

# Qatar Airways–FC Barcelona sponsorship deal: a catalyst of sports diplomacy?

Qatar  
Airways–FC  
Barcelona deal

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to evaluate how Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona affects Qatar's sports diplomacy and brand awareness. It focuses on the sponsorship's demand strategy and takes into account the opinions and attitudes of Spanish nationals toward Qatar and Qatar Airways.

**Design/methodology/approach** – To assess this, a survey of 434 Spanish nationals from 17 different regions from four zones (North, South, Center, and East) in Spain between November 3, 2022 and November 21, 2022 was conducted using a strata sampling method.

**Findings** – We argue that Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona serves to improve Qatar's recognition and national reputation in Spain. We also found that there is a need for consistent sponsorship and marketing efforts in sports diplomacy to better fulfill public diplomacy aims. Overall, this paper concludes that Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona positively contributes to the country's sports diplomacy despite significant challenges.

**Originality/value** – The major contribution of this study to the literature is the discussion of the role of sports sponsorships in the recognition of the sponsor, which was assessed through conducting a quantitative analysis of public opinion in the sponsored team's host country.

**Keywords** Sponsorship, Sports diplomacy, Nation branding, Soft power, Qatar

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Many academics view international sponsorship through the lens of nation branding. On one side, some of these studies have focused on international reputation. According to [Ginesta \(2013\)](#), the agreement between FC Barcelona and the Qatar Foundation is seen as a demonstration of the popularity of European football among Arab and Middle Eastern actors and the importance of the sport for Qatar's international reputation. Similarly, [Ginesta and Eugenio \(2014\)](#) investigate the relationship between the Qatar Foundation and FC Barcelona as part of Qatar's sports placement branding strategy. On the other side, a few studies have examined sponsorship in relation to soft power and sports diplomacy (e.g. [Abdi et al., 2019](#); [Koch, 2020](#)). In [Abdi et al.](#), models of sports diplomacy are classified into three categories: sporting events, sports' human capital and sports manufacturers and sports products, with this last group including brands, investors and sponsors. In [Koch \(2020\)](#), investments in sports are viewed as far more important than soft power, which also includes political, economic, personal and other goals, in addition to government leaders' efforts to spread a favorable image of their nation abroad in a variety of ways. In the literature, there is also some research analyzing Twitter conversations about corporate sponsors of football clubs. [Jensen et al. \(2015\)](#) investigated the use of visual images to analyze corporate sponsorship interactions by using visual analytics during the 2015 Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League final between Juventus and FC Barcelona. One of the most important implications of this study is that it shows Qatar Airways was far more effective than Jeep in engaging fans.



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By emphasizing the parallels between nation branding and sponsorship, we aim to contribute to the literature on sports diplomacy. We delve into sports sponsorship studies to highlight the practical effects of national brands' contributions to sports diplomacy. There are a few studies in the literature that look at the similarities between sports sponsorship and research into the contributions of national brands to sports diplomacy. For example, [Phiri and Chakauya's \(2023\)](#) study examines how football tournament sponsorships influence brand preferences and image. Similarly, [AlShawaaf \(2023\)](#) research looks into how the cultural element influences the impact of football team sponsorship on brand image, purchasing intention and brand loyalty. [Herold \*et al.\*'s \(2023\)](#) study explores the concept of social responsibility and describes how professional football clubs integrate social responsibility plans with the concepts of legitimacy and loyalty. [Ekren and Anagnostopoulos \(2023\)](#) provide an overview of sports development and tourism in regional and national settings in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly Qatar's Generation Amazing (GA) program, as an illustration of corporate social responsibility through the sport-for-development program. GA is a framework developed in 2010 as part of Qatar's bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup that promotes football at the individual and community levels. We can claim, however, that there is little research in this area because these studies do not explicitly examine the direct implications of national brands on sports diplomacy.

Within the context of sports diplomacy, [Eugenio \*et al.\* \(2017\)](#) examine the FC Barcelona Peace Tour 2013 initiative in Israel and Palestine. Their article expresses the belief that FC Barcelona's corporate social responsibility projects, such as Peace Tour 2013, can operate as a mediator between two antagonistic communities (Israel and Palestine). As a result, such projects make a clear contribution to sports diplomacy and peacebuilding. However, the political issues that arose during the initiative's planning highlight the geopolitical complexity of the Middle East as well as the limitations of sports diplomacy.

As [Côme and Raspaud \(2018\)](#) indicate in their study, sports sponsorships and sports club investments are commonly used in sports diplomacy, having a positive effect on branding. The sports diplomacy undertaken by the Gulf governments, particularly Qatar, is an excellent example of this. According to their article, despite their best efforts, Qatar "plays" sports through proxies, since they lack the demographics necessary to develop their own champions. The little emirate's new wealth is lessened by the money spent on grandiose endeavors that fail to appeal to the foreign publics' sympathy for the demonstration of its power; these sporting events raise awareness of the significant disparities in the distribution of this income. The article claims that Qatar lacks global support for several reasons, such as the FIFA World Cup in 2022 is the most talked-about event. However, the report does not reveal whether this is the case regarding the Spanish people.

We will critically discuss the essential literature on nation branding, sports diplomacy and sponsorship in the next sections. Contrary to other research, we argue that sponsorship has an impact on customer perceptions of the sponsoring brand, as well as brand awareness and image. International brand sponsorship that symbolizes a country not only affects the company's value but also helps with nation branding and sports diplomacy by influencing perceptions and attitudes toward the country and its residents. The goal of this study is to provide insights into Spanish citizens' thoughts and attitudes about Qatar Airways and Qatar based on Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona.

## 2. Literature review

As previously mentioned, many academics have viewed international sponsorship through the lens of nation branding. Although this study will concentrate on the role of sponsorship in sports diplomacy, nation branding and sports diplomacy serve similar functions. As a result,

we will define the terms nation branding, sports diplomacy and sponsorship below while carrying out the literature review on these subjects.

### *2.1 Brand attitude and nation branding*

Branding is about reputation management, or more particularly, managing brand equity (Govers, 2013) and making a difference. To establish a brand attitude that leads to greater brand equity, brand connections in memory must be powerful, positive and distinctive to the brand (Elliott *et al.*, 2015). According to Franzen (1999), brand equity is a collection of assets and liabilities that he divides into four groups: perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand associations. Brand equity stresses the significance of the brand in marketing efforts. A brand name can affect how a product or service is marketed in a distinct way. Making a distinction in customer preferences is the main focus of branding. Building customer-based brand equity requires establishing a positive brand image in consumer memory—strong, favorable and distinct brand associations. Brand knowledge, which consists of two elements, namely brand awareness and brand image, is an associative network memory, which is a network of nodes and connections, in which the brand node in memory has numerous associations connected to it. In the marketplace, brands build recognition, importance and more. The creation and strength of the associations that comprise the brand image are influenced by brand awareness (Keller and Swaminathan, 2019). Intentional brand purchases depend on brand awareness (Elliott *et al.*, 2015). Brand awareness is made up of brand recognition and recall performance. Many consumer decisions are made at the point of sale, where the brand name, logo, packaging and so on are physically present and visible; thus, brand awareness is critical. If, on the other hand, most consumer decisions are made away from the point of purchase, brand recall becomes more crucial. As a result, developing brand recall is crucial for service and online brands: consumers must actively seek out the brand and thus be able to recover it from memory when necessary (Keller and Swaminathan, 2019). From this perspective, nation brands that stand out and impart brand knowledge to their target audience through brand awareness and brand image have high brand equity. Through their national brands, nations can raise their brand equity.

