the participating teams to visit Qatar and sing during the opening ceremony next

⁴¹، وذكر تقرير لوكالة «أسوشيتد برس» أن كثيرًا من المشجعين الذين تجمعوا وهم يرتدون قمصان هذه المنتخبات كانوا من الهند، المعروفة بالشغف الشديد للعبة الكريكت، والتي لم تشارك إطلاقًا في نهائيات كأس العالم لكرة القدم».

Sunday... It (the agency) stated that these fans must stay at least two weeks inside the country, while encouraging them to post positive content on social media platforms and to report offensive content about Qatar and the tournament.
⁴²(Ramadan, 2022c, November 16).

This critical attitude, although presented in a neutral way, of AMAY towards the "authenticity" of the fans indicates a skepticism towards the sincerity of the event in Qatar.

B. FIFA Corruption

There is the sub-theme "FIFA is corrupt", which criticizes FIFA as an organization. Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter described FIFA itself as a "monster" that is too focused on commerce and politics. AMAY stated as follows:

Blatter admitted in press statements to a German newspaper, which is expected to be published tomorrow, Thursday, that he made FIFA a giant monster in the world of commerce and politics as well, and that he was unable, during his tenure as president of the International Federation of Football, to protect the mass game from political and commercial interference. ⁴³ (Al Genidy, 2022, December 21).

This is combined with criticism of the way the event is set up and the over-commercialization of football. All three of these criticisms and controversies highlight the QFWC.

Overall, through this conscious but implicit critical view, AMAY seeks to make its readers aware of criticisms and controversies that might otherwise remain underexposed in the Egyptian media landscape. By raising these issues, AMAY seeks to influence the public debate on these topics in Egypt. One major difference with Al Ahram is that AMAY does not always simultaneously switches to defending its criticisms when discussing them.

Overall, AMAY tries to raise a whole range of controversial and sensitive topics with this first theme, which plays an important role in shaping and influencing Egyptian public discourse on the subject, as opposed to state-controlled press like Al Ahram. However, due to the potentially severe sanctions by the Egyptian authorities, this newspaper has to be wary of overly critical and sensitive coverage, which is reflected occasionally in its restrained way of reporting. Additionally, this detailed

⁴²، وأشارت الوكالة إلى أن منظمي البطولة يدفعون لنحو 1600 مشجع تابعين للمنتخبات المشاركة، من أجل زيارة قطر والغناء خلال حفل الافتتاح الأحد المقبل... وذكرت أنه يتوجب على هؤلاء المشجعين البقاء لأسبوعين على الأقل داخل البلاد، مع تشجيعهم على نشر محتوى إيجابي عبر منصات التواصل الاجتماعي والإبلاغ عن المحتويات المسيئة بشأن قطر والبطولة؟

⁴³، واعترف بلاتر في تصريحات صحفية مع إحدى الصحف الألمانية ينتظر أن تنشر غدا الخميس أنه صنع من «فيفا» وحشاً عملاقاً في عالم التجارة والسياسة أيضاً ولم يستطع خلال توليه رئاسة الاتحاد الدولي لكرة القدم حماية اللعبة الجماهيرية من التدخلات السياسية والتجارية؟

discussion of sensitive criticism and controversies is directly linked to the next theme, with which it engages in dialogue.

Theme 2: Self-assessment & Refutation of Criticism by Qatar and FIFA

This theme provides clarity on the efforts of both the Qatari government and FIFA regarding defending (international) criticism and establishing a positive image of the QFCW.

First, FIFA president Gianni Infantino refuted criticism regarding working conditions in Qatar. AMAY, for example, quoted the following of him saying:

This moral lesson is one-sided. It is sheer hypocrisy. Conditions for workers in Qatar are better than conditions for immigrants in Europe... He concluded, "Many international institutions have recognized that workers' rights standards in Qatar are similar to Europe, and there will be a permanent headquarters for workers in Qatar affiliated with the International Labor Organization. " ⁴⁴ (Saber, 2022, November 19).

Next to that, Infantino and Qatari officials present themselves as inclusive and welcoming in spite of criticism. AMAY quotes FIFA president Gianni Infantino as saying: "The State of Qatar welcomes everyone, regardless of their orientations, and everything is beautiful and everyone feels happy here in Qatar," Infantino said. ⁴⁵ (Saber, 2022, November 19).

It also sought to refute criticism regarding the "authenticity" of fans. AMAY discusses this as follows: "The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy said in a statement: "Many journalists and commentators on social media have asked if these are real fans. We completely reject these assertions, which are both disappointing and unsurprising."⁴⁶ (Al Nasr, 2022, November 18).

Lastly, the theme also covers defensive actions by countries such as Sudan against these criticisms. It is stated in AMAY as follows:

⁴⁴« هذا الدرس الأخلاقي من جانب واحد إنه مجرد نفاق، ظروف العمال في قطر أفضل من ظروف المهاجرين في أوروبا... وأختتم حديثه: «العديد من المؤسسات الدولية أقرت أن معايير حقوق العمال في قطر مثل أوروبا، وسيكون هناك مقر دائم للعمال في قطر يتبع منظمة العمل الدولية». »
⁴⁵« دولة قطر ترحب بالجميع بغض النظر عن توجهاتهم وكل شيء جميل والكل يشعر بالسعادة هنا في قطر. »
⁴⁶« وقالت اللجنة العليا للمشاريع والإرث في بيان: «تساءل كثيرون من الصحفيين والمعلقين على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، عما إذا كان هؤلاء مشجعين حقيقيين. نرفض تمامًا هذه التأكيدات، التي تُعتبر مخيبة للآمال وغير مفاجئة في الوقت ذاته». »

The President of the Sudanese Federation said in a statement that the Sudanese Federation stands with Qatar and rejects the campaigns of defamation and "tenious skepticism" against Qatar, pointing out that these campaigns will not hinder Qatar's march, which began early in organizing an exceptional and historical tournament that does not only represent Qatar, but is a tournament for all Arabs.⁴⁷ (Ramadan, 2022a, November 5).

While it is not Qatar or FIFA refuting criticism here, I thought this was worth mentioning. This code indicates regional solidarity and underlines opposition to negative reporting. This indicates "Arabicity", a theme strongly present in AMAY, like it was the case with Al Ahram's coverage of the QFWC.

While Theme 1 discusses a range of criticisms and controversies, this second theme brings out the counter perspective. By including a focus on refuting criticism from the Qatari government and FIFA, AMAY offers a balanced and objective narrative. However, the challenge AMAY is facing here is that it has to balance in its coverage between highlighting these two themes in order to keep the Egyptian authorities pleased while going its own way in line with its reputation as an independent newspaper. As a researcher, this does not make it easy for me to distinguish exactly when AMAY tries to satisfy the authorities and when it publishes in line with its own editorial choice. This balancing act, characterized by a wide range of perspectives, both negative (criticism) and positive (refutation), contribute to shaping and influencing public debate among AMAY's readers in Egypt (and beyond).

This positive coverage around the QFWC host is also reflected in Theme 3, in which AMAY highlights Qatar's huge investments in infrastructure and modernization.

Theme 3: Infrastructure in Qatar for the QFWC

This is a theme, which I had not expected in advance to identify as a theme. The infrastructure in Qatar however, was discussed at such length in the news coverage of AMAY that I felt I had to

⁴⁷ وقال رئيس الاتحاد السوداني في تصريح له إن الاتحاد السوداني يقف مع قطر ويرفض حملات التشويه و«التشكيك المغرضة» التي تتعرض لها قطر، مشيرًا إلى أن هذه الحملات لن تعطل مسيرة قطر التي بدأت مبكرًا في تنظيم بطولة استثنائية وتاريخية لا تمثل قطر فحسب بل هي بطولة لكل العرب».

include it. This highlights once again how useful inductive thematic analysis is, where the researcher is open to the data he/she comes across while researching.

This theme deals with Qatar's huge efforts and investments in modernizing and enhancing infrastructure in view of the QFWC.

Within this theme, various aspects are dealt with, beginning with the integration of some sustainability principles in stadium construction. For example, this was manifested in the construction of the world's first fully demountable stadium. AMAY states this as follows:

Stadium 974 was previously known as Ras Abu About Stadium, and it is one of the most famous stadiums in Doha, but it was renovated and converted into the first fully dismantled stadium in the history of the World Cup... It was built to keep pace with global voices in preserving the environment and climate, and to become an example for the world to follow in sustainability. ⁴⁸ (Al Nasr, 2022, November 18).

In addition, cultural representations were also incorporated into the architecture of the stadiums to honor Qatari and Islamic culture. In its coverage, AMAY reported the following about the Lusail Stadium: "Many architects described it as an architectural masterpiece, inspired by Qatari and Islamic culture."⁴⁹ (Hisham, 2022b, December 10). What really struck me is the term "تحفة فنية معمارية" ("architectural masterpiece") in this code, referring to the Lusail Stadium. In describing this stadium based on Qatari and Islamic identity and culture, I believe this code points to AMAY's wish to underline the (regional) prestige of Islam and to promote of a positive, modern image of Islam among its readership in Egypt (and beyond).

Moreover, community involvement and influence are highlighted thanks to the stadiums' close location to public transport and community centers. Besides, technological innovation also has a role to play in spectator comfort, due to the implementation of unique cooling systems to counter high temperatures. Lastly, Qatar spent a substantial \$250 billion to implement these infrastructural developments, as a way of underlining the grandeur and scale of these projects (Al Nasr, Omar & Mustafa, 2022, December 16; Abdulmomen, 2022, November 18).

What stands out in this third theme of AMAY's coverage is the emphasis on Qatar's huge efforts and investment in infrastructure for the QFWC, which can be seen as an attempt to portray Qatar in a

⁴⁸ "استاد 974 كان يُعرف من قبل باسم ملعب رأس أبو عيود، وهو من أشهر ملاعب الدوحة، ولكن تم تجديده وتحويله لأول ملعب قابل للتفكيك بالكامل في تاريخ كأس العالم... وتم بناؤه لمواكبة الأصوات العالمية بالحفاظ على البيئة والمناخ، وحتى يصبح مثالا يقتدى به العالم في الاستدامة."⁴⁹ وصفه الكثيرون من المهندسون المعماريون بأن استاد لوسيل تحفة فنية معمارية، مستوحاه من الثقافة القطرية والإسلامية."

positive way. This includes highlighting things like the integration of sustainability principles, recognition of Islamic culture, community involvement and technological innovation in the infrastructure of stadium construction (Al Nasr, 2022a, November 18). Even in this coverage, I ask myself in a speculative manner: Does AMAY report in this way under pressure from the Egyptian authorities or out of a sense of Arab solidarity (in line with its own stance)?

First, by bringing forward a positive perception of Qatar may partly be a reflection of the pressure from the Egyptian authorities, and the associated fear of imposing censorship, to report positively on Qatar because of Egypt's good relations with the country.

Second, it may be that AMAY wants to underline the prestige and the modern form of Islam. This emphasis on cultural representation also touches on Theme 7, which focuses on the Arab nature of this SME.

Third, this coverage could also simply be a reflection of AMAY's status as a newspaper known for its in-depth coverage and focus on specific details or analysis of issues such as infrastructure, given that reporting on this appears purely informative, neutral and objective at first glance. This kind of coverage does not come across in the case of Al Ahram because this newspaper, with its wide readership, normally chooses to focus on general information about the tournament, and therefore does not focus on precise matters such as those related to infrastructure. As for the public debate surrounding the QFWC, this positive coverage potentially once again paid off in favor of Qatar.

Theme 4: Respect Cultural Norms

This theme, about respecting culture, sheds light on the balancing act the Qatar government underwent during the QFWC, which is in line with Griffin's theory (2019). For example, a balance had to be struck between preserving Qatari and Islamic culture and identity on the one hand and hosting an event of such a large scale on the other, which involves infiltration of Western values, among other things. In other words, the one thing that emerges strongly from this theme is that the QFWC functioned as a unique crossroad where different cultures clashed.

More specifically, this theme highlights the Qatari authorities' expectation that international visitors must adapt to and respect the local culture during the FWC. Among other things, this includes

adherence to the country's Islamic norms and values, reflected in the alcohol ban and not promoting homosexuality/LGBTQ. AMAY's coverage shows that upholding Qatari and especially Islamic values was respected by the following prominent Egyptian figure:

Dr. Ahmed Karima, a professor of comparative jurisprudence and Islamic law at Al Azhar University, thanked the government and people of the State of Qatar for preventing the raising of the gay slogan and banning the consumption of alcohol during the FWC, saying: "May God reward you for preserving the identity of the Islamic nation."⁵⁰(Mustafa, 2022, December 3).

