

The Western Lens in Pre- and Post-2022 FIFA World Cup Media Coverage: A Critical Stylistic Analysis

Ola Eid Ali Hussein^{1*}

¹Department of English, Faculty of Al-Asun, Ain Shams University

Corresponding Author: Ola Eid Ali Hussein*

Publication Date: 2026/07/29

Abstract: The 2022 FIFA World Cup was the first World Cup hosted by an Arab and Muslim-majority nation, and Qatar's selection as host generated an unusually large body of Western press commentary both before and after the tournament. This study applies a qualitative-quantitative critical stylistic analysis to thirty Western sports-news articles published between September 2010 and March 2023, split evenly into a pre-event and a post-event corpus. Using Jeffries' (2010, 2016) text-conceptual toolkit, the analysis focuses on four functions: naming and describing, the representation of actions, events, and states, prioritizing, and hypothesizing. These patterns are then interpreted through Van Dijk's (2006, 2009) triangulated theory of manipulation and Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism. Qatar emerges from the pre-event corpus through a recurring vocabulary of scandal, expense, and risk, while transitivity choices consistently hand Western institutional actors the discourse's verbal and mental processes of judgment and confine Qatari agency to nominalized or passive forms. Negative material is fronted more often than context or reform, and modal verbs let writers cast doubt as probability rather than open assertion. Comparing the two sub-corpora shows that this underlying Ideological Square persists after the tournament, though it takes a different shape: anticipatory scepticism gives way to a qualified, still-evaluative acknowledgment of Qatar's success, and a competing Arab-media counter-discourse enters the picture for the first time. The study argues that sportswashing works as a modern, self-sealing vehicle for the older Orientalist construction of the Middle East as excessive and morally suspect, and it offers a triangulated model for tracing how linguistic structure, socio-cognitive manipulation, and ideological hegemony interact in coverage of mega-events hosted in the Global South.

Keywords: *Critical Stylistics, 2022 FIFA World Cup, Orientalism, Manipulation, Sportswashing, Media Discourse.*

How to Cite: Ola Eid Ali Hussein (2026) The Western Lens in Pre- and Post-2022 FIFA World Cup Media Coverage: A Critical Stylistic Analysis. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(7), 1777-1784.
<https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jul1114>

I. INTRODUCTION

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar sits at an unusual junction in the recent history of global sports media, one where the line between athletic celebration and political critique grew increasingly hard to draw. Media discourse rarely transmits events neutrally; it is a socially situated practice that builds particular versions of reality, and in doing so it tends to reinforce existing power relations and ideological commitments (Fairclough, 2013). Within that landscape, a recognizable “Western lens” has repeatedly served as a gatekeeper, filtering non-Western nations through hierarchies that predate any single news story (Van Dijk, 2015). The coverage of the Qatar

tournament offers, on this basis, a productive site for examining how media texts negotiate cultural identity and construct the figure of the “Other.”

Nowhere is this construction of reality more visible than in contemporary sports discourse, which has drifted a long way from simple play-by-play reporting toward something closer to a forum for national identity and ethical judgment. Journalists covering twenty-first-century mega-events routinely look past the field of play to assess a host nation's governance, values, and human-rights record (Boykoff, 2022). It was in this climate of heightened scrutiny that “sportswashing” became one of the defining terms of Qatar 2022 coverage: the use of a high-profile

athletic event to launder a state's international reputation or to draw attention away from domestic controversy (Fruh et al., 2023). Western outlets leaned on this framework heavily in the years before the tournament, often presenting the event less as a sporting occasion than as an exercise in public relations, and the scepticism this produced carried through into almost every stage of subsequent coverage.