The term “nation branding” has several different definitions. According to Aldersey-Williams (1998), a nation’s branding or rebranding is a contentious and highly politicized process. The nation brand is defined by Dinnie (2008) “as the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences.” For branding purposes, any location, including a nation, a region, a city, or a neighborhood, is viewed and treated as a brand or multidimensional construct made up of strategic, relational, emotional and functional components that together produce a distinctive set of associations with the location in the public mind (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). According to Anholt (2010), the primary goal of nation branding is to increase awareness of a country, because increased visibility is associated with greater attraction. Country names serve as brands, aiding consumers in their evaluation of goods and decision-making. They are responsible for associations that may increase or decrease the perceived value of the goods (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). The sole prerequisite for a brand’s hometown or locality to contribute extra free equity capital is for the product to “chime” with its place of origin and in the minds of consumers, and there must be some kind of logic connecting the two (Anholt, 2002).

In today’s world, nations are increasingly recognizing sports’ potential as a strategic instrument for shaping and improving their global brand. The nexus of sports and nation branding refers to countries’ purposeful efforts to highlight their distinct cultural identity, values and achievements on a global scale (Brown and Lee, 2024). This proactive approach to

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using sports for nation branding emphasizes sports' multidimensional influence beyond competition. As argued by [Hazime \(2011\)](#), Qatar aims to transform itself into an advanced country by 2030, primarily through human, social, economic and environmental development, through its long-term strategy, primarily through its Master Plan and its National Vision 2030. Qatar Airways' growth and the refurbishment of Doha International Airport are also part of the country's branding plan. People who create place brands (or, at the very least, those who decide what should or should not be established, stimulated and applied) frequently work in government or semi-governmental institutions ([Govers and Go, 2009](#)). According to [Peterson \(2006\)](#), Qatar's high profile as an autonomous state in the GCC with its oil wealth and production, sporting events, the creation of several world-class museums and modern buildings and shopping are all major components of Qatar's brand image. These components have raised the awareness and legitimacy of Qatar. Peterson also emphasizes that, unlike other Gulf countries, this should create a unique niche branding strategy. According to [Sendrowicz \(2014\)](#), Qatar has also found the advantages of nation branding to be an essential component of its soft power strategy. When the nation's branding is done successfully, and the country's reputation develops, it helps improve the country's soft power as well as its sports diplomacy.

### *2.2 Sports diplomacy*

Since the first Olympic Games in ancient Greece, countries have been using sports to enhance a nation's reputation abroad or to strengthen international ties as a diplomatic tactic ([Pigman, 2010](#)). As a dynamic force in the field of international relations today, sports diplomacy uses the unifying potential of sports to promote international collaboration and cross-cultural understanding ([Smith, 2024](#)). Events and partnerships in sports are becoming more widely acknowledged as useful tools for helping countries get over political divides and foster international diplomacy and a common sense of identity. By promoting intercultural understanding and collaboration, international sports events help mediate conflicts between individuals and their governments. For example, bilateral sports events were frequently used during the Cold War to improve communication between adversarial nations ([Trunkos and Heere, 2017](#)).

Sports diplomacy is regarded as an application of public diplomacy, which is used to enhance a nation's reputation, win over other countries and strengthen relationships globally. Public diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy in that it involves non-governmental actors and the public in the diplomatic process, while also listening to other countries. Like sponsorship, the goal of sports diplomacy is to achieve mutual benefits. Sports diplomacy activities are conducted with the intention of enhancing reputation and serving society by considering the public interest in addition to the advertising and promotion that are successful in nation building. [Cull \(2008\)](#) believes that sports can be used in many aspects of public diplomacy. Sports events are branded to symbolize specific meanings by their hosts, and the stars of these events are typically employed as advocates for specific causes. Sports diplomacy has been defined in a variety of ways by different academics and professionals. As [Murray \(2018\)](#) argues, it has been said that sports diplomacy is a long-standing but little-examined component of the strained relationships between peoples, nations and states. But today, it is more accurately described as the deliberate, strategic and ongoing use of sports, athletes and sporting events by state and non-state actors to advance policy, trade, development, education, image, reputation, brand and inter-human connections. [Gök \(2016\)](#) defines the goal of sports diplomacy as informing foreign public opinion and sports organizations about their own countries, as well as in shaping target audiences' opinions in order to create a positive image of their country and to aid in reflecting the government's foreign policy aims. According to [Keech and Houlihan \(1999, p. 112\)](#), one of the appeals of

utilizing sport as a form of diplomacy is that it is “low risk, low cost, and high profile.” Indeed, it is reasonable to claim that sports diplomacy, which helps to fulfill a country’s foreign policy goals and improves the country’s image and reputation, can be implemented with various budgets, and it also involves various levels of risk.

As mentioned in the previous section, the Sports Diplomacy Model was developed by [Abdi et al. \(2019\)](#), which includes resources, conversion tools and outcomes. This sports diplomacy concept is founded on the agreement of both sports specialists and practitioners of international public diplomacy. Sporting events, sports’ human capital and sports producers and products are all considered as the essential resources for sports diplomacy. The specific (cross-cultural communication, mutual understanding and trust building) and general (sports industry development, sports tourism development and socio-economic development) outcomes in this model of sports diplomacy all help to build a nation’s reputation, draw in tourists and ultimately co-option (conflict normalization/peace building) between hostile or competing nations. This study will evaluate the applicability of the sports diplomacy model to Qatar’s sports diplomacy considering its implications for national reputation, tourism and international peace building. [Côme and Raspaud \(2018\)](#) argue that sports have allowed Qatar to gain global recognition following its independence. Different policies and arguments on sport as a soft power can be seen in Qatar’s sport narrative. Such sports policies and debates are beneficial to Qatar’s foreign policy in a variety of ways. Organizing large-scale events is a fantastic way to enhance a country’s reputation, sense of identity and modernity as a leading global power ([Al-Dosari, 2021](#)). The leaders of Qatar have focused on sports as part of their foreign policy agenda since the 1990s. Over the past three decades, the ruling Al Thani family has turned to sports to promote a positive image and maintain national security ([Çetin, 2021](#)). There are three clear strategies that Qatar uses to develop sports diplomacy as a soft power within the context of public diplomacy: providing excellent facilities, an international federation focused on lobbying efforts and hosting high-profile sports organizations ([Çetin, 2015](#)).

According to Guegan, Qatar looks to club ownership and sponsorship operations outside the country to boost its image in the world community and to show itself more sympathetically. While implementing all these actions, Qatar aims to attract more visitors, foreign corporations and qualified employees to the country’s territory by raising the country’s recognition and image to the desired level ([2017](#)). The state of Qatar is one of the sponsors of the United Nations resolution on sport for development and peace, which highlights the role of sports in fostering development, peace, respect and tolerance and establishing an active and healthy community. Qatar hopes to transform the image of the Middle East and establish a favorable climate of interaction between the region and the rest of the globe by investing in international sports organizations and international teams ([Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022](#)). With 45 countries and 40 sports, Qatar became the first Arab Middle Eastern country to organize the Asian Games, which were the largest Asian Games ever held, in 2006. It required seven years and US\$2.8bn to prepare and develop sufficient facilities for this event ([Amara, 2005; Li, 2009](#)). Qatar has also made significant investments in foreign sports teams (and international sports organizations) to raise its profile on the global scale, including professional sports. Such investments raise the standards in sport and have positive branding effects ([Kobierecki, 2020](#)). With its sports sponsorship policies, Qatar aims to establish a solid brand image for Qatar Airways, while also engaging in lobbying in the football community ([Çetin, 2022](#)).

However, allegations of bribery and match-fixing regarding the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, accusations of collaboration with Iran and financing terrorism, harsh working conditions and trade union rights and the *kafala* (the sponsorship system that links employees to their employers) are all threats to Qatari sports diplomacy that can result in backlash and misunderstanding ([Côme and Raspaud, 2018](#)).

