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Country Image Beyond External Audiences: Evidence from Qatar

Mohammed A. Ibrahim

Faculty of Economics and Management, Yerevan State University, Armenia

Email: ibrahim.saif@ysu.am**Vardan S. Aleksanyan**

Faculty of Economics and Management, Yerevan State University, Armenia

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Abstract

This study investigates how people who reside in Qatar (citizens and residents) perceive the country compared to international audiences the post-FIFA World Cup period. The analysis is informed by Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Index (NBI), which conceptualises national reputation through six dimensions: people, governance, tourism, culture and heritage, investment and immigration, and exports. In addition, the study explores how these perceptions differ across selected demographic characteristics. Data were collected from 174 respondents residing in Qatar and analysed quantitatively. The results highlight three main findings. First, internal stakeholders generally hold very favourable views of Qatar's nation brand, both overall and across all six dimensions, and these evaluations are consistently more positive than those reported by international audiences. The largest perception gaps were observed in the governance, people, and tourism dimensions. Second, despite these differences, a high degree of internal consensus was found, particularly regarding governance and people, suggesting substantial agreement among stakeholders in their

assessments of Qatar's national image. Third, perceptions of the nation brand differed significantly according to age and length of residence. Younger participants tended to evaluate Qatar less positively than older respondents, which may reflect differing expectations concerning economic opportunities and future development. Furthermore, Qatari nationals and individuals born in Qatar reported more favourable perceptions than long-term residents, underscoring the influence of place attachment and a stronger sense of belonging on nation brand evaluations.

Keywords

Nation branding, Qatar, Nation Brand Index, country image, public diplomacy, soft power.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, countries have sought to strengthen their appeal to a variety of reasons, such as tourism, investment, and attracting talent (Dinne, 2015). Nation branding efforts primarily aim to shape a country's image (Ibrahim and Aleksanyan, 2026). The idea of nation branding has been the subject of ongoing discussion and debate for many years, as there is no universally accepted definition. It is interconnected with various fields. Nation branding is the application of marketing communications and branding techniques to countries (Kaur, 2020; Rojas-Méndez, 2013). According to Fan (2010), nation branding refers to the process by which a country's image is created, managed, monitored, and evaluated to enhance its reputation among international audiences. Unlike traditional marketing, nation branding focuses on shaping and managing a nation's overall perception among foreign stakeholders.

The concept of nation branding is closely linked to soft power, which is, in a way, considered one of its tools. Soft power refers to the ability to influence and change perceptions by persuasion and attraction rather than force or coercion (i.e., military) (Nye, 1990). Another linked aspect is public policy, which involves governments, civil society, and institutions engaging directly with international audiences to shape global perceptions and influence foreign policies (Cull, 2008).

The State of Qatar has increasingly deployed soft power strategies, including the hosting of prominent international mega-events such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup,

as part of its broader efforts to enhance its global reputation (Ibrahim & Aleksanyan, 2026; Ibrahim, 2026; Mohib & Carroll, 2024). While this body of work has largely focused on outward-facing nation branding initiatives, the present study shifts attention inward by applying Anholt's Nation Brand Index which conceptualizes nation branding through six dimensions: people, governance, tourism, culture and heritage, exports, and investment and immigration (Anholt, 2007; Ibrahim & Aleksanyan, 2026).

Existing research on Qatar's nation brand has predominantly concentrated on international perceptions, often overlooking the views of internal stakeholders such as citizens and long-term residents. Limited attention has been given to how these internal evaluations may differ across generational cohorts and what such variation might reveal about domestic consensus or divergence in nation brand perceptions. This study addresses this gap by examining internal stakeholder perspectives and exploring the role of age-based differences in shaping evaluations of Qatar's nation brand.

Research Questions:

1. How is Qatar's nation brand evaluated by internal stakeholders across the six dimensions of the Nation Brand Index compared to international audiences?
2. To what extent is there consensus among internal stakeholders regarding Qatar's nation brand across the six dimensions?
3. To what extent do nation brand perceptions differ across demographic groups in Qatar, and what implications do these differences have for future nation-branding efforts?

In the following sections, you will find answers to all the research questions through this quantitative empirical study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nation Branding

The concept of nation branding originated from place branding, which involved the application of marketing principles to geographic locations and initially emerged from tourism promotion and destination marketing (Kotler et al., 1993). The term nation branding was introduced by Anholt in 1996 and has subsequently developed into a distinct academic field (Kaneva, 2011).

While there is no universally agreed definition of nation branding, it is generally understood as the strategic management of a country's image and reputation. Nations, similar to products and organisations, operate in a competitive global environment and can strengthen their position through deliberate branding, image construction, and coordinated communication strategies (Kotler et al., 1993; Fan, 2010). Anholt (2007) conceptualizes a nation brand as the overall reputation of a country, influenced by perceptions of its governance, culture, people, tourism, and exports. Likewise, Dinnie (2008) characterizes nation branding as a multidimensional concept encompassing functional, emotional, and symbolic attributes that differentiate a nation in the international arena.