This study takes the position that such framing has deeper roots than the sportswashing debate alone would suggest — that it draws, whether consciously or not, on the older tradition of Orientalism that Edward Said (1978) described. Said's Orientalism names the process by which the West has historically produced the East as a static, irrational, and lesser counterpart, a foil against which it defines itself as rational and modern. Read against that history, the vocabulary of sportswashing in Qatar 2022 coverage often does older ideological work: it casts the Middle Eastern host as fundamentally out of step with global sporting and civic norms. By bringing Van Dijk's (2006, 2009) theory of manipulation together with Jeffries' (2010, 2016) stylistic toolkit, this study traces how such assumptions get built into specific linguistic choices, and how those choices in turn shape what readers come to believe and reinforce Western cultural authority.

➤ Objectives

Four objectives guide the analysis: identifying the critical-stylistic tools most heavily used in Western coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup; explaining how manipulation was constructed cognitively and socially in that coverage; establishing how the resulting representations reflect or reinforce Orientalist ideology and the sportswashing discourse; and comparing the pre- and post-tournament datasets to see what changed, and what stayed the same, across the thirteen years the corpus spans.

➤ Research Questions

- What are the predominant critical-stylistic tools — naming, transitivity, prioritizing, and modality — employed in Western articles to represent the 2022 World Cup?
- How is manipulation cognitively and socially constructed in these articles, according to Van Dijk's triangulated theory?
- In what ways do the linguistic representations reflect or reinforce Orientalist ideology and the concept of sportswashing?
- What are the significant similarities and differences between the pre-tournament and post-tournament datasets?

➤ Significance of the Study

Most existing scholarship on the 2022 World Cup approaches the tournament through political science, sociology, tourism, or sports management. Linguistic accounts of the “Western lens” itself remain comparatively rare. By triangulating Jeffries' (2010, 2016) Critical Stylistics with Van

Dijk's (2006, 2009) socio-cognitive theory of manipulation and Said's (1978) Orientalism, this study proposes a way of reading media discourse as a site of power and grounds that reading in corpus evidence — showing how a genre that presents itself as a neutral chronicle of sport can, on closer inspection, replay a much older discourse of civilizational hierarchy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarship on the 2022 World Cup spans several disciplinary registers. Some linguistically oriented work has examined FIFA's own ceremonial discourse using Fairclough's textual categories, or has taken a multimodal approach to visual and textual framing in tournament coverage, including how fan practices around LGBTQIA+ visibility were represented in reporting on the German team in Qatar. Sports-science and international-relations scholarship, meanwhile, has looked at how Qatar managed human-rights scrutiny during the bidding and hosting process in order to protect its international image and build “soft power.”

Linguistically focused critiques of Western representation are harder to find. Dawood (2023) applied Halliday's (1994) transitivity system to a single Guardian editorial on Qatar's hosting and found that material processes (28.2%), relational processes (25.6%), and verbal processes (20.5%) did most of the work of shaping editorial opinion, and recommended that further critical-discourse approaches be brought to bear on the topic. Stojan (2023) took a comparative critical discourse approach to World Cup headlines in *The Times* and the Croatian daily *Jutarnji list*, combining Fairclough's three-dimensional model with Van Dijk's approach to newspaper discourse. National athletes and coaches were quoted directly far more often in the Croatian coverage than in the British coverage, where they tended to appear as topics discussed by journalists rather than as speaking subjects — a finding that shows how the same event can be narrated quite differently depending on a newspaper's own national audience. Al Kaaby and Al Zubaidy (2023) applied Jeffries' naming and describing tools to English- and Arabic-language Paralympic sports magazines and found that the English-language texts represented female para-athletes more through collectivization, and less through individualization and positive appraisal, than the Arabic-language texts did, which suggests that Jeffries' toolkit is sensitive to cross-cultural variation in how sporting bodies get represented, not just to variation across outlets within a single language.

Van Dijk's triangulation approach has also proved useful outside the sports domain. Sorlin (2017) used a pragma-stylistic version of the model to trace how Manipulative Discourse in the American political drama *House of Cards* exploits Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, identifying tactics such as feigning interest in a target's face needs and staging a false self-face-threatening act. Ramanathan and Hoon (2015), reviewing fifteen CDA-based studies of media discourse, concluded that Critical

Discourse Analysis has repeatedly been used to expose ideologies that disadvantage subordinated groups while flattering the group that already holds institutional authority — a pattern directly relevant to the West/Qatar asymmetry examined here.