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2.2.1 *Sponsorship and the sports industry.* Consumers' purchasing and consuming behaviors might be impacted by the assumption that businesses will uphold their social obligations and contribute to society. One of the most crucial instruments that brands use to fulfill their social obligations and show respect for society and their workers is sponsorship activities. By supporting the establishment of societal benefits in the fields of sports, culture and the arts, health, education and social issues, sponsorship helps organizations to market themselves. Because of the growing worldwide interest in sports, particularly football, countries' international sponsorships and national brands have developed dramatically.

The goals of the first sponsorship application period have changed, because of the development of industry and communication technologies, and new reasons have been created for sponsorship activities, which have in fact been practiced since antiquity. In contrast to the past, when affluent aristocratic families, kings and nobles supported artists, musicians, etc. with little more than the desire to promote their reputation, today, most of these activities are carried out by commercial companies, which also have higher expectations (Okay, 2005, p. 571). More commercial organizations are returning to sponsorship activities in order to maintain their existence and promote new products and services (Ustel, 2005). To accomplish a purpose, people or organizations may sponsor individuals, teams, or other organizations in the areas of sports, the arts, culture, or social endeavors. This also refers to the organization, management and control of all such activities. In theory, sponsorship, which is built on the idea of giving and receiving, anticipates receiving something in return from the person or institution it sponsors in exchange for the money, resources, or tools it invests in them. This response could take the shape of individuals using advertisements to support a brand or including the brand in contests. These effects, however, cannot be expected to happen spontaneously; carefully prepared procedures and agreements must be facilitated in order to fulfill mutual expectations. A situational analysis should be conducted for each action to be taken, and targets should be established and controlled by being carried out in an orderly manner, especially if sponsorship is to be utilized as a professional communication tool. Advertising and media studies should always be used to support sponsorship as a complement to communication strategies, advertising and public relations techniques (Peltekoğlu, 2005, p. 289).

The sports industry is a massive global industry and social phenomena. It is a growing industry that connects millions of people, expanding its share in the global economy. The sports sector brings in nearly US\$600bn in revenue annually. Recent investments in sponsorship have made these astronomical numbers seem "normal." Businesses spend a huge amount of money on advertising in this rapidly growing market (Güneş, 2022). As of 2024, sports sponsorship is an important aspect of the sports industry, providing a significant financial motivator for athletes, teams and events. Corporations are actively investing in strategic sponsorships to not only support the sports ecosystem but also to increase brand equity by identifying with sports' values and emotions (Rimer *et al.*, 2024). A thorough awareness of current developments in sports sponsorship is required for stakeholders looking to leverage the synergies between sports and brand promotion. Numerous subcategories of the global sports market exist that cut across other markets and, in certain situations, have a direct impact on the global economy. These submarkets within the professional sports industry include licensing and broadcasting, sponsorship, among others. Sporting goods is another market on the sidelines of the professional sports industry. This market is mostly dependent on brand marketing and is frequently connected to professional sports through athlete sponsorships and affiliations. Two other major markets that are closely related to it are food and nutrition (e.g. protein supplements) and the worldwide gambling industry (e.g. online betting). The eSports market is also one to watch considering changes in technology, advancements in the video game industry and its ever-evolving economic characteristics (Statista, 2023).

Football is the world's most popular sport, accounting for 43% of the global financial sports market. American football comes in second, with 13%. Baseball (12%), Formula One

(7%) and basketball (6%) are the only other sports with more than a 5% share. In terms of financial market share, they are followed by hockey (4%), tennis (4%) and golf (3%) (SportyCo, 2017). In football, clubs and players often arrange enormous financial agreements (Güneş, 2022). According to industry data on sponsorship, 47% of sponsorship funds are given by the sponsor to the sporting organization in advance, with 28% donating products and the remaining 25% donating both products and cash (Parkhouse, 1996). With the increased usage of digitalization and social media, hitherto unrepresented sectors in sponsorship have begun to be incorporated in this medium. Many countries and corporations, particularly China and Qatar, are increasingly ready to acquire clubs, TV rights and various sponsorships in areas where sports do not receive adequate attention (Güneş, 2022).

In 2013, Qatar Airways joined the Oneworld alliance, providing service to nearly 1,000 destinations globally. In addition to being voted the “World’s Best Business Class” for the tenth time at the 2023 World Airline Awards and “World’s Best Business Class Lounge”, “World’s Best Business Class Lounge Dining” and “Best Airline in the Middle East” during the 2023 Paris Air Show. Qatar Airways won World’s Best Airline for an unprecedented seventh time in the years 2011, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021 and 2022 (QA, 2023A). Qatar was ranked as the third best airline in the world by Conde Nast Traveler’s 2022 Readers’ Choice Survey, with a score of 85.99/100 (CN Traveller, 2022; Oneworld, 2016). Qatar Airways supports several global sporting events and initiatives to raise brand awareness and cultivate enduring and devoted relationships with customers. The primary focus of Qatar Airways’ sponsorships, primarily for sporting events, is on environmental and social responsibility initiatives, which aligns with the sponsor’s primary goals (QA, 2023B). As the state airline of Qatar, the Qatari government also lends political and financial backing to Qatar Airways’ internationalization initiatives, which seek to increase its success in foreign markets and to acquire widespread acclaim.

The sponsorship of sports teams by Qatar Airways, particularly in football, a sport that draws millions of viewers from all over the world and brings people together, has been crucial to the brand’s global marketing efforts. In 2013, Qatar Airways began its sponsorship relationship with FC Barcelona, which, according to the International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS) estimate from 2010, is the most successful team in the world. In 2016, the company went on to become the “platinum” sponsor of Bayern Munich, the most successful football team in Germany. Additionally, Qatar Airways sponsored the German Bundesliga and Spain’s La Liga (Bridgewater and Chance, n.d; Hamad MA Fetais *et al.*, 2021; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003; Sporting Intelligence, 2015). Qatar Airways continues to sponsor even more organizations and teams today. In addition to sponsoring the AS Roma football team in 2018 and the AS Roma women’s football team in 2020–2022, Qatar Airways also signed a multi-year official jersey sponsorship agreement with the Paris Saint-Germain team, of which it has been the Official Airline Partner since 2020, to begin in the 2022–2023 season. The International Association of Football Federations (FIFA), the Qatar ExxonMobil Open (ATP) and Qatar Total Open (WTA), the Sydney Swans, the Qatar Classic Squash Championship, cultural events like the Qatar Years of Culture and entertainment groups KidZania Kuwait and KidzMondo Doha are all partnered with Qatar Airways.

As previously stated, FC Barcelona became the world’s most successful team in 2010. In addition, FC Barcelona was voted as the most popular football club in a survey that assessed the 20 most popular football clubs among local and international football clubs in 2010 (Yüceer, 2012). Barcelona is also one of the top three most valuable football clubs according to Forbes’ most valuable football clubs research in 2013, the year the sponsorship deal was brokered (Forbes, 2013). Following the signing of a contract with the Qatar Foundation in 2010, FC Barcelona became the first Catalan team in its 111-year history to sport a brand advertisement on the front of their jerseys: Qatar and Qatar Airways were the first paid sponsors of this successful football squad, which had never had a sponsor other than United

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Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The first sponsorship agreement was signed by Qatar Airways and FC Barcelona in 2013 for a period of three years. In 2016, the agreement was extended for an additional year. Manel Arroyo, the club's vice president of marketing and communications, claims that Qatar Airways has assisted FC Barcelona in expanding the team's brand recently "Due to their four-year sponsorship agreement with Qatar Airways, FC Barcelona has grown and become even more well-known, while Qatar Airways has assisted in improving Qatar's brand awareness and brand image." Therefore, the mutuality principle, which is a component of sponsorship and sports diplomacy, is supported by this partnership. Through this sponsorship arrangement, Arroyo has explained how FC Barcelona would grow and progress. The relationship between the two nations was boosted by the sponsorship agreement between Qatar Airways and FC Barcelona (FC Barcelona, 2016, 2017). However, some newspaper reports during the renewal of the agreement contained more speculative material that considered Qatar "sportswashing" in a sense (Özel and Aras, 2023). This study aims to assess the effects of Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona on sports diplomacy and brand knowledge, while considering the attitudes and views of Spanish citizens toward both Qatar and Qatar Airways.

