

# What Marketing Strategy is Needed to Deliver a Successful World Cup in 2022?

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**Abstract:** Sport is a rapidly evolving industry, therefore event managers need complex advertisement strategies to estimate and encounter market requirements. This condition becomes even more sophisticated when a global sports event is managed, especially when it is hosted by a country that does not have the essential infrastructure and tourism foundation. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to describe how Qatar is aggressively working to accommodate a successful World Cup in 2022, and then to explore the marketing challenges that face Qatar in effectively promoting its event at the international level. Based on that, a set of steps are defined to manage an effective marketing strategy, which can significantly increase the level of world cup participation. This can help Qatar deliver its world cup bidding slogan: "Expect Amazing."

## INTRODUCTION

The majority of the previous international sport events took place in countries that are well developed in terms of adequate infrastructure and economic development. These ingredients are essential to prepare for and host a global event that lasts for one month, because such event requires significant preparation and planning in order to meet the high standard requirements at different levels, including transportation, safety, accommodation, media coverage, and security.

Since in developed countries most of these components are already available, Qatar has to make major adjustments to arrange for the global event.

However, when FIFA selected Qatar in 2010 to host World Cup 2022, it was on the promise by Qatar that it would make all the required arrangements to build the entire infrastructure and associated sport facilities needed to host such a global event. During the negotiation to select the future location for the World Cup, Indonesia's bid was ineligible due to lack of governmental support to meet all commitments, and Mexico withdrew its bid due to high financial costs. These examples demonstrate the reason behind hosting this event frequently at countries known to have a high level of development, in order to be able to organize all aspects related to a global gathering. Additionally, all countries that hosted previous sport events are known to be global destinations for tour-

ists, something that can add significant advantage when promoting the event at the global level.

Qatar had drafted a comprehensive national vision for 2030, even before bidding to host the World Cup in 2022. Therefore, it was clear to FIFA that Qatar had the competence and commitment to organize this global event, which led to including Qatar in the list that reached the final voting. After being selected to host the event, Qatar made it clear that World Cup 2022 is just an important landmark to promote itself as a distinguished hub for sport activities and an ultimate destination for tourist activities. The Qatar national vision endorses building the infrastructure of the country and redesigning it to make Qatar a developed state by 2030. The vision is focusing on diversifying the economy to generate income from various sources other than oil and gas. Thus, hosting the World Cup will help to build a global brand image showing Qatar as an attractive business and tourist destination, in addition to showing the country as a progressive nation looking for prosperity and recognition.

When Qatar received the green light to host the sport event, it started a huge number of mega projects to build state-of-the-art facilities, including a comprehensive transportation system that provides easy access to all event locations. Qatar also started to gain the experience and knowledge to manage and organize the sport events by inviting many sport

champions and competitions at the regional and international levels, such as the international handball federation, the FINA world swimming championships, and the international volleyball competitions. The increase in the number of sport events hosted in Qatar during the last few years clearly indicates that Qatar is becoming an international hub for organizing world class sports events. For example, Qatar hosted in 2015 over 10 regional and international events of various sport activities (1). Handling such global events has increased the knowledge and experience to manage and deliver successful events.

In 2015, FIFA moved the World Cup event from summer season to February-December 2022. This decision came as a result of different logistical and environmental issues that are related to the severe weather conditions in Qatar during summer. This action was supported by scientific evidence from researchers, indicating that players and fans from Europe and places with similar environments who are not accustomed to Qatar's extremely hot and humid conditions would not be able to tolerate the heat in Qatar during summer events. There were similar concerns about heat and humidity during the World Cup in Brazil, where a match on June 22 between the U.S. and Portugal made history for being the first world cup competition to take an official water break. This shift in timing in Qatar was a good decision, because the extreme heat in summer would pose a significant challenge to finding an appropriate technology to cool the large stadiums. Even fans would be largely constrained from travelling around to explore Qatar and see attractive sites.

### WORLD CUP PREPARATION

Since 2010, Qatar has undertaken a massive spending program to build the infrastructure needed to host the World Cup. Currently, much of the capital city Doha looks like a huge construction site. Qatar has committed to spend over \$200 B for investment in the country's infrastructure: \$20 B for roads network, \$40 B for trains and metro system, \$4 B for stadiums, \$8 B for new port, \$16 B for new airport, in addition to financing many other projects related to the tourism and leisure industry.

Some critical projects have already been completed, such as Hamad International airport, which can accommodate up to 50 million passengers per year at full operational capacity. Recently, the airport is ranked among the best ten airports in the world. In addition, Qatar Airways continues to expand its global network to reach more than 155 destinations by mid-2016, and is expected to increase its interna-

tional reach considerably by 2022. Due to excellence in operation strategy and service quality, Qatar Airways received the Five-star airline award and won the World's Best Airline award for 2015, having also held the title in both 2011 and 2012. Massive expansion is taking place for building new road systems. Additionally, a state-of-the-art metro is currently being constructed to connect the airport with the major sport sites, and provide 113 km of tunneling for Doha city's important sites. This metro project received the Guinness World Record for operating the highest number of tunnel-boring machines in a single city at one time (2). This award confirms the high level of coordination activities among large engineering companies to build the metro in the shortest possible time.