No study identified in this review combines all three frameworks — Jeffries' (2010, 2016) micro-textual toolkit, Van Dijk's (2006, 2009) socio-cognitive theory of manipulation, and Said's (1978) macro-ideological theory of Orientalism — in a single analysis of Western sports journalism on the 2022 World Cup. Dawood (2023) supplies transitivity evidence but no account of naming, prioritizing, or modality; Stojan (2023) supplies discourse-analytic evidence of ideological framing without a stylistics-based account of the textual devices involved; and Al Kaaby and Al Zubaidy (2023) demonstrate how far naming strategies can carry ideological weight without extending that demonstration into a full triangulated account of manipulation and Orientalism. This study addresses that gap.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

➤ *Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Stylistics*

This study sits within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which treats language as a form of social practice and discourse as a site where power relations are negotiated and legitimized rather than simply transmitted (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2015). Jeffries (2010, 2016) built on this foundation to develop Critical Stylistics (CS), a set of text-based analytical tools rooted in Halliday's (1994) ideational function, in which textual meaning is treated as a version of reality that always carries ideological weight. Where CDA tends to work at the level of broad social effect, CS supplies a more granular, sentence-level method for locating the specific linguistic devices that produce those effects. Of Jeffries' ten textual-conceptual functions, four are applied here: naming and describing (noun choice, modification, and nominalization); representing actions, events, and states (the material, verbal, relational, and mental transitivity processes); prioritizing (fronting, subordination, and active/passive transformation); and hypothesizing (epistemic, deontic, boulomaic, and evaluative modality).

➤ *Van Dijk's Triangulated Theory of Manipulation*

Van Dijk's (2006, 2009) socio-cognitive model treats manipulation as operating at three levels at once. Socially, it is a form of illegitimate domination that reproduces inequality between groups. Cognitively, it interferes with an audience's ordinary processes of understanding and shapes biased mental models. Discursively, it is carried out through what Van Dijk calls the "Ideological Square": the systematic pairing of positive self-representation (emphasizing "Our" good qualities) with negative other-representation (emphasizing "Their" bad qualities). None of the three levels reduces to the others, which is why an adequate account of manipulation has to read across all three — the "triangulation" the theory's name refers to.

➤ *Said's Theory of Orientalism*

Said's (1978) Orientalism examines how power, knowledge, and the representation of the non-Western world are bound up together. Said describes Orientalism as something closer to an institution than a set of individual prejudices: a discourse that authorizes the West to characterize the East, to make pronouncements about it, and ultimately to set the terms on which it will be judged. The theory rests on a basic distinction between a rational, self-defining Occident and a static, excessive, and inscrutable Orient. The present study reads its stylistic and manipulation findings against this framework in order to ask whether, and how, sportswashing functions as a present-day vehicle for that historical mode of representation.

IV. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

➤ *Data Collection*

The corpus comprises thirty sports-news articles on Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, split into two chronological sub-corpora of fifteen articles each. The pre-event sub-corpus runs from Qatar's successful hosting bid in September 2010 to the tournament's opening in November 2022; the post-event sub-corpus runs from the tournament's launch through March 2023. Articles were drawn from a range of prominent Western outlets — among them The New York Times, The Guardian, NPR, BBC News, Business Insider, Politico, Bleacher Report, The Independent, The Washington Post, AP News, NBC News, CBC Kids News, and France 24. The post-event sub-corpus also draws on regional outlets — Al Jazeera, The Peninsula, and Human Rights Watch — in order to capture the counter-discourse that surfaced once the tournament had concluded. Articles were chosen for the extent to which they engaged with the controversy surrounding Qatar's hosting, and the corpus mixes hard-news reports, editorials, and opinion pieces.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study combines quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative interpretation. The quantitative side tracks how naming strategies and transitivity-process types are distributed across the thirty articles, which allows the two sub-corpora to be compared statistically; the qualitative side asks how and why these patterns work ideologically. The analysis unfolds in three phases that track the study's three theoretical strands: first, coding the corpus for Jeffries' (2010, 2016) four selected textual-conceptual functions, which addresses the "how"; second, reading the resulting patterns through Van Dijk's (2006, 2009) triangulated model of manipulation, which addresses the "why"; and third, situating the findings within Said's (1978) Orientalism, which addresses the "what."