By using the part of this code "ربنا هيوجرکم لحفاظکم على هوية الأمة الإسلامية" ("May God reward you for preserving the identity of the Islamic nation"), the recognition and appreciation of Qatari decisions are strengthened. This code also implies that AMAY recognizes, supports and appreciates this attitude of Qatar, which indicates mutual respect between Egypt and Qatar in terms of religious values and cultural norms. Since issues such as homosexuality and alcohol consumption are often associated with Western liberalization, this quote can also be seen as a symbolic act of resistance to these Western influences and norms. In short, this code shows solidarity within the Islamic community.

Additionally, tourists/visitors are briefed on dress codes and restrictions on pork consumption. This is reflected by AMAY in a neutral way: "Eating and clothing rules in Qatar for the World Cup. The rules recommend not bringing pork. Clothing that covers the shoulders and knees is recommended in government places."⁵¹ (Shauqi, 2022, November 18). Any individual who breaches these cultural norms could face harsh punishments, including fines, imprisonment and deportation, with Qatar authorities emphasizing that they do not condone criticism of the government or Islam and that such expressions could result in persecution. These codes from AMAY's coverage are more of a practical guide to cross cultures by providing information and guidance rather than dictation (Shauqi, 2022, November 18).

The neutral way AMAY reports on these rules and restrictions indicates two different things, in my opinion. On the one hand, these codes reflect a high degree of respect for these cultural norms and values, since this newspaper and its readers, would also appreciate respect for Egyptian and Islamic norms and values if it organized an SME, like the FWC. This ensures the promotion of recognition and respect for these norms within public discourse in the Egyptian and wider Islamic community.

⁵⁰ قدم الدكتور أحمد كريمة، أستاذ الفقه المقارن والشريعة الإسلامية بجامعة الأزهر، الشكر لدولة قطر حكومة وشعبًا على منع رفع شعار المثليين، ومنع تناول الخمر، خلال كأس العالم، قائلاً: «ربنا هيوجرکم لحفاظکم على هوية الأمة الإسلامية».

⁵¹ قواعد الأكل والملابس في قطر لحضور كأس العالم. توصي القواعد بعدم إحضار لحوم خنزير. يوصى بملابس تغطي الكتفين والركبتين في الأماكن الحكومية، عدا ذلك في الاماكن العامة التي تمتلى بالزائرون غير مُجبرين على الالتزام بملابس محددة».

On the other hand, this theme could indicate a conscious attempt by the newspaper to distance itself from direct criticism of these norms and values, like the Western media and critics do (as seen in the news coverage of The Times and The Guardian).

Overall, this theme points on the one hand to a reflection of the complex balancing act the Qatar government had to do between preserving its local culture and dealing with the outside pressures of hosting an SME. On the other hand it points to the differences between the Middle East (the Arab and Islamic world) and the rest of the world, regarding traditional and modern values.

Like Theme 3, this theme is also intertwined with Theme 7, which emphasizes respect for Arab culture and identity. Furthermore, this theme is also interwoven with Theme 1, which addresses the controversial issues of LGBTQ+ rights.

Theme 5: Political Impact of the QFWC

This theme further explores ways in which politics and sport are becoming increasingly intertwined, with a specific focus on the QFWC, which is considered as a milestone in this trend, described by AMAY as a “صراع الحضارات” ('clash of civilisations') (Alaa, 2022, December 29).

1. The interconnectedness of Diplomacy and the QFWC

This sub-theme explains the contribution of the QFWC to promoting international relations, specifically focusing on relations between Qatar and Egypt, Egypt and Turkey, and Qatar and the United States.

The QFWC functioned as a platform to boost diplomatic ties between different countries. In this regard, AMAY mainly connected this to Egypt's diplomatic relations. AMAY reported this as follows:

The media, Qaswaa Al Khalali, said that President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi returned safely to the homeland after attending the opening ceremony of the World Cup in Doha, Qatar, according to the official statement of the Presidency of the Republic... President Al Sisi also expressed the Qatari hospitality and good reception, and

*emphasized the depth of the historical relations between the two brotherly countries.*⁵² (Taha, 2022, November 21).

In addition, Al Sisi congratulated Qatar as follows, which awakens a form of Arabicity:

*Al Khalali added, during her presentation of her program “In the Evening with Qaswaa”, broadcast on CBC, that President Al Sisi congratulated the Qatari leadership and people on the success of the opening ceremony of the FIFA World Cup, and the launch of the tournament in an honorable manner befitting the status of the Arab countries.*⁵³ (Taha, 2022, November 21).

Additionally, the QFWC acted as a chance for a rapprochement between Egypt and Turkey, which AMAY reported as follows:

*The picture of the peace of President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan caught the eye at the opening of the World Cup in Qatar, especially considering the first picture that brings together the two leaders since President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi assumed power in 2014, while the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad appears in the picture, bringing them together, while he sat in front of the leaders at the opening of the World Cup.*⁵⁴ (Dayf, 2022, November 20).

Lastly, the American Minister of Foreign Affairs Antony Blinken recognized Qatar's efforts in hosting the QFWC, which symbolizes the strong diplomatic ties between the two countries: “For his part, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said that Qatar has outperformed the United States in hosting this wonderful and detailed dialogue and it also excelled in pleasure and entertainment.”⁵⁵ (Ramadan, 2022d, November 22).

Overall, this sub-theme shows that AMAY pays attention to how the QFWC has contributed to maintaining and improving diplomatic relations between countries, indicating that this newspaper

⁵² قالت الإعلامية قصواء الخاللي، إن الرئيس عبدالفتاح السيسي عاد بسلامة الله إلى أرض الوطن بعدما حضر حفل افتتاح كأس العالم في الدوحة بقطر 2022، وذلك حسب البيان الرسمي لرئاسة الجمهورية... واستطردت: الرئيس السيسي أعرب كذلك على كرم الضيافة وحسن الاستقبال القطري، والتأكيد على عمق العلاقات التاريخية بين البلدين الشقيقين.”

⁵³ وأضافت «الخاللي»، خلال تقديمها لبرنامجها «في المساء مع قصواء»، والمداع على فضائية CBC، إن الرئيس السيسي تقدم بالتهنئة لقطر قيادة وشعبا على نجاح حفل افتتاح بطولة كأس العالم لكرة القدم، وانطلاق البطولة بشكل مشرف يليق بمكانة الدول العربية.”

⁵⁴ خطفت الصورة الخاصة بسلام الرئيس عبدالفتاح السيسي والرئيس التركي رجب طيب أردوغان الأنظار في افتتاحية كأس العالم في قطر، خاصة مع اعتبار الصورة الأولى التي تجمع الزعيمين منذ تولي الرئيس عبدالفتاح السيسي السلطة عام 2014، فيما يظهر في الصورة أمير قطر تميم بن حمد يجمعهما سوياً، فيما جلس في واجهة الزعماء في افتتاح كأس العالم.”

⁵⁵ من جانبه، قال وزير خارجية الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، أنتوني بلينكن، إن قطر تفوقت على الولايات المتحدة في استضافة هذا الحوار الرابع والمفصل، كما تفوقت في الإمتاع والترفيه.”

sees the QFWC as something more than just a sporting event, both for the host country Qatar and other countries.

2. The Intertwining of (Political) Conflict and the FWC

This sub-theme explores the ways in which the QFWC has drawn attention to and influenced various political international tensions and conflicts, including the war between Russia and Ukraine and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

First, AMAY reported on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in a neutral purely informative way, as seen here: “And the Russian national team was excluded from international tournaments by FIFA and the European Football Association (UEFA), while the Ukrainian national team was eliminated from the World Cup qualifying round by losing to Wales.”⁵⁶ (Rajab, 2022, October 31).

Additionally, this newspaper discussed the following: “And Monday, the Ukrainian Federation confirmed in a statement that the executive committee wants to exclude Iran from the tournament because of the possible involvement of Iran in the Russian-Ukrainian war.” (Rajab, 2022, October 31). This request was on the grounds of possible human rights violations and UN Security Council sanctions against Iran. In this way, this conflict (almost) affected the sporting aspects of the FWC.

International media such as The National (UAE) argue that Egypt initially stayed neutral during this conflict, although it later condemned the Russian invasion under pressure from the West, but did not impose sanctions against Russia because of its dependence on Russian trade (Tabikha, 2023, March 24). Using this political context, the neutral codes of AMAY’s coverage can be seen as reflecting Egypt's neutral position in this conflict, as the Egyptian authorities influence AMAY's coverage.

Thirdly, the QFWC has also affected Palestinian-Israeli relations. While the conflict is still ongoing, a Qatari official advocated against the politicization of the FWC. AMAY puts it like this: “In Doha, a Qatari official told AFP on condition of anonymity that the agreement falls within the framework of Qatar’s commitment to the requirements of hosting the World Cup in football and should not be politicized.”⁵⁷ (Ramadan, 2022b, November 10). For instance, the FWC was seen as an opportunity for both Israelis and Palestinians to watch football together, something that could be used as a

⁵⁶ «وَجَرى استبعاد منتخب روسيا من البطولات الدولية من قبل فيفا والاتحاد الأوروبي لكرة القدم «بيوفا» في الوقت الذي خرج فيه منتخب أوكرانيا من الدور الفاصل المؤهل للمونديال بخسارته على يد منتخب ويلز».

⁵⁷ «وفي الدوحة، قال مسؤول قطري لوكالة فرانس برس طالبًا عدم نشر اسمه إن الاتفاق «يندرج في إطار التزام قطر بمتطلبات استضافة كأس العالم في كرة القدم ولا ينبغي تسييسه»».

platform for improved relations. Nevertheless, Qatar's position is still linked to the resolution of the Palestinian issue, including the two-state solution, AMAY states.

Overall, AMAY seems to put forward the role of the QFWC as a platform to highlight and potentially resolve international conflicts, albeit in a neutral, objective and balanced informative manner. This could also reflect the political pressure exerted by the Egyptian authorities, which in turn influences the shaping and influencing of public discourse around the FWC.

In Theme 5 it becomes clear that AMAY lays emphasis on the relationship between the QFWC on the one hand, and international politics and broader geopolitical issues associated with it on the other hand. In this regard, this theme makes it clear how this SME was used as an instrument for countries to not only increase diplomatic engagement but also to challenge international conflicts in the Middle East and beyond, which in turn shapes and influences public discourse around the QFWC.

What struck me while conducting this ITA is that AMAY linked politics and the FWC more (three times more in collected codes) than Al Ahram did. I rather expected this to be the other way round, which points to the inductive character of this research. While I don't know the exact explanation for this, I do have some speculative hypotheses, two of which I discuss here.

First, since both AMAY and Al Ahram are newspapers that are, although to varying degrees, under the influence of the Egyptian government, the Egyptian government might exert pressure on these papers to offer balanced coverage to the Egyptian readership (and beyond). For instance, the government can decide to take a more open political discussion in AMAY, while allowing a more nuanced approach to political issues in Al Ahram. As such, the Egyptian authorities succeeded in finding a balance between controlling news coverage and maintaining a certain degree of press freedom.

Second, each newspaper can have its own editorial agenda and focus. For example, AMAY could have decided to deliberately provide a broader context around the QFWC by covering political issues surrounding Qatar and the FWC.

I think it is key as a researcher to note here that this research, like any research, runs into certain limitations, and I would also like to recognize the biases of my approach used in my research. In doing so, I note that the precise reasons behind the different approaches of AMAY (and Al Ahram) could vary depending on a complex set of factors, of which some relate to the internal editorial processes of AMAY (and Al Ahram) (e.g. pressure from government, preferences and interests of the

readership, set of journalistic values and standards, individual beliefs, interests and expertise of the journalists working for these newspapers). For future research, it may be interesting to confirm these speculative hypotheses with more detailed research.

Theme 6: Economic Impact of the QFWC

This theme covers the economic implications of the QFWC, both for the host country itself as for the surrounding regions/countries like Egypt.

More specifically, AMAY articulated as follows why the QFWC provided a great opportunity to leverage for the Egyptian economy, as stated here from the Egyptian perspective:

*For his part, Kamel Abu Ali, head of the Tourism Investment Association, confirmed that international sporting events, especially those related to football, attract the world's attention, and it was a great opportunity for us to take advantage of this global event to promote tourism in Egypt and the possibilities offered by hotels, beach tourist attractions, and others.*⁵⁸ (Al Sayed Suleiman, 2022, December 19).

With the phrase "تجذب أنظار العالم" ("attract the world's attention"), AMAY puts forward her acknowledgement of the immense global interest in the QFWC and its host, Qatar.

In addition, the QFWC also strengthened economic cooperation between Egypt and Qatar through Qatari investments in Egypt and through Egyptians employment in Qatar, about which the Qatari Ambassador in Cairo emphasizes the Qatari focus on taking care of these Egyptian workers (Atef, 2022, December 13).