Nation branding is widely understood as a strategic tool that contributes to a country's soft power by enhancing its attractiveness and influence through favourable perceptions rather than coercion (Nye, 2004). It is closely linked to public diplomacy, as both seek to engage international audiences, cultivate trust, and enhance a nation's reputation. However, whereas public diplomacy is generally understood as a government-driven communication effort designed to support foreign policy goals, nation branding represents a broader process of reputation formation influenced by a variety of stakeholders and national experiences (Szondi, 2008). As a result, maintaining alignment between branding and communication activities is essential for developing a consistent and positive nation brand.

Internal Perspectives in Nation Branding

Nation branding primarily involves managing a country's reputation among international audiences and has consequently been evaluated predominantly through external perceptions (Anholt, 2007). While the significance of internal stakeholders has been acknowledged (Dinnie, 2015), empirical research in nation branding remains focused on external evaluations. Nevertheless, internal stakeholders, especially residents and citizens, are instrumental in shaping and sustaining national brand narratives. Balmer and Greyser (2002) suggest that external reputation is rooted in internal identity and consistency, while Cull (2008) emphasizes that national narratives are unlikely to be perceived as credible without internal support.

Internal stakeholders play an important role in nation branding through their daily experiences, cultural activities, and interactions with public and private institutions. As noted by Andreja (2018), nation branding is a collective process that involves a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, businesses, cultural institutions, media organizations, and citizens. The Nation Brand Molecule framework suggests that these experiences influence brand associations across various dimensions of the nation brand (Rojas-Méndez, 2013). Perceptions of citizens and residents shape place identity, a core element of a nation's brand and overall reputation (Govers & Go, 2009).

Alignment between internal and external perceptions is critical for establishing a strong nation brand. Branding initiatives that disregard internal stakeholders risk generating narratives that lack legitimacy and authenticity (Aronczyk, 2013). In addition, research indicates that inconsistencies between internal beliefs and externally communicated messages can undermine trust and diminish brand effectiveness (Balmer, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Despite these findings, internal stakeholder perceptions remain insufficiently examined in nation branding research, especially in comparative studies of internal and external evaluations and in rapidly developing regions such as the GCC countries.

Assessing Nation Brand Perceptions

Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Index (NBI) provides a systematic framework for evaluating nation brand perceptions. This framework is just a way to illustrate the six key dimensions of multidimensional nation branding: exports, governance, tourism, investment and immigration, people, culture, and heritage (Anholt, 2007). By capturing multiple aspects of national reputation, this approach enables a more comprehensive assessment of a country's image and has contributed to the NBI's extensive use in nation-branding research.

In this study, the NBI is employed as a diagnostic tool rather than to test Anholt's theoretical assumptions. The framework facilitates comparison between internal stakeholders' perceptions and international audiences' evaluations, enabling identification of areas of convergence and divergence. Employing a standardized measurement tool further enhances the comparability and interpretability of the findings. Due to its widespread application, the NBI has been criticized for oversimplifying national identity and relying heavily on perception-based

measures (Kaneva, 2011; Aronczyk, 2013). Critics argue that it may overlook contextual, political, and experiential factors that shape national reputation, while placing greater emphasis on external audiences than internal stakeholders. Recent research, therefore, views nation branding as a dynamic, multi-stakeholder process shaped by identity, experience, and interaction over time (Kaneva, 2011; Kusraeva, 2024). These perspectives highlight the importance of complementing established frameworks, such as the nation brand index, with approaches that capture internal stakeholder perceptions and contextual variation.

Demographic Differences and Internal Nation Brand Perceptions

While nation branding research has traditionally emphasized aggregate perceptions of countries, evaluations of nation brands can differ across demographic groups. Age has been recognized as an important factor shaping attitudes, expectations, and assessments of social and economic environments. Recent studies indicate that Generation Z, defined as individuals born in the mid-1990s and later, differs from previous generations in online connectivity, access to global information, and awareness of international opportunities (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Consequently, younger individuals may assess countries from a more comparative and globally informed perspective, prioritizing factors such as career opportunities, economic prospects, quality of life, and future development. Studies of Generation Z suggest that this cohort is highly aware of social, environmental, and ethical issues and is strongly influenced by digital media and online information sources (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022). Such characteristics may contribute to the development of more demanding expectations and more critical evaluations of social and economic environments. Despite the increasing significance of younger generations, limited nation branding research has examined whether perceptions of a country's image vary across age groups.

Place attachment is another factor that may influence nation brand perceptions. Place attachment refers to the emotional, cognitive, and social bonds individuals develop with specific places through lived experience and personal connection (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Individuals with stronger attachment to a place often exhibit more favorable attitudes and a greater sense of identification with its achievements and characteristics (Lewicka, 2011). In the context of nation branding, citizens and individuals born or raised in a country may therefore

evaluate the nation more positively than residents with weaker emotional ties or shorter-term connections. Examining both demographic differences and residency-related attachment may provide a deeper understanding of how internal stakeholder perceptions of nation brands are formed and maintained.