A new city, Lusail, is under construction to host the opening and closing ceremony of the World Cup event. This city is located on the coast, about 23 km north Doha. It is planned to have ports, residential areas, island resorts, luxury malls, business district, and large entertainment facilities there. Lusail city has received the Global Recognition at International Property Awards, recognizing the highest levels of industry achievement and using the highest technology in building the city. Upon completion, Lusail will be one of the most advanced and unique cities in the world. It will be a symbolic tourism city with advanced facilities, which use the latest information technology trends and tools to support an exclusive lifestyle (3).

To make the experience of the World Cup memorable and exceptional for fans, they will be able to visit many tourist sites that have unique characteristics, in addition to attending sport events. Thus, Qatar is investing considerably in the leisure industry by building new tourist sites and renovating traditional ones. In addition, the current capacity of hotel rooms, which stands at around 60,000 rooms, will increase to 95,000 rooms by 2022.

Finally, Qatar has promised to build around eight state-of-the-art stadiums to host over 32 teams and produce an extraordinary experience for those who will visit Qatar. Each stadium will have a spectacular design that uses impressive and groundbreaking structures, reflecting an architecturally iconic vision. All stadiums will be accessible by modern transportation systems, and have different attendance capacities, while the largest stadium will be reside in Lusail with capacity of 80,000. Outstanding efforts have been initiated to start construction on most of the stadiums, and build all surrounding facilities.

It is important to mention here an important fact regarding the case of Qatar World Cup 2022. Qatar case is much different from that of other countries that hosted previous world cup events, because all those countries had the required infrastructure to prepare for the event, but needed only to add extra facilities and some stadiums. In addition, all these countries were accustomed to receiving large numbers of tourists every year. In contrast, Qatar does not have the required infrastructure to host a global event, and was not known as a global destination site at the time of winning the bid. However, it is taking a remarkable lead forward to build all the essential projects to deliver a successful and astonishing event, as it promised at the time of winning the bid "Expect Amazing".

To date, Qatar has been able to work effectively on the scheduled plan to produce an exciting event, one that never took place in the MENA region. Remarkably, different government agencies are working together under one umbrella, in order to ensure the coordination activities are leading to the predefined objectives in a timely manner. All indicators show that Qatar will be able to complete all construction projects on time and develop all the required infrastructure to host the event. Even with oil and gas prices going down noticeably, the contraction projects are still moving at a steady level as originally proposed.

## **THE CHALLENGES TO MARKET WORLD CUP 2022**

Hosting a successful world cup event requires two interrelated components: (1) building the required foundation and logistics to host the event, and (2) marketing for the event to encourage effective participation and involvement at a global scale. The previous section demonstrated that Qatar is moving rapidly to create the vital foundations and related logistics needed to host the event. However, in this section I will discuss some of the challenges that must be addressed during the marketing campaign to promote World Cup 2022, and propose some solutions to reduce their potential impact. These challenges did not exist for previous world cup events, because the previous hosting countries had distinctive conditions that differ from Qatar's.

### **1- CHANGING THE WORLD CUP DATE**

Moving the date of the World Cup from summer to winter, that is November 21 until December 18, removed two critical obstacles: (1) the issue of handling the extreme temperatures in Qatar which can rise to 50°C and which imposes significant cost

and technological challenges; (2) the fans' thought of spending a month inside air-conditioned hotels, shopping malls and stadiums is unlikely to have universal appeal, and could prevent many from attending the World Cup.

However, the new proposed period is known to be a busy time for Christmas shopping, which accounts for almost half annual sales of many companies. In addition, during this period significant preparation is taken at the personal and family levels to plan for the major holiday time-off, which lasts around two to three weeks. Thus, attending World Cup 2022 and enjoying the Christmas vacation at the same time would be like taking double holidays separated by a few days only, which most western people did not experience in the past. In fact, choosing just one of them as the ultimate choice might cause major confusion for many people, even sport fans.

On the other hand, summer time is known to be the major season for traveling worldwide. This is why all previous world cup events took place in summer, when fans and travelers take the advantage of attending a sport event during the main vacation time. There is no doubt that convincing fans to attend World Cup 2022 during the new timing window requires considerable marketing strategy to create a strong case for people to shift their standard living procedure. The advertisement campaign should trigger consumers' attention and motivate their involvement in the sport event.

