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Internal–International Alignment of Qatar's Nation Brand Perceptions

Mohammed A. S. Ibrahim[1*], **Vardan Aleksanyan**[2]

[1,2]Department of Management and Business, Faculty of Economics and Management, Yerevan State University, Yerevan, Armenia.

Abstract. This paper examines the extent to which internal stakeholders' perceptions of Qatar's nation brand align with international perceptions in the post–FIFA World Cup context. Drawing on Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Index, the study evaluates Qatar across governance, people, tourism, culture and heritage, exports, and investment and immigration, and whether these evaluations are shared consistently across internal groups. The results show three core patterns. First, internal stakeholders express uniformly positive assessments of Qatar's nation brand, with particularly strong confidence in governance and the social environment. Second, internal consensus is uneven: while societal and institutional dimensions are broadly shared, perceptions of economic competitiveness and opportunity show greater differentiation across demographic groups, especially by age and residence history. Third, internal evaluations are consistently more favourable than international perceptions across all aspects, indicating a systematic internal–external perception gap rather than isolated misalignments. This difference points to a reputational asymmetry in which domestic experience is not fully reflected in external evaluation. The study determines that effective nation branding and public diplomacy depend on converting internal strengths into internationally credible narratives grounded in lived experience and stakeholder validation.

Keywords: Nation Brand Index (NBI), Nation Brand, Perceptions, Qatar, Soft Power.

1. INTRODUCTION

Countries have long competed to present themselves as appealing destinations for tourism, investment, talent, and international recognition in today's global, competitive world (Dinnie, 2024). Recent research on nation branding shows that a country's image is a valuable asset. It shapes how the world views the country and influences decisions made by stakeholders across economic, social, and cultural areas (Kaneva & Popescu, 2014). The reason for a country's nation branding always depends on its overall goals, whether it's tourism, attracting investment, attracting talent, or a combination of these.

Public diplomacy refers to a government's intentional effort to interact directly with foreign publics instead of only with foreign governments to build understanding, trust, and influence in support of national policies and interests (Cull, 2008). This form of engagement complements nation branding by emphasising reputation management, dialogue, and soft power as tools through which states shape international perceptions beyond traditional diplomatic pathways (Nye, 2004).

The definition of a nation brand has been the matter of ongoing debate for several decades, as no universally accepted definition has yet been established. Broadly, nation branding refers to applying branding and marketing communication strategies to promote a country's image (Kaur, 2020; Rojas-Méndez, 2013). A nation brand involves using national-level marketing strategies to position a country's image and reputation as valuable assets (Kotler et al., 1993). In this context, countries employ branding tools commonly utilised in commercial marketing to influence and change perceptions among both domestic and international audiences.

The State of Qatar, one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, has actively utilised nation branding as a form of soft power, particularly through mega-sporting events and tourism-led initiatives (El-Dabt et al., 2025; Ibrahim & Aleksanyan, 2026; Ibrahim, 2026; Mohib & Carroll, 2022). Existing research has largely focused on international perceptions of Qatar's nation brand, especially in relation to the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

This study builds on our previous research examining international perceptions of Qatar's nation brand before and after the 2022 FIFA World Cup, using Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Index and its six dimensions: Governance; Exports; Tourism; Investment and Immigration; Culture and Heritage; and People (Ibrahim & Aleksanyan, 2026; Anholt, 2005). While the previous study focused exclusively on the perceptions of external international audiences, it did not account for the views of internal stakeholders. The present research addresses this gap by examining the perceptions of internal stakeholders in Qatar and assessing how these relate to post-World Cup international evaluations, with the aim of evaluating internal–external alignment in Qatar's nation branding. Therefore, the study's research questions are as follows:

1. How do internal stakeholders perceive Qatar's nation brand?
2. To what extent do internal stakeholders show consensus in their perceptions of Qatar's nation brand?
3. Do perceptions of Qatar's national brand differ across internal stakeholder demographic groups (e.g., nationality status, length of residence, age, and occupation)?
4. To what extent do internal stakeholders' perceptions of Qatar's nation brand differ from how they believe it is viewed by international audiences?

These research questions are addressed through an empirical survey of internal stakeholders in Qatar, including citizens and residents, capturing perceptions of the nation brand across Anholt's six nation brand dimensions. By examining internal consensus, demographic variation, and comparisons with international perception findings, the study identifies areas where internal stakeholder perceptions may support or constrain

Qatar's nation-branding and public diplomacy strategies, particularly regarding narrative consistency and stakeholder alignment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Nation Branding Concept

The concept of nation branding has evolved through the years. Kotler et al. (1993) were the first to apply branding and marketing to geographic location through place branding, including destination branding, which emerged from tourism promotion for specific locations. The concept has since evolved to include nation branding as an umbrella term, introduced by Simon Ahnolt in 1996 (Kaneva, 2011). The concept has progressed, with many scholars attempting to define it, though there is no single, agreed-upon definition in marketing. However, we mention here some scholars' efforts to define this concept. Simply put, Kotler et al. (1993) argued that countries, like products and organisations, compete in global markets and can therefore be managed using core marketing concepts such as positioning, image management, and strategic communication. However, according to Anholt (2007), a nation brand is a country's overall reputation, formed by perceptions across multiple dimensions, including governance, culture, people, tourism, and exports. It is not as simple as this, but Dinnie (2008) conceptualises the nation brand as a multidimensional construct comprising functional, emotional, and representative elements that serve to distinguish a nation on the international stage. In contrast, Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) characterise the nation brand as a collection of beliefs and impressions that shape stakeholder attitudes and behaviours toward a country.

