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Sportswashing effects on nation brand

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Sportswashing has rapidly emerged as a focal talking point amongst sports journalists and sports researchers during the recent years. The phenomenon itself is not necessarily new, as the earliest examples of the action can be traced back to Ancient Greece but has not emerged into mainstream consciousness until the 21st century. Sportswashing refers to the practice of using sports events and associations to improve the public image of a nation, often to divert attention from negative aspects such as human rights violations. This research investigates and provides understanding on how these efforts impact the perception of a nation's brand via quantitative research.

Through a comprehensive literature review, the theoretical framework of sportswashing and nation branding is established. The literature review will introduce theories of sportswashing and explain the actions being used in sportswashing strategies to give reader understanding on what can be classified as sportswashing.

The data used in this study was collected via survey. The anonymous survey was chosen as a data collection method to get a public opinion about the sports, sportswashing and its effects on nation brand.

The findings of the research showed that overall using of sports as a tool for branding a nation is a very effective way to get positive brand recognition among the public. The data also showed that using of sports in washing purposes can also enhance a nation's image by associating it with successful and admired sports events or teams, it can also lead to increased scrutiny and backlash. This dual effect underscores the complexity of sportswashing as a strategy for nation branding

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1.Introduction

1.1 Background

Sportswashing as a phenomenon has been gaining a lot more attention from researchers and media in the recent years. While the activities related to sportswashing are not especially new and have been used by multiple perpetrators during the history of sports, the direct state-led investments by many wealthy Middle Eastern countries has made the phenomenon as a vocal talking point by many sports journalists. Actions such as Saudi-Arabian Public Investment Fund's purchase of the English Premier League club Newcastle United (Skey 2023), and Qatar hosting FIFA Football World Cup in the fall of 2022 has been criticised as sportswashing.

From the history of sports, there have been many events which have lot of similarities to the modern-day sportswashing actions. Perhaps the most notorious example of this is the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, Germany. Germany was at the time ruled by the Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Regime, and researchers has identified lot of similarities from that event to the modern-day events, such as Sochi Winter Olympics 2014 in Russia (Boykoff 2022). As many researchers has identified, hosting these kind of major worldwide sporting events has been used as a tool for promoting the host nation's heritage, enhancing the nation image in the eyes of the worldwide audience, to shift attention from the actions which have been viewed as unacceptable and as a way to obtain soft power around the world.

As the world has been getting increasingly globalized with the aid of internet and social media, the brand image of companies, but also the brand image of the nations has become even more important than before. When information reaches every part of the globe in just milliseconds, promoting and preserving the image in the eyes of the global audience can be said to be a vital part to successfully do business and be powerful within one's preferred interests. Protecting the positive brand image and trying to maintain brand equity is a very important part of successfully operating in the globalized world where mishaps quickly spread around and ruin the brand

image. The negative image in the eyes of potential investors and tourists may easily lead to the situation where the decision about travelling to a particular destination or investing to a particular company can be decided by the image of the nation.

While the purpose of nation branding is to promote nation's image in the eyes of foreign audience, with the intention to lure tourists and investments into the country, the actions vary between countries. Especially with the nations, which faces allegations of human right violations or other comparable actions, different kinds of "washing" actions have become a prominent tool as a way to shift attention away from the allegations. Cambridge Dictionary describes "washing" as an action to clean something using water, but in the context of sports- or green- or whitewashing operations is rather than actually wash something with the words original meaning, to figuratively wash their images in the eyes of the audience.

Sportswashing as a fairly new talking point amongst media and research has not been a topic for an extensive amount of research. While new research is being published at an increasing pace, there still is a substantial research gap when studying sportswashing from a wider perspective. Most of the research done on sportswashing have been focusing on the phenomenon itself, rather than its effects on some other phenomenon. Although the concept of sportswashing is discussed in theoretical literature, studies examining public awareness and perceptions of sportswashing are limited. This research fills this gap by empirically assessing the familiarity with sportswashing among respondents and its impact on their perceptions of nation branding. This research will explore the effects of sportswashing on nation's brand, with the intention to contribute to the research by creating a new dimension on the effects of sportswashing. The research will also conduct quantitative analysis on public's opinions on the phenomenon, which has rarely been done before since most of the researches related to this topic have been discussing the topic at a more empirical level, rather than conducting analysis on public's perception on the topic.

Despite the apparent benefits of sportswashing, its implications for nation branding are complex and multifaceted. While some countries have successfully leveraged sports to improve their

international image, others have faced backlash and increased scrutiny, leading to a paradox where sportswashing efforts may simultaneously enhance and damage a nation's brand.

1.2 Research questions and objectives

The purpose of this study is to find out what kind of effects sportswashing has on the perpetrator's nation brand reputation. The study will discuss about the key implications and strategies used on sportswashing and nation branding via previous literature on the subjects. The objective for the literature review is to understand the deeper means of sportswashing, introduce the key theories and strategies for nation branding and offer a comprehensive theoretical base for the study.

The actual research and data collection is gathered via a survey, which will be analysed statistically. The objective and reasoning for choosing the survey as the data collection method, is to gain public opinion about the subject, and to find out if the public believes whether the sportswashing and nation branding methods presented in this thesis are successful or not. The main research question for this research is:

r1 "How do sportswashing efforts impact on the perception of a nation's brand?"

1.3 Study structure

This study is divided into five different parts. Firstly, the study explains what sportswashing is, whom are the operators behind sportswashing, the historical frames of sportswashing and common examples of sportswashing. This is done based on the previous research about the subject. The objective is to understand the deeper means of sportswashing and why it has become even more visible term on discussion about professional sports business.

In the second part of the literature review is explaining nation branding theories based on previous research. The objective is to find out how branding a nation differs from common product or company branding if it will differ at all. The whole objective of the literature review is to gain knowledge and understand the deeper reasoning for sportswashing and nation branding.

For the research part, the objective is to find out what kind of correlation there is between sportswashing and nation branding. Whether the correlation is positive and therefore will the research suggest that sportswashing is indeed a valuable tool for building a more positive nation brand reputation. The research data is gathered from survey, which should provide a deep and reliable statistical insight for the study.

The study will provide a whole new dimension for the research about sportswashing, as studies about the correlation and successfulness of sportswashing and nation branding have not been conducted before. The whole sportswashing phenomenon is quite new topic amongst the sport business researchers, and this study should provide a good insight and base for further research in the future.

2. Literature review

This literature review will discuss the subjects of this thesis on theoretical perspective. This will be done by presenting several different relevant research about nation branding and sportswashing.

The literature review will be divided into two main chapters, the first chapter will focus on sportswashing. The chapter focusing on sportswashing will be further divided into four sub-chapters. The research will explain and define sportswashing theories, history, operators, and motives. The purpose of this is to give reader explicit and deep understanding about the phenomenon.

The second chapter of the literature review will delve into branding. In the chapter the research will discuss about the core meaning of a brand and briefly about history of branding. The main focus in the chapter is to present several branding theories, especially theories which are related and useful when branding a nation. Nation branding is the other main subject of this thesis, which is why the main focus will be on that phenomenon.

The objective for literature review is to discuss about the subjects and introduce the phenomena to the reader. The most relevant findings and theories will also be used as a core for the analytical part of this thesis.

2.1 Sportswashing

2.1.1 Definition of sportswashing

Sportswashing is a complex phenomenon, which is tightly related to many different phenomena, such as concept of soft power and other forms of “washing”, such as green- and whitewashing. As Skey (2023) mentions, sportswashing is a neologism that has begun to appear with increasing

regularity in the English-language media over the past few years. Skey (2023) argues that the term has evolved into a valuable analytical concept for understanding the strategic manipulation of sports for political ends. Professor Jules Boykoff defines sportswashing as a phenomenon that a lot of people in sports studies call "Sportswashing," using sports megaevents in order to launder reputation on the world stage. (Francis 2022)

As Roslender (2024) writes, an activity that can be pursued by an individual, group or organisation, sportswashing by nation-states has become a major concern in top-flight football. It entails a nation-state providing generous financial support for sporting organisations and events, with the intent to or deflect attention away from unacceptable activities it is pursuing. At the heart of Roslender's analysis lies the role of football clubs as vehicles for sportswashing. He argues that the globalization of football has made top-flight clubs increasingly attractive targets for investment by wealthy individuals or entities seeking to gain prestige and influence on the global stage. These owners often have vested interests beyond football, and their financial injections into clubs can serve as a form of reputation laundering, allowing them to portray themselves as benefactors of the sport while diverting attention from their questionable activities elsewhere (Roslender 2024).

Furthermore, the term "sportswashing" refers to a strategic effort by states, corporations, or other entities to leverage the positive associations and global appeal of sports to cleanse their tarnished reputations. This practice involves sponsoring sports teams, hosting international sporting events, or acquiring sports franchises to shift public focus away from negative activities, such as human rights abuses or political oppression, and towards the favourable values linked with sports (Bergkvist & Skeiseid 2024). The motivations behind sportswashing are multifaceted. For states, the primary goal is often the acquisition of soft power—enhancing their global standing and influencing international opinion through cultural and diplomatic means. Hosting prestigious sports events can boost tourism, attract foreign investments, and foster national pride. For corporations, sportswashing can help distract from unethical practices, environmental degradation, or poor labor conditions, thereby protecting their market position and consumer base (Bergkvist & Skeiseid 2024).

Sportswashing is often tied as a part of nation's soft power strategy. Classic definition for soft power is Nye's "Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies (Nye 2008)". As Davis et al. defines, oppressive regimes can achieve legitimation through sponsorships of popular teams or hosting of prestigious sporting events and provided the Saudi Arabian government hosting of Formula 1 events since 2021 and sponsorship of LIV Golf as examples of how this concept is applied in practice (Davis et al. 2023). Another example of Saudi Arabian actions in the field of professional sports is purchasing ownership of the professional football team, Newcastle United from England, who plays in the Premier League. The purchase gained a lot of attention, and the term 'sportswashing' appeared in many of the reports around the story (Skey 2023). A lot of the attention was critical as the long-debated Saudi Arabia-takeover of Newcastle United was confirmed, human rights groups criticised the club for facilitating sportswashing of the Saudi regime. (Taylor et al. 2023)

The meaning of sportswashing can be deeply tied with other forms of "washing", such as greenwashing and whitewashing. The English word "wash" is explained in Cambridge Dictionary as an action to clean something using water. When mooring the concept of washing with the prefixes of green- sports- or white, it becomes apparent that concept of these washing operations is rather than actually wash something with the words original meaning, to figuratively wash their images in the eyes of the audience. de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) defines greenwashing as "practice of promoting environmentally friendly programs to deflect attention from an organization's environmentally unfriendly or less savoury activities". On the other hand, scholars has defined whitewashing to be an important concept in the study of racism. It "refers to both the process and works within a loose problematic of racialization," in which the focal point manifests "on the construction of white racialized identities. (Gabriel 1998). The definitions of these different types of "washing" clearly shows the deep connection between the concepts, while the methods are different, all of the concepts have the same core idea to "wash" something in their favour.