Finally, AMAY states that the economic growth of Qatar, which is partly due to the non-oil sector, indicates that the QFWC has had a positive impact on the economic diversification and growth of the country. AMAY puts it as follows:

He stated that the Qatari economy continued to grow during the current year, after the decline that occurred in 2020, as the preliminary data indicates that the domestic product grew during the first half of this year by 4.3%, supported by the

⁵⁸ من جانبه، أكد كامل أبو علي رئيس جمعية الاستثمار السياحي، أن الأحداث الرياضية العالمية، خاصة الخاصة بكرة القدم تجذب أنظار العالم، وكانت فرصة كبيرة أن نستغل هذا الحدث العالمي للترويج للسياحة في مصر والإمكانيات التي توفرها الفنادق ومناطق الجذب السياحي الشاطئية وغيرها".

growth of the non-oil sector by 7.3% compared to the same period of the previous year.⁵⁹ (Al Masry Al Youm, 2022b, October 26).

Overall, this theme discusses how not only Qatar but also Egypt is using the QFWC to take its economy and tourism to the next level. In addition, this theme also shows how AMAY once again portrays Qatar in a favorable light to highlight economic cooperation between the two countries and Qatar's economic growth and diversification in a positive way. This positivity regarding Qatar's image as a respectful partner can be seen as the pressure exerted on AMAY by the Egyptian authorities, which shapes and influences the public discussion around the FWC. This theme, together with Theme 5 on politics, contributes to the overall narrative around this FWC by highlighting the broader implications of the QFWC.

Here I need to note that while conducting my ITA, few codes were generated which I could subsequently place under this theme concerning the economic impact of the FWC. Nevertheless, I still found it to be worthwhile to cover this theme.

Theme 7: Arabicity

This theme underlines AMAY's coverage of: the promoted presentation of Arab identity and culture, the pride and solidarity felt among Arab countries, the acknowledgment of Qatar's influence in region and lastly the recognition of the connecting power of sports. All of this is discussed within the boundaries of the state-controlled Egyptian media landscape, and in the context of the first QFWC in an Arab/Islamic country.

This "first time" is stressed several times in AMAY's coverage:

The world is preparing these days to receive the most important sporting event, which millions of fans of "the round witch" and others await every 4 years, which is the twenty-second edition of the World Cup, which Qatar will host from November 20 to December 18, 2022, and this is the first edition of the tournament to be held in an Arab country.⁶⁰ (Al Nasr, 2022, November 18).

⁵⁹، وأفاد بأن الاقتصاد القطري واصل النمو خلال العام الجاري، بعد التراجع الذي حدث عام 2020، حيث تشير البيانات الأولية إلى نمو الناتج المحلي خلال النصف الأول من العام الجاري بنسبة 4.3% مدعوماً بنمو القطاع غير النفطي بنسبة 7.3% مقارنةً بالفترة المماثلة من العام السابق،⁶⁰ يتأهب العالم هذه الأيام لاستقبال الحدث الرياضي الأهم، والذي ينتظره الملايين من عشاق الساحرة المستديرة وغيرهم كل 4 أعوام، وهو النسخة الثانية والعشرين من بطولة كأس العالم، والتي تستضيفها قطر في الفترة من 20 نوفمبر حتى 18 ديسمبر 2022، وتعتبر هذه أول نسخة من البطولة تُقام في دولة عربية".

By using the phrase "الساحرة المُستديرة" ("the round witch") here, which is a metaphor for football, this code helps create an atmosphere of excitement regarding the QFWC.

As a result, the QFWC is considered a prime opportunity to present Arab culture and identity on the world stage, as demonstrated by the focus on Arabic language and traditions, as follows in AMAY's coverage:

The World Cup final witnessed several scenes that were the most prominent and most circulated among the pioneers of social media, on top of which was the closing ceremony, which was dominated by the Arab character, starting with singing in Arabic by Arab singers, alongside foreign artists, preserving the Qatari uniform, whether from artists or officials, and the appearance of the Palestinian poet Tamim Al Barghouti and reciting a poem supporting the Palestinian cause, pride in the Arabic language, and other aspects that were praised by masses around the world.

⁶¹ (Al Nasr, 2022b, December 20).

Through the phrase "غلب عليه الطابع العربي" ("dominated by the Arab character"), AMAY emphasizes the celebration of Arab identity. In addition to Arab unity and solidarity, this code also focuses more specifically on the Palestinian issue, indicating AMAY's support for it. This seems to be in tune with the position of the majority of the Egyptian readership, which is against Israel in this conflict. This code could possibly imply AMAY's own position on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as this is not in line with the position of the Egyptian authorities, who rather act as mediators in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as reported in Reuters (Al Mughrabi, 2023, 9 February). While this is worth mentioning, I will not discuss it further as this complex conflict is beyond the scope of my research.

Also, this theme simultaneously looks at the role of sport as a medium for cultural unity. Sporting events, such as the FWC, cross national borders and bring together people from diverse backgrounds in their common enthusiasm and passion for sport. For example, this sentiment came out strongly among all Arab fans, as AMAY states: "The Arab public showed clear solidarity through social media platforms, during the first round of the World Cup matches, as the Arab teams performed well."⁶² (Magdy, 2022, November 26). Lastly, this theme explores the role of social media, which is used, on the one hand, to express solidarity and support for Arab teams and, on the other, to promote Arab

⁶¹ "شهد نهائي كأس العالم عدة مشاهد كانت الأبرز والأكثر تداولاً بين رواد السوشيال ميديا، وعلى رأسها حفل الختام الذي غلب عليه الطابع العربي، بداية من الغناء باللغة العربية من مطربين عرب، بجانب فنانيين أجانب، والحفاظ على الزي الرسمي القطري، سواء من الفنانين أو المسؤولين، وظهور الشاعر الفلسطيني تميم البرغوثي وإلقاء قصيدة تدعم القضية الفلسطينية، والاعتزاز باللغة العربية، وغيرها من المظاهر التي أشاد بها الجماهير حول العالم."

⁶² "أبدى الجمهور العربي تكاتفًا واضحًا عبر منصات التواصل الاجتماعي، خلال الجولة الأولى لمباريات كأس العالم، حيث أثلت المنتخبات العربية بلاءً حسنًا"

culture and identity. This then helps raise the global visibility and acknowledgement of the Arab world.

In its coverage around Arabicity, AMAY's style of language contributes to the creation of a narrative of Arab unity, pride and celebration of cultural identity, which in turn influences public debate surrounding this SME.

Just as was the case with Al Ahram, this theme is linked to no less than three different themes (Theme 3, 4 and 5), making it possible to say that this theme is the common thread running through AMAY's coverage of the QFWC. As such, these four themes all have positivity around this SME at their core and all contribute to a general sense of Arab unity and pride.

3.3.4. The Guardian

Theme 1: Criticism & Controversies surrounding the QFWC

In this theme, a lot of criticism against this QFWC and its host focuses on human rights in the country, with particular concerns being raised about the treatment of migrant workers that built infrastructure for this SME. In the following code, The Guardian sums up the biggest criticisms and controversies associated with Qatar: "Qatar has come in for severe criticism on a number of fronts, but in particular for its treatment of migrant workers, anti LGBTQ+ laws, and restrictions on freedom of speech." (Wintour, 2022, November 15) Besides criticism on human rights, there is also criticism of Qatar's infrastructure, its size and suitability as a host country, and its role in exercising power and reputation management.

1.1. Human Rights

1.1.1. Working conditions and rights of migrant workers

In its coverage, The Guardian produced a plethora of online newspaper articles spotlighting the working conditions of migrant workers in Qatar. Considering this enormous volume, I could only select a few illustrative excerpts to underline this stance. For instance, The Guardian puts it like this:

The city that awaits them is one that has been transformed in the 12 years since the small Gulf state won its bid to host one of the biggest sporting events in the world... They are also the legacy of the sweat and toil of the migrant worker army recruited from some of the poorest countries around the globe who worked long hours in sweltering conditions to build Qatar's World Cup dream. (Pattison, 2022a, November 20).

By using the harsh terms "sweat and toil" and "migrant army", The Guardian highlights the hard work and sacrifices of migrant workers. This reflects the newspaper's attempt to elicit empathy from its readership in order to influence public discourse, to the disadvantage of the organizers of this QFWC.

The conditions The Guardian mentions include long working days without pay, unhygienic living conditions and exploitation in general - often described as "modern slavery". Workers themselves express feelings of powerlessness and helplessness and feel trapped in their current situation. The Guardian discusses one migrant worker's experience as follows:

Ganesh's short life formed part of a major investigation into the treatment of Qatar's vast low-wage migrant workforce (almost 90% of the country's population comprises migrant workers). It revealed an appalling catalog of abuses – overcrowded, filthy accommodation, passport confiscation and non-payment of wages – which in some cases may have amounted to forced labor, a modern form of slavery. (Pattison, 2022b, November 15)

Using terms like "appalling catalogue of abuses" and "forced labor" on the one hand, and suggesting that workers are treated as modern-day slaves on the other, creates a strong moral resentment among The Guardian's readership about these violations, thereby influencing the public discourse. The online newspaper article continues as follows:

We documented the poverty wages being paid to the men constructing the new stadiums. In 2014 one told us he was earning overtime pay the equivalent of 45 pence an hour. Four years later another said his basic wage worked out at 60 pence an hour – 10,000 times less than the reported earnings of Lionel Messi. (Pattison, 2022b, November 15).

By mentioning these contrasting wages, The Guardian underscores the unfairness of the situation.

Then again, in another online newspaper article, The Guardian quotes a migrant worker as follows: "Geoffrey: "They don't know their rights; their contracts are violated; there is discriminatory pay,

and then there's the weather. People are working in severe temperatures. They get dehydrated. Workers have been dying in their sleep." (Pattison, 2022c, October 23). In addition, there is criticism that human rights issues only manifested themselves after the FWC was granted to Qatar. This questions the responsibility of organizations like FIFA to be mindful of human rights in the country in question when deciding on host countries. The Guardian quoted the same migrant worker, Geoffrey, saying: "I think a country's human rights record should be part of the evaluation process when awarding a World Cup. For Fifa, it was an afterthought." (Pattison, 2022c, October 23) In another news article The Guardian phrases the following with some degree of sarcasm: "Who would have thought that an authoritarian regime with an appalling workers' rights record was not to be trusted?" (MacInnes, 2022b, November 18) With this sarcasm and irony, The Guardian wants to underline the hypocritical choice to let Qatar host this FWC. As such, the criticism focuses not only on the specific situation in Qatar, but also on the wider, global football community (especially FIFA) and its priorities and values. This criticism reflects The Guardian's role as a progressive media dedicated to revealing systemic problems that go beyond specific events, such as the QFWC.

Now I discuss more specifically the "Lack of Transparency", which was an important topic in The Guardian's coverage. This topic relates to the allegations made against Qatar for not disclosing enough information regarding working conditions and deaths of (migrant) workers in the run-up to the start of the QFWC.

Various codes from The Guardian raise questions about the figures provided, pointing out that the factual number of worker deaths might be much higher than what is officially reported. The Guardian discusses this, as reported by different authorities or organizations:

The number of work-related deaths in Qatar is in dispute. Last year the Guardian reported that at least 6,500 migrant workers – many of them likely to have been working on World Cup preparations – had died in Qatar since it won the right to stage the event... The Supreme Committee has said three work-related deaths and 37 non-work-related deaths have occurred on World Cup-related projects... In a recent TV interview Hassan Al Thawadi, the Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, estimated that the number of migrant workers who had died on World Cup-related projects was "between 400 and 500. (Ingle, 2022d, December 8)

Another news article suggests even a completely different number:

While the official number of work-related deaths during preparations for the \$220bn project is three, according to the Qataris and Gianni Infantino, Fifa's president, the exact number of migrant workers who have died as a result of negligence remains unknown. (Abdul, 2022, November 18)

From these codes, the inconsistency about the number of deaths comes out strongly.

Besides, this section about the lack of transparency argues that more research should also be done on worker deaths and claims that many families of deceased workers did not receive compensation. The Guardian states as follows:

The continued debate around the number of workers who have died in the preparation of the World Cup exposes the stark reality that so many bereaved families are still waiting for truth and justice. Over the last decade, thousands of workers have returned home in coffins, with no explanation given to their loved ones. (MacInnes, 2022c, November 29)

By using words like "bereaved families", "still waiting for truth and justice", "coffins", The Guardian is once again seeking to shock and emotionalize its readership, resulting in the creation of a negative image of the host country Qatar in the public arena.