VI. RESULTS

➤ Naming and Describing

Naming and describing supplied the evaluative vocabulary through which Qatar was repeatedly re-categorized over the course of the corpus: from “wild card” and “untested” bidder in 2010 (The New York Times, September 2010), through “gamble,” “scandal,” and “corruption” in coverage of infrastructure spending and labor conditions at mid-decade (Business Insider, 2014; The Guardian, 2015, 2021), to “scandal-plagued” and “controversial” host in the coverage immediately preceding the tournament (The Guardian, October 2022; NPR, November 2022). Nominalizations such as bidding, promoting, exploitation, scrutiny, and corruption turn up across outlets with enough regularity that negative phenomena can be foregrounded without naming an agent — a move that preserves a surface appearance of journalistic objectivity while keeping criticism at the center of the text. Spatial and cultural qualifiers, too — “in the desert,” “in a Muslim country,” “in a Gulf state,” “first time in the Middle East” — recur often enough across

outlets and genres that they read as a pattern rather than a coincidence, foregrounding Qatar's cultural difference as a precondition for scepticism before any substantive argument has even been made.

Naming in the post-event sub-corpus shifts toward a more qualified register of acknowledgment. “A remarkable thaw” (describing Gulf relations), “an extreme scale” (describing spending), “real spoils,” and “a plethora of political objectives” appear alongside continued negative naming: “disaster,” “nightmare,” “isolated regional outcast,” “a highly irregular U-turn.” Modification remains the dominant naming strategy in both sub-corpora. Qualifiers do most of the work of signaling the writer's evaluative stance, and nominalization continues to background agency in both critical statements and the less frequent commendatory ones.

➤ Representing Actions, Events, and States

Table 1 summarizes the transitivity patterns identified across the fifteen pre-event and fifteen post-event articles.

Table 1 Dominant Transitivity Patterns in the Pre- and Post-Event Sub-Corpora

Process Type	Pre-Event Corpus	Post-Event Corpus
Material	Qatar as an active but reckless builder/spender (constructed, funded, expanded, invested, lobbied FIFA); negative outcomes rendered as unagented events (“a lot of problems would arise”)	Qatar as an active, materially successful builder/host (delivered, hosted, managed, showcased); qualified through relational recontextualization as “controversial” or a “testing ground”
Verbal	Qatar and Qatari officials largely confined to defensive verbiage (denied, defended, refused, justified); Western NGOs, scholars, and officials granted evaluative verbiage (criticized, warned, questioned)	Same asymmetry persists; Western academic and diplomatic voices (e.g., “a verbal slap on the wrist”) retain evaluative authority; Qatari/Arab-media voices increasingly present but often rendered as affective (“felt proud”) rather than judicial
Relational	Qatar identified as “wild card,” “corrupt system,” “conservative society,” “repressive regime”	Qatar identified as “a public relations disaster,” “a magnifying glass” on its human-rights record, alongside “a key player” and “an international hub”
Mental	Western doubt, fear, and suspicion naturalized as a reasonable reaction (doubted, feared, distrusted, anticipated backlash)	Western impression management persists (seen as, may view, seemingly wooed) alongside newly visible Qatari/Arab pride and satisfaction

Material processes were the single most frequent process type in both sub-corpora, but they did different work in each period: in the pre-event corpus they cast Qatar as ambitious yet reckless, while in the post-event corpus they register achievement that is acknowledged, if still qualified. Across both sub-corpora, the verbal and mental processes of judgment — criticizing, doubting, fearing, questioning — stayed with Western institutional actors: NGOs, scholars, officials, journalists. These figures function throughout as the discourse's “Sayers” and “Sensors,” while Qatari agency is rendered through nominalization and passive constructions (“Qatar has brushed aside questions,” rather than a more agentive alternative) that foreground problems ahead of progress.