Qatar as a Case Study

Qatar has increasingly utilized soft power strategies to enhance its global reputation, with major sporting events—particularly the FIFA World Cup—playing a key role in this process. Recent research identifies the tournament as a turning point in Qatar’s nation-branding, with issues such as modernity, international engagement, national ambition, and political legitimacy becoming more prominent in its aftermath (Badran, 2025). Scholars have also examined the country’s broader soft power instruments, including cultural diplomacy, international broadcasting, and strategic communication.

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined how global media outlets contribute to the construction and dissemination of international perceptions of Qatar, particularly in the post-World Cup period (Brannagan & Reiche, 2023; Dubinsky, 2024). Many of these studies has concentrated on how Qatar is represented in international media and how foreign audiences respond, assessing whether perceptions have shifted following the World Cup and what long-term reputational effects may exist. At the same time, there has been growing interest in post-World Cup tourism development, particularly in relation to destination branding, infrastructure expansion, and Qatar National Vision 2030’s role in supporting the country’s sustained global positioning (Ibrahim, 2026; Mahboob & Faisal, 2025).

However, most studies continue to prioritize international perspectives. Limited attention has been given to internal viewpoints, particularly how individuals within Qatar perceive the nation’s brand and how these perceptions compare with external assessments. This gap is addressed in the present study.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Instrument and Development

A standardized self-administered questionnaire was used to evaluate perceptions of Qatar across six dimensions of the nation brand: governance, culture, people,

tourism, exports, and investment and immigration (Anholt, 2007). Each dimension was assessed with three items, yielding a total of 18. Responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In alignment with previous research, the findings were compared with contemporary perceptions of international audiences (Ibrahim & Aleksanyan, 2026).

Initially the survey was developed in English, then translated to Arabic by a professional translator and subsequently back translated to confirm accuracy and conceptual consistency between the two versions (Brislin, 1970). Before the main survey was carried out, the questionnaire was pretested with a small group of 10 individuals identifying potential issues related to item wording, comprehension, and overall usability. Feedback obtained during this process informed minor revisions to several questions, improving their clarity and reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation. Conducting a pilot test is an established practice in survey research and contributes to the development of more valid and reliable measurement instruments (Reynolds et al., 1993).

Data Collection

Data collection occurred between January and February 2026 using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. Conducting the survey in the post-FIFA World Cup period allowed for the assessment of relatively stable perceptions following the event. For comparative purposes, the findings were aligned with international benchmark data reported by Ibrahim and Aleksanyan (2026). Although the datasets were collected at different times, both represent post-World Cup evaluations and thus offer a suitable basis for examining differences in internal and external audiences' perceptions.

In the beginning the questionnaire was shared through the researchers' networks and subsequently circulated through online communication channels to encourage wider participation. Participants were also encouraged to share the survey with others, thereby increasing its reach and facilitating the recruitment of additional respondents. This approach combined convenience and snowball sampling techniques, enabling the survey to be disseminated through respondents' social and professional networks.

To ensure respondent relevance, participants were required to confirm current residency in Qatar and to have resided in the country for at least five years. This criterion was adopted because longer-term residents are likely to possess greater familiarity with the place and develop more accurate and informed perceptions based on their lived experiences and attachment to the national environment (Stylidis et al., 2017).

Data Cleaning and Analysis

The online survey distributed via Google Forms generated a total of 193 responses. These were subjected to a screening process to ensure suitability for analysis. 19 responses were excluded at this stage due to eligibility and completion issues. Specifically, 14 respondents had resided in Qatar for less than five years, which did not meet the study's inclusion criteria, while a further 5 questionnaires were not fully completed. After removing these cases, the final dataset consisted of 174 valid responses, representing 90.2% of the original submissions. The final data set was further analyzed using SPSS version 27, an overview of the screening and exclusion procedure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Screening and Final Valid Responses

Category	Frequency	Proportion
Number of responses received	193	100%
Ineligible: Residence < 5 years	14	7.3%
Ineligible: Do not reside in Qatar	5	2.6%
Ineligible responses	19	9.8%
Final analytical sample	174	90.2%

RESULTS

RQ1: How is Qatar's nation brand evaluated by internal stakeholders across the six dimensions of the Nation Brand Index compared to international audiences?

Generally, citizens and resident expressed positive evaluations on all dimensions, and the overall high composite as well ($M = 4.40$). Governance recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.68$), followed by People ($M = 4.62$) and Tourism ($M = 4.51$), while Culture and Heritage also received favourable ratings ($M = 4.36$). In

comparison, Exports ($M = 4.15$) and Investment and Immigration ($M = 4.11$) were rated relatively lower.