### 3. Methods

There are two fundamental techniques, supply-side and demand-side, to evaluate the effects of sponsorship activities, according to Keller and Swaminathan (2019, p. 235). The supply-side technique assesses the extent to which media coverage determines a brand's potential exposure. In contrast, the demand-side strategy focuses on consumer-reported exposure. The demand-side method is an alternative measurement strategy that attempts to determine the effects of sponsorship on consumers' brand knowledge structures. As a result, monitoring or private surveys can investigate sponsorships' ability to influence awareness, opinions and even purchases. Audiences can be identified and surveyed after the event to gauge attitudes and intentions toward the sponsor because of the event, in addition to whether the sponsor's name is remembered. Therefore, in order to assess the impact of Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona on sports diplomacy and brand awareness, we decided to use a survey method in our study. We focused on the sponsorship's demand strategy and took into consideration the views and opinions of Spanish citizens regarding Qatar and Qatar Airways.

In this study, we designed a survey consisting of six sections and 38 items. Yüceer's (2012) study was utilized in the creation of the main questionnaire form in preparation of the survey. The data gathering form was divided into six stages. In the first stage, participants were asked questions on their interest in football using a scale established by Dalakas and Levin (2005) to assess the effects of sponsorship on consumer attitudes. In the second step, participants were asked questions regarding the FC Barcelona squad using a scale created by Wam and Branscombe (1993) to assess sports fans' attachment to their teams. In accordance with the research, only a tiny alteration was made to the fourth question. In the third stage, questions regarding Qatar and Qatar Airways were asked using Batra and Stayman's (1990) study to quantify the influence of advertising and Palda's (1966) study on the effect hierarchy. The fourth step of the study asked questions on the sponsorship agreement, using data from Aaron Smith *et al.*'s (2008) study on sports sponsorship, team support and purchasing intentions. Questions were posed in the fifth stage of the study to determine the contribution of sponsorships, which was prepared by the researchers within the scope of this study on sports diplomacy. In the sixth stage of the study, participants' demographic data was collected.

In choosing sample size, it is advised in the literature to reach 5–10 times as many persons as the number of items on the scale (Akgül, 2005). The survey administered to participants comprised 38 items, with the intention of encompassing a minimum of 380 participants, calculated as 38 multiplied by 10. The strata sampling method used to pick the sample was based

on the existence of 17 regions from four zones (North, South, Center and East) in Spain. Zone North includes the regions of Asturias, Cantabria, Galicia, Navarre, Basque Country and La Rioja. Zone South contains the regions of Andalusia, Murcia, the Canary Islands and Extremadura. Zone Center includes the regions of Madrid, Castilla y León, Castilla La Mancha and Aragón. Zone East includes the regions of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Community of Valencia. When there are substrata or subunit groups in a population with specified borders, the stratified sampling approach is applied (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016, p. 116) (See Table 1).

The study surveyed only Spanish nationals living in Spain. Spain has a central government that shares powers with 17 autonomous regions, which means that while the national government has some authorities, each area has a local government with additional capabilities. Spain's administrative regions are often called autonomous communities. What distinguishes Spain is that some of its regions, like Catalonia, have a distinct regional identity and culture. It even has its own language, Catalan, as well as its own traditions, culture, food and literature.

The survey approach was used to collect data from 434 Spanish citizens from 17 regions in four zones in Spain between November 3 and November 21, 2022, in order to learn the attitudes and behaviors of citizens regardless of the World Cup, assuming that there are also Spanish citizens who will participate in the World Cup.

Of the participants, 189 (44.2%) were female and 230 (53.7%) were male. A total of nine (2.1%) did not want to specify gender. Of the total, 112 (26.0%) were between the ages of 26 and 35. A total of 167 (38.8%) respondents had some university education. The income range of 173 (42.1%) respondents was between 1,000 and 1,999 euros (See Table 2).

Zone	Frequency	Percentage
North (Asturias, Cantabria, Galicia, Navarre, Basque Country, La Rioja)	65	15
South (Andalusia, Murcia, Canary Islands, Extremadura)	121	27.8
Center (Madrid, Castilla y León, Castilla La Mancha, Aragón)	140	32.2
East (Catalonia, Balearic Islands, Community of Valencia)	108	25
Total	434	100.0

Source(s): Authors' own creation

**Table 1.**  
Sample distribution

		N	%
Gender	Woman	189	44.2
	Man	230	53.7
	I don't want to specify	9	2.1
Age	18–25	82	19.1
	26–35	112	26.0
	36–45	96	22.3
	46–55	90	20.9
	56 and over	50	11.6
Education	Early education	5	1.2
	High School	124	28.8
	University	167	38.8
	Masters	113	26.3
	Ph.D.	21	4.9
Monthly Household Income	Less than 1,000 euro	96	23.4
	1,000–1,999 euro	173	42.1
	2,000–2,999 euro	94	22.9
	3,000–3,999 euro	29	7.1
	More than 4,000 euro	19	4.6

Source(s): Authors' own creation

**Table 2.**  
The demographics of  
the respondents

When analyzing the study's findings, the SPSS statistical analysis program was employed. The analysis was based on descriptive statistical approaches (frequency, percentage, average and standard deviation). In the study, correlation, Pearson chi-square test, likelihood ratio, Cramér's v, gamma and Kendall's tau-b were utilized. The inter-scale correlations were ascertained using the Pearson correlation analysis. In order to compare quantitative data between two groups, the Pearson chi-square test was employed.

#### 4. Results

Respondents were asked about FC Barcelona, Qatar and Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona in order to assess the relationship between sponsorships and sports diplomacy.

Table 3 presents the distribution of participants' opinions regarding FC Barcelona. Each row represents a different statement about FC Barcelona, while the columns represent the level of agreement with the statement, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." Here's a breakdown of the analysis:

"I love the Barcelona club": The majority of participants either agree or strongly agree with this statement, with 24.1% strongly agree and 12.5% agree. However, a notable portion (29.7%) strongly disagree and (13.9%) disagree, while 19.7% is neutral.

"I support the Barcelona club": Similar to the previous statement, a significant proportion of participants express support for Barcelona, with 25.2% strongly agreeing and 13.0% agreeing. Again, a notable portion (25.7%) is neutral, while (24.1%) strongly disagree and (12.0%) disagree.

"In a national league match that I watch, I would like Barcelona to win": Participants' preferences for Barcelona winning in a national league match are slightly lower compared to the previous statements but still significant. Approximately 27.7% strongly agree and 13.2% agree. Again, there is a notable neutral stance (21.2%), with 15.0% disagreeing and 22.9% strongly disagreeing.

"In an international league match that I watch, if one team is Barcelona, I would like it to win": This statement shows the highest overall preference for Barcelona winning in an international league match, with 28.2% strongly agreeing and 24.1% agreeing with this statement. The proportion of participants who are neutral is lower (20.8%), with 8.8% disagreeing and 18.1% strongly disagreeing.