➤ Prioritizing

Risk-laden material — labor deaths, climate extremes, corruption allegations, restrictions on alcohol and LGBTQ+ expression — was routinely fronted in headlines and opening paragraphs of the pre-event corpus, while context, reform, and Qatari responses were saved for the closing paragraphs, when they appeared at all. Subordination backgrounded information that implicitly disqualified Qatar as a host (“...that has not hosted an Olympics or a World Cup”; “...that soar to 118 degrees”), while fronting brought Western concern to the foreground explicitly (“Qatar has brushed aside questions about its climate and social constraints...”). The same logic persists in the post-event corpus but relocates: human-rights criticism is still fronted (“Same-sex relations are illegal in Qatar and

migrant workers have been ill-treated although...”), while subordination now embeds detail about Qatar’s history and geography that carries an implicitly marginalizing charge (“...whose capital was little more than a sleepy fishing town”).

➤ *Hypothesizing*

Epistemic modals — would, could, may — let the pre-event corpus present Qatari failure as probable rather than merely possible (“A lot of problems would arise”; “Qatar could face a quandary”), while deontic modals framed Qatari cultural practice as an obligation still to be met (“FIFA would require Qatar to allow any Israel delegate”). Evaluative modality delivered outright judgment under cover of forecasting (“they won’t be able to do that”). Hypothesizing persists in the post-event corpus, but its object shifts from the event itself to its legacy: rather than speculating about whether Qatar could host the tournament, post-event modality speculates about whether its achievements will last (“stadiums might become white elephants”) and whether its success deserves trust (“The real spoils may be...”).

➤ *Manipulation: Discourse, Cognition, and Society*

Read through Van Dijk’s (2006, 2009) triangulated model, the patterns above make up the discursive level of an Ideological Square pairing positive Western self-representation — rational, concerned, legitimately authoritative — with negative Qatari other-representation — reckless, culturally restrictive, in need of correction. At the cognitive level, the repetition of this pairing across fifteen pre-event articles from outlets as different as The New York Times, The Guardian, NPR, and Bleacher Report produces a kind of lexical priming: the word “Qatar” comes pre-loaded with associations of migrant-worker deaths, heat, and financial excess, so that later information gets absorbed into an already-sceptical mental model rather than assessed on its own terms. At the social level, this priming draws its legitimacy from an alignment with existing normative hierarchies that treat Western liberal-democratic values as the implicit standard against which Qatar’s legal and cultural choices are measured, with little corresponding attention paid to a framework of cultural relativism.

This manipulative architecture does not dissolve in the post-event corpus; it persists. Once Qatar’s material success became undeniable, the Ideological Square simply relocated. Western coverage held on to the discursive position of rational scrutiny — Qatar’s achievements are real, but “testing,” “questionable” — while Arab-media outlets occupied the position of an interested party whose pride is treated as understandable but less authoritative than Western caution. This is a refinement, not a departure from Van Dijk’s model: one voice keeps the right to evaluate, and the other is permitted only the right to feel.

VII. DISCUSSION

➤ *Research Question 1: Predominant Stylistic Tools*

Naming, transitivity, prioritizing, and hypothesizing did not operate in isolation; they worked as a mutually reinforcing system. Naming supplied the vocabulary of judgment. Transitivity distributed the roles of judge and judged. Prioritizing decided which judgments the reader met first. Hypothesizing let those judgments be delivered as speculation rather than accusation. Taken together, these patterns confirm Jeffries’ (2010, 2016) claim that no single textual-conceptual function works alone, and they show empirically how a coordinated stylistic apparatus — not any one device on its own — produced the “Western lens” this study set out to trace.