The accusations of using sportswashing as a tool for improving the nations image have been specially made towards the Middle Eastern wealthy oil-rich countries. The human rights, as we understand human rights in the Western countries, has been argued to be in considerably weaker state in the Middle Eastern countries for a long time. Malone (1984) stated that the Amnesty International reported uses of detention and torture amongst ways of violating the human rights. Freedom House's annual "Freedom in the world 2023" report classifies that 93% of Middle Eastern population lives in countries classified as Not Free. Freedom House describes the areas situation as area's population demands for freedom continues to run up towards some of the most entrenched oppression systems in the world (Freedom House 2023)

2.1.2 History of sportswashing

Although 'Sportswashing' is one of the most recent concepts to abruptly enter the political, media and popular lexicon, similar to 'social capital' and 'soft power' before it" (Grix et al. 2023), the history behind the word reaches all the way back to the ancient Olympic games in ancient Greece. When Athens was fighting a long-fought war against Sparta, Athens political leader Alcibiades decided to enter several expensive, resource-demanding horse chariots to the Olympic games. While he was questioned why he would spend the little available resources to the Olympic games instead of the war, he explained that when we win the games, everyone in the world will fear us. Which they achieved by winning the games. It can be considered straight-up geopolitical manoeuvre (Rosenberg 2022). This can be considered as one of the earliest examples of using sports as a tool for showing nation's power. It can also be argued that ancient Rome also used early adaptation of sportswashing with its sports events, such as gladiator fights and chariot races. As Vamplew states "similarly Greek athletic festivals were promoted by their city hosts to strengthen the community, to outdo rival cities, and to boost the local economy. Ultimately, the city administration bore the costs but they looked to local sponsors for funding, men who sought social capital and political influence. (Vamplew 2022)"

As in the ancient Greek and Rome the society was widely different than the society in the more modern world, the sportswashing term does not apply completely to the ancient events, but they can be used as an early example of the phenomenon. The first event scholars widely agree that was used as a sportswashing tool was the Berlin Summer Olympics in 1936. Germany was under the regime of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party, and the Olympic event was used as a tool for strengthening their political power. The Nazis even invented a new tradition to facilitate sportswashing: the Olympic Torch Relay. Under their plan, a flame lit at Mount Olympus in Greece eventually wended its way to Berlin's Olympic stadium, where it ignited the Olympic cauldron (Boykoff 2022). The idea behind the Olympics was to organize a world-wide recognized sporting mega-event, where the regime intended to show the world the power of the German people and showing the strengths of the new rising Germany. The Olympics has for a long time been a mega-sized media event, so organizing the event of that scale is a great way to present the nation to the world. For example, the New York Times published an article, where they described the German leader Hitler as "the new Caesar of this era" (Birchall 1936). Hitler also used the event as tool to bolster his regimes popularity in the domestic scape, as the Fuhrer's popularity amongst the citizens of Germany was as its peak during the summer of 1936 (Hilmes 2018). The domestic support that Hitler gained with hosting the Olympics helped him to shift attention to the military actions, which eventually led to the annexation of Austria, Sudetenland, and Czechoslovakia. Eventually in the September of 1939 Hitler began the invasion of Poland and the second World War began. (Taylor 1996)

The Nazi-Germany hosting the Olympic Games is a one prominent event from the 20th century which have been later discussed to be earlier adopters of the sportswashing, but it is not the only one. Other major notable sporting events from the 20th century, whom hosts has been accused of using the event to bolster their reputation internationally or domestically are the Football World Cup 1978 in Argentina, which was held under a military dictatorship (Scharpf, Gläbel & Edwards 2023) and the Rumble in the Jungle boxing title match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in the African nation Zaire, which was ruled by dictator Mobutu Sese Seko (Erenberg 2019). In some ways, notable sporting events between United States and Soviet Union at the Cold War-era, could be at least argued to be used as a political tool to demonstrate the

nations power, if not clearly been used as a sportswashing tool in its true definition. Events as Summit Series 1972 in Ice Hockey has been linked to the Cold War (though the Summit Series was between Canada and Soviet Union and not between the USA and Soviet Union, which were the two most prominent players in the Cold War), where the fight for superiority were fought in hockey rink instead of using military power. (Buckel 2008)

In the 21th century the use of sports in efforts to demonstrate the nation's power and improve the nation's image around the world has become notably prominent. Obtaining the rights to host several different sporting mega-events has been a trend with the nations which have been accused of human-rights violations. Events such as Beijing Summer Olympics 2008 and Beijing Winter Olympics 2022 in China, Sochi Winter Olympics 2014 in Russia, Football World Cups 2010, 2018 and 2022 in South Africa, Russia and Qatar are just the most notable examples of events, which have gained negative public attention and accusations of sportswashing, especially in the democratic Western countries (Boykoff 2022).

2.1.3 Sportswashing operators

Hosting such mega-events such as Olympics and Football World Cups has been argued to be the most notable tool for sportswashing. The 2008 and 2022 Olympics in China has been criticized because of China has been accused of several human right violations, such as freedom of speech. When bidding for hosting the Olympics, China has stated that hosting the event would enhance social conditions such as human rights, but studies has shown that the reality has actually been the opposite, the human right violations have been more frequent after hosting the Olympics. This can be argued to be the case in most of the accused sportswashing events, when the world's attention focuses in the country, they try to give out the best possible image by organizing the event very well, but as soon as the focus shifts elsewhere, the problems arise again. (Boykoff 2022).

The 2014 Olympics and 2018 Football World Cup hosted by Russia is another great example of using mega-events in order to laundry nation's image. Similarly to China, Russia has been also

accused of human rights violations, especially towards to the LGBT community. It has also been argued that Russia tried to enhance its image also on domestic level, with intention to show nation's power to its own citizens. Boykoff argues that use of the events for strengthening the regime's popularity was greatly successful as the popularity of President Putin was at an all-time high level in the wake of 2014 Olympics (Boykoff 2022). After the 2014 Olympics Russia invaded the Crimean Peninsula and a region from its neighbouring country, Ukraine, which popularity in the domestic audience has been tied to the hosting of the Olympics, which gave the people an image of a powerful nation.

Third, and probably the most notorious example of using mega-events for enhancing nations image is the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The criticism for Qatar hosting the event comes from multiple different human rights violations. The reports have stated that Qatar has used modern day slavery in order for building the venues for the event, most of workers being from poor circumstances. British newspaper Guardian reported in 2021 that over 6500 workers have died during the construction work since 2010, when the Qatar was announced as a host for the World Cup. The criticized "slavery" of the workers comes from the Kafala-system which is used in Qatar. Kafala system ties migrant workers' legal status to their employers. This system has been criticized for giving employers significant control over the lives of workers, including their ability to change employment or flee the country, although this system has been abolished in 2020 (Boykoff 2022). LGBT rights in Qatar were also a massive talking point in discussion about the oncoming World Cup. Same-sex sexual acts are criminalised by law, and oppression of sexual minorities is common in Qatar (Amnesty 2022).

When using mega-events for sportswashing, the operators first need to obtain rights for hosting these events. This has been at least in some cases handled by bribery and corruption. Again, the research shows that Qatar 2022 Football World Cup is one of the main talking points, when discussing about possible corruption. Critics of Qatar 2022 emphasize unprecedented multi-layers of corruption allegations, including whistleblower's evidence of over a million dollars promised to FIFA Executive Committee (ExCo) members (Dubinsky 2023). In 2015, US Department of Justice revealed the widespread corruption of chair members of football's

international government body, FIFA. This corruption included taking bribes for voting in favour of the bribing nation. These bribes were handed out for example for the voting of 2022 World Cup host (Blake & Calvert 2015) The Qatar winning the hosting rights for the 2022 World Cup was also criticised because of sport-related aspects, such as Qatar's football team did not have had appearance in the World Cup before, and the event being shifted to the end of the year, rather than hosting it during the summer, which is the traditional schedule for the World Cup.

The use of sportswashing has also been expanding from hosting mega-events, to obtaining ownership of popular sports organizations. First example of this is Roman Abramovich purchasing ownership of the London-based Premier League club Chelsea Football Club. Roman Abramovich is a Russian oligarch, who has been alleged to be in close contacts with Russian President Vladimir Putin. There has been even made allegations that Putin ordered Abramovich to purchase Chelsea FC. (Lock, 2023). In 2022, Abramovich was forced to sell his ownership of the Chelsea FC, because United Kingdom sanctioned him due to Russia-Ukraine war.

Another, and probably the most notorious example of gaining ownership of sports organizations is the state-owned football clubs, such as Manchester City and Newcastle United, also playing in the English Premier League. In 2008, Manchester City Football Club were bought by the Abu Dhabi United Group – a private equity group operated by Abu Dhabi royalty and UAE politicians. Since 2008, the club have won seven Premier League titles, eight domestic cup trophies and the 2023 UEFA Champions League; achievements that would have been deemed impossible before the takeover. This has aroused criticism for not only financially distorting club football, but also as 'one of football's most blatant attempts to "sportswash" a country's deeply tarnished image (Kearns et al. 2023)

Newcastle United is the most recent major sports club which has been purchased by Middle Eastern owners and has been included in talks concerning sportswashing. The sale was closed in the autumn of 2021, despite months of arbitration and protests regarding the relationship between the PIF (Public Investment Fund) and the Saudi government, the sale closed, transforming Newcastle United from an quite average English club into one of the world's richest teams (Nober 2022).

These three clubs, alongside with Paris Saint-Germain, which has been owned by Qatar Sports Investment since 2011 (Bocquet & Dalakas 2023), are the four most prominent sports clubs, which have been in focal points in talks about sportswashing, and according to many researchers, these clubs are used as sportswashing tools.

Sponsorship of the sports teams have also been considered as a sportswashing operation by many researchers. Sponsoring is a more subtle way of promoting nation image, via state-owned companies. This kind of operation has been also become more prominent in recent decades. Sponsorship can be described as a practise for promoting company's interest and its brands by tying them to a specific and meaningful event or sports team (Dolphin 2003). Sponsorships are a two-way related relationships between the sponsoring company, and sponsored side of this relationship. Usually, the sponsoring company pays an agreed amount of money in exchange for getting their brand visible when the sponsored side appears in public. The sponsorship market was growing very rapidly in 2000 (Currie 2000). In 2000 the market size was estimated to be around 370-390 million pounds in 2000 as compared to 97,35 billion dollars in 2022.