Overall, Table 3 indicates a generally positive sentiment toward FC Barcelona among the participants surveyed, with significant portions expressing love, support and a desire for the

Participants' opinions about FC Barcelona	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
I love the Barcelona club	128	60	85	54	104	431
	29.7	13.9	19.7	12.5	24.1	100.00
I support the Barcelona club	104	52	111	56	109	432
	24.1	12.0	25.7	13.0	25.2	100.00
In a national league match that I watch, I would like Barcelona to win	99	65	92	57	120	433
	22.9	15.0	21.2	13.2	27.7	100.00
In an international league match that I watch, if one team is Barcelona, I would like it to win	78	38	90	104	122	432
	18.1	8.8	20.8	24.1	28.2	100.00

**Table 3.**  
Distribution of respondents' opinions about FC Barcelona

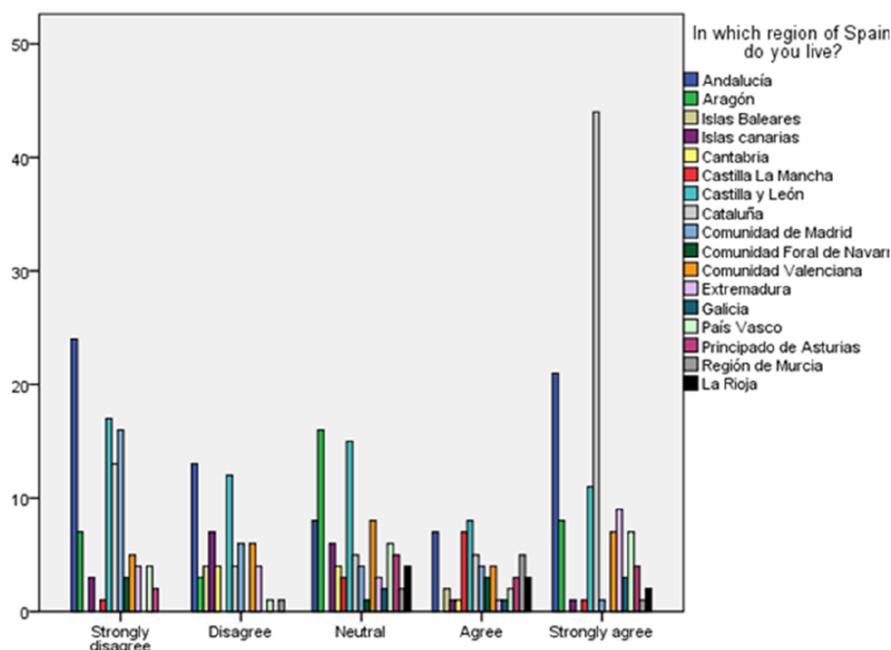
**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

team to win in both national and international matches. However, there are also notable proportions of participants who remain neutral or express disagreement with these sentiments.

Figure 1 shows the geographical diversity in support for FC Barcelona's triumph in a national league match, with the Catalonia area—where FC Barcelona is based—showing the greatest support. In the Andalucía region, the percentage of people who strongly agree and disagree is relatively close to one another. When we look at the variance of ideas regarding brand image compatibility, it appears that Catalonia and Andalucía find the FC Barcelona and Qatar Airways brands the most compatible. Respondents from Catalonia, Andalucía and Castilla y León are the most likely to find the brand image compatibility neutral.

The majority of opinions about support for FC Barcelona, whether they win or lose and always speaking positively were indifferent or negative in regions like Andalucía, Castilla y León, Aragon and Comunidad Valenciana. Nonetheless, it is evident that certain individuals from these areas are in favor of the links between Qatar and Spain and have grown more interested in Qatar and Qatar Airways as a result of the sponsorship. With 45.1% of respondents, it appears that the Catalan region's sympathy with Qatar has grown the most since the sponsorship.

The results show that there is a significant variation in the level of agreement with the statement of support for FC Barcelona across the different regions of Spain. The highest level of agreement is in the southern region of Andalusia, where 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The lowest level of agreement is in the northeastern region of Catalonia, where only 35% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.



Source(s): Authors own creation

Figure 1. Support for FC Barcelona's win in a national league match by region

There are a number of possible explanations for this variation. One possibility is that people in Andalucía have a stronger sense of Spanish identity than people in Catalonia. This may be due to a number of factors, including the history of the two regions, the culture and the language. Another possibility is that people in Andalucía are more likely to be satisfied with the current state of affairs in Spain. This may be due to a number of factors, including the economy, the political situation and the social climate. They might regard Barcelona as a Catalan group rather than Catalan nation. Whatever the reasons, the variation in the level of support to FC Barcelona across the different regions of Spain is a significant finding. It suggests that there is a great deal of diversity within Spain when it comes to sports club. There is solid and strong support for sports considering that there is a visible amount of non-supporter to FC Barcelona in international tournaments. Those people support their own teams and want to see their teams succeeding in international matches.

Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents' opinions regarding Qatar Airways. The majority of respondents agreed with the statement "Qatar Airways is a successful brand." Respondents agreed less with the statement "I find a close connection with the image of Qatar Airways." Table 4 displays the values.

Our findings indicate that the majority of the respondents have a positive opinion about Qatar Airways. Also, a significant number of respondents agree with the statement "Qatar Airways is a quality brand." These findings were further supported by the many participants who agreed with the statement "Qatar Airways is a successful brand" and have a positive perception of the image of Qatar Airways.

Table 5 presents the distribution of respondents' opinions regarding Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona. Most respondents agreed with the statement "I think Qatar Airways made the right decision by sponsoring the Barcelona club." Respondents said they agreed least with the statement "Due to the sponsorship of Barcelona, I will prefer Qatar Airways as a priority for my travels." The values are shown in Table 5.

We can conclude, based on the survey, that the majority of the respondents have a positive opinion about Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona. This is evident from the fact that a majority of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statements that the sponsorship is a good fit, that it has improved FC Barcelona's image and that it has made Qatar Airways a more attractive airline.

Table 6 presents the distribution of participants' opinions regarding Qatar. Most respondents agreed with the statement "I support relations between Qatar and Spain." Respondents said they agreed least with the statement "After this sponsorship, my sympathy for Qatar has grown." The values are shown in Table 6.

The survey attempted to find out whether the participants would like to know more about Qatar, whether they have more sympathy for Qatar, whether they think Qatar's investments

Participants' opinions about Qatar Airways	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
My opinion of Qatar Airways is positive	64	55	213	94	7	433
Qatar Airways is a quality brand	14.8	12.7	49.2	21.7	1.6	100.00
Qatar Airways is a successful brand	24	29	182	167	27	429
	5.6	6.8	42.4	38.9	6.3	100.00
I find a close connection with the image of Qatar Airways	26	30	167	172	35	430
	6.0	7.0	38.8	40.0	8.1	100.00
	121	91	156	57	8	433
	27.9	21.0	36.0	13.2	1.8	100.00

**Table 4.**  
Distribution of respondents' opinions about Qatar Airways

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

**Qatar Airways–FC Barcelona deal**

Participants' opinions about the sponsorship between FC Barcelona and Qatar Airways	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
The images of Qatar Airways and Barcelona are compatible with each other	53 12.3	63 14.6	200 46.4	76 17.6	39 9.0	431 100.00
I think Qatar Airways made the right decision by sponsoring the Barcelona club	46 10.8	38 8.9	179 42.1	109 25.6	53 12.5	425 100.00
I think Qatar Airways' image has improved positively after this sponsorship	45 10.5	43 10.0	187 43.6	115 26.8	39 9.1	429 100.00
Due to the sponsorship of Barcelona, I will prefer Qatar Airways as a priority for my travels	135 31.3	79 18.3	154 35.7	48 11.1	15 3.5	431 100.00
After this sponsorship, I would like to learn more about Qatar Airways	132 30.8	73 17.0	134 31.2	71 16.6	19 4.4	429 100.00
After this sponsorship, I follow Qatar Airways' activities more as an institution	144 33.8	83 19.5	137 32.2	59 13.8	3 0.7	426 100.00