➤ *Research Question 2: The Cognitive and Social Construction of Manipulation*

Manipulation operated at the discursive, cognitive, and social levels described above, and these levels fed back into one another. The consistency of this architecture across outlets, and across the thirteen years the corpus spans, suggests that Qatar’s portrayal was not accidental or simply reactive. It looks instead like the product of a sustained interaction between ideologically loaded discourse, a cognitively primed audience, and a social context already stocked with the relevant normative assumptions.

➤ *Research Question 3: Orientalism and Sportswashing*

The pre-event corpus performs almost exactly the function Said (1978) assigns to Orientalist discourse. Qatar is not simply reported on; it is produced — as a “wild card,” an “untested” and “unusual” choice whose fitness to host requires justification in a way that no earlier, Western host’s fitness ever did. Sportswashing works within this corpus as a modern vehicle for that older trope. Framing Qatar’s hosting as “image-cleansing” (Fruh et al., 2023) lets the press attribute a single, totalizing motive to a genuinely varied set of Qatari actions, folding infrastructure investment, labor reform, and cultural diplomacy alike into evidence of the same underlying deception. The frame is, in effect, self-sealing: building a stadium reads as lavish overcompensation; reforming labor law reads as image management timed for a Western audience; and hosting a successful tournament reads as success that is nonetheless “controversial” or “a mixture of success and hypocrisy.” Nothing Qatar could do within the discourse’s own terms would fully discharge the suspicion the discourse itself created.

The transitivity imbalance discussed under Research Question 1 is Orientalism working at the grammatical level. Said’s Orient is a subject spoken about and spoken for rather than one permitted to speak, and the corpus reproduces that arrangement almost literally: Western NGOs, scholars, and officials hold the discourse’s verbal and mental processes of judgment, while Qatari agency keeps being rendered through nominalization and the passive voice. The post-event data complicate any simple story of unbroken Orientalist continuity, however. The post-event corpus’s inclusion of Al Jazeera, The

Peninsula, and Human Rights Watch introduces, for the first time, a counter-discourse that names Qatar's hosting “a symbol of Arab pride” and “a regional milestone.” This fits Said's own later acknowledgment that Orientalism generates its own opposition — that it is a hegemonic system rather than a monolithic one, and has to keep reasserting itself against competing representations rather than simply going unchallenged. Yet what Said calls “flexible positional superiority” lets Western discourse absorb this counter-narrative without giving up its interpretive authority: the Western corpus does not need to deny Qatar's material success in order to stay Orientalist. It only needs to remain the voice that decides what that success means and whether it can be trusted.

➤ *Research Question 4: Pre- and Post-Event Comparison*

Three patterns describe how the two sub-corpora relate to each other. The first is continuity: the Ideological Square persisted essentially unchanged in its underlying logic, with Western institutional voices retaining interpretive authority, Qatari and regional voices remaining comparatively defensive or coded as emotional rather than evaluative, and the same thematic clusters — labor rights, cultural restriction, financial excess — anchoring the negative framing in both datasets, with “sportswashing” supplying a consistent interpretive vocabulary across the full span of the corpus. The second is transformation: the dominant textual-conceptual function moved from anticipatory hypothesizing toward retrospective, evaluative naming and relational processes, tracking the shift from projected risk to acknowledged, if qualified, achievement; hypothesizing did not go away, but its object moved from the event itself to its legacy. The third is expansion: the post-event corpus is structurally more heterogeneous, drawing on regional and Arab-media sources that are entirely absent from the pre-event dataset — the clearest evidence in this study that the post-event media landscape has become a genuinely contested field, one in which Western scepticism and Arab-media pride coexist and compete for interpretive authority, even as the Western contribution to that field keeps its evaluative privilege.