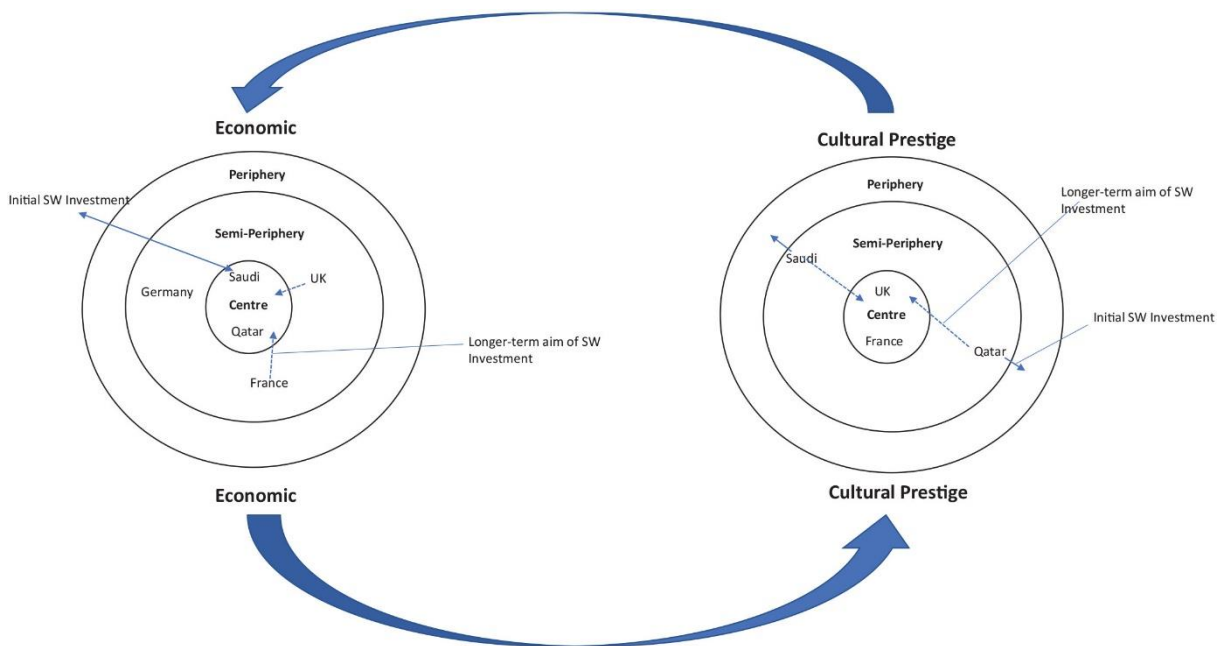
As the sponsorship industry has developed into a billion-dollar business, and not only Middle Eastern companies operates in this business, but many of them are also very prominent players in this field. While most of the Western companies who are major players in the sponsorship markets are publicly owned private companies, the Middle Eastern counterparts are usually state-owned, and therefore very tightly connected to the state's strategies and operations. Companies such as Emirates Airways and Etihad Airways, who are owned by the state of United Arab Emirates and Qatar Airways, which is owned by the state of Qatar, are very visible players especially in sport sponsorship. Emirates Airways logo have been appearing on the kits for clubs such as Real Madrid, Arsenal, and AC Milan. Fly Emirates also sponsors other major sporting events, such as Tennis Major tournaments and Formula 1 races. Etihad Airways on the other hand has been sponsoring for example Manchester City, which coincidentally is also owned by the UAE Investment Fund, as told earlier in this research. Qatar Airways managed to lure their logo on the kit of FC Barcelona, which ended their over 100-year tradition to not have sponsorship on their kits. (Krzyzaniak 2018)

2.1.4 Motives for sportswashing

The motives for engaging in sportswashing operations can be divided into two different category, impression management and reputation management. Impression management is related to the Nye's concept of soft power and is usually used to fulfil short-term goals. Reputation management on the other hand is more about creating a long-time strategy which concentrates on enchanting the country's image in long-term. The two concepts are focusing on the same objective, gaining power, and improving the operator's image in the eyes of the desired audience. While every nation in the world gives attention to managing its reputation in the eyes of other nations, the tools for it are different in different countries.

Grix et al. (2023) argues that "It is clear that states associated with political and social values deemed unattractive by others deriving from, inter alia, particular historical events (e.g. Nazism in Germany, Apartheid in South Africa), human rights abuses (e.g. Qatar and Saudi Arabia), or undemocratic governance (e.g. Russia or China) appear to have much more to gain from using sport to attempt to change their image." The intended long-term outcome for this is to embed illiberal regimes in the global economy which leads them to become normalised members of international business. Grix et al. (2023) conceptualises sportswashing as those who possess cultural power and prestige and those who want to have it, and those who possess cultural power and prestige want economic power in exchange. Trying to capitalize this exchange is one of the reasons for sportswashing.

Figure 1 Cultural and Economic exchange (Grix et al. 2023)



This conception explains the sportswashing from capital-rich countries, they want to gain cultural power with the capital investments, but this is usually initially blocked by the media as media headlines the issues concerning human-rights, or other possible issues with the sportswashing countries. This is why sportswashing is used as a tool for shift attention away from these issues. Grix et al. divides this strategy for gaining soft power into three different waves, in which the first one is to make capital investments in exchange to gain cultural power. The second wave consists of a campaign in which the discussion about the cultural negativities and counter-negativities are discussed. This wave usually consists of the operator to host a sporting mega-event to showcase their abilities. The third wave is when the sportswashing become normalized and accepted, the discussion dies down and the operators interest shift away from sportswashing to using the gained cultural power as a tool for soft power. The best example for successful three-wave conception is the economical investment from UAE to purchasing Manchester City, which initially faced a lot of criticism, but the discussion has slowly faded away. Researchers argues that along with the main actors in the sportswashing relationship, media also plays a major role in framing and presenting the relations to the world (Grix et al. 2023)

Related to the previously explained conception, the intention for acquiring cultural power in exchange for economical capital is often deeply linked to sportswashing operator's strategical plans. Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia has been accused as one of the major players in sportswashing, and using sports to wash away negative attention is one of the major strategical aspect of their Vision 2030 strategy (Elsborg 2022). The 'Vision 2030' program attempts to diversify economical sector and make changes to social and healthcare systems in Saudi-Arabia (Rahman & Qattan 2021). The motive for this is mainly to decrease the economic dependence on fossil fuels, dominantly oil as world is shifting towards greener economy. With this strategy, tourism has been identified as one of the most important income sources for the future, and this is one of the reasons why Saudi regime tries to use sports to improve the nations cultural image in eyes of the foreign investors and tourists (Elsborg 2022). Saudi regime also uses sports to increase its power all around the world, which can be seen as a typical example of how sportswashing is used in order to obtain political power (Elsborg 2022).

2.2 Brand Management

2.2.1 Definition of a brand

This chapter of the research concentrates into phenomenon called branding. Branding encompasses a combination of tangible and intangible elements aimed at generating awareness and identity, as well as establishing the reputation of a product, service, individual, location, or organization (Sammut-Bonnici 2014). American Marketing Association defines brand as 'name, term, sign, symbol, or design or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller group to differentiate them from those of competitors' (Dall'Olmo Riley 2009). The core of all branding activity is the human desire to be someone of consequence, to create a personal and social identity, to present oneself as both like other people (e.g. to belong) and unlike other people (e.g. to stand out), and to have a good reputation. Sign and symbol are essential ingredients of this branding phenomenon. (Bastos & Levy 2012) It can be argued that branding in its core definition means creating positive views about the brand in the minds of the audience.

While brands are often thought to be deeply tied with companies and their marketing, especially in the modern days' brands can be equally link to persons and nations. Whilst branding has been a traditional remit of marketing, business and public relations professionals, the notion of the brand itself carries a certain slipperiness and pervasiveness (Fehimovic & Ogden 2018). Branding is also a worldwide national phenomenon and cultural management practice used by state administrations. (Aronczyk 2013). A brand-culture approach necessitates an understanding of the tensions, heritage, history, and mythology that contribute to brand meaning and value. It offers the essential cultural, historical, and political analytical connections required to comprehend nation branding within its context. (Yalkin 2018). Related to the previous research, whilst companies and nations do not go with the same definition, they are even more deeply linked to each other in terms of branding and marketing aspects in the modern days.

Human- or person brands are connected to the worldwide renowned persons, who have such a large visibility in the different parts of the world, that their personal brand itself is worth of multimillions. Person-brands are a standard fare in fields such as fashion, entertainment, and sports, though person-brands have become to emerge also into fields such as cooking and social media. Some great examples of well-known personal brands are Calvin Klein in fashion and LeBron James in sports (Eckhardt & Fournier 2019)

2.2.2 History of branding

While branding is nowadays a very prominent element of marketing, the concept of branding entered to the academic marketing discussion quietly over the time. According to Bastos & Levy (2012), the historical origin of branding comes from ancient Greeks and Romans, who marked their livestock and slaves with fire. The word "branding" has been linked to the word "burning", because of the burning marks that was used to mark the livestock and slaves. In essence, the central concept of branding originating from fire conveys a profound intensity of meaning. It evokes emotions of partisanship and opposition, as well as power and excitement.

Despite its early roots, long history, and power, the concept of branding did not emerge as a central part of thinking in marketing until well into the twentieth century. (Bastos & Levy 2012) Brown (1925) wrote the brand is often used as a synonymous with trademark, although it does not always necessarily have the same significance. The brand could just be a label describing a particular variety and grade of goods. When the concept of branding was beginning to be more recognized in the twentieth century, the marketing researchers still often neglected branding in their marketing research. (Bastos & Levy 2012)

The evolution of branding has been often tied to the rise of nationwide media, such as newspapers, radio and especially television. "This [the evolution of branding] is largely a phenomenon that could have only occurred starting at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, due to the media (TV, radio, print advertising, e-marketing, etc.)" (Moore & Reid 2008).

The importance of branding was increasing rapidly after the second world-war. With the productive resources developed for the war effort, the accumulation of capital, and the pent-up consumer demand, the late 1940s and the 1950s witnessed a flood of goods and a surge in buying, which was dubbed the "Consumer Revolution." (Bastos & Levy 2012)

2.2.3 Branding theories

The theories of branding are vital for understanding the deeper meaning of what branding means. Theoretical frameworks set a context on how brands should be researched. Pennington argues that brands acquire meaning through repeated social use within the context of other similar behaviours. Dominant basis for brand meaning is advertising and other forms of marketing communication. Marketers try to set standards through associating brands other cultural elements that have widely known and accepted standard meanings (Pennington 2019). Similarly to Pennington, in Holt's theory about cultural branding, communications are the centre of customer value. The brand's value lies in its cultural expression, specifically in the unique cultural elements of the brand's myth and how these elements are conveyed through communication. (Holt 2004).

Brand equity theory is another popular theory on branding. It was created by David Aaker and can be described as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, name, and symbol. The assets and liabilities on which brand equity is based differ from context to context. These assets can be however grouped in five different categories. The following figure demonstrates how the concept of brand equity can be summarized. On top of the figure lies the five different assets that underlie brand equity. The figure also shows how brand equity creates value for both the customer and the firm (Aaker 2018)

Figure 2 Brand Equity Model (Aaker 2018)

FIGURE 1-3 Brand Equity

The sports organizations from all around the world have a very large and passionate pool of followers. The most popular organization, or team brands are hugely recognizable in every part of the world, and the most popular teams have a very diverse and passionate fan base. While branding a sports team may not be exactly similar to branding a product, the same theories can be applied to the sporting teams as well. For example, Aaker's theory of brand equity can be very well applied to sports brands. The brand loyalty and name awareness can be argued to be much more apparent with sports team fanbases, while a passionate Coca-Cola drinker might occasionally drink Pepsi-Cola products as well, an passionate Manchester United fan will not wear rival teams shirts or do purchases from rival teams fan shop. Brand equity can equally be associated with nation's brand. The national symbols such as nation's flag, coat of arms, motto and even head of state are part of a nation's brand and combined they create brand equity for a nation. In addition to the symbols, even the name of the nation can be associated with the

brand, for example the United States of America instantly draws associations in the eyes of a consumer.

Brand management is one of the most important aspects of branding. It is a very complex phenomenon with a variety of different methods which can be used when managing a brand. The importance of branding is perhaps bigger than ever, but at the same time the brand management may be more important than ever. (Keller 2013). Mogaji (2021) argues that brand management is focused on managing the branding process. It includes analysing, planning and implementing conscious practices to strengthen the brand, gaining a loyal customer base, differentiate from competitors and establish the brand's position.