Table 2: Internal Stakeholder Perceptions of Qatar

Dimension	Internal Mean	SD
Exports	4.15	0.80
Governance	4.68	0.49
Culture & Heritage	4.36	0.54
Investment and Immigration	4.11	0.74
People	4.62	0.44
Tourism	4.51	0.57
Total	4.40	0.41

Or, in a slightly more academic style: To assess the degree of convergence between domestic and international evaluations of Qatar's nation brand, the mean scores reported by residents and citizens in the present study were compared with international Nation Brand Index assessments reported by Ibrahim and Aleksanyan (2026). The one-sample t-test results revealed significant differences across all six nation-brand dimensions, with internal stakeholders consistently assigning higher ratings than external audiences ($p < .001$). The largest gaps were found in the dimensions of Governance, Tourism, and People, indicating particularly strong domestic confidence in Qatar's performance and image in these areas relative to international perceptions. Significant, though comparatively smaller, differences were also observed for Culture & Heritage, Exports, and Investment & Immigration. Taken together, these findings suggest a clear divergence between internal and external evaluations of Qatar's nation brand, with residents expressing substantially more positive assessments across every dimension of the Nation Brand Index.

Table 3: Differences Between Internal and International Nation Brand Perceptions of Qatar

Dimension	Internal Mean	International Mean	Mean Difference	t	p
Exports	4.15	3.41	0.74	12.15	<.001
Governance	4.68	3.35	1.33	35.77	<.001
Culture and Heritage	4.36	3.66	0.70	16.95	<.001

Investment & Immigration	4.11	3.46	0.65	11.48	<.001
People	4.62	3.51	1.11	33.56	<.001
Tourism	4.51	3.37	1.14	26.33	<.001

RQ2: *To what extent is there consensus among internal stakeholders regarding Qatar's nation brand across the six dimensions?*

The degree of internal consensus was examined using measures of central tendency and dispersion (Table 4). Overall, respondents exhibited a strong level of agreement in their assessments of Qatar's nation brand. The highest levels of consensus were found for Governance ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.49$, $IQR = 0.67$) and People ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.44$, $IQR = 0.67$), reflecting consistently positive evaluations among respondents.

While respondents expressed positive views across all dimensions of the Nation Brand Index, the degree of consistency varied. Assessments of Tourism ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.57$) and Culture and Heritage ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.54$) were characterized by relatively limited dispersion, reflecting a high level of agreement among participants. Conversely, evaluations of Exports ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.80$) and Investment and Immigration ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.74$) were more varied, indicating less consensus regarding these aspects of Qatar's nation brand.

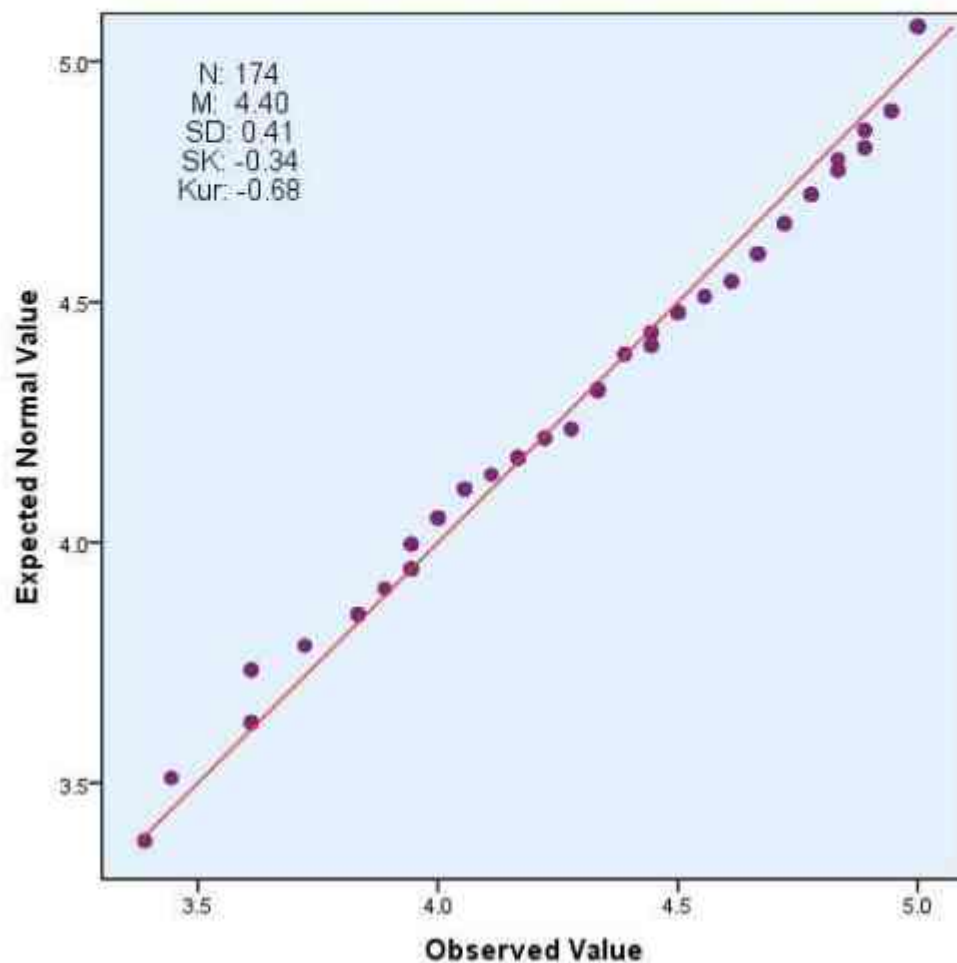
Overall, the composite nation brand score indicated strong agreement among respondents ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.41$, $IQR = 0.67$), reflecting a generally consistent internal evaluation of Qatar's nation brand. Before performing parametric group comparisons, the distributional properties of the six composite dimensions were assessed visually using Q-Q plots to evaluate normality assumptions (Figure 1).