➤ *Theoretical Synthesis*

Said's (1978) central claim is that Orientalism is not merely a set of prejudiced beliefs but a systematic discourse with its own internal rules: it decides what can be said about the Orient, who has the standing to say it, and which kinds of evidence will count. Triangulating Jeffries (2010, 2016) with Van Dijk (2006, 2009), as this study does, supplies exactly the kind of textual evidence that Said's largely literary and historical analysis did not — a corpus-based account of the specific lexical, transitivity, prioritizing, and modal choices through which a contemporary instance of Orientalist discourse gets assembled, sentence by sentence, in a genre that presents itself as a neutral chronicle of athletic events. That neutral self-presentation is exactly what makes the pattern significant once it is exposed. Sportswashing, on this reading, gives Orientalism a vocabulary that feels contemporary and morally serious — concerned with governance and human rights rather than

anything explicitly civilizational — which lets the underlying hierarchy Said describes keep operating under cover of what looks like a progressive critique. This matches what Said calls latent Orientalism: an underlying, fairly stable set of assumptions about the essential difference and inferiority of the Orient that survives even as its manifest vocabulary changes to fit whatever a given era happens to be preoccupied with.

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model explains how this latent structure gets transmitted and naturalized at the level of the individual reader, through the mechanisms of priming and mental-model formation described above. Jeffries' Critical Stylistics explains which textual devices carry out that transmission. Said's Orientalism explains why the resulting mental models take the particular shape they do. The three frameworks turn out to be mutually necessary rather than simply compatible with one another.

➤ *Comparison With Previous Studies*

These findings both confirm and extend earlier work. In line with Dawood's (2023) transitivity analysis of a single Guardian editorial, this study found agency distributed systematically in favor of Western institutional actors, but across a much larger corpus spanning more than a decade, and it extends Dawood's account by showing how naming, prioritizing, and modality work alongside transitivity as a coordinated system rather than a device operating on its own. Stojan's (2023) finding — that Western coverage tends to present national athletes and officials as topics rather than as directly quoted speaking subjects — is corroborated here by the findings on transitivity and prioritizing. Al Kaaby and Al Zubaidy (2023) demonstrated how individual critical-stylistic tools can expose ideological effects in the representation of sporting bodies, while Sorlin (2017) and Ramanathan and Hoon (2015) established the methodological value of triangulation in political and media discourse more broadly; this study brings those two lines of scholarship together for the first time in relation to the 2022 World Cup, and in doing so develops an explicitly Orientalist macro-reading that earlier sports-science accounts of Qatar's pursuit of soft power gesture toward without developing linguistically.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine, through a triangulated framework combining Jeffries' (2010, 2016) Critical Stylistics, Van Dijk's (2006, 2009) theory of manipulation, and Said's (1978) Orientalism, how the Western media lens constructed Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup across thirty pre- and post-event articles. Naming and describing, transitivity, prioritizing, and hypothesizing worked together as an integrated stylistic apparatus that consistently handed agency, evaluative authority, and narrative prominence to Western institutional voices. In Van Dijk's terms, this apparatus operated as a manipulative Ideological Square whose discursive, cognitive, and social dimensions reinforced one another and made scepticism toward Qatar feel like the default, reasonable

interpretive stance. Read through Said's Orientalism, these findings show “sportswashing” functioning as a contemporary, self-sealing vehicle for the historical Orientalist construction of the Middle East as a static and morally suspect Other — a construction that persisted, in adapted form, even after the tournament's material success made it impossible to dismiss Qatar's achievements outright, and one that has begun to meet organized counter-discourse from regional and Arab media without yet losing its interpretive privilege.

This study contributes an empirically grounded, corpus-based demonstration that Said's Orientalism remains linguistically active in a genre not previously subjected to sustained critical-stylistic analysis of this kind; a methodological model for triangulating micro-textual, socio-cognitive, and macro-ideological levels of analysis; and, through its comparative pre-/post-event design, a template for future studies of how an Orientalist media frame adapts over time in response to counter-evidence — one that should apply equally well to other Global South-hosted mega-events.