Nation branding is regarded as a soft-power resource that influences perceptions and enhances national attractiveness, rather than relying on coercive measures such as military or economic incentives (Nye, 2004; Anholt, 2007). Nation branding and public diplomacy intersect within their shared concern with engaging foreign publics to build trust, legitimacy, and enduring relationships. As Szondi (2008) explains, while public diplomacy has traditionally operated as a government-led communication activity aligned with foreign policy objectives, nation branding functions as a broader reputational process shaped by diverse stakeholders and everyday national experiences. Their intersection lies not in equivalence but in a common relational logic, in which strategic communication, identity projection, and sustained engagement jointly contribute to the development of a national reputation. Therefore, countries must be aware of all efforts to ensure consistent perceptions of their nation brand.

2.2. Internal Stakeholder in Nation Branding

The concept of branding a nation is widely recognised, primarily directed toward international audiences and is largely concerned with managing a country's international reputation (Anholt, 2007). Consequently, empirical measurement in nation branding research has mainly relied on evaluations by external audiences. Although Dinnie (2015) acknowledges the importance of internal stakeholders in nation branding efforts, much of the operationalisation of the concept remains externally oriented.

Within this context, the role of internal stakeholders (Residents and citizens of a nation) has received comparatively limited empirical attention. As Hatch and Schultz (2002) argue, external identity is embedded in and formed by internal culture. This suggests that national brand narratives cannot be sustained effectively without internal alignment. From a public diplomacy perspective, Cull (2008) further notes that national narratives lack credibility when they are not supported and validated internally.

Branding efforts that exclude internal stakeholders therefore risk producing symbolic accounts that lack social legitimacy (Aronczyk, 2013). Within the Nation Brand Molecule framework, internal stakeholders exist reflected across multiple dimensions of the nation brand, as brand associations frequently originate from social behaviours, cultural practices, and institutional experiences within the country (Rojas-Méndez, 2013). Similarly, Govers and Go (2009) recognise that the perceptions of people connected to a place, including residents and citizens, contribute to understanding place identity, which is fundamental to how a nation brand is experienced and evaluated.

Alignment between internal and external perceptions is necessary; otherwise, it can have negative effects on the nation. Research on organisational branding and identity suggests that when externally communicated narratives aren't supported by internal beliefs and experiences, parties are more likely to challenge their authenticity, leading to erosion of trust and reputational vulnerability (Balmer, 2001). According to Hatch and Schultz (2002), these discrepancies can also lead to fractured meanings, impairing overall brand efficacy and reducing narrative coherence when internal and external audiences have different perceptions of the same brand.

Despite these insights, internal stakeholders' perceptions remain understudied and inadequately examined in the empirical nation-branding literature, particularly in comparisons of internal and external audiences' evaluations.

2.3. Measuring Nation Brand Perceptions

In this study, we use Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Index (NBI) to measure nation brand perceptions in a structured, comparable way. The NBI conceptualises a nation's brand as a multidimensional construct and

captures perceptions across six widely recognised dimensions: governance; exports; tourism; investment and immigration; culture and heritage; and people (Anholt, 2005). Its multi-dimensional design permits a comprehensive assessment of national reputation beyond single-issue indicators.

The strength of the NBI resides in its capacity to generate insights which are both analytically robust and policy-relevant, which explains its extensive use in empirical research on country image and reputation. In this study, the NBI is not employed to test Anholt's theoretical propositions. Rather, it is used as a diagnostic framework to facilitate systematic comparison between internal stakeholder perceptions and external international evaluations. Using an established, standardised measurement tool enables clearer assessment of alignment and divergence across audiences, improving the comparability and understandability of the findings.

2.4. Qatar's Nation Branding in the Literature

Qatar has increasingly relied on soft power methods to improve its international image, most notably by hosting major sporting events, such as the FIFA World Cup. Recent post-event scholarship conceptualises the tournament as a reputational inflexion point, examining how narratives of modernity, worldwide connectivity, national ambition, and political legitimacy were constructed and contested in the immediate aftermath of the event. Beyond sport, a growing body of research has revisited Qatar's wider soft-power ecosystem, including international media engagement, cultural diplomacy, and calculated communication initiatives. Post-2022 studies examine the role of global broadcasters, particularly Al Jazeera, in shaping international discourse and mediatin g interpretations of Qatar's political and cultural positioning (Badran, 2025; Brannagan & Reiche, 2023; Dubinsky, 2024; Ullah, 2024). Collectively, this literature remains largely focused on international media framing and foreign public discourse, assessing the persistence or transformation of global perceptions and stressing the World Cup's ongoing influence on Qatar's external image beyond 2022. In parallel, tourism development has received renewed scholarly attention in the post-World Cup context, notably regarding destination branding, infrastructure legacy, and long-term image sustainability under Qatar National Vision 2030 (Ibrahim, 2026; Mahboob & Faisal, 2025).