Table 4: Level of Internal Consensus Across the Dimensions of Qatar's Nation Brand

Dimensions	Descriptive Statistics	Statistic	Std. Error
Exports	Mean	4.15	0.06
	Median	4.00	
	Std. Deviation	0.80	
	Interquartile Range	0.67	
Governance	Mean	4.68	0.04
	Median	5.00	

Culture	Std. Deviation	0.49	0.04
	Interquartile Range	0.67	
	Mean	4.36	
	Median	4.33	
	Std. Deviation	0.54	
People	Interquartile Range	1.00	0.03
	Mean	4.62	
	Median	4.67	
	Std. Deviation	0.44	
	Interquartile Range	0.67	
Tourism	Mean	4.52	0.05
	Median	4.67	
	Std. Deviation	0.57	
	Interquartile Range	1.00	
	Mean	4.11	
Investment	Median	4.00	0.06
	Std. Deviation	0.74	
	Interquartile Range	1.00	
	Mean	4.40	
	Median	4.44	
Overall Nation Brand Perception	Std. Deviation	0.41	0.03
	Interquartile Range	0.67	
	Mean	4.40	

Figure 1: Q-Q Plot of the Study



RQ3: *To what extent do nation brand perceptions differ across demographic groups in Qatar, and what implications do these differences have for future nation-branding efforts?*

To explore whether perceptions varied among different segments of the population, respondents were grouped according to their length of residence in Qatar, age, employment status, gender, and nationality. The results showed that nation brand evaluations differed significantly according to length of residence, age, occupation, and nationality. However, no statistically significant differences were found between male and female respondents, indicating broadly similar overall assessments of Qatar's nation brand across genders (Table 5). However, occupation and nationality were not examined further because several categories contained very small numbers of respondents, limiting the reliability of subgroup comparisons. Consequently, the analysis focused on age and length of residence,

which provided sufficiently large and balanced groups for meaningful interpretation.

Age emerged as the strongest source of variation ($F = 5.46, p < .001$), followed by length of residence ($F = 4.79, p < .001$). Younger respondents aged below the age of 25 reported the lowest overall nation brand evaluations with median 4.02. Whereas respondents aged 55 and above reported the highest ($M = 4.62$). Similarly, respondents born in Qatar reported more favourable perceptions than residents who had lived in Qatar for longer periods. These findings suggest that although internal perceptions of Qatar's nation brand are generally positive, meaningful differences exist across demographic groups, particularly with respect to age and length of residence. The results highlight the importance of considering generational and residency-related perspectives in future nation-branding and public diplomacy initiatives.

Table 5: Summary of Demographic Differences in Overall Nation Brand Perceptions

Demographic Variable	Test Statistic	p-value	Significant Difference?
Length of Residence	$F = 4.79$	$< .001$	Yes
Age	$F = 5.46$	$< .001$	Yes
Occupation*	$F = 2.21$	.04	Yes
Nationality*	$F = 2.00$	.02	Yes
Gender	$t = 0.02$	.89	No

Nation Brand Perceptions by Residency Status

Table 6 presents the results of the analysis across residency groups. Significant differences emerged for the overall nation brand score ($F = 4.79, p < .001$), indicating that evaluations of Qatar's nation brand varied according to respondents' residency background. Among the individual dimensions, the strongest differences were observed for Exports ($F = 9.63, p < .001$) and Investment and Immigration ($F = 6.57, p < .001$), while Governance, People, and Culture and Heritage also showed statistically significant variation between groups. By contrast, Tourism was the only dimension for which perceptions remained largely consistent across respondents, with no significant differences detected.