Additionally, human rights organizations also criticize Qatari authorities for lack of action and accountability within this context. The Guardian discusses this as follows:

There has not been a single conviction despite, reportedly, thousands of laborer deaths... Nothing has changed, because the system works... Whoever wins out of Argentina and France, the ultimate winner has been Qatar. It got away with it. (Hyde, 2022, December 16)

Here as well, The Guardian uses strong language such as "It got away with it", by which it wants to call Qatar and FIFA a murderer. The Guardian highlights this whole controversy about Qatar's alleged lack of transparency in dealing with this issue in general, stating that human rights organizations are hugely upset about it.

Although there have been reforms, which I discuss in the next theme, doubts exist about the effectiveness and timing of these reforms. Subsequently, alongside these reforms, compensation for abuses such as wage theft and unexplained deaths continues to be demanded, The Guardian states as follows:

As fans and footballers descend on the Persian Gulf country for the month-long tournament, workers and their families, who have spent 12 years sounding the alarm on exploitative conditions endured while building the tournament's infrastructure, are seeking an amount equivalent to the \$440m (£372m) World Cup prize money for a remediation programme. (Abdul, 2022, November 18).

By putting "\$440 million (£372 million) World Cup prize money" next to "remediation programme", the Guardian aims to highlight that attention to this FWC must be proportional to attention to the working and living conditions of Qatar's laborers.

1.1.2. Racism/ Women's rights/ LGBTQ rights

This subtheme relates specifically to the concerns about and criticism of discrimination and inequality that different groups, including people of color, women and members of the LGBTQ+ community, experience in Qatar. These include legal restrictions but also cultural and social prejudices.

According to The Guardian's reporting, racism, particularly towards African workers, is an ever-present problem in Qatari society. This is how The Guardian described the experience of a migrant worker of color: "'Kachara' ['garbage'], they shout at us. The attitude is that we barely exist." (Ames, 2022, December 21)

Next to that, a key area of discussion is LGBTQ+ rights, with worries about the treatment and rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in the Gulf country, considering that their activities are punishable under Qatari law. In one of its articles, The Guardian describes this as follows:

Years in prison that men and women who have sexual relations outside marriage can face under 281 article of the penal code... Cases of ill-treatment in detention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people between 2019 and 2022, according to a report by HRW in October 2022. (Ingle, 2022a, November 14)

Further, it is also described as follows:

Take LGBTQ+ rights. For years, western reporters and human rights groups have criticized Qatar's record. Then this month a Qatari World Cup ambassador, Khalid Salman, called homosexuality a 'damage in the mind' and warned gay fans they would 'have to accept our rules'. (Ingle, 2022b, November 18)

Lastly, women's rights are also a concern, with limitations based on guardianship laws standing in stark contrast to positive developments such as increased employment and educational participation among women (Safi, 2022, November 20). A journalist from The Guardian wrote the following about her experience as a woman in Qatar:

I do have insight into being a woman, and was advised by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that if I was sexually assaulted I should not report it to the police – but to the Australian embassy instead – because I could be prosecuted for engaging in what the state deemed to be extramarital sex. (Kemp, 2022b, December 8)

On the basis of these codes, it becomes clear once again that The Guardian uses a lot of emotive and upsetting language in order to exercise more influence on its readers and, consequently, on public discourse.

1.2. Other Controversies

This subtheme consists of a large number of topics related to different forms of criticisms and debates around the QFWC.

A. Corruption

This topic draws attention to criticism and controversies around the awarding of the FWC to Qatar. For instance, The Guardian reflects on the bidding process as follows:

It has been a grueling process to reach this point... Instead, from the moment Blatter opened his envelope and read out the word 'Qatar' in a halting voice... he lit a fuse under Fifa's own mountain bunker... This is item one on the Qatar 2022 charge sheet, a World Cup that was basically awarded by a toxic criminal organization. (Ronay, 2022a, November 18)

What is notable is that The Guardian, in line with its reputation for in-depth analysis, did state clearly in its coverage that Qatar has officially been proven not guilty (yet), something not highlighted in the other three newspapers:

Before we go on, I should of course say there has never been any incontrovertible evidence uncovered that links Qatar to corruption in the manner it secured its World Cup... There is no smoking gun on Qatar's successful bid... The desert state

would prefer you focus solely on its jubilation in that 2010 footage of Sepp Blatter opening the envelope revealing the word 'Qatar'. (Hyde, 2022, December 16)

B. Celebrities

This topic covers reactions of well-known personalities to criticism and controversies related to the QFWC. The Guardian's online newspaper articles provide examples of performers defending or refusing to take part in the event. For example, The Guardian states:

Robbie Williams has defended his decision to perform in Qatar during the World Cup, arguing that it would be “hypocritical” not to go... The singer, 48, has been criticized on social media for agreeing to sing during the tournament, due to the country’s human rights record, stance on homosexuality and treatment of migrant workers. (Badshah, 2022, November 18)

Since Williams was keen on going to the FWC anyway, Amnesty International requested the following: "Amnesty International has called on Williams to use his concert to publicly address the accusations against Qatar." (Badshah, 2022, November 18) With this topic, The Guardian allows its readers to explore the intersection of entertainment, activism and ethics, thereby stimulating public debate on ethical commitment.

C. Alcohol Ban

This topic primarily focuses on particular controversies related to the impact of Qatar's cultural and national identity on the regulations around the event, in this case the alcohol ban. The Guardian states that there is a certain amount of fear surrounding this: "And fans who sink a few alcoholic drinks still don't know where the boundary will be between over-exuberance and arrest." (Ingle, 2022c, November 19) Important to note here is that this topic was barely touched upon by The Guardian, as it prioritizes other controversies.

D. Sportswashing

This topic relates to accusations that Qatar is leveraging SMEs to portray a more positive image of the country in the global community. The Guardian illustrates it like this: "This is the stuff of a nation giddy on wealth and gifted a licence, through football, to launder its reputation on the global stage." (Kemp, 2022, November 19) In another online newspaper article The Guardian states the following:

The nation-building exercise since that fateful December day in 2010, when the world watched in collective disbelief as this oil-rich Gulf nation was awarded

World Cup hosting rights, has been a turbocharged operation in infrastructure growth with questionable long-term prospects. (Kemp, 2022, November 19)

What is striking here is that The Guardian uses the more positive connotated word “nation-building” instead of “sportswashing”, which correlates to what I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis. This variation in name-calling reflects The Guardian's nuanced eagerness to communicate with more accurate meanings. An example where The Guardian does use the term “sportswashing” is the following:

As we know from the World Cup, Qatar is intensely involved in the use of sport to refashion its image on the international stage, and Qatar's possible involvement with Tottenham should be seen in this context – as more potential sportswashing. (The Guardian, 2023, January 12)

Another code links “sportswashing” to human rights concerns:

We're not necessarily opposing the further involvement of state-linked overseas financial consortia in English football, whether at Tottenham or anywhere else, but the Premier League must urgently update its ownership rules to ensure they're human rights-compliant and not an open invitation for more sportswashing. (The Guardian, 2023, January 12)

So this advice shows that The Guardian is not only criticizing, but also suggesting improvements. In this regard, The Guardian underscores its commitment to responsible journalism by putting forward the concept of "sportswashing" in line with the ethical issues associated with it. In fact, The Guardian argues that Qatar's attempt to use sport as a vehicle to showcase the country has backfired:

Qatar wanted the world's gaze. Instead, it has received its glare, in the form of critical media coverage of its conservative social laws, substandard conditions for low-wage workers and the circumstances surrounding its successful World Cup bid. (Safi, 2022, November 20)

This is in contrast to Papanikos (2023) and Al Thani (2021), whom I mentioned in my introduction. They argue that the QFWC did not backfire. I believe opinions will always be divided on this matter since soft power, as already mentioned, is not an analytical concept.

This theme clearly brings to the fore the role that The Guardian seeks to adopt in shaping the discourse around these critiques and controversies in the context of the QFWC, which is the role of both critic and advocate. Both these roles are directly in proportion to how to present The Guardian in general:

an investigative, progressive and human rights-focused newspaper. In terms of the role of critic in the context of the QFWC, The Guardian is extremely active in engaging in discussions on ethical issues and reflecting on them critically. In terms of its advocacy role, The Guardian takes a stance on human rights and the transparency and accountability that comes with it. Lastly, this theme demonstrates prominently how The Guardian, to a much greater extent than The Times, makes use of shocking and emotional language and direct speech. In doing so, The Guardian seeks to denounce social injustice and strengthen the voices of marginalized workers and thereby shape and influence public debate.

Having discussed all the newspapers' theme on criticism and controversies, it is obvious to me that The Times and especially The Guardian devote more attention to this than AMAY and in particular Al Ahram. Like the other newspapers, this theme engages in direct dialogue with the theme on the refutation of criticism and controversies. Moreover, this theme has some connection to the third theme on fans, emphasizing controversies about the authenticity of fans and about Western fans their adaptation to the Qatari culture, especially LGBTQ+ fans. Lastly, this theme strengthens the fourth theme by, while discussing the wider implications of the FWC, also reigniting some critical discussions about Qatar's policies. In sum, I dare say that this is the most significant and comprehensively discussed theme in The Guardian's coverage of the QFWC, suggesting that this critical view stretches to the other themes in The Guardian's coverage as well.

Theme 2: Response to and Refutation of Criticism

This theme discusses The Guardian's coverage about the reactions to the criticisms and controversies surrounding the organization of the QFWC, principally by the host country itself, but also by visitors. As such, this theme covers a wide variety of topics, among them the transformative impact of the event, the successful management of it, the enhancement of workers' rights and the FWC's role in creating a bond between East and West.

First and foremost, The Guardian introduces a pushback:

The torrent of criticism that has poured down on Qatar at the start of the World Cup, particularly over its treatment of women, gay people and migrant workers, has also created a pushback, both from supporters of the Qatari regime and those who see in the criticism only western "performative moral outrage", "colonial myths" and "orientalist stereotypes. (Malik, 2022, November 27)

In this code, The Guardian admits that criticisms of the QFWC are not only based on genuine concerns, but also on outdated or distorted perceptions, stemming from "colonial myths" and "orientalist stereotypes". Like Al Ahram, The Guardian also recognizes that there is Orientalism underlying all the criticism from the international media.

Certain terms from the following code highlight the polarized political landscape in this context: "A striking feature of the pushback against criticism of Qatar is the prominence of rightwing figures whose usual target is the 'woke' left." (Malik, 2022, November 27) This code illustrates that the rise of right-wing figures can lead to a shift in the overall narrative surrounding the QFWC. The use of the precise term "woke" is indicative of the criticism of politically progressive figures, some of which can be discarded as overly performative or disingenuous.

Altogether, The Guardian quotes FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who defended various criticisms regarding the QFWC as follows:

Infantino pointed to the abolition of the kafala worker sponsorship system and the introduction of a minimum wage of £231 a month before promising he had received reassurances that the rights of gay people would be respected, at least during the World Cup. (Ingle, 2022c, November 19)

A. Regarding Working Conditions

Regardless of all the negative news coverage in The Guardian, Qatar is also portrayed, although to a lesser extent, for being a resilient and hospitable country that has made significant gains in terms of migrant workers' rights. Often, this progress is overlooked by Western media, creating counter-criticism. This highlights how the media have the ability to report on certain aspects and ignore others, demonstrating a power dynamic in reporting, which is in accordance with the agenda setting theory I already discussed in my literature review.

For instance, a Qatari official stated the following about the protection of migrant workers from large companies: "In response, a Qatari official said the country had a zero-tolerance approach towards violating companies, issuing harsh penalties that included fines and prison sentences." (Pattison, 2022a, November 20) Next to that, The Guardian recognizes the progress as follows: "The Qatari authorities and Fifa claim the World Cup will leave a lasting legacy of better workers' rights in the country and the region." (Pattison, 2022c, October 23) Moreover, it was acknowledged that reporting and advocacy were crucial in promoting these reforms. Yet, in its coverage of refuting criticism, criticism against Qatar is not spared by The Guardian, as it turns out:

The World Cup has been a catalyst for faster, deeper changes, including to the country's notorious labour sector – too late for the at least 6,500 south Asian migrant workers estimated to have died in the country over the past decade. (Safi, 2022, November 20)

This code therefore clarifies that, despite the emphasis on progress in this theme, criticism against Qatar prevails here again, which may highlight the power of the media as a platform for social discussion and at the same time influencing public discourse. This is reminiscent of how Al Ahram uses the same strategy, but vice versa. Thus, Al Ahram tries to put Qatar in a favorable light by highlighting positive elements when discussing the criticisms and controversies surrounding the QFWC. By this means, which is called "framing", the news media contributes to shaping and influencing public discourse.