Brand management can be inspected through eight different brand approaches (Bjerre, Heding & Knutzen 2020). The different approaches vary from each other, some of the approaches focuses on more financial aspect of a brand, while others argue more about psychological or cultural aspects of a brand. The variety of different concepts and theoretical frameworks makes an overview about brand management an impossible task. The different perspectives lead to that a commonly accepted conception about brand management has not been agreed upon on. In this research we are taking a more accurate look at the personality and especially cultural approaches since they are more relevant for this research.

Cultural approach in brand management research is called cultural because it is based on analysis of brand in the light of cultural influences. Cultural approach emphasizes the cultural forces in society and how these can be used to build iconic brands as well as impact the branding practices on globalized level (Bjerre, Heding & Knutzen 2020).

The cultural approach has been inspired by cultural studies, as cultural approach adds an exchange between macro-level culture and brands to the picture. This approach research more about consumer culture rather than individual culture. Consumer cultural theory (CCT) by Arnould and Thompson (2005) is the foundation for culturally based approach in brand management.

Consumer culture theory illuminates symbolic and experiential aspects of acquisition behaviors and sociocultural complexities of exchange behaviors and relationships (Arnould & Thompson 2005). When taking a broader view of consumer culture theory, the research has emphasized the productive aspect of consumption. Consumer culture theory research is deeply concerned with cultural meanings, sociohistorical influences and social dynamics that shape consumer experiences in hectic everyday life (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Analysis emphasizes need to analyse consumer's understanding of history and temporality more generally. The researchers also highlight a need to inquire about globalization of the consumer culture and its intentions in less developed countries, to which this study will provide further information.

The cultural approach views consumption through cultural lens means that all analysis is done with their respective cultural contexts. It broadens the brand analysis from individual consumer to the macro-level about the role's brands play in consumer culture. The approach gives analysis what brands do to the culture and what culture does to the brands. Iconic brands are those who have been able to integrate themselves into culture more skillfully than others (Bjerre, Heding & Knutzen 2020). Consumers also increasingly expect brands to be more well-behaved, which leads to an expectation to brands not to violate commonly accepted norms of a society. A good example of this when analysing nation branding, is the United States, whom culture is widely recognized all around the global world. Some other nations might have recognized brands locally or at the nearby nations, but not necessarily all around the world. The iconic brands from countries, as Coca-Cola and Hollywood from the United States provides wide recognition and helps nations to establish their national brand. From lesser recognized nations, creating iconic brands should help their aim to improve their nation brands worldwide.

Personality approach on brand management draws on theories on human psychology and consumer behaviour research. As Aaker mentioned on his research, the construct of brand personality refers to set of human characteristics associated with brand (Bjerre, Heding & Knutzen 2020). Consumer behaviour research shows that consumers tend to use brands for symbolic consumption and as means to show their personality through using particular brand.

Consumers evaluate the personality of the brand based on their observations on the brand over time (Bjerre, Heding & Knutzen 2020). This is an important factor considering this research topic. One of sportswashing's purposes is to change audience views on the perpetrator, and if being successful, the observations should change into more favourable and therefore lead to generation of interest among the consumers.

The theory behind the personality approach relies on three main blocks. Personality construct has its origin in the human personality research. Self-expression draws its origins from consumer behaviour research and probably the most relevant block for this research is congruence between brand personality and consumer self. Its origins stem from the field of social psychology and focus on the social identification process that consumers undergo with the brands they consume (Bjerre, Heding & Knutzen 2020).

2.2.4 Nation Branding

Nation branding is a branding method that is used by nations to brand themselves to be more attractive in the eyes of investors and tourists. While branding is generally linked to be action which is done by companies to brand their products, nations do this as well in order trying to enhance their image around the world. While the base meaning of this action is same with both companies and nations, there are differences which shall be noted. It is imperative to recognize that while marketers instigate the branding process, it is the buyer who forms the mental vision of the brand (Dinnie 2008). This is especially relevant in the nation branding process, where pre-existing national stereotypes might already be entrenched into consumers' minds. Therefore nation branding strategy must be done as a long-term strategy, rather than aiming for a short-term fix of their national image (Dinnie 2008).

According to Dinnie (2008), the nation-brand is characterized as a unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that offer culturally grounded differentiation and relevance to all its target audiences. This definition recognizes the multi-faceted nature of the nation-brand. Nations are making increasingly conscious efforts to enhance their nation branding because of three major

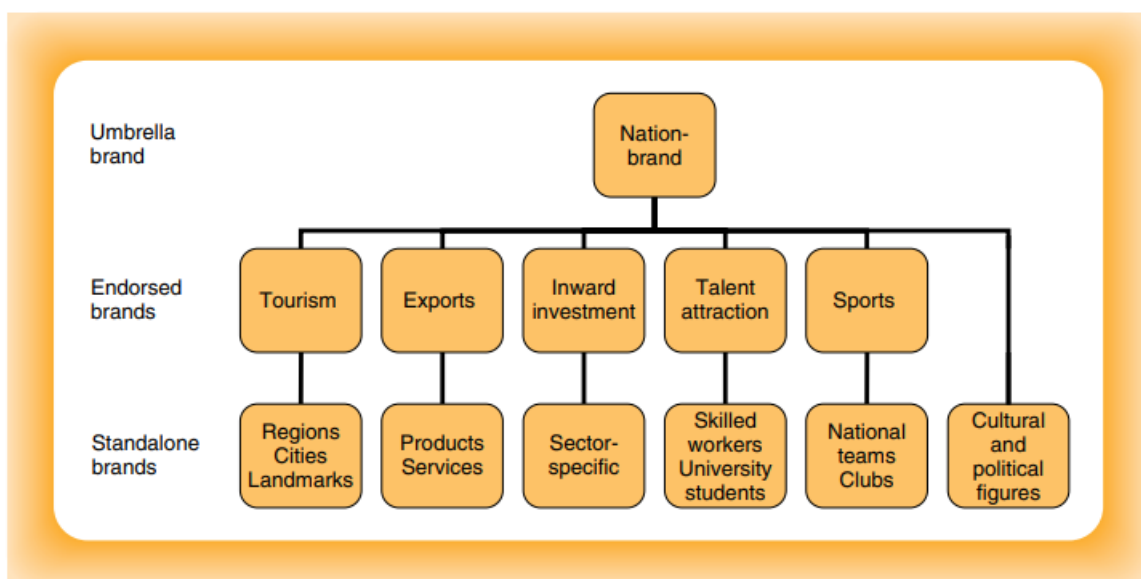
reasons. Nations want to attract tourists, stimulate inward investments and boost exports. The core reason for paying more attention to the nation brand is the increasingly global competition that nations face in their both domestic and global markets (Dinnie 2008). As this study is concentrating in sportswashing, it can be seen as one example of trying to boost nation brand in the eyes of the public. As Dinnie states, nation brand management should be treated as national policy, and never as a singular campaign, which is separate from planning, governance and economic development. This statement supports strongly the subject of this study. A powerful and positive nation brand can provide vital competitive advantage in the global competition.

Country-Of-Origin (COO) concept is a pivotal concept when researching nation branding. The concept refers to the effect that a product or service's origin has on consumers attitude towards that product or service. Some obvious categories where COO plays a differential role in are eg. Italian fashion and French perfumes. The COO plays a big role in both ways, for example Italy is known for its fashion, and the fashion icons play a role in nation branding, and at the same time the Italian fashion brand gains value just for being from Italy (Dinnie 2008). Although the concept has been criticised for being too western centric, it is still valid for the purposes of this study. The COO concept when it comes to sportswashing effects on nation brand is especially important when inspecting the negative effects of COO. The negative COO effect can be very harmful for nation's brands. The COO is usually damaged by poor quality perceptions, animosity towards nation's political regime, unflattering portrayals by media and multitude of social, cultural, economic or historical issues. In order to improve nation's image, creating new positive associations can be the most effective way (Dinnie 2008). The middle eastern countries efforts with increasing nation's brand via sports can be deeply tied to this concept of negative COO. While the brands that middle eastern countries purchase into their ownership might not straight-forwardly be originally from these countries, and the COO effect is not so clear with those brands, the ownership can harm the brand. On the other hand, the owners try to sportswash their brand via these ownerships, and therefore counter the COO effects via having recognized and admired brands in their ownership.

The role of sports in nation branding is also explained by Dinnie. Sport engenders a high level of passion and may be considered to be central contributing factor on a sense of national identity (Dinnie 2008). The hosting of major international sporting events, such as Olympic games and FIFA football world cup have been effectively used to favourably re-image and publicize a nation's place on a global scale (Dinnie 2008). It has been suggested that incorporating sports into nation-branding mix is an under-used tool, although that has been changing with middle eastern nations, whom as already mentioned, have incorporated this strategy in a very large scale in recent years. Qatar hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022 is definitely the best example of this, and Saudi-Arabia will follow with them being a front-runner to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup. (Ames 2023)

National branding architecture model consists of three different level of brands, where at the top of the architecture is the nation brand, which divides into sub-brands. Brand architecture is one key concept in brand theory. The brand architecture model can be and originally is used for illustrating corporate brands model, where at the top of the architecture lies the monolithic umbrella brand, the parent brand. At the endorsed and standalone brand levels lies the sub-brands. The model is however also very useful when inspecting nation brands (Dinnie 2008).

Figure 3: Nation branding architecture model (Dinnie 2008)



The parent brand in nation branding architecture model is obviously the nation brand. The sub-brands divide into different economic interests, such as tourism and sports, which divide forward into e.g. landmarks and national teams. It is recommended that the endorsed brand structure is used with the sub-brands, whose popularity and success supports the strength of the umbrella brand, the nation brand.

Steenkamp (2021) delves into the intricacies of nation branding, exploring the strategies and challenges involved in shaping a positive image of a country on the global stage. As globalization continues to blur boundaries and competition for investment, tourism, and talent intensifies, the concept of nation branding has gained prominence as a tool for enhancing a country's reputation and competitiveness.

At the core of the research is the recognition that nation branding is not merely about creating superficial slogans or logos but involves a comprehensive and strategic approach to managing a country's reputation. The importance of authenticity, stressing that a nation's brand must be grounded in its unique identity, culture, values, and achievements. This authenticity resonates with audiences and fosters trust, distinguishing a genuine nation brand from mere marketing gimmicks (Steenkamp 2021).

The need for consistency in messaging and actions across various stakeholders, including government agencies, businesses, cultural institutions, and citizens is one of the key strategies in nation branding. A cohesive and unified narrative about a country's strengths, values, and aspirations reinforces its brand identity and helps to counteract negative perceptions or misconceptions. It is important to leverage success stories and positive experiences to create a compelling narrative that resonates with target audiences (Steenkamp 2021).

Another crucial aspect of nation branding discussed in the article is the role of soft power in shaping perceptions of a country. Soft power, by Joseph Nye, refers to the ability to influence others through cultural, educational, and diplomatic means rather than through coercion or force. Steenkamp argues that investing in cultural diplomacy, promoting educational exchanges,

and showcasing national achievements in areas such as arts, sports, and innovation can significantly enhance a country's soft power and contribute to its overall brand image (Steenkamp 2021).