Table 6: Nation Brand Perceptions by Residency Status

Dimension	Duration of Residence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Exports	Qatar Citizen	46	3.72	1.06	9.63	0.00
	Qatar-Born	55	4.50	0.45		
	5–9 Years of Residence in Qatar	19	4.35	0.38		
	10+ Years of Residence in Qatar	54	4.07	0.75		
Governance	Qatari citizen	46	4.84	0.32	5.63	0.00
	Qatar-born	55	4.78	0.33		
	5–9 Years of Residence in Qatar	19	4.53	0.64		
	10+ Years of Residence in Qatar	54	4.51	0.62		
Culture	Qatari citizen	46	4.37	0.56	3.60	0.01
	Qatar-Born	55	4.53	0.51		
	5–9 Years of Residence in Qatar	19	4.18	0.50		
	10+ Years of Residence in Qatar	54	4.23	0.53		
People	Qatari citizen	46	4.82	0.43	4.95	0.00
	Qatar-Born	55	4.59	0.37		
	5–9 Years of Residence in Qatar	19	4.53	0.51		
	10+ Years of Residence in Qatar	54	4.51	0.43		
Tourism	Qatari citizen	46	4.59	0.54	2.01	0.11
	Qatar-Born	55	4.61	0.58		
	5–9 Years of Residence in Qatar	19	4.37	0.63		
	10+ Years of Residence in Qatar	54	4.40	0.55		
Investment	Qatari citizen	46	4.44	0.47	6.57	0.00
	Qatar-Born	55	4.16	0.87		
	5–9 Years of Residence in Qatar	19	3.93	0.53		
	10+ Years of Residence in Qatar	54	3.83	0.75		
Overall	Qatari citizen	46	4.46	0.44	4.79	0.00
	Qatar-Born	55	4.53	0.41		
	5–9 Years of Residence in Qatar	19	4.31	0.36		
	10+ Years of Residence in Qatar	54	4.26	0.36		

Differences in Nation Brand Perceptions by Age Group

As shown in Table 7, age was significantly associated with overall nation brand perceptions ($F = 5.46$, $p < .001$). Significant differences were also found across several dimensions, including Culture and Heritage, People, Tourism, and Investment and Immigration, whereas perceptions of Exports and Governance remained relatively consistent across age groups. Overall, younger respondents (18–24 years) reported the least favorable evaluations of Qatar's nation brand ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.31$) especially with those economic dimensions like Immigration and

Investment and Tourism, while more positive assessments were generally observed among older participants.

Table 7: Differences in Nation Brand Perceptions by Age Group

Dimensions	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Exports	18-24	16	4.15	0.17	1.16	0.33
	25-34	80	4.21	0.84		
	35-44	68	4.08	0.85		
	45-54	3	3.33	0.00		
	55+	7	4.38	0.68		
Governance	18-24	16	4.54	0.51	1.79	0.13
	25-34	80	4.76	0.41		
	35-44	68	4.62	0.57		
	45-54	3	4.33	0.00		
	55+	7	4.86	0.38		
Culture	18-24	16	3.90	0.23	6.66	0.00
	25-34	80	4.42	0.58		
	35-44	68	4.37	0.48		
	45-54	3	3.67	0.00		
	55+	7	4.86	0.38		
People	18-24	16	4.23	0.38	5.00	0.00
	25-34	80	4.73	0.45		
	35-44	68	4.59	0.39		
	45-54	3	4.67	0.00		
	55+	7	4.57	0.50		
Tourism	18-24	16	3.96	0.62	4.85	0.00
	25-34	80	4.56	0.61		
	35-44	68	4.56	0.47		
	45-54	3	4.33	0.00		
	55+	7	4.76	0.37		
Investment & Immigration	18-24	16	3.38	0.91	4.83	0.00
	25-34	80	4.15	0.63		
	35-44	68	4.22	0.75		
	45-54	3	4.00	0.00		
	55+	7	4.29	0.80		
Overall	18-24	16	4.02	0.31	5.46	0.00
	25-34	80	4.47	0.43		
	35-44	68	4.41	0.35		
	45-54	3	4.06	0.00		
	55+	7	4.62	0.46		

Demographic Variations in Nation Brand Perceptions

To identify demographic sources of variation in internal nation brand perceptions, overall nation brand scores were compared across respondents' length of residence in Qatar, age, occupation, nationality, and gender (Table 8). Significant differences were observed for length of residence, age, occupation, and nationality, whereas gender was not associated with differences in overall nation brand evaluations. Because several occupation and nationality categories contained very small subgroup sizes, limiting the reliability and representativeness of comparisons, these outcomes are reported only as supplementary evidence. The discussion, therefore, focuses on age and length of residence, which represent the most robust and substantively meaningful sources of variation in the sample.

As presented in Table 8, age was associated with the greatest variation in overall nation brand perceptions ($F = 5.46, p < .001$), followed by length of residence in Qatar ($F = 4.79, p < .001$). The youngest age group (18–24 years) reported the lowest overall evaluation of Qatar's nation brand ($M = 4.02$), whereas respondents aged 55 years and above reported the highest evaluation ($M = 4.62$). In addition, individuals born in Qatar and Qatari nationals tended to provide more favorable assessments than long-term residents and non-Qatari respondents. These findings suggest that both generational and residency-related characteristics play an important role in shaping internal perceptions of Qatar's nation brand.