The study is limited by its purposive sample of thirty articles which, while sufficient for detailed qualitative-quantitative critical-stylistic analysis, cannot claim statistical representativeness of Western sports journalism on Qatar as a whole. The corpus is also restricted to English-language, mostly Anglo-American outlets; the post-event dataset's inclusion of Al Jazeera, The Peninsula, and Human Rights Watch was not mirrored by an equivalent regional sample in the pre-event dataset, which limits how strongly this study can claim to know how the identified counter-discourse evolved over the full period. And because the analysis is qualitative-dominant, coding naming choices, process types, and modal categories necessarily involves interpretive judgment, though the consistency of the patterns across fifteen articles per sub-corpus offers some protection against idiosyncratic interpretation.

Future research could extend this triangulated framework to a larger, more geographically diverse corpus that includes Qatari, Gulf, and wider Global South media across the full pre- and post-event timeline, in order to test whether the post-event counter-discursive pattern identified here is a durable feature of the media landscape or a temporary response to the tournament's immediate aftermath. Comparative studies applying the same three-theory triangulation to coverage of other Global South-hosted mega-events — the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2018 Russia World Cup, or future tournaments in similarly scrutinized host nations — would help establish whether the Orientalist patterns identified here are specific to how Western media construct the Middle East or reflect a broader template applied to non-Western hosts generally. Finally, reception studies that examine how actual readers process these manipulative strategies would extend this study's textual analysis into direct empirical evidence of cognitive uptake.

Ultimately, the coverage of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup was never simply a chronicle of a sporting event. At every level of its linguistic construction, it was a site where an older discourse of civilizational hierarchy renewed itself in a contemporary vocabulary of governance, human rights, and reputational scrutiny. The tools of Critical Stylistics show how; the theory of manipulation shows why; and Said's Orientalism shows what was ultimately at stake — the West's continuing claim to the authority to judge the East, an authority that this study's data suggest was troubled, but not yet dislodged, by Qatar's own voice and by the voices of a region that spoke, with growing confidence, on its behalf.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Al Kaaby, A., & Al Zubaidy, N. (2023). Naming and describing male and female para athletes as social actors: A critical stylistic study of selected English and Arabic Paralympic sports magazines. *Adab Al-Farahidi Journal*.
- [2]. Boykoff, J. (2022). Toward a theory of sportswashing: Mega-events, soft power, and political conflict. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 39(4), 342–351. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2021-0090>
- [3]. Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- [4]. Dawood, N. (2023). The Guardian's diametrical view on Qatar's World Cup: A critical discourse analysis. *Eastern Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literatures*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.53906/EJLL.L.V4I2.168>
- [5]. Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- [6]. Fruh, K., Archer, A., & Wojtowicz, J. (2023). Sportswashing: Complicity and corruption. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 17(1), 101–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2022.2107697>
- [7]. Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech acts* (pp. 41–58). Academic Press.
- [8]. Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). Edward Arnold.
- [9]. Jeffries, L. (2010). *Critical stylistics: The power of English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- [10]. Jeffries, L. (2016). Critical stylistics. In V. Sotirova (Ed.), *The Bloomsbury companion to stylistics* (pp. 157–176). Bloomsbury Academic.
- [11]. Ramanathan, R., & Hoon, T. B. (2015). Application of critical discourse analysis in media discourse studies. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 21(3), 57–68.
- [12]. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- [13]. Sorlin, S. (2017). The pragmatics of manipulation: Exploiting im/politeness theories. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 121, 132–146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.10.002>

- [14]. Stojan, D. (2023). Football players and coaches as social actors: A comparative critical discourse analysis of 2022 FIFA World Cup headlines in *The Times* and *Jutarnji list*.
- [15]. Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, 17(3), 359–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250>
- [16]. Van Dijk, T. A. (2009). *Society and discourse: How social contexts control text and talk*. Cambridge University Press.
- [17]. Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton, & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed., pp. 466–485). Wiley Blackwell.