Other noteworthy aspect of the article is also challenges and pitfalls of nation branding, particularly in today's hyperconnected and rapidly changing global landscape. He cautions against the tendency to oversimplify complex national identities or to rely too heavily on marketing tactics without addressing underlying issues such as socio-economic inequality, political instability, or environmental sustainability. Moreover, he warns against the dangers of "brand stretching," where countries attempt to project an image that is inconsistent with their reality, leading to accusations of greenwashing or whitewashing (Steenkamp 2021).

Steenkamp also highlights the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in nation branding efforts, as perceptions of countries can be shaped by a wide range of factors, including geopolitical events, economic trends, and social movements. Flexibility in adjusting strategies and tactics in response to changing circumstances is essential for maintaining relevance and credibility in the eyes of global audiences (Steenkamp 2021).

Rojas-Mendez & Khoshnevis (2023) conceptualize nation branding in their systematic literature review article. The article begins by establishing a clear definition of nation branding as the strategic management of a country's image and reputation in the global arena. Nation branding goes beyond traditional notions of marketing and promotion, encompassing a range of activities aimed at shaping perceptions, influencing stakeholders, and achieving specific goals such as attracting investment, tourism, or talent.

One of the major themes in the article is identification of key dimensions of nation branding. They outline three main dimensions: symbolic, experiential, and instrumental. The symbolic dimension refers to the symbolic elements and narratives used to construct a country's brand identity, including its history, culture, values, and symbols. The experiential dimension focuses on the lived experiences of individuals who interact with the country, such as tourists, immigrants, or investors, and how these experiences shape perceptions of the brand. The

instrumental dimension relates to the tangible outcomes and strategic objectives of nation branding initiatives, such as economic growth, diplomatic influence, or social cohesion. One of the key findings of the review is the recognition of the dynamic and context-dependent nature of nation branding. The authors emphasize that nation branding is not a one-size-fits-all approach but must be tailored to the specific characteristics, needs, and aspirations of each country. This requires careful consideration of factors such as history, culture, politics, and socio-economic development, as well as the evolving nature of global trends and perceptions.

They also highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement in nation branding initiatives. They argue that successful nation branding requires collaboration and cooperation among a wide range of actors, including government agencies, businesses, civil society organizations, cultural institutions, and citizens. By involving stakeholders in the branding process, countries can ensure that their brand narratives are authentic, inclusive, and reflective of diverse perspectives (Rojas-Mendez & Khoshnevis 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research methods

This research will be conducted as quantitative survey research. Using survey as the main research method allows this research to gain validity via a sheer amount of collected data. Using quantitative research methods, the research will gain statistical data, which allows the researcher to deep further into the phenomena and analyse the effects of different factors. The researcher often has preliminary analysis plan early in the researching process. Analysis choices are strongly influenced by previous decisions about design, sampling, ethics, and coding (Vogt et al. 2014). This is an important factor to be aware of as the validity of the data must not be influenced by the researcher's own implications. The collected data should be processed in a very neutral manner. As Story & Tait (2019) writes, the survey questions should yield reproducible results (reliable), accurately measure their intended subjects (valid), and take less than 10 minutes to complete. Effective survey research reports present results with valid and reliable answers to the research question, achieve an adequate response rate (at least 40%), and maintain adequate precision (ideally with a margin of error of 5% or less).

Choosing survey as a tool for collecting the method, there are several characteristics to be aware of. Survey methods involve collecting information about the current status of a specific target variable within a particular group and then summarizing the findings. This summary includes data in quantitative form. (Thomas 2003). The information needed in this research is not obtained directly from the people. The gathered information acts as a supportive data which can be compared to existing previous information about the topic (Thomas 2003). This helps when analysing the data, comparing new data with existing ones and drawing conclusions based on the data gives greater validity for the research. The analysis is usually done as a meta-analysis, The label *meta-analysis* identifies any quantitative integration of empirical research reports (Thomas 2003).

Choosing the correct data collection method is not always an easy task. Usually, each option has advantages and disadvantages that make it more or less effective when analysing the data in question (Vogt et al. 2014). Choosing the right method is crucial because it will influence the quality of the study's result. It can be difficult because the differences between the methods raises several conceptual problems. The initial analysis plan is good to have, but after collecting data the researcher might notice that the initial plan will not work correctly, and the approach method need to be changed. However, this does not mean that initial plan should be scrapped completely. Minor adjustments might be enough to obtain great analysing results (Vogt et al. 2014).

The word data refers to perceptions and thoughts that we have symbolized in some way, as words, numbers, and images. The synonyms for data and analysis are evidence and study. Therefore, we can reason that analysing the data can be referred also as studying the evidence. However, the data does not speak for themselves. The data, which is a collection of words, numbers and images, needs to be studied and modify it to be understandable. For that, the researcher needs tools to be used when reshaping the data for understandable and utilized form (Vogt et al 2014).

3.2 Data collection

The chosen method for data collection for this research was an online survey. The survey was created by using Webropol survey platform and had a total of 25 different questions. The questionnaire was developed with intention to get more information and insight related to the research subject and obtain the opinions of the public about the key subjects related to the research. The survey was conducted as an online survey because of its easier reachability of the audience, and because online surveys are faster to conduct than other survey methods, such as telephone survey.

The questionnaire did consist mainly of Likert scale questions, with the addition of a few Yes or No questions. Likert scale is a popular way to measure respondents' opinions about a particular subject. Respondents choose from a range of possible responses to a specific question or statement; responses typically include "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral," "disagree," and "strongly disagree (Jamieson 2024). This survey did use an odd-number five-point Likert Scale, which the researcher found the best suitable for this survey, since it offers two "negative" options, a neutral option and two "positive" options. The five-point Likert Scale is also traditionally the most used scale in researches (Jamieson 2024).

The survey was made to be answered anonymously, only demographic questions were the age and the gender, to have some demographic statistics which would be useful when analysing the results. As the anonymous survey methods appear to promote greater disclosure of sensitive or stigmatizing information compared to non-anonymous methods, this method was chosen since the survey questionnaire did have some slightly sensitive questions, to which some respondents might have not answered if the answer could have been connected to them (Murdoch et al. 2014).

4. Analysis and results

This part of the study focuses on analysing the gathered data with several different statistical tools and will present the results found from the analysis. As the study is trying to find answers to multiple different questions about sportswashing and nation branding, several different hypotheses have been identified based on the literature review. Based on the theoretical research, hosting major sporting events is the most popular form of sportswashing, which indicates that sporting events should impact positively on nation's brand. The five hypotheses for the study are based on the theoretical research about the topic:

Hypotheses H1 and H2 are based on the research which have identified hosting sporting events as the most common sportswashing action. The hypotheses have been created with the assumption that sportswashing operators have identified this method as a workable strategy for successful sportswashing. The hypotheses have been divided into two slightly different hypotheses since the researcher wants to study if there are differences between hosting sports events without sportswashing purposes and hosting events with sportswashing purposes.

H1: Hosting major sporting events positively influences the nation's brand perception among the public.

H2: Sportswashing is an effective tool for getting positive attention and improving nation brand

The third hypothesis is created based on assumption that sports followers are more knowledgeable about the phenomenon compared to people who does not follow sports. The assumption comes from the theoretical research, which have recognized that sportswashing as a fairly new subject in the media and scientific community. Therefore, it is feasible to assume that people who follow sports media and sports-related have heard about the phenomenon more often than people who does not.

H3: Following of sports correlates positively with knowledge about sportswashing

The fourth hypothesis expands the assumption of sporting events improving nation brand from the first two hypotheses to the wider perspective of using sports as a branding tool. The research about branding has found that sports overall are important tool for branding, and the assumption is based on that. Sportswashing studies has also identified that not only sports events are being used in sportswashing activities but also sports teams and players are being used in these activities.

H4: The use of sports is effective and important tool for nation branding

The fifth and final hypothesis for the study is based on the basic intention of washing activities, to shift public's attention away from negative associations. The research has shown that most of the sportswashing operators has been involved on negatively associated actions, such as using slavery and violating human rights, and the purpose of sportswashing has been argued to be shifting attention away from these actions. This hypothesis assumes that use of sports is an effective tool for shifting attention away.

H5: Sporting events shift attention away for negative associations of the nation

4.1 Descriptive analysis

The survey was conducted between 30.05.2024-13.06.2024. The survey was shared through various social media channels to make the survey gain visibility and reach the audience. The survey generated a total N (responds) of 62.

For the demographic statistics of the survey, the survey asked about the respondent's age and gender. The respondent's median age was 25 and mean age 27,1, while gender distribution was

67,7 percent males and 32,7 percent females. The respondent's average profile was a 20–30-year-old male.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	62	27,1452	6,74317
Gender	62	1,3226	,47128

(Gender 1=male, 2=female)

Table 2 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics				
Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	Age	42	26,8095	4,80466
	Gender	42	1,0000	,00000
Female	Age	20	27,8500	9,76716
	Gender	20	2,0000	,00000

As we can see from the descriptive statistics comparing genders, male respondents mean age is a bit lower and has a lower standard deviation number, which means that age distribution for males is lower than females.

Next part of the survey asked the respondents about their following of football, Formula 1 and several different major sporting events. Most of the respondents do follow at least occasionally, the median answer was "occasionally", and mean value was 2,85, which shows that the average respondent does follow football quite occasionally. As for Formula 1 following, the median answer was again "occasionally", but mean value was a bit lower than with football, as it was

2,58. With the descriptive statistics of these questions, we can analyse that the respondents were mostly casual followers of these two sports. The third question about the following of the sports asked about following of major sports events, such as Olympic Games, FIFA Football World Cup and Boxing Title Fights. The following of these events were chosen to be asked based on the literature review, which revealed that these events are the most popular examples of being used as a part of sportswashing related strategies. Out of the respondents, the Olympic Games and FIFA Football World Cup were easily the most followed events, as over 60% of the respondents follow both of these events. Formula 1 races and World Athletic Championships was followed by over 20 percent of the respondents, while Boxing Title Fights, UFC Events and Professional Golf was followed by just under 10 percent of the respondents. Around 20 percent of the respondents responded that they do not follow any of these events. The purpose of asking about respondents sports following was to get supportive data for analysis, since one of the hypotheses is that people that follow sports actively, especially sports which have been used as a tool for sportswashing, are more knowledgeable of the phenomenon compared to people who does not follow sports as actively.

Second part of the survey asked the respondents about their knowledge about sportswashing, and whether accusations of sportswashing has impacted their decision to for example to travel or watch events which could have been used as a part of sportswashing.

Most of the respondents were at least somewhat familiar with the concept of sportswashing, the mean value was 3,06, and median answer was "somewhat familiar", but the most popular answer was "familiar". 90,3 percent of the respondents also were at least heard about instances where nations have used major sports events of investments in sports to improve their international image. Over 60 percent of the respondents have also boycotted or considered boycotting sporting event or a brand due the concerns about host nation 's human rights record or political motivations.

When asked about if hosting sporting events affects respondents desire to travel to a country, most of the respondents responded that it does affect, as the mean value of the question was 3,38 and the median value 4 (Does affect). Most of the respondents though did respond that

hosting sports events has not improved their opinion about the hosting nation. When asked if the respondents would consider travelling to a nation which hosts a popular sports event, but has been accused of sportswashing, the respondents shifted towards not considering, as mean value of the question was 2,72. Respondents were also asked about their following of one of the most notorious examples of accused sportswashing event, Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022. Mean value of the respondents was 2,54, and over half of the respondents stated that they did not follow the event as actively as usual. As a follow-up question, respondents who did not follow the event as actively, were asked to tell if the host nation affected their interest towards the event in question. This question was simple yes or no question, and the respondents were very divided, as 52,2 percent responded that host nation did affect on their interest, and 47,8 percent responded that host nation did not affect on their interest.