Table 8: Overall Differences in Nation Brand Perceptions Across Demographic Groups

Demographics		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	Sig.
Connection to Qatar Based on Residence	Qatari citizen	46	4.46	0.44	4.79	0.00
	Qatar-Born	55	4.53	0.41		
	5–9 Years of Residence in Qatar	19	4.31	0.36		
	10+ Years of Residence in Qatar	54	4.26	0.36		
Age	18–24	16	4.02	0.31	5.46	0.00
	25–34	80	4.47	0.43		
	35–44	68	4.41	0.35		
	45–54	3	4.06	0.00		
	55+	7	4.62	0.46		
Occupation	Academic	13	4.41	0.34	2.21	0.04
	Entrepreneur	5	4.78	0.12		
	Government Employee	47	4.32	0.40		
	Housewife	32	4.44	0.46		

	Private Sector Employee	45	4.41	0.34		
	Retired	3	5.00	0.00		
	Student	29	4.36	0.49		
Nationality	No country	8	4.35	0.41	2	0.02
	American	1	4.94			
	British	4	4.24	0.42		
	Egyptian	9	4.08	0.36		
	Indian	2	4.58	0.59		
	Iranian	4	4.78	-		
	Iraqi	2	4.83	-		
	Italian	2	4.44	-		
	Jordanian	17	4.35	0.35		
	Moroccan	1	4			
	Pakistani	3	4.44	-		
	Palestine	13	4.69	0.32		
	Qatari	50	4.45	0.41		
	Sudanese	10	4.13	0.34		
	Syrian	13	4.29	0.44		
	Yemeni	35	4.4	0.45		
Gender	Male	77	4.29	0.41	0.02	0.89
	Female	97	4.50	0.40		

DISCUSSION

RQ1: Internal Stakeholder Perceptions and the Internal–External Perception Gap

The primary aim of this study was to examine internal stakeholders' perceptions of Qatar's nation brand and compare these evaluations with those of international audiences. The findings indicate that internal stakeholders hold consistently positive views across all six dimensions of the Nation Brand Index. Governance, People, and Tourism received the highest evaluations, whereas Exports and Investment and Immigration received comparatively lower, yet still favorable, ratings. These results suggest that citizens and residents generally view Qatar's nation brand positively and perceive strong performance across both institutional and societal dimensions. The findings support existing literature emphasizing the importance of internal stakeholder experiences in nation branding, as a nation's reputation is shaped not only by external communication but also by internal validation and lived experiences (Anholt, 2007; Govers & Go, 2009).

A comparison between internal and international evaluations revealed significant differences across all six dimensions. Internal stakeholders consistently rated Qatar

more favorably than international audiences, with the largest disparities observed in Governance, Tourism, and People. These findings suggest that some of Qatar's strongest attributes, as experienced by citizens and residents, are not fully reflected in external perceptions. Rather than indicating overly positive domestic evaluations, the results point to a gap between internal experiences and external assessments of the country. Previous nation-branding research similarly argues that inconsistencies between internal identity and external image can present challenges for reputation management and international positioning efforts (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Dinnie, 2015).

One explanation for this divergence is that internal and external audiences rely on different sources when forming their evaluations. Internal stakeholders base their assessments on direct experiences with institutions, services, infrastructure, and daily social interactions. In contrast, international audiences are more likely to rely on media representations, public diplomacy, and other indirect sources of information. Prior research demonstrates that mediated narratives significantly influence international perceptions of countries (Cull, 2008; Szondi, 2008). Although the present study did not directly examine these mechanisms, the findings indicate that Qatar's nation branding challenge involves not only sustaining positive domestic perceptions but also effectively communicating and gaining international recognition for these experiences that are experienced inside the country.

RQ2: Agreement Among Internal Stakeholders in Evaluations of Qatar's Nation Brand

The second objective was to evaluate the extent of shared perceptions among internal stakeholders regarding Qatar's nation brand. The findings indicate a high degree of internal agreement, with respondents consistently providing positive evaluations across all six Nation Brand Index dimensions. This suggests that perceptions of Qatar's nation brand are broadly aligned among residents and citizens. Such alignment is significant, as internal stakeholder consensus is often considered essential for establishing a credible and sustainable nation brand (Dinnie, 2015). An external image is more likely to be regarded as authentic when it reflects experiences and perceptions widely shared by the population inside the country.

However, the degree of consensus varied across dimensions. Governance and People elicited the highest levels of agreement among respondents, indicating stable perceptions of institutional performance and the characteristics of Qatar's population. In contrast, the economic dimensions of Exports and Investment and Immigration exhibited greater variability. This is unsurprising, as perceptions of economic opportunities and performance are more likely to be shaped by individuals' personal experiences, employment situations, and future expectations, resulting in less uniform evaluations across respondents.

These findings add to the literature that conceptualizes nation brands as dynamic and multidimensional constructs rather than static reputational assets (Kaneva, 2011; Kusraeva, 2024). Although aggregate scores indicate a strong positive internal nation brand, variation across dimensions suggests that internal stakeholders may attribute different meanings or experiences to specific aspects of the country's image. Therefore, understanding internal consensus necessitates examining individual dimensions, as different facets of the nation brand may elicit varying degrees of agreement among stakeholder groups.