There is a need to understand the level of consumer reaction, at different global regions, for attending a World Cup that is close to Christmas holiday. For some people, this holiday is the major spiritual occasion for family gathering, which requires significant preparations and commitment, while for others, it can be a good time for family and friends to meet. Some however consider it just a timeout to stay away from work.

### **2- QATAR AS A TOURISM DESTINATION**

Many of the fans who attend sport events would like to also explore the hosting country, and learn about its culture and natural beauty. The previous countries that hosted world cup events have a strong foundation in tourism, with a large number of attractive sites and entertainment activities, which attract a significant number of tourists each year. They also have the ability to hold huge numbers of cultural and social events. For example, the UK with 64 million population receives 31 million visitors per year; whereas Spain with 46 million welcomes 62 million visitors annually (4).

Qatar has started building several projects that reflect the cultural aspects of local life and provide a base for the tourism and leisure industry. In this regard, the number of brand name hotels increased noticeably in the last five years, and many tourism-related projects are close to being completed. However, the issue remains in promoting Qatar as a global tourist destination, similar to previous countries that hosted world cup events. Effective marketing strategies to promote Qatar as a global destiny for travel and leisure is crucial to increase its appearance on the world tourism map.

In this regard, UAE was able to introduce itself as one of the major global destinations, where it had an overall Tourism Competitiveness Index Ranking of 24th. Qatar took the 43rd ranking out of 140 countries (5). In particular, Dubai was ranked in the fourth position among the top 10 destination cities for 2015, with 14 million visitors (6). Interestingly, UAE has invested tremendous resources to build a wide spectrum of stunning attractions, which were able to attract a considerable number of visitors. Several factors have played an important role in making UAE a reputable global destination. First, the beauty and uniqueness of touristic sites provide a new experience and different involvement for visitors, leaving good emotions in their hearts and great memories in their minds, and making them hope to come again or advise others to try the Qatar experience. Second, the quality of service and the effective use of information technology in UAE have made international visitors comfortable and contented, where everything is easily accessible and can be found promptly. Third, the high quality and experience of employees working in the tourist industry have created a pleasant and responsive environment, which enable the serving of tourists and addressing their needs properly.

In the last ten years, tourism in Qatar has been on the rise. According to Qatar Tourism Authority, the number of visitors to Qatar is growing annually on an average of 17% (7), which indicates that more travelers are considering Qatar in their touring plans. Recently, some hotels and resorts in Qatar have earned prestigious Food & Travel GCC Tourism Awards, for their excellence in customer service (8).

#### **EFFECTIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES**

Currently, Qatar is moving ahead on several fronts to build a global sport event. Many projects are under construction, several have been completed and others will soon be finalized. All the projects are locally built, and what is needed is to conduct an effective worldwide advertisement campaign to promote the

global event. The event should be marketed as an unforgettable occasion, the first ever of its kind, an event that no one should miss. The advertisement strategy should show the unique environment and culture of Qatar, and how it can enrich the visitors experience by giving spectacular memories.

Based on the two challenges mentioned earlier, the marketing strategy needs to be focused and precise, in order to produce the highest possible positive influence at a global level. It is recommended to implement the following steps to achieve this strategy.

#### **1- UNDERSTAND GLOBAL PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD CUP 2022**

As mentioned earlier, the global event in Qatar will take place just before Christmas holiday, which is an important period for intensive shopping and spending in preparation for family and friends gathering. Thus, it is important to understand to what extent people are willing to participate in both occasions and the level of their participation. For example, some might be willing to be involved by come to Qatar and watch the events, others might participate by buying related products and services and watch all games on TV or in coffee shops, while the rest might observe just parts of the events.

It is vital at this step to collect extensive data , in order to understand people's perceptions and how they can be addressed properly. People should therefore be encouraged to participate in filling out surveys, by offering them numerous attractive awards at the end of the exploration study. Such awards can include free tickets to the sport event having people's pictures taken with the top players, free hotel rooms, free airline tickets, free access to local events, and some cash prizes. Data collection from people could utilize non-conventional methods, such as using brain imaging technology (Magnetic Resonance Imaging, MRI) to monitor people's response to different advertisements and adopting the advertisements that produce the highest brain activations. This technology has already been used for marketing many brand products.

The final success of a sport event can be measured by the level of public participation in the actual event, ether by attending it physically or by participating in different formats, as stated previously. Qatar is expecting to welcome around half a million fans during the World Cup, whereas a massive number of people worldwide watch soccer games at a multitude of locations.

## 2- UNDERSTAND GLOBAL PERCEPTION OF QATAR TOURISM

Generally, fans come both to attend the sport events and to visit attractive sites in the hosting country. The idea of spending one month in a hotel room waiting to attend the next match would not be appealing enough for someone to attend the event in the first place. In fact, sport fans attending World Cup events are thrilled to explore exciting activities and visit new sites in the host country. Before attending the World Cup therefore, they would study what attractions the host country has to offer, and plan their tourist itinerary accordingly.