Despite the expanding post-2022 literature, empirical research remains strongly oriented toward international audiences, with limited attention to how internal stakeholders perceive Qatar's nation brand and whether these perceptions correspond to international evaluations.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Paradigm

The present study is informed by a postpositivist research paradigm, which assumes the existence of an external reality while recognising that this reality can only be imperfectly comprehended through human sensing and measurement. From this perspective, nation brand perceptions are treated as observable, quantifiable phenomena that are able to be systematically examined using structured survey instruments and statistical analysis (Creswell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Phillips & Burbules, 2000). This makes it particularly suited to empirical nation branding and public diplomacy research, as it makes possible the identification of patterns and variations in stakeholder perceptions while recognising that findings are probabilistic rather than absolute

3.2. Research Design and Measurement

A standardised, self-administered questionnaire measuring opinions of Qatar in six nation-brand dimensions—governance, culture, people, tourism, exports, and immigration and investment—was used to gather data. The nation-branding literature, especially perception-based frameworks frequently linked to Anholt's Nation Brand Index, which conceptualise national image as a multidimensional construct, served as the basis for the measurement structure (Anholt, 2005; Anholt, 2007).

Three survey items were used to operationalise each nation-brand dimension, for a total of eighteen items. A five-point Likert scale, spanning from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was used to measure each issue. Building on our earlier research, responses were then contrasted with contemporary views of worldwide audiences (Ibrahim & Aleksanyan, 2026).3.3

3.3. Survey Language and Translation Process

To ensure linguistic consistency and conceptual equivalence across respondents, the questionnaire was administered in both English and Arabic. Arabic is the primary language in Qatar, whereas English is the most widely used foreign language and is generally accepted as a functional second language in professional and public settings (Qatar Tourism, 2026).

The survey instrument was first developed in English, the primary language of the research, and then translated into Arabic by a professional translator. To verify translation accuracy and ensure semantic identity between the two versions, a back-translation procedure was implemented. The resulting text was compared with the original to identify any differences (Brislin, 1970). No substantive discrepancies were found, showing a high degree of conceptual and linguistic similarity between the versions.

3.4. Pilot Study

Before full-scale data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 10 participants drawn from the researchers' personal networks and close acquaintances. The purpose of the pilot study was to assess the clarity, wording, and overall structure of the questionnaire. Based on feedback, a small number of items were modified or removed to increase clarity and guarantee the questions were clearer and more straightforward.

Pilot testing is a critical step in survey-based research, as it helps detect probable errors in question wording, ambiguity, and structural issues before large-scale distribution, thereby enhancing the instrument's validity and reliability (Reynolds et al., 1993). In particular, the phrasing of two items was revised to ensure conceptual and linguistic parity between the English and Arabic versions of the questionnaire.

3.5. Sampling and Data Collection

A non-probability sampling strategy that integrates convenience-based and snowball sampling was implemented in accordance with perception-based research in marketing and branding, where access to relevant and reachable respondents is prioritised over statistical representativeness (Hair et al., 2019). The survey was first distributed through the researchers' personal and professional networks and shared on social media platforms and messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, which constituted convenience sampling. Snowball sampling was then facilitated when initial respondents voluntarily disseminated the survey link within their networks, consequently expanding participation beyond the researchers' direct contacts (Bryman, 2016).

Additionally, the survey was distributed via a Qatar-based social media influencer, reaching digitally engaged audiences who self-selected for the study. Influencer-mediated distribution is increasingly used in contemporary marketing research as a practical method for reaching relevant consumer segments in online environments (Kozinets, 2015).

To boost data quality and ensure respondent relevance, two screening questions were incorporated at the beginning of the survey. Respondents were required to confirm that they were currently living in Qatar (as this is an internal-perception measure in the Qatar Nation Brand Survey) and had resided in the country for more than 5 years. We chose that the responder to the survey has to at least live in Qatar for five years because prior research on place attachment, acculturation, and stakeholder perception suggests that extended residence duration is essential for developing meaningful evaluations of a place beyond superficial or short-term impressions (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Zenker & Braun, 2017).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Data Screening and Final Sample

A total of 193 responses were collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms. Following export and screening, 19 respondents were excluded for ineligibility or non-completion: 14 respondents reported living in Qatar for less than five years, and 5 indicated they were unwilling to complete the survey. The final analytical sample comprised 174 valid responses (90.2%) and was retained for all subsequent analyses in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26) (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Data Cleaning Process.