The respondents were asked also their opinions on should sports organizations take into consideration the human rights record of the host nations, and whether they believe that corruption exists in the selection process of granting the hosting rights to nations. The respondents responded quite unanimously that they think the human rights record should be taken into consideration, and that they believe that corruption exists in the selection process. The both questions had over 90 percent of the respondents to respond "yes".

The third and final part of the survey questionnaire asked respondents about their views on nation branding, and the effect of sports events on it. The respondents were asked about their opinions on the importance of sports events for nation's brand, their influence compared to other nation branding strategies, and also about respondents views on human rights issues.

Respondents did not think that media coverage of sports events effects on their opinion about the hosting nation, as most of the respondents believed that media coverage has no influence on their opinion. While media coverage was not believed to impact on their opinion on the nation brand, hosting sports events and owning sports organizations seemed to impact positively on the nation brand. The mean value for the question "In your opinion, what kind of effect hosting major sport events (such as Olympic Games etc.) has on the hosting nation's

brand?" was 3,85, as the value 4 was labelled as "has positive impact". For the question "In your opinion, what kind of effect owning major sport organisations has on owner's nation brand?" the mean value was 3,54, which again shows that respondents believe that owning sports organizations does have a positive effect on the nation brand. Nation's own athletes or sports teams also seems to have an positive effect on the nation brand, as the mean value for that question was also 3,54.

The respondents took a very negative stance when asked on human rights violations' effects on the nation brand. 93 percent of the respondents responded that they affect their opinion either very negatively or negatively. Next question was about if the sporting events hosted by a nation which has human rights issues have increased their awareness of the issues. Mean value for this question was 3,74, which shows that respondents believe that sporting events have increased their awareness.

The final four questions of the survey were about the overall impact of sporting events on the nation brand, how effective tool it is and whether the respondents think that using sports as a tool for sportswashing should be opposed or not. For all of these four questions, respondents did have a quite consistently similar opinion. Respondents thought that sporting events are an effective tool for public diplomacy, as mean value was 3,72. Respondents are also likely to oppose nation's hosting of sporting event, if they are aware of that it may be used as a sportswashing tool, as mean value of 4,01 shows (4=likely to oppose). Majority of the respondents thought that use of sporting events as a nation branding tool is more effective than other comparable tools, such as tourism campaigns and cultural festivals, mean value for this question was 3,61. The final question asked the respondents about the overall importance of using of sports as a tool for nation branding, and the respondents thought that use of sports events is an important tool for nation branding. The mean value for the final question was 3,93 (4=sports events are important tool for nation branding).

This part of the study will concentrate on statistical analysis of the gathered survey data. The analysis will be done with using several statistical tests to test the correlations between the variables and to find out whether the data can be considered reliable.

The core of the analysis will be regression analysis. Regression analysis is a powerful statistical tool used to examine the relationship between one dependent variable and one or more independent variables. This method allows the researcher to understand how changes in independent variables influence the dependent variable, providing insights into patterns, trends, and underlying relationships in the data.

When more than one independent variable is involved, the analysis becomes multiple linear regression. This method extends the simple linear model to accommodate multiple predictors, enhancing the model's explanatory power.

For getting reliable regression analysis results, we need to inspect the internal consistency of the gathered data. Cronbach's alpha reliability (Cronbach, 1951) is one of the most widely used measures of reliability in the social and organizational sciences (Bonett & Wright, 2015). It is known as a measure of "internal consistency" reliability. (Bonett & Wright 2015). The Cronbach's alpha for this study is calculated from the 14 ordinal scale variables, which will be vital for the regression analysis.

Table 3 Cronbach 's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha
,775

The Cronbach's Alpha is 0,775, which can be considered as acceptable value. There are different reports about the acceptable values of alpha, ranging from 0.70 to 0.95 (Tavakol & Dennick 2011). Therefore, we can say that the validity of the chosen predictors is acceptable and can be used in the statistical analysis. We could also eliminate some of the variables from the study, by using item-total statistic, but the item total table does not suggest doing so.

4.2 Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis is a vital part of the statistical analysis for this research. Correlation analysis is a statistical technique used to quantify the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. This method helps researchers and analysts understand whether and how strongly pairs of variables are related. Correlation does not imply causation, but it provides essential insights into potential associations between variables, which can be a foundation for further analysis and research. The analysis will be done by using Pearson Correlation. **Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r)**: This measures the linear relationship between two continuous variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient is typically used for jointly normally distributed data (data that follow a bivariate normal distribution) (Schober et al. 2018).

Correlation Coefficient: The primary measure in correlation analysis is the correlation coefficient, which quantifies the degree of relationship between two variables. The coefficient value ranges from -1 to +1:

+1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, meaning that as one variable increases, the other variable also increases proportionally.

-1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, meaning that as one variable increases, the other variable decreases proportionally.

0 indicates no correlation, meaning there is no linear relationship between the variables.

Table 4 Correlation matrix 1

		How actively do you follow football?	How actively do you follow Formula 1?	In your opinion, how important are sports events in the overall nation branding strategy of a country?	How familiar you are with the concept of sportswashing?
How actively do you follow football?	Pearson Correlation	1	,352**	,416**	,558**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,005	<,001	<,001
How actively do you follow Formula 1?	Pearson Correlation	,352**	1	,290*	,501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,005		0,022	<,001
In your opinion, how important are sports events in the overall nation branding strategy of a country?	Pearson Correlation	,416**	,290*	1	,322*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	0,022		0,011
How familiar you are with the concept of sportswashing?	Pearson Correlation	,558**	,501**	,322*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	0,011	
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					

When looking at the correlations table, we can analyse that following of football and formula one clearly correlates heavily with the familiarity of the concept of sportswashing, as Pearson Correlation value with these variables is over 0,5. There is difference between football followers and formula one followers, since following of Formula One does not seem to correlate as much with the importance of sports events in nation branding, while amongst football followers correlation is quite strong. The familiarity with the concept of sportswashing also does not seem

to correlate heavily with the importance of sports events in nation branding, although some correlation is to be found.

Table 5 Correlation Matrix 2

		How actively did you follow Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022 compared to previous World Cups?	In your opinion, how important are sports events in the overall nation branding strategy of a country?	How familiar you are with the concept of sportswashing?	How actively do you follow Formula 1?	How actively do you follow football?	Would you consider traveling to countries whom are accused of sportswashing, if they host major events such as football FIFA World Cup of Formula 1 race?	How does human right violations affect on your view on the nation image?
How actively did you follow Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022 compared to previous World Cups?	Pearson Correlation	1	0,202	0,161	-0,018	,275*	,428**	,314*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,115	0,21	0,89	0,03	<,001	0,01
In your opinion, how important are sports events in the overall nation branding strategy of a country?	Pearson Correlation	0,202	1	,322*	,290*	,416**	,298*	0,11
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,115		0,011	0,022	<,001	0,019	0,42
How familiar you are with the concept of sportswashing?	Pearson Correlation	0,161	,322*	1	,501**	,558**	,315*	,281*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,21	0,011		<,001	<,001	0,013	0,03
How actively do you follow Formula 1?	Pearson Correlation	-0,018	,290*	,501**	1	,352**	,435**	0,15
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,89	0,022	<,001		0,005	<,001	0,26
How actively do you follow football?	Pearson Correlation	,275*	,416**	,558**	,352**	1	,304*	0,24
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,03	<,001	<,001	0,005		0,016	0,07
Would you consider traveling to countries whom are accused of sportswashing, if they host major events such as football FIFA World Cup of Formula 1 race?	Pearson Correlation	,428**	,298*	,315*	,435**	,304*	1	,444**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	0,019	0,013	<,001	0,016		<,001
How does human right violations affect on your view on the nation image?	Pearson Correlation	,314*	0,105	,281*	0,146	0,235	,444**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,013	0,415	0,027	0,258	0,066	<,001	
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).								
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).								

From the table above, we can find strong correlation between the consideration of travelling to a nation which hosts a major sporting event and the following of the Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022. The other major finding on the correlation between these variables is the strong correlation between the human right violations effect on the nation image view and the following of the Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022. While these are the only strongly correlating (<0,4) variables, especially following of football variable seems to be correlating with almost every other variable at the significant level.

4.3 Regression analysis

Regression analysis examines the relationship between one dependent variable and one or more independent variables. When multiple independent variables are involved, the analysis becomes multiple linear regression, which enhances the model's explanatory power. The equation used is:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1i} + \beta_2 x_{2i} + \dots + \beta_p x_{pi} + e$$

Where Y is the dependent variable, in this study "how important are sports events in the overall nation branding strategy of a country?" As for the simple case, β_0 is the constant – which will be the predicted value of y when all explanatory variables are 0. In a model with p explanatory variables, each explanatory variable has its own β -coefficient. (Tranmer & Elliot 2008).

The null hypothesis for the regression analysis is:

$$H_0 = \text{independent variables have no significant effect on the dependent variable}$$

And the alternative hypothesis

H1=Independent variables have significant effect on the dependent variable

The selection of variables for the regression analysis was done by eliminating the not significant variables for the analysis. This was done by analysing the p-values of every variable, and step-by-step eliminating the variables with the highest p-value. In the end, the two selected variables for the analysis were “How do you compare the impact of using sports to other forms of nation branding (e.g., tourism campaigns, cultural festivals)?” and “In your opinion, how effective are sports events as tools of public diplomacy for host countries?”. These two variables were easily the most significant predictors of the dependent variable “In your opinion, how important are sports events in the overall nation branding strategy of a country?”

Table 6 Regression coefficients

	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
In your opinion, how effective are sports events as tools of public diplomacy for host countries?	0,369	0,097	0,363	3,785	<,001
How do you compare the impact of using sports to other forms of nation branding (e.g., tourism campaigns, cultural festivals)?	0,491	0,091	0,519	5,416	<,001

The regression analysis coefficient table shows that both predictors are statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, meaning they have a substantial and reliable impact on the perceived importance of sporting events in nation branding. Based on this result, we can invalidate the null hypothesis, and confirm the alternative hypothesis H1 to be true, as the selected independent variables have significant effect on the dependent variable. The effectiveness of sports events as tools of public diplomacy (B = 0.369, Beta = 0.363) has a significant positive effect on the dependent variable. This suggests that perceiving sports events as effective public diplomacy tools strongly correlates with viewing these events as important for nation branding. Comparing

the impact of using sports to other forms of nation branding ($B = 0.491$, $Beta = 0.519$) shows an even stronger positive effect. This implies that when sports are perceived as more impactful compared to other nation branding methods, the importance of sporting events in nation branding increases more significantly.

Table 7 Regression model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,760a	0,578	0,564	0,54636

From the model summary, we can see that the correlation coefficient ($R=0.760$) indicates a strong positive relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable. That also validates the assumption that the model is usable for the study.

The r square value (0.578) means that approximately 57,8% of the variance in the importance of sporting events in nation branding is explained by the model. This is an important value for the study, as the good r squared value makes the analysis more reliable. The consideration as how high the R squared value should be to make research more reliable differentiates, but for this survey which indicates the opinions of people, 57,8 is a fairly good value and validates the research.