**Table 5.**  
Distribution of respondents' opinions about Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona

**Source(s):** Authors own creation

Participants' opinions about Qatar	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
After this sponsorship, I would like to know more about Qatar	117 27.3	72 16.8	122 28.4	94 21.9	24 5.6	429 100.00
After this sponsorship, I am following more of Qatar's activities as a nation	132 30.8	92 21.5	118 27.6	80 18.7	6 1.4	428 100.00
After this sponsorship, my sympathy for Qatar has grown	134 31.2	105 24.5	136 31.7	51 11.9	3 0.7	429 100.00
To me, Qatar's investments in Spain seem positive	74 17.2	57 13.3	131 30.5	123 28.7	44 10.3	429 100.00
I consider Qatar's investments in international organizations to be positive	87 20.3	47 11.0	151 35.2	119 27.7	25 5.8	429 100.00
I support relations between Qatar and Spain	79 18.4	58 13.5	122 28.4	120 27.9	51 11.9	430 100.00

**Table 6.**  
Distribution of respondents' opinions about Qatar

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

in Spain are positive, whether they consider Qatar's investments in international organizations to be positive and whether they support relations between Qatar and Spain. The results show that a majority of participants would like to know more about Qatar. This suggests that there is a visible level of interest in Qatar among the participants. The majority of participants think that Qatar's investments in Spain are positive. This suggests that the participants believe that Qatar's investments are beneficial to Spain. The majority of participants also consider Qatar's investments in international organizations to be positive. These findings serve the goals of Qatari public diplomacy: to project Qatar as a responsible member of the international community. According to the survey, relations between Qatar and Spain are largely considered positive. This is an indication that the respondents may believe that there should be closer ties between the two countries. [Table 7](#) is a contingency

		Attitude toward the sponsoring brand			Total
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Interest in football	Negative	79 55.63%	73 45.06%	10 8.62%	162 38.57%
	Neutral	43 30.28%	46 28.40%	31 26.72%	120 28.57%
	Positive	20 14.08%	43 25.93%	75 64.66%	138 32.86%
Total		142 100.00%	162 100.00%	116 100.00%	420 100.00%
		Value			Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test		92.6431			0.000
Likelihood ratio		100.1964			0.000
Cramér's V		0.3321			
Gamma		0.5577			0.048
Kendall's tau-b		0.3889			0.037
<b>Source(s):</b> Authors' own creation					

**Table 7.**  
Relationship between respondents' interest in the sponsored club and their level of interest in Qatar

table showing the distribution of respondents' attitudes toward a sponsoring brand based on their interest in football. The rows represent the individuals' interest in football, categorized as Negative, Neutral and Positive. The columns represent the attitudes toward the sponsoring brand categorized as Negative, Neutral and Positive. There are 79 individuals who have a negative interest in football and a negative attitude toward Qatar Airways, accounting for 55.63% of the total count in the "Negative" column. There are 75 individuals who have a positive interest in football and a positive attitude toward Qatar Airways, accounting for 64.66% of the total count in the "Positive" column. The total count in each row and column is provided at the end of the rows and columns, respectively.

This table can help in analyzing the relationship between individuals' interest in football and their attitude toward Qatar Airways. It appears that individuals with a positive interest in football tend to have a more positive attitude toward Qatar Airways compared to those with neutral or negative interest in football.

There is a strong positive relationship between respondents' interest in football and their attitude toward the sponsor ( $Pr < 0.01$ ).

**Table 8** is a contingency table showing the distribution of respondents' attitudes toward the sponsoring brand based on their interest in the sponsored team. A high interest in FC Barcelona is expressed by 59.48% of those who have a favorable attitude about Qatar Airways. Negative attitudes regarding Qatar Airways are shared by 51.77% of those who have little interest in FC Barcelona.

There is a strong positive relationship between respondents' level of interest in the sponsored team and their attitude toward the sponsor ( $Pr < 0.01$ ). **Table 8** demonstrates that those who are sympathetic and interested in FC Barcelona tend to have a favorable opinion of Qatar Airways.

**Table 9** is a contingency table showing the distribution of respondents' intentions to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand based on respondents' support for the team. 83.87% of respondents who strongly support FC Barcelona said that they have strongly positive intentions of purchasing Qatar Airways' products and services. A total of 56.36% of those who oppose purchasing Qatar Airways' products and services do not support FC Barcelona. There is a strong positive relationship between respondents' level of support for

Qatar  
Airways–FC  
Barcelona deal

		Attitude toward the sponsoring brand			Total
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Interest in the sponsored team	Negative	73 51.77%	52 32.10%	15 12.93%	140 33.41%
	Neutral	41 29.08%	68 41.98%	32 27.59%	141 33.65%
	Positive	27 19.15%	42 25.93%	69 59.48%	138 25.23%
Total		141 100.00%	162 100.00%	116 100.00%	419 100.00%

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	69.7285	0.000
Likelihood ratio	68.8363	0.000
Cramér's V	0.2885	
Gamma	0.4894	0.055
Kendall's tau-b	0.3373	0.041

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

**Table 8.**  
Relationship between respondents' interest in the sponsored team and their attitude toward the sponsoring brand

		The intention to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand					Total
		Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive	
Support for the team	Strongly negative	62 56.36%	12 17.14%	28 19.05%	2 2.86%	0 0.00%	104 24.30%
	Negative	6 5.45%	22 31.43%	14 9.52%	10 14.29%	0 0.00%	52 12.15%
	Neutral	22 20.00%	17 24.29%	59 40.14%	10 14.29%	0 0.00%	108 25.23%
	Positive	9 8.18%	10 14.29%	12 8.16%	20 28.57%	5 16.13%	56 13.08%
	Strongly positive	11 10.00%	9 12.86%	34 23.13%	28 40.00%	26 83.87%	108 25.23%
	Total	110 100.00%	70 100.00%	147 100.00%	70 100.00%	31 100.00%	428 100.00%

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	206.8869	0.000
Likelihood ratio	199.3989	0.000
Cramér's V	0.3476	
Gamma	0.5306	0.042
Kendall's tau-b	0.4226	0.035

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

**Table 9.**  
Relationship between respondents' support for the team and their intention to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand

the team and their intention to buy Qatar Airways' products and services (Pr < 0.01). Overall, [Table 9](#) demonstrates that FC Barcelona fans wish to take advantage of Qatar Airways' goods and services.

[Table 10](#) is a correlation table showing support for the team and the intention to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand. As a result of the correlation analysis

performed to determine the relationship between Team Support and Purchase Intention, a positive and significant relationship was found between the scores ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Accordingly, as support for the team increases, so does the intention to purchase.

Table 11 is a contingency table showing the distribution of respondent attitudes toward the sponsor based on respondents' intention to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand. 57.76% of participants who have a positive opinion of Qatar Airways say that they intend to buy Qatar Airways' goods and services, whereas 51.41% of those who have a negative opinion of Qatar Airways say that they do not wish to buy Qatar Airways' goods and services.

There is a strong positive relationship between the respondents' attitude toward the sponsor and their intention to buy the products and services ( $Pr < 0.01$ ). Table 11 demonstrates that those who have a positive attitude toward Qatar Airways are likely to purchase goods and services from Qatar Airways.

Table 12 is a contingency table showing the distribution of interest in Qatar based on interest in the sponsored club. 52.48% of respondents with a high level of interest in FC Barcelona have a high level of interest in Qatar. Alternatively, 53.69% of those with little interest in Qatar also show little interest in the club.

There is a strong positive relationship between the respondents' interest in the sponsored club and their interest in Qatar ( $Pr < 0.01$ ). Table 12 indicates that when the level of interest in the sponsored team rises, so does the level of interest in Qatar.