To evaluate the level of tourism attractiveness in Qatar, it is important to understand what kind of activities and events would increase the likelihood of people visiting Qatar during the World Cup. People in different parts of the world have their personal preferences and wishes, so it is important to divide people into different geographical categories and assess the factors that motivate people in these categories to attend the World Cup. Initially, the focus of exploring can be concentrated on nearby countries where 2 billion people live within a four-hour flight of Doha (9), then expand the investigation to include remote continents and countries.

It is important to note that many tourists never had the chance to tour and explore the Middle East region, although many have used it as a hub to transfer their flights at some point. In the first and second previous steps, therefore, it is important to understand people's feelings and perceptions of Qatar from different viewpoints, in order to assess exactly what can motivate them to come and invest almost one month of their time in a new region. It is also important to know the impact of recent political events across the region on people feeling secure to stay for one month, because this knowledge would be useful to ensure that visitors safety is guaranteed, and the level of security expected by visitors.

## 3- USE CUSTOMIZED MARKETING STRATEGIES

The above two steps will reveal people's attitude toward World Cup 2022, including their expectations, concerns, and what they like to experience in the country's culture. The collected information would be used to define the appropriate marketing strategies for each region and sub-region. Even for the same region, different advertisement tools can be used to increase the level of participation in the World Cup by any format. For example, in Europe where fans might be disappointed at the absence of

football tournaments during winter, it is important to use effective advertisement that shows the amazing experience fans would get by joining their teams in Qatar, or even supporting them while staying at home and watching matches.

Regarding the timing of the World Cup, which is just before Christmas holiday, the advertisement can focus on using the World Cup as an early vacation time for the family, and devote the Christmas time for relaxing among family and friends. The Christmas holiday can be presented as an opportunity to relax and talk about their memories while visiting Qatar. Also, some advertisements can show that buying world cup-related products can give a different taste to the Christmas shopping experience, by encouraging people to share their views about special teams and their achievements. World cup-related products can generate noticeable revenues if they are designed to fit consumers' flavor in each region. Such products can target all segments of society including children, teens, and adults.

To ensure the effectiveness of the implemented marketing strategies, it is important to initiate them a reasonable time ahead of the World Cup event and assess the reaction worldwide. This can help in defining whether extra marketing activities should be considered for urgent action. To measure the impact of early advertisement campaigns, there should be a link at the end of each advertisement to enable people to make early booking for a hotel or an allied airline. By monitoring the traffic and actual early booking, the effectiveness of the marketing strategy can be accessed for different regions worldwide.

## 4- UTILIZE DIFFERENT ADVERTISEMENT CHANNELS

With the current technological advancements, reaching people worldwide is not a difficult task, and in fact, right now we can reach people in different parts of the world easier than ever before. The majority of people in different continents have a smart-phone equipped with social media applications, such as What's-up, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. The spread of the Internet is widely recognized even in the under-developed countries. Thus, reaching potential World Cup fans is not an issue, but it is important to determine the right advertisement channels being used by a wide range of potential fans. Although social media networks can play an enormous role in publicizing World Cup 2022, the use of the standard advertisement channels is very important (such TV, Newspapers, Magazines).

## WHAT MARKETING STRATEGY IS NEEDED

For example, YouTube has over a billion users (nearly one-third of all Internet users). YouTube on mobile alone reaches more 18 to 49 year-olds than any cable network in the U.S (10), where many advertisement videos are posted daily generating millions of views. The number of people watching YouTube is increasing annually, making it as the largest advertisement company in the world. YouTube is the second-largest search engine and the third-most visited website (10). On the other hand, What's-up and Facebook Messenger have recorded one billion users in 2016, controlling around 79% of the Internet Messaging market (11), where almost half a billion people love using What's-up daily to communicate instant news.

Nonetheless, there are also many approaches that can promote this event indirectly. First, hosting world-class business and academic conferences and exhibitions can act as a platform to encourage people to visit Qatar and explore it before the big event. This

approach was used in the past in Dubai and Abu-Dhabi, and it turned out to be effective in producing an amazing experience for conference attendees, which inspired them to revisit the place on future occasions with family. Such an approach can be an effective means to spread a positive word-of-mouth in media and in every-day conversation.

## CONCLUSION

Qatar is taking the lead in hosting a huge global event that has never before been offered in this region, which requires a massive level of planning and preparation. Most of the essential components of this event are being developed locally in organized steps. However, what is needed at the international level is an adequate marketing strategy to promote a wide participation in World Cup 2022, and build a strong brand image for Qatar, which is critical toward achieving the country's 2030 vision. This image will show Qatar as a progressive nation looking for prosperity and international recognition.

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## BIO

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