B. Regarding Other Controversies

In the process, some visitors to the QFWC had a more positive experience than previously assumed. The Guardian journalist Emma Kemp shares her experience:

The reason for the cognitive dissonance is that I had an enjoyable time in Qatar. I felt welcome and looked after, and the tournament was well run... After 12 years of negative press, there is a new narrative emerging from some visitors to the Gulf state. They are saying it's not that bad after all. They have seen it with their own eyes now and can confirm it. (Kemp, 2022b, December 8)

In her entire article, Kemp described how she struggled with herself during her experience in Qatar during the QFWC. Due to the very negative criticism surrounding Qatar for the past years, she would have expected to notice this immediately once she was on site. However, she did not, leaving her with a strange feeling as she felt that the negative controversies surrounding Qatar, brought forward by the media since Qatar was appointed as the host country of this FWC, may not have turned out to be (completely) true. That said, she still maintains that Qatar to some extent has polished its display to the world during the QFWC, making everything look a little better during that period. Kemp calls this the grey zone between positive interactions and complex realities.

I found it very interesting that The Guardian painted a fairly positive picture of Qatar here. However, it cannot be compared to the articles by Al Thawadi and Barnes of The Times, as these were much sharper reviews. Moreover, this article was authored by a journalist from the newspaper itself, which

is slightly less risky, since the journalist is still reporting in line with the journalistic standards of the newspaper in question.

Furthermore, this article by Kemp is the perfect example of the media's powerful capability to shape and influence Kemp's opinion, an opinion she questions after her own observation in Qatar, resulting in cognitive dissonance. In other words, Kemp's article highlights the contrasting position in which even critical journalists sometimes find themselves between their own experiences and prevailing societal opinions and expectations.

Besides, The Guardian admits that the Gulf country has shown that it can host an event of this magnitude. Through its financial efforts, the country was able to undergo a transformation and show something new to the world. Next to that, The Guardian considered the QFWC a bridge between East and West through the shared love for football, and with this, Qatar is writing its own positive narrative. The Guardian states this as follows: "Squint hard enough, and those shiny brochure claims about this World Cup being a bridge between east and west due to a shared love of football no longer appeared so fetched." (Ingle, 2022c, November 19)

C. Arabicity

Everyone now has an opinion about Qatar, and not just in the west. In some parts of the noisy Middle East social media, a mood of angry, patriotic Arab unity has grown, including in Gulf states that have been at loggerheads with Qatar for a decade. One popular hashtag says in Arabic: I am Arab and I support Qatar... Doha today is subjected to the most heinous attacks from the arrogant west, which sees us as just Arab societies from the third world and sees Qatar hosting the World Cup as a wrong decision...The anger does not seem to be manufactured. At a recent game in Iraq, fans from the Baghdad-based Air Force club unfurled a banner saying: "We stand with Qatar 2022." An Arab League meeting in Algiers even included in its final declaration a rejection of "the malicious campaigns of distortion and skepticism that affect [the tournament]". (Wintour, 2022, November 15)

In this code, the sense of "Arabicity", a major theme in the coverage of both Al Ahram and AMAY, is prominently brought out by The Guardian here. This kind of reporting by The Guardian was quite unexpected for me. This focus indicates that The Guardian is very ambitious when it comes to in-depth analysis about certain cultural and regional nuances that influence the broader narrative. This

automatically implies that The Guardian wants to take specific contexts and perspectives outside Western discourse seriously, while seeking to understand them.

Overall, my analysis of this second theme shows that while The Guardian largely focuses on the criticism and controversies surrounding the QFWC, it still presents its coverage to its readership in a nuanced way by sharing specific personal experiences, attitudes and biases, and by acknowledging the transformative impact of the QFWC. As such, this theme shows that The Guardian, like its conservative counterpart The Times, is not blind to the positivity surrounding the QFWC and thus also looks beyond the negative aspects, albeit to a lesser extent. This shifts at least some parts of The Guardian's overall narrative, thereby shaping and influencing the public discourse around this SME. This theme is therefore closely intertwined with Theme 1, as it is the reaction to it.

Theme 3: Fans during the QFWC

This theme deals with the complex relation between football fans and socio-political dynamics in Qatar during the QFWC. Several important points in this theme come up.

First, the clear socio-economic inequality between visitors and workers in Qatar comes forward in The Guardian's coverage, which creates feelings of discomfort and privilege among fans. This becomes clear from this code:

Each time a worker opened a door for me with a subservient smile, I felt a grotesque pang of privilege... The workers themselves will still be there, standing sentry at their station like servants inside a mansion of disproportionate wealth. (Kemp, 2022b, December 8)

The Guardian's contrasting choice of words (especially "subservient smile" and "grotesque pang of privilege") and its use of the "servants in a mansion" metaphor amplify the critical message suggesting social inequality and injustice between rich football fans and poor workers in the context of the FWC. Next to that, this code is exactly aligned with The Guardian's liberal and progressive beliefs on coverage of the QFWC, namely highlighting controversies around social justice and human rights.

Second, the fact that Qatari authorities reimburse so-called 'fake fans' in order to create a positive atmosphere and social media content, which is a strategy that raises questions about authenticity and propaganda. The Guardian describes this as follows:

The Fan Leader Network is a scheme run by the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the Qatari agency responsible for the World Cup. It has recruited supporters from around the globe, offering travel and accommodation and a place at the World Cup opening ceremony in return for enthusiasm and positive social media content. (MacInnes, 2022b, November 18)

Whilst this code seems to be a neutral representation, I believe this is only an appearance, considering The Guardian's choice of words regarding "scheme". This word does not have the neutral connotation of "programme" here, but rather the negative of "a secret or deceptive plan", which would indicate an implicit stab at the QFWC organizers. In the same context, The Guardian states that things did not always go smoothly for these fans: "Members of the Fan Leader Network from two European countries said their payments had been canceled three days ago and that authorities had blamed the decision on the bad press which followed the revelation that fans were being paid." (MacInnes, 2022b, November 18) In spite of the neutral reporting on this topic, these codes relating to paid fans still implicitly evoke many questions about the authenticity and propagandistic messages that organizers of the QFWC want to convey to the world during this SME. However, I must add here that this topic was barely touched upon by The Guardian, compared to the other newspapers.

Third, this theme focuses on the influence of fans' experiences on their decision to attend, with some being aware of issues around workers and LGBTQ+ rights, but still deciding to go there for the love of football. For example, this is highlighted by this experience of these fans: "They acknowledged that they were aware of problems with workers and LGBTQ+ rights, which they said had led to some of their friends not traveling. But for them, at least, football trumped everything else." (Ingle, 2022c, November 19) This code is interesting considering the degree to which football fans are influenced by the narrative, which was molded by the (news) media, and thereby deciding whether or not to go to Qatar.

Fourth, this theme draws attention to how culture and media affect fans' experiences, focusing on the role of media news coverage and public perception, but also on the impact of Qatari culture on fans' visits and experiences. The Guardian suggests here that fans (especially the ones from the LGBTQ community) in Qatar could clash with local Qatari culture, reflecting the broader cultural differences inherent in the relationship between the West and the East (the Gulf states).

Lastly, the different challenges fans had to face, such as the last-minute cancellation of daily payments for food and drinks.

In short, it is clear that The Guardian's coverage of FWC fans covered a range of different social, cultural and political loads, aligned with, on the one hand, The Guardian's status within the wider dynamics of the UK media landscape and, on the other, The Guardian's ideological positioning within the world as a whole. Regarding the semantic level, The Guardian's language choices in its coverage of FWC fans reflect a complex duality between neutral and objective reporting on the one hand and subtle criticism on the other. In the case of The Guardian, both sides of this duality are reflected in line with its well-known progressive stance. This balance, in turn, shapes and influences public debate concerning these ethical issues in the context of the QFWC.

This theme, unique to The Guardian and not explicitly found in the other three newspapers, shows their special interest in the (challenging) experiences of football fans in the context of the QFWC, reflecting this newspaper's people-centered approach. Since The Guardian pays attention to how fans deal with the controversies and issues surrounding the QFWC, this theme can mainly be linked to Theme 1.

Theme 4: Political Impact of the QFWC

The last theme concerns the political and geopolitical ramifications that arise from hosting a global SME like the QFWC.

In context of the QFWC, this theme is related to emerging political tensions, including criticisms regarding the allocation of the tournament to Qatar and human rights issues in the country. However, The Guardian also sheds light on Qatar using this QFWC as a platform to highlight its foreign policy, diplomatic activities and economic power. The Guardian adds that the country took the opportunity in attracting foreign investment and strengthening its position as a key player in the global liquefied natural gas market (Wintour, 2022, November 15). Additionally, the QFWC helped foster national feelings and pride in Qatar, as its success or failure is frequently perceived as a reflection of the host country's competence.

In addition, The Guardian discusses Qatar's role as a mediator in the region, albeit again critically:

Qatar's foreign ministry acts like a mini UN mediation service, hosting radical groups such as Hamas and the Taliban, not out of support but instead in pursuit of conflict resolution and dialogue. From Darfur to Afghanistan to Iran, it offers its

services with mixed outcomes. It is an irony that this advocate of dialogue and mutual understanding has found it impossible to stop the FWC turning into such a divisive event. (Wintour, 2022, November 15)

So while at first glance this code does not seem critical, there is a certain skepticism. On one side, The Guardian emphasizes the positive image of Qatar as a regional conflict mediator, by respecting its position as a “mini UN mediation service”. At the other end, it doubts Qatar’s diplomatic capability by evaluating it as “mixed outcomes” and it highlights the irony that the QFWC led to a "divisive event", referring to all the criticism and controversies surrounding the QFWC. This balanced coverage created a nuanced picture of Qatar: positive in the sense of a country promoting peace and understanding, but negative in the sense of accusing Qatar of making controversial decisions.

In short, this theme provides a complex and nuanced view of the political impact of the QFWC, focusing on both its positive and problematic aspects. As such, the underlying tone and suggestions of the text reflect the progressive and critical approach inherent to The Guardian's reporting. Furthermore, the text highlights the idea that global events like the QFWC go beyond sports and can have deep political and geopolitical implications, giving countries prominence or criticism. This theme also shows that, through the use of agenda-setting theory, The Guardian shapes and influences the public debate on the QFWC.

As this topic is covered more succinctly in The Guardian, I discuss it so briefly as well. This reflects a more social and less political focus in The Guardian's coverage of the QFWC. As for the intertwining of Theme 4 with the other three themes, this fourth theme highlights, among other things, the geopolitical tensions and criticisms surrounding the Qatar allocation, which is reflected in the criticisms and controversies discussed in Theme 1.

Phase 5: Creating Conceptual Diagrams and Theory-Building

Since my focus is on understanding and interpreting the themes in light of the data collected rather than creating conceptual diagrams or formulating new theories, I decided to skip the fifth step from Christou's (2023) six-step plan when conducting my ITA. This is not unusual, as Christou (2023) states in his research that this fifth step is often omitted in academic texts that discuss the process of thematic analysis.

Phase 6: Producing the Final Report

At this final phase, Christou (2023) states that the researcher should generate a convincing picture of the overall narrative upon which the ITA, and its resulting themes are shaped into one story. This phase is another point where I slightly deviated from Christou's (2023) plan. As such, in this sixth phase I focused less on coherently conveying the overarching story of the four papers, while using codes from the data as a means of reinforcing my analysis, as I did this already in phase 4. Phase 6 rather coincides with my discussion and interpretation of my findings (Chapter 4), where I linked the overarching narrative to my two research questions in order to eventually come to an overall conclusion.

Chapter 4. Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

The comparison of the four newspapers studied provides different insights into the different ways in which the QFWC is approached and represented, both between and within national media landscapes. In what follows, I discuss and interpret my research findings using the existing research from my literature review (and introduction).

RQ1: Do the selected British and Egyptian newspapers represent and approach the QFWC differently, and if so, how do these representations differ between the two nations?

After compiling my research findings, I found that, besides some similarities, there are mainly differences between the coverage of the Egyptian and British newspapers. Of course, these differences are largely attributable to the specific unique socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts in which newspapers from both media landscapes find themselves. The reasons for these differences are confirmed in the following studies already discussed in my literature review: Sittar and Mladenić (2021), Ramasubramanian and Miles (2018), Elyas et al. (2022) and Bhatti et al. (2022).

On the one hand, the UK media culture enjoys a higher degree of press freedom and pluralism compared to the Egyptian media landscape, as was particularly highlighted in the RSF reports (2023a, 2023c) (cf. Introduction). This implies that the UK authorities have no influence on the coverage of UK newspapers, which also means that the status of Qatar-UK relations is not reflected in this coverage. On the other hand, the Egyptian media landscape is characterized by a low level of press freedom and pluralism, which is reflected in how the Egyptian authorities use the media as an instrument of power and control to impose their interests, which was made clear by the reports by RSF (2023a) and by Media Landscapes (n.d.). This implies that in this media landscape independent newspapers (AMAY), next to state-run newspapers (Al Ahram), are influenced in their coverage by pressure from the Egyptian state, which also means that the status of Qatar-Egypt relations is reflected in their coverage (in the context of the QFWC).