**Table 10.**  
Correlation analysis of support for the team and the intention to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand

	Participants' support for the team	Intention to buy the products and services
Participants' support for the team	1.0000	
Intention to buy the products and services	0.5047	1.0000

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

		Attitude toward the sponsor			Total
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Intention to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand	Strongly negative	73	27	6	106
		51.41%	16.98%	5.17%	25.42%
	Negative	33	22	15	70
		23.24%	13.84%	12.93%	16.79%
	Neutral	36	76	28	140
		25.35%	47.80%	24.14%	33.57%
	Positive/Strongly positive	0	34	67	101
		0.00%	21.38%	57.76%	24.22%
Total		142	159	116	417
		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

**Table 11.**  
Relationship between respondents' attitude toward the sponsor and the intention to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	170.5761	0.000
Likelihood ratio	190.0518	0.000
Cramér's V	0.4522	
Gamma	0.6903	0.037
Kendall's tau-b	0.5147	0.032

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

Qatar  
Airways–FC  
Barcelona deal

		Interest in Qatar			Total
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Interest in the sponsored club	Negative	80 53.69%	48 35.04%	18 12.77%	146 34.19%
	Neutral	37 24.83%	58 42.34%	49 34.75%	144 33.72%
	Positive	32 21.48%	31 22.63%	74 52.48%	137 32.08%
Total		149 100.00%	137 100.00%	141 100.00%	427 100.00%

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	69.4085	0.000
Likelihood ratio	71.2449	0.000
Cramér's V	0.2851	
Gamma	0.4732	0.055
Kendall's tau-b	0.3283	0.041

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

**Table 12.**  
Relationship between respondents' interest in the sponsored club and the level of interest in Qatar

Table 13 is a contingency table showing the distribution of attitudes toward Qatar's investments in Spain based on interest in the sponsored club. FC Barcelona is of great interest to 48% of those who positively perceive Qatar's investments in Spain. A low degree of interest in the FC Barcelona team is shared by 55.81% of those who negatively perceive Qatar's investments in Spain.

There is a strong positive relationship between the participants' interest in the sponsored club and their attitude toward Qatar's investments in Spain ( $Pr < 0.01$ ). Table 13 indicates that when the level of interest in the sponsored team rises, their attitude toward Qatar's investments in Spain becomes more positive.

		Attitude toward Qatar's investments in Spain					Total
		Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive	
Interest in the sponsored club	Negative	48 55.81%	13 27.66%	59 39.07%	19 15.97%	7 28.00%	146 34.11%
	Neutral	24 27.91%	18 38.30%	60 39.74%	36 30.25%	6 24.00%	144 33.64%
	Positive	14 16.28%	16 34.04%	32 21.19%	64 53.78%	12 48.00%	138 32.24%
Total		86 100.00%	47 100.00%	151 100.00%	119 100.0%	25 100.00%	428 100.00%

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	60.8144	0.000
Likelihood ratio	60.9517	0.000
Cramér's V	0.2665	
Gamma	0.3645	0.055
Kendall's tau-b	0.2625	0.041

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

**Table 13.**  
Relationship between respondents' interest in the sponsored club and their attitude toward Qatar's investments in Spain

Table 14 is a contingency table showing the distribution of attitudes toward Qatar’s investments in international organizations based on interest in the sponsored club. A total of 68.63% of those who think Qatar’s investments in international organizations are very positive are interested in FC Barcelona. Alternatively, 55.13% of those who oppose Qatar’s investments in international organizations show little interest in FC Barcelona.

There is a strong positive relationship between respondents’ interest in the sponsored club and their attitude toward Qatar’s investments in international organizations ( $Pr < 0.01$ ). Table 14 shows that when interest in the sponsored team grows, so does a positive attitude toward Qatar’s investments in international organizations.

Table 15 is a contingency table showing the distribution of respondents’ attitudes toward the image of Qatar Airways based on their interest in Qatar. 30.50% of respondents with a high level of interest in Qatar identify with the image of Qatar Airways. The table shows that 56.67% of respondents with little interest in Qatar have a negative image of Qatar Airways.

There is a strong positive relationship between the degree to which respondents identify with Qatar Airways’ image and their level of interest in Qatar ( $Pr < 0.01$ ). Table 15 shows that as participants increasingly identify with Qatar Airways’ image, their level of interest in Qatar grows.

Table 16 is a contingency table showing the distribution of respondents’ attitudes toward Qatar–Spain ties based on their interest in the sponsored club. 68.63% of those who have a favorable attitude toward Qatar–Spain relations also have a positive view of FC Barcelona. However, 55.13% of those who have a negative attitude toward the two nations’ relations show little interest in FC Barcelona.

There is a strong positive relationship between participants’ interest in the sponsored club and their attitudes toward Qatar–Spain ties ( $Pr < 0.01$ ). Table 16 shows that participants’ perceptions toward Qatar–Spain relations improve as their interest in the sponsored club grows.

Table 17 is a contingency table showing the distribution of respondents’ attitudes toward Qatar–Spain ties based on their interest in the sponsoring brand. A total of 43.14% of

		Attitude toward Qatar’s investments in international organizations					Total
		Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive	
Interest in the sponsored club	Negative	43 55.13%	18 31.03%	57 46.72%	22 18.33%	5 9.80%	145 33.80%
	Neutral	25 32.05%	22 37.93%	42 34.43%	46 38.33%	11 21.57%	146 34.03%
	Positive	10 12.82%	18 31.03%	23 18.85%	52 43.33%	35 68.63%	138 32.17%
Total		78 100.00%	58 100.00%	122 100.00%	120 100.00%	51 100.00%	429 100.00%

**Table 14.** Relationship between respondents’ interest in the sponsored club and their attitude toward Qatar’s investments in international organizations

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	78.7213	0.000
Likelihood ratio	80.0276	0.000
Cramér’s V	0.3029	
Gamma	0.4221	0.050
Kendall’s tau-b	0.3102	0.038

**Source(s):** Authors’ own creation

**Qatar Airways–FC Barcelona deal**

		Interest in Qatar			Total
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Participants finding a close connection with the image of Qatar Airways	Strongly negative	85	25	8	118
		56.67%	18.25%	5.67%	27.57%
	Negative	19	46	25	90
		12.67%	33.58%	17.73%	21.03%
	Neutral	32	58	65	155
	21.33%	42.34%	46.10%	36.21%	
	Positive/	14	8	43	65
	Strongly positive	9.33%	5.84%	30.50%	15.19%
Total		150	137	141	428
		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	138.2961	0.000
Likelihood ratio	138.4641	0.000
Cramér's V	0.4019	
Gamma	0.5637	0.049
Kendal's tau-b	0.4138	0.039

**Table 15.** Relationship between the degree to which respondents identify with Qatar Airways' image and their level of interest in Qatar

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

		Attitude toward Qatar–Spain ties					Total
		Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive	
Interest in the sponsored club	Negative	43	18	57	22	5	145
		55.13%	31.03%	46.72%	18.33%	9.80%	33.80%
	Neutral	25	22	42	46	11	146
		32.05%	37.93%	34.43%	38.33%	21.57%	34.03%
		Positive	10	18	23	52	35
	12.82%	31.03%	18.85%	43.33%	68.63%	32.17%	
Total		78	58	122	120	51	429
		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.0%	100.00%	100.00%

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	78.7213	0.000
Likelihood ratio	80.0276	0.000
Cramér's V	0.3029	
Gamma	0.4221	0.050
Kendall's tau-b	0.3102	0.038

**Table 16.** Relationship between respondents' interest in the sponsored club and their attitude toward Qatar–Spain ties

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

supporters of Qatar–Spain relations have a positive view of Qatar Airways. Approximately 68.35% of respondents who have a strongly negative view of relations between Qatar and Spain also have a strongly negative image of Qatar Airways.