RQ3: Demographic Differences in Nation Brand Perceptions

The third research question investigated whether perceptions of the nation's brand differ across demographic groups and considered the implications of these differences for future nation-branding strategies. The results demonstrated significant variation by age and length of residence, whereas gender was not associated with differences in overall nation brand evaluations. Although statistically significant differences were also observed for occupation and nationality, the small sample sizes in several categories limited the reliability and representativeness of these subgroup comparisons. Therefore, the most robust and interpretable findings pertain to age and residency status.

Age represented the most significant source of variation in the study. Respondents aged 18–24 consistently provided lower evaluations across multiple dimensions of Qatar's nation brand, including culture and heritage, people, tourism, and investment and immigration. In contrast, respondents aged 55 and above reported the most favorable evaluations. These results indicate that internal stakeholder perceptions are heterogeneous and that generational differences substantially influence nation brand assessments. Younger respondents (18-24) belong to

Generation Z, a cohort characterized by extensive digital connectivity, high exposure to global media, and a propensity to compare national performance with international standards and opportunities (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Djafarova & Fouts, 2022). Consequently, younger stakeholders may apply more rigorous evaluation criteria and adopt more critical perspectives when assessing national performance.

The evaluations among younger respondents may also be attributed to their life stage. Unlike older cohorts, many young adults are entering a highly competitive economic environment and are particularly concerned with employment opportunities, affordable living, and future prospects. As a result, dimensions related to economic opportunity, investment, and future development are likely to be assessed through the lens of personal aspirations and expectations (especially in factors that touch on economic aspects). In contrast, older respondents, including those nearing or in retirement, may evaluate the country based on accumulated life experiences, long-term stability, and satisfaction with institutional performance rather than concerns about future economic uncertainty. The higher evaluations among older respondents may thus reflect both stronger place attachment and distinct priorities when assessing the nation.

Length of residence also affected perceptions of Qatar's nation brand. Respondents born in Qatar and Qatari nationals generally provided more favorable evaluations than other residents 5 years and above. This result aligns with theories of place attachment and identity, which propose that emotional connection, familiarity, and a sense of belonging positively influence perceptions of place (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Individuals with stronger personal ties to the country are more likely to identify with national achievements and to evaluate the nation more positively than those with primarily residential or professional ties.

Strategic Implications

These findings indicate that internal stakeholder perceptions are shaped by both demographic and experiential factors. Respondents reported highly favorable evaluations of Qatar's nation brand, important differences exist between generations and residency groups. For policymakers and nation-branding practitioners, these results highlight the importance of recognizing that internal audiences are not a homogeneous population. Future nation-branding and public

diplomacy initiatives should therefore pay particular attention to younger stakeholders, whose expectations regarding economic opportunity, career development, and future prospects may differ substantially from those of older generations. Addressing these concerns may not only strengthen internal alignment but also contribute to the long-term sustainability and credibility of Qatar's nation brand.

Another important point regarding the significant gap identified between internal and international perceptions suggests that nation-branding efforts should focus not only on strengthening domestic engagement but also on improving the translation of internal realities into internationally recognized narratives. Greater alignment between internal experiences and external perceptions can be achieved through more transparent communication, strategic international collaborations, cultural diplomacy initiatives, and engagement with global media and digital influencers who shape international opinion.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the use of convenience and snowball sampling restricts the representativeness of the sample and limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Qatar. In addition, the online distribution of the survey may have led to an overrepresentation of respondents with higher levels of digital connectivity.

Second, certain demographic categories, particularly occupation and nationality, included very small subgroup sizes. Although significant differences were observed, these results were treated with caution and not explored in depth, as the imbalance in group sizes limits the robustness of comparisons. Future research should aim to use more balanced samples or larger datasets to enable more reliable subgroup analysis across a wider range of demographic categories.

Third, the study's cross-sectional design and dependence on self-reported survey data collected at a single point in time limit its ability to capture changes in perceptions over time and may be subject to response-related biases. Future research could employ longitudinal approaches to investigate how perceptions of Qatar's nation brand develop and change in the years following the FIFA World Cup and throughout the implementation of broader nation-branding initiatives.

Future research could also further explore demographic differences in greater depth, particularly focusing on younger cohorts such as Generation Z, whose perceptions appear more critical and economically oriented. In addition, comparative studies across different stakeholder groups, including more systematic international samples, would help strengthen understanding of how internal and external perceptions diverge and how these gaps can be narrowed over time.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that internal stakeholders possess highly positive perceptions of Qatar's nation brand across all six Nation Brand Index dimensions. The findings indicate a significant gap between internal and external perceptions, with internal audiences consistently evaluating Qatar more favorably than international audiences. Although a strong internal consensus was identified, notable differences were observed across demographic groups, particularly in relation to age and length of residence. These results underscore the necessity of incorporating internal stakeholder perspectives into nation-branding research and practice. For Qatar, aligning domestic experiences with external narratives may strengthen the credibility, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability of its nation-branding and public diplomacy initiatives.

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