1. UK Media landscape

What clearly emerges in my research findings is that all four newspapers pay attention to the theme of criticisms and controversies surrounding the hosting of the QFWC, although the intensity around this is more pronounced in the coverage of British newspapers. British newspapers pay more specific attention to human rights issues in this regard, especially working conditions and LGBTQ rights.

Regardless, the critical approach, which emerges in these British newspapers, can be linked to several matters, the most prominent of which can be attributed to the socio-cultural and political contexts, with their associated different norms and values, in which British reporting took place. These specific contexts are reflected in the genuine concern for human rights and Orientalism, which in turn ensures the critical manner in which British newspapers report on the QFWC.

First, I believe that there is a certain degree of genuine concern among the two British newspapers about human rights (and other controversies) in Qatar.

Second, I think this concern is to a certain extent inherently linked to an Orientalist discourse. I illustrate this using Griffin's (2019) study, in which he argues that Qatar could positively influence the international discourse surrounding the QFWC itself by aligning itself with a set of "universal norms and values".

On the one hand, I consider that this is in itself a self-centered Western perspective. As such, there is a clear distinction made by the international (Western) media, in this case British newspapers, who consider their norms and values to be "universal" whilst criticizing Qatari and Arab/Islamic values. Like many international (Western) media, the high levels of criticism by the two British newspapers under study implicitly suggest that Qatar should conform to these "superior universal" norms and values, which are seen as modern and liberal by the British media landscape.

On the other hand, as I mentioned above, I consider Griffin's (2019) assertion naive that Qatar, by simply conforming to some "universal norms and values", which are considered modern and liberal by the West, would bring along a positive public discourse around the QFWC. Thus, I think that the criticism of Qatar on human rights, among other things, is much deeper than simply opening up to these "universal norms and values". This criticism could rather be attributed to a deeper embedded racist and Orientalist discourse of the two newspapers from the British (Western) media landscape. This perfectly aligns with Dawood's (2023) thesis, namely that this masked Western criticism of Qatar is blatant as it has nothing to do with issues such as human rights. Instead, it is the age-old Orientalism that Western media have reshaped, but for a contemporary audience (Dawood, 2023).

By following the arguments of both Sanhaji (2023) and Dawood (2023), I argue that the negative image of Qatar portrayed by the two British newspapers and their criticisms of the QFWC reflect Western prejudice, false moral outrage and blatant double standards, stemming from a broader,

deeper racist, Islamophobic and Orientalist rhetoric about the "backward East" (Sanhaji, 2023; Dawood 2023). Nevertheless, it should be added that both British newspapers are well aware of Orientalism by the international (Western) media in their coverage. Whether this is reassuring or hardly so, I will leave open for discussion.

In contrast, I should mention that UK newspapers also provided space to discuss the refutation of criticisms of the QFWC, thus giving the organizers of this SME (Qatar and FIFA) the opportunity to defend both their interests and reputations by countering international criticism against them. The approach and degree of coverage of this was very different between the two British newspapers, but I discuss that in my answer to the second research question.

Both British newspapers link the political impact of the QFWC mainly to the criticism surrounding the QFWC, for example in the form of accusations of "sportswashing". In contrast, they also do acknowledge Qatar's strengthened political position on the world stage as a result of hosting the QFWC. However, these political aspects, as well as the economic implications of the QFWC, are less prominent in British newspapers, as they focus more on the controversial aspects related to human rights, among others.

2. Egyptian Media landscape

Controversies were also highlighted in the two Egyptian newspapers. This is in line with the research of Dibas, Rabab'ah and Haider (2022), who argued that not only newspapers from Western countries but also those from Arab countries sometimes portray each other negatively. Nevertheless, coverage of the refutation of these criticisms prevailed in both Egyptian newspapers. This is because Egyptian newspapers are heavily influenced by pressure from the Egyptian authorities, which in the context of the QFWC is reflected in the (partial) underexposure of the criticisms and controversies surrounding the QFWC, since at the time the Egyptian state also wanted to maintain good diplomatic ties with Qatar. Furthermore, criticisms in general, and certainly those on culturally sensitive issues such as the LGBTQ community or religious criticism, were mostly excluded from both newspapers' coverage. This is in line with Idlibi's (2018) research, in which she argued that factors, related to cultural sensitivities, explain why newspapers from different countries and cultures differ so much in their coverage of a particular event, as such issues are often omitted in Arab coverage. This is an example of gatekeeping, which the media apply, thereby contributing to the shaping and influencing of public discourse.

What is noticeable is that in their coverage, when Egyptian newspapers do criticize the QFWC organization anyway, they do so carefully using certain strategies. For instance, they often do so indirectly through “direct speech”. This allows the newspaper to distance itself more from the criticism being made, as all attention is focused on the person or institution making the statement. As a result, the newspaper avoids being held responsible for critical statements itself.

In contrast to the negative Orientalist perceptions expressed in the Western media about the organization of the QFWC, there was rather a very strong sense of positivity within the Egyptian media landscape around the QFWC. This positive image portrayed about Qatar, partly under pressure from the Egyptian authorities (because of the strong ties with Qatar), was reinforced by another phenomenon, namely "العروبة" ("Arabicity").

This sense of "Arabicity" emerged both from the general regional public itself and from shaping and influencing the public discourse put forward by the Egyptian newspapers. This emphasizes my contention that news media both passively reflect on public discourse and actively shape and influence it.

In my view, this sentiment emerged from a deeper reaction to the historical Orientalist discourse that the (Western) international media, including the two British newspapers, put forward. Whereas the (Western) international media were extremely skeptical, condescending and negative about the FWC in an Arab/Islamic country, I believe that this caused a regional reaction among both people and media, including the two Egyptian newspapers. As such, this “counter-movement” saw the QFWC not only as a sporting event, but also as a platform for the promotion and recognition of Arab culture and identity on the world stage.

This solidarity, prevailing among the Arab and Islamic world, also featured strongly in the coverage of both Egyptian newspapers and radiated to all other themes of their coverage. This sense of solidarity, however, was not present in the British newspapers, which were thus more likely to focus on the criticism and controversies surrounding the QFWC in their coverage.

Lastly, both Egyptian newspapers are merely very positive about the political implications for Qatar as a result of the QFWC. Both newspapers are aware of its importance for regional political dynamics and power relations. As for the economic implications of the QFWC, both newspapers refer to them sporadically, albeit to a lesser extent. For instance, the Egyptian newspapers, on the one hand, acknowledge Qatar's strong regional economic position and, on the other hand, highlight the Egyptian

state's attempt, in the wake of Qatar's organization of the FWC, to give the Egyptian tourism sector an economic boost.

As Table 2 (cf. Appendix) shows, British newspapers generally paint a more negative and critical picture of the organization of the QFWC, while Egyptian newspapers generally paint a significantly more positive picture of the QFWC. Yet it is not as black and white as it seems: the progressive Egyptian newspaper and the conservative British newspaper almost converge in Table 2, as they both paint a more neutral picture in their coverage of the QFWC. From this, it can be deduced that they have a higher degree of internal pluralism than the other two newspapers.

RQ2: How and to what extent do representations and approaches differ within each nation's media landscape, specifically between progressive and conservative newspapers?

1. UK Newspapers

Regarding this second research question, there are both similarities and differences in the news coverage of The Times and The Guardian. As I mentioned in my answer to the first research question, unlike the Egyptian media landscape, newspaper coverage in the UK media landscape is considered as independent and unbiased, and thus not influenced by the UK's political ties with Qatar. Thus, it is rather newspapers' values, readership interests, political orientations (progressive vs conservative) and the need for in-depth, informative reporting that generally determine the tone and content of UK newspapers' coverage.

The Times, which I described in the introduction to this thesis as a conservative center-right newspaper, is a newspaper that strives for more balanced, objective and neutral coverage and highlights both positive and negative perceptions of this SME. Furthermore, The Times sees itself as an advocate of change and awareness and as a critical watchdog highlighting underexposed international controversies. Next to that it is known for pursuing high journalistic standards.

In the context of the QFWC, in shaping the public discourse around the critiques and controversies central to its research, The Guardian assumes the role of both critic and advocate. Both roles are in direct relation to how The Guardian is to be presented in general: a center-left newspaper, focused on nuanced, critical, progressive and people-oriented coverage of the QFWC, based on in-depth research. This in-depth research was reflected several times in its coverage, for example: in the statement that Qatar has officially been found not guilty of bribery (yet), the accurate use of

terminology (e.g., "sportswashing," "nation-building"), the discussion of the emerging sense of "Arabicity,"... These in-depth analyses indicate that The Guardian is very ambitious to understand certain cultural and regional nuances outside of Western discourse, that affect the broader narrative. In terms of its role as a critic in the context of the QFWC, The Guardian is very active in engaging in discussions about ethical issues and reflecting on them critically. In terms of its advocacy role, The Guardian takes a stand on human rights and the transparency and accountability that accompany them. By proposing these improvements, The Guardian underscores its commitment to responsible journalism.

Themes

Although both British newspapers address the same themes in their coverage of the QFWC, they each do so to different degrees and each in their own specific ways. These differences can of course be attributed to the specific characteristics of both newspapers, which I have discussed above and throughout this thesis.

First, both newspapers focus on human rights criticisms and controversies in Qatar, but put more specific emphasis on LGBTQ rights in the case of The Times, and the working and living conditions of migrant workers in the case of The Guardian. Secondly, The Times pays quite a lot of attention to alcohol prohibition and corruption within FIFA, which are topics that are less covered in The Guardian. Third, due to the inductive character of the ITA, I surprisingly identified the theme about fans only in The Guardian, in which The Guardian even reported on the theme of "Arabicity". This focus on fans was a direct reflection of The Guardian's people-oriented approach, which is further reinforced by its less comprehensive coverage of the QFWC's political impact. In short, The Guardian's coverage is mirrored by its people-centric approach and commitment to social justice.

Lastly, it was also notable that both British newspapers emphasized refuting criticisms and controversies about the organization of the QFWC. However, they each did so to varying degrees and each in their own specific ways.

What stood out was that The Times highlighted this remarkably extensively in its coverage and even gave a platform to a very important Qatari official to make his case. As extensively as this theme has been covered, it is still under-reported compared to the criticisms and controversies it raises. Nevertheless, this theme showed that The Times is trying to position itself as an impartial, critical,

nuanced quality newspaper that is not blind to highlighting the positivity surrounding the QFWC and thus looking beyond the negative aspects.

In contrast, The Guardian hardly paid attention to refuting criticism, and when it did, it was often in direct connection with discussing the criticisms and controversies themselves. This is a strategy also used by Al Ahram, but in the opposite direction, to put Qatar in a good light despite all the criticism. This strategy, which is used by media to shape and influence public discourse, can be linked to "framing," as well as "gatekeeping" and "agenda-setting." The fact that these two newspapers use this strategy reflects their position in Table 2 at the ends of this spectrum.

Semantically

I think the main difference in the coverage between the two newspapers was in the semantic approach with which both newspapers described the QFWC. In this regard, as emerged in the study by Dibas, Rabab'ah and Haider (2022), I considered it crucial that language should not be considered merely a passive, but rather a highly active and ideological tool, which can be used to shape and convey meaning.

When discussing critiques and controversies, which is the most discussed topic in both British newspapers, both The Times and The Guardian use characterizing and emotive language to shock their readers and thus convince them of their views. Nevertheless, The Guardian goes much further in this, completely blurring its neutral reporting and turning it into very progressive reporting, which is not the case for The Times, which often reports formally and neutrally. In this way, The Guardian seeks to expose social injustice and amplify the voices of marginalized workers in order to shape and influence public debate. This is consistent with Dawood's (2023) findings in her research on The Guardian's coverage of the QFWC.

While in The Times the explicit messages in the newspaper articles are mainly factual information and events, the underlying messages and themes of The Times raise critical questions about critiques and controversies. This means that The Times is also consistently concerned about the safety and rights of especially the LGBTQ+ community, which is in line with its traditional role within the British media landscape as a newspaper that raises issues in society.

Although both newspapers acknowledge the Orientalist discourse of the Western (international) media, they are themselves guilty of it, as I argued in my answer to the first research question.

In summary, both coverages mostly reveal a negative picture about the QFWC, although not to the same extent nor in the same way. While *The Times* brought a more balanced and broader range of perspectives, *The Guardian* focuses more on social justice, with specific issues such as labor rights and fans' experiences in a one-sided critical manner on the one hand, and advocacy for improvements regarding human rights on the other. Such differences in focus and approach mainly reflect the conservative, neutral and objective reporting of *The Times*, and progressive, critical and people-oriented coverage of *The Guardian*. This is one the one hand reflected in Table 2. On the other hand, in accordance with the findings of RSF's report (2023c) and Barber's study (2022), I observed external pluralism between *The Times* and *The Guardian* (conservative vs. progressive), even though I cannot simply generalize my findings because I examined only two newspapers from the British media landscape. Regarding internal pluralism, I observed a higher degree of pluralism in *The Times* than in *The Guardian*, as this newspaper put forward more balanced coverage of the QFWC than *The Guardian*.