Description	Responses (n)	Percentage (%)
Total responses collected	193	100
Excluded: Residence less than 5 years	14	7.3
Excluded: Not living in Qatar	5	2.6
Total responses excluded	19	9.8
Final valid responses used for analysis	174	90.2

RQ1: Internal stakeholders' perceptions of Qatar's nation brand

Internal stakeholder perceptions were assessed across six Nation Brand Index dimensions (Exports; Governance; Culture and Heritage; People; Tourism; Investment and Immigration) and an overall composite score (Table 2). Overall, internal evaluations of Qatar's nation brand were strongly positive ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.41$, range = 3.39–5.00), indicating consistently favourable internal perceptions across the measured facets.

At the dimension level, Governance received the highest evaluation ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.49$), followed closely by People ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.44$). Both dimensions exhibited negatively skewed distributions (Governance skewness = −1.79; People skewness = −0.99), suggesting that responses clustered toward the upper end of the scale. Tourism was also rated strongly ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.57$; skewness = −1.08), reflecting favourable internal assessments of Qatar's tourism appeal. Culture and Heritage showed a high mean ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.54$) but a near-symmetric distribution (skewness = −0.05), indicating greater variation in how cultural attributes were evaluated across respondents.

By contrast, the two economically oriented dimensions were rated relatively lower and demonstrated greater dispersion. Exports recorded $M = 4.15$ ($SD = 0.80$) with a wider observed range (1.00–5.00), while Investment and Immigration recorded $M = 4.11$ ($SD = 0.74$) with a range of 2.00–5.00. Collectively, these descriptive patterns reflect that internal stakeholders evaluated Qatar's nation brand most strongly on governance- and

people-related attributes, with high assessments also evident for tourism and culture, and comparatively more differentiated evaluations for exports and investment/immigration-related attributes.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics.

Dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Exports	174	1.00	5.00	4.15	0.80	-1.69	4.18
Governance	174	3.00	5.00	4.68	0.49	-1.79	2.95
Culture	174	3.33	5.00	4.36	0.54	-0.05	-1.45
People	174	3.33	5.00	4.62	0.44	-0.99	0.04
Tourism	174	3.00	5.00	4.51	0.57	-1.08	0.31
Investment	174	2.00	5.00	4.11	0.74	-0.89	0.97
Overall	174	3.39	5.00	4.40	0.41	-0.34	-0.68

RQ2: Internal consensus in nation brand perceptions

Internal consensus was examined using dispersion indicators (standard deviation and interquartile range), alongside central tendency (mean and median) for each dimension (Table 3). The results show strong overall consensus, particularly high agreement on societal and governance-related dimensions.

The highest consensus was observed for People (Mean = 4.62; Median = 4.67; SD = 0.44; IQR = 0.67), indicating relatively concentrated perceptions regarding the social climate and interpersonal environment. Governance also demonstrated high consensus (Mean = 4.68; Median = 5.00; SD = 0.49; IQR = 0.67), reinforcing the stability and uniformity of internal evaluations of governance-related attributes.

Moderate variability was observed for Culture and Heritage (Mean = 4.36; Median = 4.33; SD = 0.54; IQR = 1.00) and Tourism (Mean = 4.51; Median = 4.67; SD = 0.57; IQR = 1.00), suggesting broadly positive but more heterogeneous assessments. The lowest consensus was observed for Exports (Mean = 4.15; Median = 4.00; SD = 0.80; IQR = 0.67) and Investment and Immigration (Mean = 4.11; Median = 4.00; SD = 0.74; IQR = 1.00), indicating comparatively more differentiated internal views related to economic competitiveness and opportunity structures.

At the aggregate level, the overall nation brand score showed strong agreement (Mean = 4.40; Median = 4.44; SD = 0.41; IQR = 0.67), indicating broad internal convergence in the overall evaluation of Qatar's nation brand. Distributional diagnostics were also assessed visually using Q–Q plots for the six composite dimensions (Figure 1) before conducting parametric group comparisons.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics.

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	
	Std. Deviation	0.49	
	Interquartile Range	0.67	
Culture	Mean	4.36	0.04
	Median	4.33	
	Std. Deviation	0.54	
	Interquartile Range	1.00	
People	Mean	4.62	0.03
	Median	4.67	
	Std. Deviation	0.44	
	Interquartile Range	0.67	
Tourism	Mean	4.51	0.04
	Median	4.67	
	Std. Deviation	0.57	
	Interquartile Range	1.00	
Investment	Mean	4.11	0.06
	Median	4.00	
	Std. Deviation	0.74	
	Interquartile Range	1.00	
Overall	Mean	4.40	0.03
	Median	4.44	
	Std. Deviation	0.41	
	Interquartile Range	0.67	