4.4 Results

The descriptive statistics of the survey provided a good insight into the respondents' opinions about the subjects. The respondents were quite familiar with the concept of sportswashing, which is important for the understanding of the following questions of the survey. If the

respondents would have not been familiar with the concept of sportswashing, the questions might have been harder to understand which could have affected to the answers. Survey answers revealed that almost everyone has heard of events which have been related to the sportswashing, which is a good indication about that media has been writing about the subject more regularly and the public is knowledgeable about the subject.

Respondents answered that they are more likely to travel to a nation which hosts major sporting events. This indicates that sporting events are an important tool for attracting tourists to the country, and nations should be interested in investing for obtaining rights to host major sporting events in attempt to attract tourists. Respondents also were not very actively keen to boycott events which could be used as a sportswashing tool, which indicates that sporting events are a useful tool, for at least attracting tourists. Though the public's opinion about the nation does not seem to increase much even when hosting sporting events. This could indicate that sporting event is felt to be so interesting, that the hosting nation does not matter that much to the public interest. There was a difference in interest about traveling to attend a sporting event if the host nation was accused of using the event as a sportswashing tool. While the interest was definitely lower, most of the respondents might at least consider about travelling and attending to the event. The respondents did not take extreme stances on these questions, most of the respondents might consider most of the questions asked, and not straight-up deny for example travelling to a sporting events but were also not extremely keen about the idea.

The survey also asked about the respondents following of Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022, which is probably the most notorious event which have been accused of being a sportswashing tool due to the questionable human right situation in the nation. The following of the event was a bit more unactive amongst the respondents than usually, but the host nation only affected just over half of the respondents' interest. Other major factor might have been the time of the year, the World Cup is usually held during the summer, whilst the Qatar World Cup was held in November-December which is not during the usual holiday season which could have effected on the following.

Next, the respondents were asked about their opinion about whether they think that human rights issues should be considered when choosing the host for major sporting events, and whether they believe that corruption exists in selection process. Almost all the respondents believed that corruption does exist, and that the human rights issues should be considered. This indicates that the public does not appreciate and accept the sporting events to be held in nations which violates human rights, but as previously analysed, might not necessarily take action in resisting it in the form of boycotting, for example. This again indicates the successfulness of the sportswashing, while in theory the actions are not accepted, the public still are interested on the events, and are giving their quiet acceptance for the actions.

The next part of the survey asked about the effect of hosting sports events, owning sporting organizations and nations own athletes or teams effect on the nation's brand. These questions provide insight to the previous chapter, on why the sportswashing might be impactful, even though the public are not necessarily accepting the actions. The respondents felt that hosting sports events has a positive effect on the nation brand, and it was felt to have most positive effect amongst these three options. Owning organizations and the nation's own athletes or teams (such as the national football team, for example) does also have a positive effect on the nation brand, but the effect was felt a bit lower than the actual hosting of the events. These answers indicates that sports overall is a very important tool for building a positive and strong nation brand, which again leads to the question if the sportswashing is a successful tool. From these question we can analyse that it seems to be successful, at least if it is done subtle and is not clearly visible.

Continuing with the survey descriptive statistic results, the respondents were asked about their stance on the human right violations, whether they think that violations impact on their view on the violating nation's brand. The respondents were almost completely thinking that the violations have a very negative effect on their view on the nation brand, which is not surprising. They also answered that sporting events these nations has hosted increased their knowledge about the violations, which indicates that the media has reported about these possible issues and the public is knowledgeable about the issues. The respondents also answered that they

would more like to oppose the nation's hosting of sports event if they are aware that it is used on sportswashing. This underlines the role of media on bringing the issues out to the public knowledge, if the use of sports as a tool for image washing purposes is something that public wants to oppose.

The final part of the survey focused on the overall effectiveness of sports on nation brand. The respondents thought that sports events are an effective tool for not only branding, but also for public diplomacy. The public also thinks that sports and sports events are more useful tool for nation branding than other comparable actions, such as tourism campaigns and cultural festivals. This also underlines the surprising importance of sports in the eyes of the public audience. Sporting events are very widely and passionately followed, and thus are very effective way to present nation to public audience, and therefore improve the nation brand image. The final question asked the importance of the use of sports in nation branding. The use of sports was important part of nation branding strategy, which shows that the sports should indeed be used as a part of strategy, when trying to improve nation brand. While using sportswashing as a tool to wash attention away from negatively felt issues is not accepted by majority of the respondents, it seems that it is still effective and public are at least somewhat willing to oversee the issues and the nation brand can be improved by using sportswashing as a tool.

From the correlation analysis between variables, the findings revealed that there was a lot of positive correlation between specific variables. The primary focus in correlation analysis is to understand how these variables interact with one another, identifying any significant associations that could inform the research hypotheses and objectives. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the variables.

The most notable positive correlation finding from the correlation analysis was that football following highly correlates with almost every other variable in the analysis. From there, we can draw a conclusion that amongst active football followers, the knowledgeability about concept of sportswashing and its effects are higher than people who does not watch football as actively.

Active football followers also tend to regard importance of sports in nation branding more important than others. This is not surprising finding, since football is the most widely followed sport in the world, and it is also the most used sport in sportswashing activities. Football also has very high-profile national teams, and high-profile tournaments between national teams, which makes it a very useful tool in nation branding overall.

Another major finding from the correlation is that there is a strong correlation between considering traveling to a nation hosting major sports events and following the Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022. This implies that individuals who follow such events are more likely to consider traveling to these nations. This could indicate that the sportswashing strategies are especially impactful for people who actively follow professional sports, especially football. It seems like while football followers are more knowledgeable about the topic, they are also a bit more willing to accept it and still consume the events and not care about the related negatively associated issues.

The regression analysis results provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the perceived importance of sports events in nation branding. As the multiple linear regression analysis model turned out to be reliable, we can present results based on the regression analysis. The analysis results showed that sports events are really effective tool for nation branding and also for public diplomacy.

These findings align with the survey's descriptive statistics, highlighting the significant role of sports events in shaping public perception and nation branding. This is closely in line with the results of the correlation analysis, where the following of sports and especially football correlated very highly with the knowledge of sportswashing and the importance of sports in nation branding.

However, the negative impact of human rights awareness highlights the importance of addressing human rights issues to avoid potential damage to the nation's image. The study clearly shows that the audience is not accepting the sportswashing actions, and the opposing of it is very strong. This creates a dilemma, the audience clearly want to oppose sportswashing activities, but very rarely take any action on actually opposing it with concrete actions, such as boycotting the events being used on sportswashing purposes. Many of the respondents had

considered boycotting a sportswashing event, but almost none had actually done it. This can be considered as a positive thing for sportswashing operators, as the events are followed around the world.

We can now move on to the assessing the validity of the hypotheses:

H1: Hosting major sporting events positively influences the nation's brand perception among the public.

The first hypothesis will be accepted, the results definitely tell that hosting major sporting events has a positive influence on the host nation's brand.

H2: Sportswashing is an effective tool for getting positive attention and improving nation brand

The second hypothesis will be rejected, as the results did not reliably prove that sportswashing is effective. The use of sports is effective, but if the audience is knowledgeable about the issues that the perpetrator tries to wash away, the positive effects might be levelled by the negative counter effect.

H3: Following of sports correlates positively with knowledge about sportswashing

Third hypothesis is accepted, the following of sports correlates very positively with knowledge about sportswashing, the results showed that they are way more knowledgeable about the subject than people who does not follow sports.

H4: The use of sports is effective and important tool for nation branding

The fourth hypothesis is also accepted. The results show that the respondents tend to believe that sports is a very effective tool for nation branding, and was stated to be more important than other comparable actions, such as tourism campaigns or cultural festivals.

H5: Sporting events shift attention away for negative phenomenon associations of the nation

The fifth hypothesis is partially confirmed. The results showed that sporting events can bring a lot of positive attention for the nation which has issues with negatively associated phenoms, but

at the same time the hosting of major sporting events will bring more attention towards the negative associations.

5. Conclusions

This chapter will draw a conclusion for this thesis research and discuss about the major findings of the study, provide implications for further research and conclude the project overall.

5.1 Conclusions and discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the recently popularizing phenomenon called sportswashing, and research its effects on the nations who have been involved in the actions related to the sportswashing phenomenon. The phenomenon has not been researched widely yet, but it is rapidly becoming more popular topic also in the scientific community, especially in the research areas which focuses on professional sports. The other major theme in this research was branding, and specifically nation branding. Theories about nation branding was explored in purpose to find out which kind of actions usually have been used as a tool for branding and how actions which are used in sportswashing are related to those historically common actions.

The theoretical part of the study underlined the key themes in the concept of sportswashing and nation branding. As Boykoff, Roslender and Skey all writes, sportswashing refers to the practice of using sports events to divert attention from negative aspects, such as human rights violations or political controversies. The researchers have identified key aspects of sportswashing, and it can be related to the other washing activities, such as greenwashing. The basic core foundation behind these actions is to “wash” the perpetrators image better by using a publicly accepted, popular phenomenon in order to show the world the good side of the perpetrator. They hope to hide the negatively associated phenomenon behind the good publicity. The most notorious examples when discussing about sportswashing were stated to be Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022, which have been accused as a sportswashing event, the purpose being that the event would show the hosting nation as a modern, advanced and successful nation, and fade the attention

from negative accusations of host nation using poor third world citizens basically as a slave labour when building new buildings and sights in the nations hotspots.

Sportswashing is not only done by hosting sports events, but also through purchasing ownership of professional sports organizations. The theoretical part introduced multiple examples of these kind of actions, such as English Premier League teams as Chelsea, Manchester City and Newcastle United being purchased by wealthy foreign owners, in case of Newcastle United even directly by state-controlled investment fund. By looking at massive cash influx and investments, it is a noteworthy to think about the true motivations behind these actions. On one hand the teams have been able to rise their popularity by purchasing star players and they have reached success by winning competitions such as UEFA Champions League, but on the other hand wealthy investors usually want some return on their investment, and these actions are not necessarily very conventional investment decisions. Many researchers believes that the investments have been done by the order of the investors respective nations head of states, perhaps in attempt to gain positive popularity via owning these teams.

Third option for sportswashing operation seems to be attempt to gain popularity to nations own sports league. Saudi-Arabian professional football league has been filled by worldwide star players, such as Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar, by offering them record-braking salaries and other benefits. This can also be seen as an attempt to wash negative attention away by trying to raise the popularity of the league worldwide, since these star players have monumental amount of followers and fans in every corner of the globe. By presenting these players as a Saudi-league players, they hope to shape their image by creating positive associations in the minds of the audience. This can be seen as the most recent form of sportswashing, since state-funded teams has not been a common thing in the other footballing nations before, with maybe the exception of some Eastern bloc teams during the communist regime. The effects of this action is hard to predict, but very likely the Saudi Football League will gain popularity and it could attract tourists and foreign investments, and therefore indirectly improve the nation's brand.

The theoretical research about branding, and especially nation branding focused on explaining the most important aspects of branding a product, which in this study mainly is a nation. The inspection of branding related literature revealed a lot of different focal points to take into account when constructing a good branding strategy, the importance of brand equity by Aaker as an example. The theory about brand equity is not originally created as nation branding theory, but it can be very well applied to nation branding as well, since brand equity theory highlights the importance of name awareness, product quality and brand associations. Nations are foremostly known by their names, which is their main branding symbol along with the nation flag. Nations who produce good quality products also get brand recognition from the quality products from their nation, such as German cars, or in sporting context Brazilian footballers. Brand associations are closely related to product quality, consumers often associate quality product and quality brand together, such as Brazilian footballer must be good since he or she comes from Brazil.