2. Egyptian Newspapers

Although *Al Ahram* and *AMAY* are similar in the topics they cover, they also have important differences in how and to what extent these topics are approached, which can be attributed to the differences regarding a complex set of factors related to the internal editorial processes (e.g., government influence, readership preferences and interests, set of journalistic values and norms, individual beliefs, expertise and interests of the journalists working for these newspapers, ...).

To refresh, I briefly repeat the characteristics of both newspapers. First, *Al Ahram* is considered the voice of the Egyptian government and a conservative newspaper, covering the QFWC from a more general (less in-depth), objective and neutral perspective. In other words, its coverage is heavily influenced by the political interests of the Egyptian state. Although *Al Ahram* strives for balanced and informative reporting, diplomatic ties and Egypt's domestic politics may play a role in how certain news is presented.

Second, *AMAY* is considered an independent newspaper that offers an alternative voice in the Egyptian media landscape by raising sensitive and critical issues, sometimes at odds with government interests. However, this independence can only be considered relative because of the pressure it feels from the Egyptian authorities. If it is too critical, this can manifest itself in the imposition of sanctions by the Egyptian state, such as censorship or shutting down the newspaper. To avoid this, this

newspaper occasionally restrains itself, which manifests itself in the form of a kind of self-censorship, which can affect its reporting. In short, AMAY tries to provide informative, in-depth and independent news while maintaining a certain distance from official government policy.

Both newspapers had no less than five common themes, indicating common concerns in their coverage. This is no coincidence, as they are themes embedded in the Egyptian context, such as the refutation of international criticism of Islamic and Arab culture, the (positive) political and economic impact of the SME, and the importance of Arab identity in coverage of the FWC. Yet both newspapers approached these themes from their own unique editorial perspectives that they employed in their particular contexts.

As I discussed in my response to the previous research question, the theme of "Arabicity" emerged as a common thread in the coverage of both Egyptian newspapers. This theme strongly suggests that both newspapers, and their readership, pay attention to the cultural significance of the QFWC to the Arab world, and more specifically to the desire to encourage a sense of Arab solidarity. This focus may also be used, especially in the case of Al Ahram, in light of the restored relations between Egypt and Qatar and the strong desire on both sides to further strengthen these relations. It may also be that, for this reason, AMAY published on this topic especially under pressure from the Egyptian government. As I pointed out in my thesis, as a researcher it was often difficult to discern exactly when AMAY was trying to satisfy the authorities and when it published in line with its own editorial choice.

On a semantic level, it is notable that not only AMAY, but also Al Ahram discusses this topic about "Arabicity" using words with strong positive connotations, metaphors, adjectives and descriptive phrases to create the feeling of "Arabicity" through a vivid description that helps the reader gain a deeper, more emotionally invested understanding of the event and its meaning. In fact, this allows the reader not only to "see" what is happening, but also to "feel" what it means. In other topics, Al Ahram remains very formal and neutral on a semantic level.

In addition, neither newspaper is blind to the negativity surrounding the issue of criticism and controversy, suggesting that, although to a lesser extent than the British newspapers, they also offer critical analysis of the QFWC.

Although in Al Ahram's case this is only vague criticism, it can be interpreted as a reflection of Al Ahram's openness to publish criticism of the QFWC, indicating the newspaper's willingness to present other perspectives despite the country's general political stance. It is possible that this attempt by Al

Ahram to present a balanced picture of the QFWC serves to continue to come across as a reliable, objective and impartial news source. Nevertheless, the positive image of the QFWC prevails, which fits Al Ahram's traditional and conservative position as a state-controlled newspaper seeking diplomatic balance when covering a regional event of this magnitude, such as the QFWC.

This criticism is much more prominent in AMAY than in Al Ahram, reflecting AMAY's reputation, despite its reticence for fear of sanctions from the Egyptian authorities, as a newspaper with liberal, reformist views and objective reporting. More specifically, AMAY emphasizes controversial topics such as human rights, labor rights, LGBTQ issues and the phenomenon of "fake fans." In particular, LGBTQ rights are discussed very briefly and subtly through "direct speech." This is a rather courageous choice by AMAY, looking back to the RSF report discussed (2023a), which stated that gay rights issues are particularly sensitive and that media reporting on them can be accused of publishing material that "violates the country's moral code." This is consistent with the previously mentioned study by Idlibi (2018).

At the semantic level, it is striking that the two papers address these criticisms and controversies in the same specific way. First, when they address a specific criticism regarding the QFWC, they do so only by simultaneously also pointing out positivity regarding the criticism in question. A major difference between the two Egyptian newspapers is that AMAY does not always use this strategy, but Al Ahram does. Secondly, it is notable that both newspapers often use "direct speech" in this context. As a result, the statement gains authenticity and engagement. On the other hand, direct speech allows the newspaper to avoid expressing an explicit opinion, thus avoiding subjectivity. The newspaper thus attempts to place full responsibility for the opinions expressed on the persons quoted. A third strategy, which is more obvious, is that Egyptian newspapers, when reporting on criticism, simply report as neutrally as possible without taking any particular position. In a media landscape like Egypt's, these three ways of reporting can be particularly useful for a newspaper like AMAY. But so is Al Ahram.

This balancing act that AMAY makes here is characterized by a wide range of perspectives, both negative (criticism) and positive (rebuttal), which helps to shape and influence public debate among AMAY's readers in Egypt (and beyond).

As criticism of Qatar, a country with good ties to the Egyptian state, is avoided by newspapers from the Egyptian media landscape, more emphasis is placed on the refutation of these criticisms by the organizers of the GFWC (Qatar and FIFA). This common theme can be seen as an attempt to maintain the diplomatic balance between Egypt and Qatar, given the improved relations between the two

countries since 2021. By placing much more emphasis on refuting criticism than on the criticism itself, Al Ahram manages to paint a generally more optimistic picture of the QFWC. AMAY also does so, albeit to a lesser extent and although it is difficult to determine whether it does so out of its own consideration or under pressure from the Egyptian authorities.

It was also noteworthy that Al Ahram, while conducting the ITA, was the only newspaper where I identified the theme "General perception of the organization of the QFWC" because it featured so prominently in the coverage. What was striking about this theme was that it was exclusively positive about the organization of the QFWC, despite the possible negative aspects surrounding the event. Looking at Table 2, it is no coincidence that this theme emerged only in Al Ahram's coverage, given Al Ahram's status within the Egyptian media landscape. Besides this theme about the general perception of the QFWC, there are two more unique themes of Al Ahram that highlight Qatar in a positive way, namely the themes about unity and inclusiveness on the one hand and about Qatar's future plans after the QFWC on the other. This shows that Al Ahram sees this SME as an opportunity for progress and improvement, not only for Qatar, but also for the region as a whole. At a time when relations between Egypt and Qatar have improved significantly, this extremely positive approach may be a sign of a willingness to encourage a more cooperative and constructive tone in the region.

On the other hand, AMAY, known for its liberal, reformist views and objective reporting, offers a unique perspective on the QFWC. By focusing on the issue of the political impact of the QFWC, AMAY demonstrates its inclination to conduct in-depth political analysis and examine the interconnectedness of politics, diplomacy and conflicts related to the QFWC. Such a focus is characteristic of a newspaper that is not afraid to address the broader geopolitical context of the event, especially amid the changing dynamics of relations between Egypt and the QFWC since 2021. On the other hand, it may also be that AMAY shows Qatar in a positive light because of pressure from Egyptian authorities who want to maintain good relations with Qatar. This is then a perfect example of how newspapers are used by the Egyptian authorities as a tool to convey this positive image of Qatar to the public, which is in line with the findings of Baharuddin and Baharuddin (2022). In addition, AMAY emphasizes practical aspects of the event, such as infrastructure and respect for cultural norms, which are strongly linked to the theme of Arabicity. This rather pragmatic focus reflects their commitment to objective reporting, even when covering complex and potentially sensitive topics. More specifically, the neutral way AMAY reports on these rules and restrictions (theme on respect for cultural norms) is indicative of a high degree of respect for these cultural norms and values, as this newspaper and its readers would also value respect for Egyptian and Islamic norms and values when organizing an SME, such as the QFWC. This kind of coverage does not emerge in

the case of Al Ahram, as this newspaper, with its wide readership, normally chooses to focus on general information about the tournament.

In sum, these two different approaches reflect the unique role these two newspapers play within the Egyptian media landscape. This illustrates the importance of a multifaceted approach when examining the media presentation of prominent SMEs such as the QFWC. These perceived differences can be attributed to differences in readership, editorial guidelines and other context-specific factors, including political orientation (progressive vs. conservative) and pressure from Egyptian authorities.

1. Al Ahram, in line with its role as a state-run newspaper, tries to put forward a predominantly positive image of this SME and its host. To maintain diplomatic ties with Qatar, Al Ahram largely tries to avoid, gloss over and minimize criticism towards Qatar, thereby contributing to shaping and influencing public discourse.

2. AMAY, on the other hand, known for its liberal, reformist views, dares to criticize controversial issues and tackles them through deeper analysis. In addition, this newspaper also addresses very specific issues such as infrastructure and respect for cultural norms and takes a closer look at the political and practical aspects of the QFWC. Nevertheless, its coverage of the QFWC is still mostly positive, due to the pressure it feels from the Egyptian authorities.

Consistent with the findings of the RSF report (2023c), I observed a certain degree of external pluralism between Al Ahram and AMAY (conservative vs. progressive), although to a lesser extent than with the British media landscape, due to the low degree of press freedom as the Egyptian authorities exert a great deal of influence over public discourse in Egypt (and beyond). It should be added here that I cannot generalize my findings because I examined only two newspapers in the Egyptian media landscape. Regarding internal pluralism, I observed a higher degree of pluralism in AMAY than in Al Ahram, as this newspaper provided more balanced coverage of the QFWC than Al Ahram. These findings are reflected in Table 2.

It must be noted here that the theme of Arabicity was a common thread that ran through both newspapers' coverage on the QFWC.

Regarding Public Discourse...

As noted, British newspapers focus on themes regarding criticisms and controversies, and Egyptian newspapers on the theme of Arabicity. On the one hand, this points to the phenomenon of agenda-setting, in line with McCombs and Shaw's (2017) research that I already discussed, as both British and Egyptian newspapers considered these themes most important within their specific context of their own media landscape. On the other hand, the phenomenon of “gatekeeping”, which I already discussed in the case of Sakurai's (2017) study, also emerges strongly here, as newspapers from both media landscapes consciously choose to emphasize, reduce or omit certain themes. In this regard, Monteiro et al (2021) also highlighted in their study the importance of analyzing the omission of certain discourses in (news) media coverage of an SME. By applying these strategies, they exert a lot of influence on public discourse within their own national media landscape (and even beyond).

In addition, it can be argued that the negative image of the QFWC by British newspapers outweighs the positive image of Egyptian newspapers, regarding their ability to shape and influence international public discourse. This may be an Orientalist, or at least Eurocentrist, assumption of mine, since in other parts of the world this negative image around the QFWC is possibly not felt this way.

Nevertheless, my assumption is in line with Dawood's (2023) study, where she points out the importance of language in shaping and influencing public discourse. More specifically, she argues that English-language sources have even more power and influence on public discourse because English is understood almost everywhere in the world.

Besides the influence of English-language reporting (Dawood, 2023), there is another factor that gives British newspapers an edge over Egyptian newspapers regarding the power to influence international public discourse. For instance, Sakurai (2017) argues that differences in representations in coverage across countries and cultures can also be attributed to the influence of powerful countries, manifesting in more specifically named factors such as language (as Dawood (2023) argues), colonial ties, ethnicity and geographical proximity. Applying this to the UK media landscape, following Sakurai's (2017) reasoning, I see that British news coverage may have been influenced by the UK's unique historical, cultural and geopolitical position. Due to these factors, the negative news coverage regarding the QFWC from the British media may shape not only British but also international public opinion. According to Sakurai (2017), this ensures that powerful countries such as the UK tend to dominate the news media, reinforcing the status quo, while less influential countries (such as Egypt) remain marginalized. This 'gatekeeper' model, which Sakurai (2017) puts forward, centralizes news around a handful of powerful countries. This potentially leads to a uniform global culture rather than

a diverse one, which may lead to the negative image, which was created around Qatar and the QFWC, to also radiate into a wider international opinion.