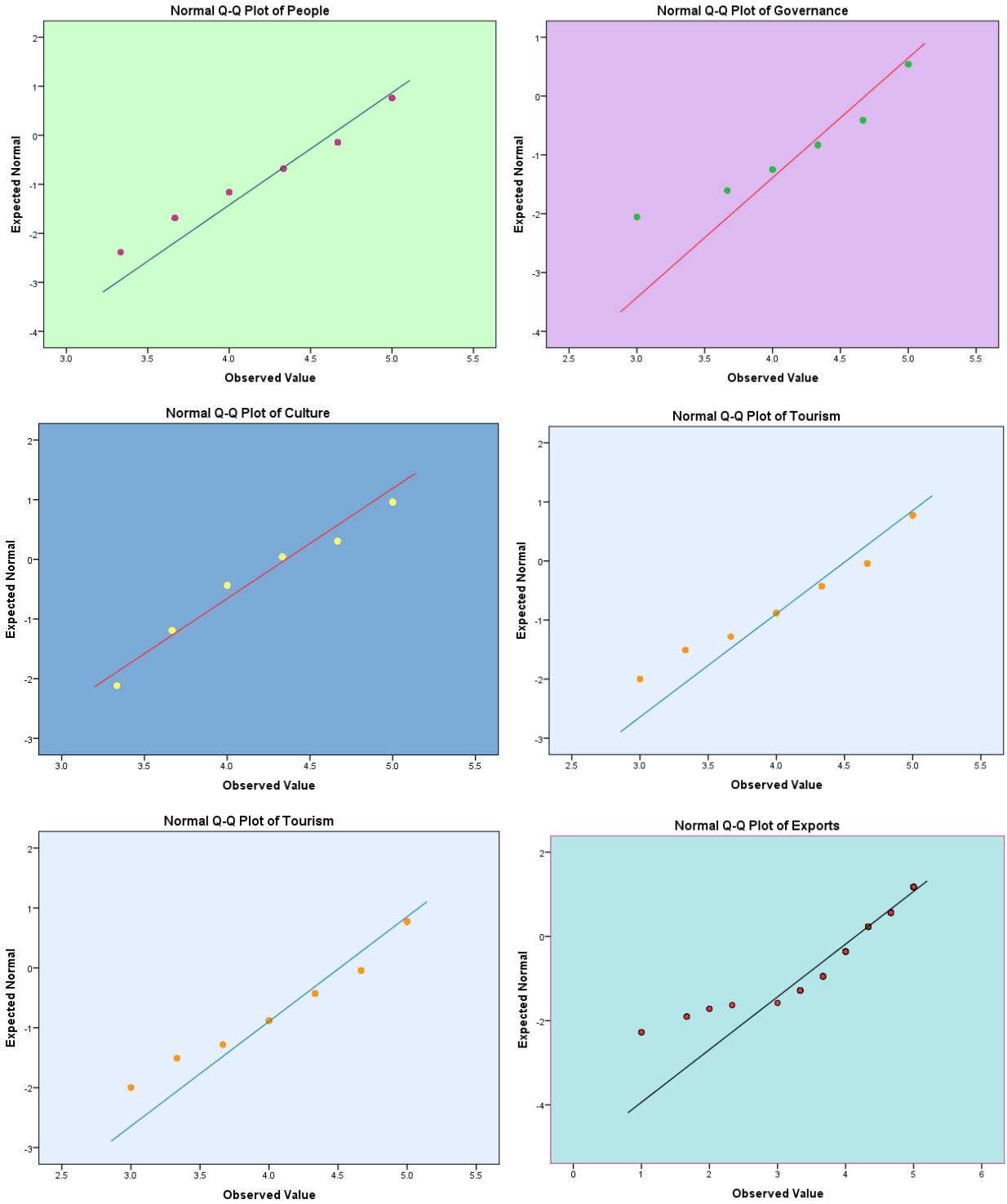


Figure 1. Q-Q Plots of dimensions.

RQ3: Differences in perceptions across demographic groups

Differences in internal perceptions were examined across demographic characteristics, including length of residence, age, occupation, gender, and nationality.

4.2. Length of Residence

One-way ANOVA results indicated statistically significant differences by length of residence across most dimensions and for the overall score (Table 4). Significant group differences were identified for Exports ($F = 9.63$, $p < .001$), Governance ($F = 5.63$, $p < .001$), Culture and Heritage ($F = 3.60$, $p = .01$), People ($F = 4.95$, $p < .001$), and Investment and Immigration ($F = 6.57$, $p < .001$). The overall nation brand score also differed significantly by residence grouping ($F = 4.79$, $p < .001$). In contrast, Tourism did not differ significantly by residence duration ($F = 2.01$, $p = .11$), indicating relatively stable tourism evaluations across groups.

Table 4. One-way ANOVA on Length of Residence.

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

4.3. Age

ANOVA results showed statistically significant age-based differences for Culture and Heritage ($F = 6.66$, $p < .001$), People ($F = 5.00$, $p < .001$), Tourism ($F = 4.85$, $p < .001$), Investment and Immigration ($F = 4.83$, $p < .001$), and the overall nation brand score ($F = 5.46$, $p < .001$) (Table 5). No significant differences were observed for Exports ($F = 1.16$, $p = .33$) or Governance ($F = 1.79$, $p = .13$), indicating that these two dimensions remained relatively consistent across age cohorts. Notably, the youngest cohort (18–24) reported the lowest overall evaluations ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.31$), whereas older groups reported higher overall scores.