There is a strong positive relationship between the degree to which respondents identify with Qatar Airways' image and their attitudes toward Qatar–Spain ties ( $Pr < 0.01$ ). [Table 17](#) shows that respondents' perceptions of relations between Qatar and Spain improve as they identify more strongly with the image of Qatar Airways.

		Attitude toward Qatar–Spain ties					
		Strongly negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Strongly positive	Total
Participants finding a close connection with the image of Qatar Airways	Strongly negative	54 68.35%	17 29.31%	32 26.23%	14 11.67%	4 7.84%	121 28.14%
	Negative	9 11.39%	21 36.21%	23 18.85%	29 24.17%	7 13.73%	89 20.70%
	Neutral	15 18.99%	15 25.86%	59 48.36%	48 40.00%	18 35.29%	155 36.05%
	Positive/Strongly positive	1 1.27%	5 8.62%	8 6.56%	29 24.17%	22 43.14%	65 15.12%
Total	79 100.00%	58 100.00%	122 100.00%	120 100.0%	51 100.00%	430 100.00%	

**Table 17.** Relationship between the degree to which respondents identify with Qatar Airways' image and their attitudes toward Qatar–Spain ties

	Value	Pr/ASE
Pearson chi-square test	141.0259	0.000
Likelihood ratio	133.6798	0.000
Cramér's V	0.3306	
Gamma	0.5140	0.044
Kendall's tau-b	0.3964	0.036

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation

## 5. Discussion

We looked at the Pearson chi-square test, likelihood ratio, Cramér's  $v$ , gamma and Kendall's tau-b to see if there was any correlation between the variables. They all demonstrate the relationship between the variables and provide proof of correlation. As our  $p$ -values are less than 0.05, there is evidence of a significant relationship between our variables. Factor item loadings were found to be above 0.30. Although there is no exact value specified in the sources regarding for which values the correlation coefficient is reliable, some sources state that this coefficient should be over 0.30, though most state that 0.20 is the limit value (Gözüm and Aksayan, 2003).

The findings reveal the relationship between participants' interest in football and their attitude toward the sponsoring brand. Those who are more interested in football are more likely to have a positive attitude toward the sponsoring brand. The relationship between the participants' interests in the sponsored team and their attitude toward the sponsoring brand support this finding as the results show that there is a positive relationship between the two variables. This means that the more interest the participants had in the sponsored team, the more positive their attitude was toward the sponsoring brand. Participants' support for the team and their intention to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand is another important finding. The more the participants support the team, the more likely they are to buy the products and services of the sponsoring brand. This is a valuable finding for the sponsoring brand, as it suggests that they can increase their sales by increasing their support for the team. There is also a strong relationship between participants' interest in the sponsored club and their attitudes toward Qatar–Spain ties. The participants who are more interested in the sponsored club tend to have more positive attitudes toward Qatar–Spain ties.

We analyzed this example of sports sponsorship to decipher the practical effects of national brands' contributions to sports diplomacy. Our findings support the study from Côme and Raspaud (2018), which underlines the effects of sports sponsorships and sports

club investments on nation branding. The Qatar Airways–FC Barcelona sponsorship agreement positively impacts public attitudes and perceptions of Qatar’s sports diplomacy initiatives in Spain. Our findings on brand image and brand awareness are similar to those of Keller and Swaminathan (2019). Brand image is influenced by brand awareness and intentional brand purchases depend on brand awareness. Our contribution to the literature is that sports diplomacy helps public diplomacy achieve the branding country’s foreign policy goals such as improving its image and reputation. Our results also indicate that the sports industry should consider regional differences in sponsorship deals, since this factor matters in support for a sponsored club and, consequently, to brand image and awareness.

## 6. Conclusion

Consumers may feel more favorably about a sponsoring brand, in this case a sponsoring nation, because of their sponsorship engagement. In this regard, Qatar Airways’ sponsorship relations with FC Barcelona serve to benefit both Qatar’s reputation and brand image in Spain and beyond and FC Barcelona’s material and financial needs, as it receives a total of 204.5 million euros as part of this sponsorship deal. In recent years, Qatar Airways has become a global partner in the sports industry through increasing its sponsorship of clubs, sports activities and even planning of future events over a relatively widespread geography. In addition to its sponsorship of these clubs and organizations, these activities provide it a global presence in sports and news media and add to its brand value. In this regard, Qatar contributes to sports diplomacy by being represented at the world’s largest sporting events and by the top international teams.

As we show in our analysis of the opinion poll, there is a strong positive relationship between respondents’ interest in football and their attitude toward Qatar Airways. Respondents’ interest in FC Barcelona is strongly related to their attitude toward Qatar Airways, as well. There is a substantial positive association between respondents’ support for FC Barcelona and their intention to purchase the products and services of Qatar Airways. FC Barcelona fans wish to take advantage of Qatar Airways’ goods and services. Respondents’ interest in FC Barcelona is strongly related to their interest in Qatar’s investments in Spain and in Qatar’s engagements in international organizations. The level to which respondents identify with Qatar Airways’ image and their level of interest in Qatar also have a strong positive link. In relation to this attitude, respondents’ interest in FC Barcelona and their sentiments toward Qatar–Spain connections have a strongly positive association. FC Barcelona fans are inclined to learn more about Qatar, support Qatar’s investments in Spain and support relations between Qatar and Spain. We underline that participants from different regions, whether FC Barcelona’s fanatic fans or people that do not support the club, increased their interest in Qatar and Qatar Airlines after the sponsorship agreement and had a positive view of relations between Qatar and Spain.

## 7. Limitations and future lines

When respondents’ sympathy for Qatar following the sponsorship agreement is broken down according to region, it becomes clear that participants from Catalonia have higher levels of sympathy, while those in the Comunidad de Madrid had lower levels. This disparity can be said to be caused by Spain’s various ethnic groups and the fact that Barcelona city is in the Catalan region of Spain. This is also likely related to the rivalry between another Spanish team, Real Madrid and FC Barcelona. Based on regional differences as well as attitudes about supporting FC Barcelona in national matches, the political difficulties surrounding Catalonia seemingly influence attitudes toward sponsorship. At this point, countries should carefully assess the teams’ organizational structures and, when sponsoring an international team,

choose a team that will receive more broad support from the country. Qatar Airways may pick another or a second team sponsorship that will appeal to a wider audience in Spain. Furthermore, FC Barcelona is not just an international squad, but it is also one of the most successful football teams globally, therefore this sponsorship arrangement goes beyond national borders for Spanish nationals as well.

The major contribution of this study to the literature is the discussion of the role of sports sponsorships in the recognition of the sponsor, which was assessed through conducting a quantitative analysis of public opinion in the sponsored team's host country. The mixed methods used in this study, including a literature review and survey results, helped to surface novel results in this discussion. Based on these results, we conclude that Qatar Airways' sponsorship of FC Barcelona contributes to Qatar's recognition and national reputation in Spain. The survey was conducted before the World Cup to avoid the impact of this event on public opinion in Spain, since we wanted to focus on the implications of the Qatar-FC Barcelona deal in particular. The results of this study show that there is a need for persistent sponsorship and promotion activities in sports diplomacy to better serve public diplomacy goals.

A future study analyzing the issue in the context of a wider public opinion survey, including Spain, after the 2023 World Cup in Qatar would provide more detail in this regard. The impact of hosting mega sports events like the 2023 World Cup on the sponsorship deal is an intriguing issue in the scholarship on sports diplomacy. To enhance future sports diplomacy studies, it is crucial to acknowledge that sports diplomacy is an integral component of broader diplomatic endeavors. Consequently, sports diplomacy needs to pay attention to the sensitivities and developments in the wider political-economic context to avoid wasting time and resources.

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