These claims by Dawood (2023) and Sakurai (2017) are reflected in the previously mentioned ranking "the Top 50 Most Popular News Websites in the World" by the PressGazette (Majid, 2023), which shows that a lot of British news media are highly ranked. This importance of online news media in influencing public discourse was also highlighted in the study by Dewi, Lande and Efendi (2022), which I have already discussed.

In this regard, I would also like to briefly mention Quintus' (2019) research. This research focused on the power the media have in shaping perceptions of an SME host and its legacy, regarding the success or failure of the soft power strategies of the host country of the SME in question. Although the discussion of soft power is not central to my research, it would still be interesting for future research to examine whether the strong influence of these British newspapers, and their negative representation of the QFWC, triggered a possible failure of Qatar's soft power strategy.

Chapter 5. Shortcomings and Future Research

5.1. Shortcomings

In this thesis, I uncovered how British (Western) and Egyptian (Arab/Islamic) newspapers reported differently on the QFWC, both within their own national context and in comparison to each other. In doing so, I encountered a few limitations.

5.1.1. Selection of newspapers

First, this is due to the fact that I am only discussing one country for both the Western and Arab worlds, which prevents me from generalizing my findings on British and Egyptian newspapers to the entire Western and Arab media landscape, respectively. This is due to the fact that all countries within these two cultures have their own specific characteristics and contexts. Next to that, I must bear in mind that the dividing line between the West and the Arab world is very complex and cannot be drawn arbitrarily.

Second, I also only discuss two newspapers per country, which means again that I cannot simply generalize my findings from these newspapers to the media landscape of the whole country. While I have achieved a high degree of pluralism by choosing these four newspapers, I must acknowledge that each newspaper from both the British and Egyptian media landscapes comes with its own specific set of biases, readership, political orientations, ...

Therefore, in both cases, I cannot assume that the countries chosen can cover the entire diversity of the entire Western and Arab world, and that the newspapers chosen cannot cover the entire diversity of the entire national media landscape.

Being the only researcher, with a lack of time and resources, I must accept that such limitations are inherent in my research, but it does leave room for future research. To give just one example, it could be interesting to examine newspapers from other Western and Arab countries as well, to promote pluralism in the research. For instance, it could be interesting to examine newspapers from the US on the Western side and some Lebanese newspapers on the Arab side, since the media landscapes within both countries also have a respectable degree of pluralism.

5.1.2. Lack of Information

Moreover, I had to acknowledge that I did not have all the information of the newspapers and their media landscapes, which I investigated. Because of this lack of information, I was sometimes unable to find out about the precise reasons behind the different approaches of the newspapers under study, as this could vary depending on a complex set of factors, of which some relate to the internal editorial processes (e.g. preferences and interests of the readership, set of journalistic values and standards, individual beliefs, interests and expertise of the journalists working for these newspapers). As a result, especially with AMAY's coverage, I could only speculate on certain latent features of the codes that seemed interesting to me.

Because of this reason, it can be felt that my research is based on too much speculation, so future research, which delves deeper into the backgrounds of media landscapes, internal editorial processes of newspapers, etc... and so on, would be welcome in order to achieve a better and less biased understanding at the end of the study.

5.1.3. Selection of Time Scope

The selected three-month time frame may have resulted in the documentation of more sensational or controversial newspaper articles. This could have distorted the general coverage of the QFWC outside these peak periods. Unfortunately, as a sole researcher with limited time and resources, it was not possible for me to conduct research over a longer period than these 3 months. Future research would be useful for this purpose.

5.1.4. Selection of Methodology

While discussing the online newspaper articles using the ITA's semantic and latent approaches, I wanted to elaborate on different topics at times, but was unable to do so because otherwise this thesis would have become too long. Therefore, to arrive at a more in-depth analysis, the thesis would need to be extended or focused more specifically on a smaller number of themes. Although it was initially my idea for this study to conduct a CDA after my ITA using Fairclough's method, this would create too much overlap with the ITA, resulting in too much repetition and an overly long thesis. Despite this, I do believe that the CDA addition could have been a good alternative methodology for future research.

I believe it could also be interesting to take this research topic to a completely different methodological level. Firstly, for example, it would be interesting to conduct a CDA analysis using quantitative methods and sophisticated software. Secondly, for a very ambitious study, it would be interesting to conduct surveys of the populations of British and Egyptian societies to check whether their perceptions of the QFWC match those of the newspapers studied. In this way, it would be possible to assess the extent to which the newspapers succeeded or failed in influencing public discourse in different societies.

5.1.5. Selection of Cases

As for my purposive sample and the ITA, there are obviously also many limitations, as both methodologies depend on the researcher's subjectivity, which can introduce a lot of bias. In the case of the purposive sample, this may manifest itself in the fact that I (mistakenly) considered certain information-rich cases not important enough. In the case of the ITA, it may be reflected in the fact

that, as a researcher, I (mistakenly) chose which codes to include or omit in my research, leading to certain themes being discussed in the study or not.

5.1.6. Through an Orientalist Lens

Lastly, as a researcher, I must acknowledge that my perception of the world has been constantly influenced by Orientalism through various factors in my life. As a result, whether consciously or unconsciously, I will always (partly) operate as an Orientalist. Hence, the same research studied by an Egyptian researcher, for example, would look different.

5.2. Conclusion

In spite of the limitations of this thesis research, I think it can nevertheless serve two specific purposes. On the one hand, I think future research can contribute by providing a deeper and broader understanding of reporting on the QFWC, by accumulating more background information on the newspapers and media landscapes under study. On the other hand, I believe that my unique hybrid methodology could also serve as a foundation on which future research can build in the academic field, and more specifically in comparative media studies.

Conclusion

How do newspapers in the UK and Egypt approach and represent the hosting of an SME in an Arab/Islamic/Gulf country, and how might these approaches and representations potentially contribute to or influence the shaping of narratives and public discourse surrounding this event? This is the main question of my research, which I shall now answer. But first, I conclude each of my two research questions, by answering them:

RQ1: How are this FWC and everything surrounding it being represented in British and Egyptian newspapers, and to what extent do these representations vary between the two nations?

The approach and representation of the QFWC in the four selected British and Egyptian newspapers showed striking differences, which appear to be influenced by specific unique socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts in which the newspapers from both media landscapes find themselves. This revealed that British newspapers, with greater press freedom, portrayed this QFWC in a more negative way than Egyptian newspapers. As such, British newspapers mainly highlighted human rights-related criticisms and controversies. This relied on genuine concern for human rights, with the inherently associated Orientalist discourse. In turn, the Egyptian media landscape, (in part) under state influence, portrayed the QFWC in a positive way, on the one hand to promote diplomatic ties between Egypt and Qatar. On the other, through the sense of "Arabicity". This "Arabicity" emerged as a reaction to the historical Orientalist discourse that the (Western) international media, including the two British newspapers, put forward, while also serving as an opportunity to promote Arab identity and solidarity, which acted as a common thread throughout the broader narrative surrounding the QFWC of both Egyptian newspapers.

RQ2: How do these representations and approaches vary within each country's media landscape, particularly between progressive and conservative newspapers?

The analysis of representations and approaches to the QFWC in British and Egyptian newspapers shows the diversity within their national media landscapes.

As for British newspapers, both emphasize human rights criticism and both paint a predominantly negative picture, albeit in different ways and to a different extent. On the one hand, The Times offers a more balanced perspective through more neutral, formal language, but also sometimes uses more descriptive language. On the other hand, The Guardian is sharply critical of issues such as human rights and uses emotionally charged words. These different perspectives of The Times and The Guardian reflect their respective conservative (center-right) and progressive (center-left) orientations.

As for Egyptian newspapers, state-run Al Ahram paints a positive picture of the QFWC and avoids criticizing Qatar to promote diplomatic ties between the two countries. In contrast, AMAY, which is known for its liberal views, delves into more specific controversial issues, but remains mostly positive because of the pressure it feels from the Egyptian authorities. The biggest similarity between the two Egyptian newspapers is the theme of "Arabicity", which is everywhere in the coverage of both newspapers, both implicitly and explicitly. These unique approaches in terms of coverage of Al Ahram and AMAY reflect their respective specific roles as state-run (conservative) and liberal, reformist (progressive) newspapers.

Thus, what I observe from my research in relation to my second research question is that the difference between the representations and approaches to the QFWC by newspapers within the same country is not solely determined by their progressive or conservative nature. While Table 2 clearly shows that the representation and approach to the same SME can be exposed in both positive and negative ways by both a conservative and a progressive newspaper within the same country, it is clear that other context-specific factors, such as (interests of) readership, editorial guidelines and so on, have a major impact on these differences. In this respect, this table visually demonstrates that, as already mentioned in this thesis, progressive and conservative newspapers are not unambiguous fixed concepts, but their meaning has to be filled in according to their specific unique contexts.

The Main Research Question:

Regarding my methodology, I utilized purposive sampling to select the most information-rich newspaper articles from both British and Egyptian newspapers in a flexible manner, giving me as a researcher a lot of freedom, in order to address the most prominent topics related to the QFWC (apart from sporting aspects). Subsequently, I conducted an ITA, as this allowed me to find out which specific themes seemed most prominent in the coverage of the QFWC in the newspapers I examined. This led to surprising themes at times, highlighting the inductive nature of this methodology.

With regard to the first part of the central research question, it is evident that newspapers in the UK and Egypt approach and present the organization of the QFWC, an SME in an Arab/Islamic/Gulf country, in remarkably diverse ways, both between countries and between newspapers within the same country. First, the differences between British and Egyptian newspapers appear to be mainly rooted in the socio-cultural and geopolitical context of each country. Second, the differences between newspapers within the same national media landscape of both the UK and Egypt cannot be solely attributed to their progressive or conservative orientations. While these orientations have a certain

impact, other context-specific factors, such as reader interests and editorial guidelines, also have a crucial role in shaping their approach and representation.

As for the second part of the central research question, on the overall influence on public discourse, it is clear that different representations and approaches regarding the QFWC from newspapers from both countries influence public discourse significantly. As for public discourse in the UK on the QFWC, the two British newspapers were able to raise critical awareness among their readership by focusing on controversial issues such as human rights violations. With regard to public discourse in Egypt on the QFWC, both from inside and reinforced by Egyptian newspapers, a feeling of "Arabicity" emerged among the readership of these newspapers. Such representations, formed by each country's unique media landscape, readers' interests, editorial guidelines and other context-specific factors, are instrumental in shaping the narratives and public discourse surrounding the QFWC.

As a result, I conclude that the powerful role of these four newspapers discussed, and the media in general, is not only manifest in reflecting public discourse around SMEs, but also in actively shaping and influencing it. In other words, newspaper coverage is a passive tool that simply reflects what is happening in society, as well as an active tool that shapes public understanding and discourse on SMEs such as the QFWC.

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Appendix

Table 1: Purposive Sampling

| | Al Ahram | | | The Times | | | Al Masry Al Youm | | | The Guardian | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| <i>Search words</i> | "كأس العالم قطر" (World Cup Qatar) "قطر مونديال" (Qatar Mondial) "قطر" (Qatar) "إستضافة قطر" (Qatar hosting) "إستعدادات قطر" (Qatar preparation) "كأس العالم لكرة القدم" (World Cup Football) | | | World Cup Qatar | | | "كأس العالم قطر" (World Cup Qatar) "قطر" (Qatar) "إستضافة قطر" (Qatar hosting) | | | The Qatar world cup Qatar | | |
| <i>Search result</i> | ca. 1500 | | | N/A | | | N/A | | | N/A | | |
| <i>1st round</i> | 167 | | | 116 | | | 105 | | | 78 | | |
| | Before | During | After | Before | During | After | Before | During | After | Before | During | After |
| | 47 | 69 | 37 | 58 | 53 | 15 | 48 | 44 | 13 | 35 | 26 | 17 |
| <i>2nd round</i> | 31 | | | 25 | | | 25 | | | 24 | | |
| | Before | During | After | Before | During | After | Before | During | After | Before | During | After |
| | 7 | 16 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 3 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 12 | 7 | 5 |
| <i>Themes Sample</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall Assessment of The FWC Criticisms and Controversies Arab Unity Morocco Success Inclusion Fans Sportswashing | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall Assessment of The FWC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Rights LGBTQ Rights Labor Rights Politics Diplomacy & Economics Allegations of Corruption Cultural Norms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paid Fans Sober Fans Celebrities | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall Assessment of The FWC Arab Unity Politics Infrastructure Criticisms and Controversies Fans Economic aspects | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall Assessment of The FWC Labour rights Other criticisms and Controversies Fans | | |

Table 2: Overview Internal and External Pluralism

| | United Kingdom | Egypt |
|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Conservative | The Times | Al Ahram |
| Progressive | The Guardian | Al Masry Al Youm |
| Negative / positive | [Red Gradient] | [Green Gradient] |