Table 5. One-way ANOVA on Age.

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	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

4.4. Occupation

Occupation-based comparisons identified significant differences for Exports ($F = 3.56$, $p < .001$), Culture and Heritage ($F = 3.27$, $p < .001$), Tourism ($F = 2.71$, $p = .02$), Investment and Immigration ($F = 3.08$, $p = .01$), and the overall nation brand score ($F = 2.21$, $p = .04$) (Table 6). Governance ($F = 1.34$, $p = .24$) and People ($F = 1.44$, $p = .20$) did not vary significantly across occupational groups.

Table 6. One-way ANOVA on Occupation.

Dimensions	Occupation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Exports	Academic	13	4.21	0.65	3.56	0.00
	Entrepreneur	5	4.20	0.45		
	Government Employee	47	3.75	1.00		
	Housewife	32	4.35	0.62		
	Private Sector Employee	45	4.33	0.50		
	Retired	3	5.00	0.00		
	Student	29	4.14	0.92		
Governance	Academic	13	4.54	0.48	1.34	0.24
	Entrepreneur	5	4.73	0.15		
	Government Employee	47	4.72	0.41		
	Housewife	32	4.51	0.79		
	Private Sector Employee	45	4.76	0.31		
	Retired	3	5.00	0.00		
	Student	29	4.70	0.45		
Culture	Academic	13	4.15	0.62	3.27	0.00
	Entrepreneur	5	5.00	0.00		
	Government Employee	47	4.24	0.55		
	Housewife	32	4.49	0.50		
	Private Sector Employee	45	4.29	0.46		
	Retired	3	5.00	0.00		
	Student	29	4.41	0.58		
People	Academic	13	4.56	0.42	1.44	0.20
	Entrepreneur	5	5.00	0.00		
	Government Employee	47	4.64	0.51		
	Housewife	32	4.52	0.39		
	Private Sector Employee	45	4.59	0.47		
	Retired	3	5.00	0.00		
	Student	29	4.67	0.33		
Tourism	Academic	13	4.67	0.33	2.71	0.02
	Entrepreneur	5	4.73	0.15		
	Government Employee	47	4.51	0.55		
	Housewife	32	4.74	0.40		
	Private Sector Employee	45	4.31	0.50		
	Retired	3	5.00	0.00		
	Student	29	4.41	0.85		
Investment	Academic	13	4.36	0.54	3.08	0.01
	Entrepreneur	5	5.00	0.00		
	Government Employee	47	4.07	0.49		
	Housewife	32	4.01	0.89		
	Private Sector Employee	45	4.15	0.72		
	Retired	3	5.00	0.00		
	Student	29	3.85	0.93		
Overall	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		

4.5. Gender

Independent-samples t-tests identified significant gender differences for Exports ($p = .01$), Culture and Heritage ($p < .001$), People ($p < .001$), and Tourism ($p = .02$), with females reporting higher mean scores in these dimensions (Table 7). No significant gender differences were observed for Governance ($p = .18$), Investment and Immigration ($p = .72$), or the overall nation brand score ($p = .89$).

Table 7. Independent Sample T-Test on Gender.

Dimensions	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Exports	Male	77	3.90	0.97	7.00	0.01
	Female	97	4.34	0.57		
Governance	Male	77	4.68	0.41	1.82	0.18
	Female	97	4.68	0.55		
Culture	Male	77	4.28	0.49	10.82	0.00
	Female	97	4.42	0.57		
People	Male	77	4.53	0.52	20.99	0.00
	Female	97	4.69	0.35		
Tourism	Male	77	4.21	0.54	5.26	0.02
	Female	97	4.75	0.48		
Investment	Male	77	4.12	0.69	0.13	0.72
	Female	97	4.10	0.79		
Overall	Male	77	4.29	0.41	0.02	0.89
	Female	97	4.50	0.40		

4.6. Nationality

Nationality-based ANOVA results suggested statistically significant differences for Exports ($F = 3.68$, $p < .001$), Governance ($F = 4.62$, $p < .001$), People ($F = 2.28$, $p = .01$), Tourism ($F = 3.55$, $p < .001$), Investment and Immigration ($F = 3.01$, $p < .001$), and the overall score ($F = 2.00$, $p = .02$), whereas Culture and Heritage did not differ significantly ($F = 1.20$, $p = .28$) (Table 8).

Table 8. One-way ANOVA on Nationality of Residents.