Dinnie's research about nation branding was the cornerstone of this paper's research about nation branding. It explained very well the important aspects of branding a nation, through the Country-Of-Origin concept and umbrella theory. Dinnie also highlighted the importance of sports in nation branding, which also was pointed out in the research analysis. When talking about sportswashing effects on nation branding, it clearly seems based on the theoretical and analytical research, that the effect is clearly visible and sports is a vital part of nation branding. Dinnie and Steenkamp write about the reasons behind nation branding. The major reasons behind nation branding are to enhance the nation's status in the globalizing world. Better nation brand seems to lead increasing foreign investments in the forms of industrial and financial investments, and in the form of tourists bringing money to the nation. The effect of a strong nation brand is quite clearly to be seen from the traditional global powerhouses, such as the United States of America which probably has one of the strongest and most recognizable nation brand out of all nations. While obviously many other things also affects on the investment and travelling decisions, strong and positive brand for the nation will definitely not decrease the chances of decision being directed to the strong nation brand holding nation. The concept of soft power by Joseph Nye was also mentioned in a lot of the researches. The concept refers to

nation's influence to other nations via cultural, educational and diplomatic actions rather than using traditional force via conflicts and wars. It can be seen as highly effective way of influencing other nations and the use of sports in the intention to improve nation branding can also be related to the concept of soft power. Using sports can easily be categorized under softer influence tool, and the research has already proven that sports is very effective way in being successful with these intentions. The use of sports can be also seen as a way for asserting own superiority over competing nations, which has been especially true in the history, all the way from Ancient Olympics to the Ice Hockey matches between Canada and USSR. These events are a prime example of using sports as a soft power tool for gaining edge over the competitors. The analytical part of this research was done by gathering data via a survey. The researcher's intention with this method was to gain insights about sportswashing, sports following and nation branding from regular persons. The objective was to get reliable answers and see if the previously thought hypothesis were accurate or not.

The results from the analysis revealed a lot of interesting things about the researched subjects. The main research question for this study was:

r1 "How do sportswashing efforts impact on the perception of a nation's brand?"

The answer for this research question is quite multifaceted and cannot be worded as a clear answer. Based on the results, the impact seems to be at least somewhat positive, as perception seems to improve, but not by a huge margin. What this study revealed, is that the using of sports as a tool for nation branding is indeed highly effective and definitely recommended. The use of sports as a washing tool seems also have some effect, but it must be done very carefully, since too clear sportswashing efforts seems to have somewhat counter-effect, the brand might actually take damage if the audience is aware about that the event or sports club is being used in purpose to brighten the imago of the perpetrator. The results did also show that while audience might be willing to at least consider boycotting sportswashing events, very rarely this consideration leads to a concrete action. If the audience does not take action on boycotting things, it can be seen as accepting the actions, which could implicate at least some succession of

the actions. While the attention is not just positive, negative opinions are also to be found, the attention especially for the lesser known nations can be seen very important, and it raises their visibility around the world. This study focused mainly on the impacts on hosting major worldwide sporting events (Olympic games and FIFA Football World Cup) and sporting organizations and hosting them is a good way to at least make nation more recognizable worldwide. All nations does not have the opportunity to gain attention via sporting events, due to the lack of funds, the hosting of mega-events is very expensive. But for wealthy nations, these actions might be a way to raise their visibility and brand towards bigger and more established nations.

The most positive effect seems to be with hosting events, since while hosting events the nation can promote itself much better than when owning foreign sporting organizations, when audience might not associate the club with the owner nation. On the other hand, owning organizations is a much more subtle act, especially if hosting the event raises concerns about human rights violations, as was the case with the Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022. Hosting events also attracts tourists, most of the survey respondents answered that they are willing to travel to a nation which hosts a sporting event, and many were willing to considerate to travel to a hosting nation which has been accused of sportswashing or other questionable actions.

Based on the results and the theoretical research, sports are a very vital part of nation branding. Sportswashing actions have become more common in recent years, and it being fairly successful with its intentions, it probably will become even more popular actions during the upcoming years. Very subtly done sportswashing seems to be a quite good way to improve the nation's brand. When considering new strategies for branding a nation, the use of sports is a very valuable tool to keep in a toolbox. While the audience might not approve the possible different violations in human rights, for example, most of them are still willing to consume the end-product, the mega-sporting event. While the situation keeps being as it is, sportswashing might become even more successful in the future.

5.2 Managerial implications

Based on the results of this research and theoretical contribution, there is several managerial implications to be suggested to practitioners involved in decision making on sportswashing and nation branding actions.

First and foremost, the most important finding this research made is that use of sports in nation branding seems to be a very successful action. Sporting events and highlighting sports is an excellent way to improve nation's brand and should therefore be implicated in the nation's branding strategy. This was also highlighted in the theoretical research and the results of the survey strongly supports this finding. While this practice has been done already successfully by lot of nations in the past, for example Finland being famous for its succession at the Olympic running events in the 1920s, the actions might not always have been consciously meant to improve the nation's brand. Nations who are eager to do actions in order to improve their relative brand, should definitely invest and implement sports and sporting events into their respective branding strategy.

Secondly, while using of sports is definitely a recommended action, using sports in sportswashing intentions is more difficult to assess. Based on the results, if the audience identify the event or other comparable sports related matter as sportswashing, the audience might be against the event. This would lead to decreasing nation brand value, since the audience could take counteractions in order to resist the sportswashing actions. The results showed that at least some parts of the population are willing to consider boycotting these kinds of events. This is a hard question to assess reliable, as there is definitely some opposition for these actions, but actually quite few will take opposing actions. It seems like that a very subtle done sportswashing should be successful and recommended action in order to improve nation brand, but too transparent actions could lead to negative results, in the perspective of the perpetrator. Managers should be really careful when planning sportswashing actions for them to be successful.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

This subject has not been very widely researched amongst the scientific community. While there has been a fair share of research about sportswashing, nation branding and branding overall, combining these in the same research and finding relations between them has not really been studied before.

The limitations for this study were mainly with the survey content. The respondents were fairly homogenic, which can lead to similarity between the responds and the number of respondents were not substantially high. This may have effected the results of the study, since if all the respondents agree on the responds, it's quite hard to find different opinions which might essentially exist if the respondent population were different. The results also show mainly a point of view of a person from a western democratic perspective and the results could be very different if the respondents were to come from Middle Eastern nations, for example. The survey also asked a lot of questions related to sportswashing, sports following, opinions on nation branding and using of sports in nation branding, which could have been a bit confusing for some respondents.

The suggestions for further research are to expand the study even further. Focusing more on a certain aspect of this phenomenon, for example just focusing on major sporting event effects, or effects on a particular nation might provide more reliable results. The different perspectives shall be taken into account and do a research from a particular perspective, the opinions from Middle Eastern people would be especially interesting as the area has been developing very rapidly have gained more worldwide attention in recent years. The research has also identified that most of the sportswashing actions come from that particular area, but the researches have mostly been done from a western perspective. Other research perspectives to be considered of could be delving more into the branding perspective, nation branding has not been a very popular topic for researches, while it seemingly is a very important part of the nation's identity, strength over competitors and also a tool in global diplomacy and politics.

This research topic was very interesting and provided a lot of challenge and raised new thoughts about the role of sports in branding and global world. The topic is becoming increasingly popular amongst researchers and media, and it will be interesting to see further research from the topic and see how the knowledge develops over time. It will be seen how future treats the sportswashing perpetrators, will Middle East become a powerhouse in global sports.

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Appendices

Survey on sportswashing and nation branding

Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

Thank you for participating in this survey, which forms a crucial part of my master's thesis research. The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomena of sportswashing and nation branding, and how these strategies impact public perception and international relations.

The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. Your responses will be anonymous and used solely for academic research purposes.

Thank you for your time and valuable input!

If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please contact me at henrimie@uef.fi

1. Age *

2. Gender *

- Male
 Female
 Other

3. How actively do you follow football? *

Very unactively	Unactively	Occasionally	Actively	Very actively
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. How actively do you follow Formula 1? *

Very unactively	Unactively	Occasionally	Actively	Very actively
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Which of these sporting events do you follow actively (you can choose multiple answers) *

- Olympic games
- FIFA Football World Cup
- Formula 1
- World Athletics Championships
- Boxing Title Fights
- UFC Events
- Professional Golf
- None of the above

6. How familiar you are with the concept of sportswashing? *

	Very unfamiliar	Unfamiliar	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	Very familiar
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Have you ever heard of instances where nations have used sports events or investments in sports to improve their international image or reputation? *

- Yes
- Not
- Not sure

8. Have you ever boycotted or considered boycotting a sporting event or brand due to concerns about the host nation's human rights record or political motivations? *

- Yes, have boycotted
- No
- Have considered

9. Are you more likely to travel to a country, if it hosts a major sports event *

Much less likely	Less likely	No effect	More likely	Much more likely
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Much less likely	Less likely	No effect	More likely	Much more likely
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<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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10. Has your opinion about a country improved after it hosted a major sports event? *

*

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

11. Would you consider traveling to countries whom are accused of sportswashing, if they host major events such as football FIFA World Cup of Formula 1 race? *

Would not consider at all	Would not consider	Might consider	Would consider	Would consider strongly
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<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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12. How actively did you follow Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022 compared to previous World Cups? *

Less actively	Slightly less actively	Usual activity	Slightly more actively	More actively
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<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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13. If not as actively, did the host nation affect on your interest?

- Yes
 No

14. Should international sports organizations take into account the human rights records of the host countries? *

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

15. Do you think corruption exists in major sports events host selection process? *

- Yes
 No
 Not sure

16. How does media coverage of sports events influence your perception of the host country? *

Very negative influence	Negative influence	No influence	Positive influence	Very positive influence
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. In your opinion, what kind of effect hosting major sport events (such as Olympic Games etc.) has on the hosting nation's brand? *

Very negative	Negative	No effect	Positive	Very positive
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. In your opinion, what kind of effect owning major sport organisations has on owner's nation brand? *

Very negative	Negative	No effect	Positive	Very positive
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. Does the reputation of a nation's sports teams or athletes affect on your perception of that nation? *

Very negative effect	Negative effect	No effect	Positive effect	Very positive effect
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. How does human right violations affect on your view on the nation image? *

Very negatively	Negatively	No effect	Positively	Very positively
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. Have sports events increased your awareness of human rights issues in the host country? *

Has not increased at all	Has not increased	No opinion	Has increased	Has increased very much
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. In your opinion, how effective are sports events as tools of public diplomacy for host countries? *

Very ineffective	Ineffective	Neutral	Effective	Very effective
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. Are you more likely to support or oppose a country's hosting of a sports event if you are aware it may be used for sportswashing? *

More likely to support	Likely to support	Neutral	Likely to oppose	Very likely to oppose
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. How do you compare the impact of using sports to other forms of nation branding (e.g., tourism campaigns, cultural festivals)? *

Much less effective	Less effective	Neutral	More effective	Much more effective
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. In your opinion, how important are sports events in the overall nation branding strategy of a country? *

Very unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very important
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>