Dimensions	Nationality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Exports	No country	8	4.25	0.30	3.68	0.00
	American	1	5.00			
	British	4	4.08	0.42		
	Egyptian	9	3.37	1.29		
	Indian	2	4.83	0.24		
	Iranian	4	5.00	-		
	Iraqi	2	4.33	-		
	Italian	2	4.33	-		
	Jordanian	17	4.33	0.37		
	Moroccan	1	4.00			
	Pakistani	3	4.89	0.19		
	Palestine	13	4.87	0.22		
	Qatari	50	3.75	1.02		
	Sudanese	10	4.00	0.27		
	Syrian	13	4.36	0.46		
	Yemeni	35	4.26	0.54		
Governance	No country	8	4.17	0.59	4.62	0.00
	American	1	5.00			
	British	4	4.50	0.58		
	Egyptian	9	4.81	0.18		
	Indian	2	5.00	-		
	Iranian	4	5.00	-		
	Iraqi	2	5.00	-		
	Italian	2	4.67	-		
	Jordanian	17	4.65	0.36		
	Moroccan	1	5.00			
	Pakistani	3	5.00	-		
	Palestine	13	4.85	0.29		
	Qatari	50	4.85	0.31		
	Sudanese	10	4.43	0.35		
	Syrian	13	3.97	1.00		
	Yemeni	35	4.71	0.35		
Culture	No country	8	4.33	0.71	1.20	0.28
	American	1	4.67			
	British	4	4.33	0.47		
	Egyptian	9	4.04	0.11		
	Indian	2	4.50	0.71		
	Iranian	4	5.00	-		
	Iraqi	2	5.00	-		
	Italian	2	4.33	-		
	Jordanian	17	4.45	0.49		
	Moroccan	1	4.00			
	Pakistani	3	4.56	0.19		
	Palestine	13	4.38	0.61		
	Qatari	50	4.39	0.54		
	Sudanese	10	4.03	0.43		
	Syrian	13	4.28	0.51		
	Yemeni	35	4.32	0.63		

People	No country	8	4.50	0.53	2.28	0.01
	American	1	5.00			
	British	4	4.17	0.43		
	Egyptian	9	4.52	0.50		
	Indian	2	4.83	0.24		
	Iranian	4	5.00	-		
	Iraqi	2	5.00	-		
	Italian	2	4.33	-		
	Jordanian	17	4.69	0.34		
	Moroccan	1	4.67			
	Pakistani	3	5.00	-		
	Palestine	13	4.74	0.28		
	Qatari	50	4.73	0.45		
	Sudanese	10	4.17	0.59		
	Syrian	13	4.54	0.40		
	Yemeni	35	4.55	0.38		
Tourism	No country	8	4.67	0.44	3.55	0.00
	American	1	5.00			
	British	4	4.25	0.50		
	Egyptian	9	3.85	0.65		
	Indian	2	4.33	0.94		
	Iranian	4	5.00	-		
	Iraqi	2	5.00	-		
	Italian	2	5.00	-		
	Jordanian	17	4.67	0.55		
	Moroccan	1	3.33			
	Pakistani	3	3.56	0.38		
	Palestine	13	4.74	0.28		
	Qatari	50	4.62	0.53		
	Sudanese	10	4.10	0.32		
	Syrian	13	4.56	0.34		
	Yemeni	35	4.46	0.64		
Investment	No country	8	4.17	0.53	3.01	0.00
	American	1	5.00			
	British	4	4.08	0.42		
	Egyptian	9	3.89	0.33		
	Indian	2	4.00	1.41		
	Iranian	4	3.67	-		
	Iraqi	2	4.67	-		
	Italian	2	4.00	-		
	Jordanian	17	3.33	1.01		
	Moroccan	1	3.00			
	Pakistani	3	3.67	-		
	Palestine	13	4.56	0.69		
	Qatari	50	4.38	0.44		
	Sudanese	10	4.07	0.77		
	Syrian	13	4.00	0.33		
	Yemeni	35	4.10	0.96		
Overall	No country	8	4.35	0.41	2.00	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	4.00			
	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	4.40	0.45		

Table 9. Overall Analysis of the Demographics.

Demographics		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Length of Residence in Qatar	Qatri National	46	4.46	0.44	4.79	0.00
	Born in Qatar	55	4.53	0.41		
	Living 5-9 years	19	4.31	0.36		
	Living 10 years and more	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		

RQ4: Internal–international alignment gaps

Internal stakeholder evaluations were compared with international benchmark means from prior research by computing gap scores (internal mean minus international mean) for each dimension. One-sample t-tests (test value = 0) indicated statistically significant positive gaps across all six dimensions (Table 10), demonstrating systematic divergence between internal and international perceptions.

The largest gap was observed for Governance (Mean Difference = 1.33, SD = 0.49; $t = 35.77$, $p < .001$). Similarly large gaps emerged for Tourism (Mean Difference = 1.14, SD = 0.57; $t = 26.33$, $p < .001$) and People (Mean Difference = 1.11, SD = 0.44; $t = 33.56$, $p < .001$). More moderate but significant gaps were observed for Exports (Mean Difference = 0.74, SD = 0.80; $t = 12.15$, $p < .001$), Culture and Heritage (Mean Difference = 0.70, SD = 0.54; $t = 16.95$, $p < .001$), and Investment and Immigration (Mean Difference = 0.65, SD = 0.74; $t = 11.48$, $p < .001$). Collectively, these results show that internal stakeholders evaluate Qatar's nation brand significantly more positively than international audiences across all NBI dimensions, with the greatest divergence concentrated in governance, people, and tourism.

Table 10. One-Sample T-Test.

Dimensions	N	Mean Internal Perception	Mean External Perception	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Exports	174	4.15	3.41	0.74	0.80	12.15	0.00
Governance	174	4.68	3.35	1.33	0.49	35.77	0.00
Culture	174	4.36	3.66	0.70	0.54	16.95	0.00
People	174	4.62	3.51	1.11	0.44	33.56	0.00
Tourism	174	4.51	3.37	1.14	0.57	26.33	0.00
Investment	174	4.11	3.46	0.65	0.74	11.48	0.00

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined how internal stakeholders in Qatar evaluate the national brand across Anholt's six Nation Brand Index dimensions and whether these views align with post-World Cup international perceptions. The findings show a consistently positive internal assessment of Qatar's nation brand (overall mean 4.40), with the strongest evaluations concentrated in Governance and People, followed by Tourism. This pattern is meaningful in the context of nation branding as soft power: internal stakeholders appear to associate Qatar's national reputation with state capacity, social order, and a favourable lived experience, which are precisely the

kinds of attributes that sustain credibility behind external branding narratives (Anholt, 2007; Nye, 2004).

At the same time, the study shows that internal consensus is not uniform throughout dimensions. Agreement is strongest for People and Governance, while greater variability is observed in Exports, Investment, and Immigration. This differentiation shows that while societal and institutional narratives are broadly shared, economic competitiveness and opportunity-related evaluations are more contested or more dependent on personal experience. The demographic analyses support this interpretation: residence length and age shape perceptions across several dimensions, with younger respondents (18–24) reporting lower evaluations, particularly for culture, tourism, and investment-related perceptions. This may reflect higher expectations, more stringent benchmarks, or different reference points shaped by digital media and transnational comparison, consistent with earlier work on identity formation and stakeholder perceptions in branding contexts (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Govers & Go, 2009).

Most importantly, the alignment analysis shows statistically significant positive gaps across all dimensions, indicating that internal stakeholders view Qatar more favourably than international audiences, with the largest divergence in Governance, Tourism, and People. This consistent internal–external gap signals a reputational asymmetry: domestic confidence and actual realities are not fully mirrored in external evaluations. From a public diplomacy perspective, this is not simply a "problem of communication" but rather a potential mismatch between internal experiences, external press narratives, and global normative expectations (Cull, 2008; Szondi, 2008). Addressing such gaps calls for sustained, evidence-based reputation management that conforms messaging with credible stakeholder experiences and internationally legible proof points, rather than short-term promotional interventions (Anholt, 2007; Aronczyk, 2013).

6. CONCLUSION

This research provides empirical evidence that internal stakeholders in Qatar hold strongly positive perceptions of the nation brand across Anholt's six dimensions, with particularly high evaluations of governance and people-related attributes. Internal consensus is generally strong, though it weakens on economically oriented dimensions such as exports, investment and immigration, indicating that some aspects of the national brand are experienced more unevenly across the population.

Beyond mapping internal perceptions, the study shows a clear, statistically significant divergence between internal evaluations and international benchmark perceptions. Internal stakeholders consistently rate Qatar more positively than external audiences, and the greatest gaps emerge in governance, tourism, and people. These results underline the importance of treating internal–external alignment as a central concern in nation branding and public diplomacy. A country's reputation cannot be sustained through external messaging alone; it relies on coherence between what is communicated internationally and what is experienced and validated internally.

Overall, the data show that Qatar's post-World Cup nation-branding landscape is characterised by strong internal confidence but an incomplete translation of that confidence into international perception. Future nation branding strategies should therefore focus on reducing the internal–external gap through credibility-building initiatives, transparent storytelling, and stakeholder-informed narrative development that speaks to both domestic realities and international evaluation criteria.

7. LIMITATIONS

This study relies on non-probability sampling and online self-selection, which limits statistical representativeness and may over-represent digitally engaged respondents. The sample includes uneven subgroup sizes across some nationalities and age categories, which can affect the stability of group comparisons. The research is cross-sectional and captures perceptions at a single point in time after the World Cup, so it cannot establish changes over time or provide causal explanations for the observed gaps. Finally, the international benchmark is drawn from prior research, and differences in sampling contexts may influence comparability.

8. IMPLICATIONS

Practically, Qatar's branding and public diplomacy actors should prioritise narrowing the internal–external perception gap by translating internal strengths into internationally credible proof points, particularly in governance, tourism, and people narratives. Communication should be supported by transparent indicators, lived-experience storytelling, and policies that address externally salient concerns. Theoretically, the study reinforces the importance of internal stakeholders as co-producers of national reputation and demonstrates the value of alignment-focused measurement using a well-structured framework such as the Nation Brand Index. Future research can extend this work through longitudinal designs and mixed-method inquiry.

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