



The role of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 brand ambassador: An analysis of Ghanim Al Muftah in promoting inclusive engagement

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Article history

Received 2023-09-06
Revised 2023-09-14
Accepted 2023-09-22

Keywords

Brand Ambassador
FIFA World Cup 2022
Ghanim Al Muftah
Inclusive

Many ways exist to promote and increase awareness of products, one of which is through collaboration with celebrities or well-known figures to become brand ambassadors. Collaboration with brand ambassadors is a form of communication carried out by a brand or event to convey messages and information to the audience regarding the content of the message. This research was conducted with the aim of understanding the role of Ghanim Al Muftah as a brand ambassador in introducing the inclusive FIFA World Cup 2022. The research method used was descriptive qualitative, employing a case study and literature review method. The results obtained in this study show that Ghanim Al Muftah's role as a brand ambassador has garnered a positive response, had a beneficial impact, and effectively conveyed awareness of the inclusivity aspect to the audience.

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1. Introduction

The FIFA World Cup is the largest sporting competition with the most extensive global viewership, held every four years by FIFA, the international federation comprising nations participating in football tournaments (Zhu, 2020). This event stands as the most prestigious sporting tournament, attracting elite players from around the world (Burton, 2019). During the summer of 2014, the event took place in Brazil, while Russia hosted it in 2018, and Qatar is set to be the host nation in 2022. Hosting these games represents a significant commitment for any country (Zowisło, 2019).

Qatar secured the hosting rights for the World Cup after winning the vote of approval from 22 FIFA executive members, triumphing over the United States, South Korea, Japan, and Australia (Guionnet et al., 2020). According to Williams et al., (2023), the World Cup marks a pivotal moment in this journey as it positions Qatar as the first Middle Eastern nation to host one of the world's largest sporting events. Doraiswamy et al., (2022) argue that Qatar's involvement in this sporting

event, particularly in promoting the nation, focuses on three main points: Health and Well-being; Progress and Modernization; and Peace and Security. This is accomplished by implementing a Sustainability Strategy aimed at maximizing the tournament's contributions to the short- and long-term well-being of the population, economic development, and environmental protection (Dun & Rachdi, 2023).

To realize this vision, FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 has committed to advocating for human rights (HAM) (Larisu et al., 2023). By delivering an inclusive, welcoming, secure, and accessible FIFA World Cup 2022 experience for all participants, Qatar's community, and the global audience, it aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlighted by FIFA, especially from a social perspective, ensuring the realization of SDG number 3, Good Health and Well-Being (Memon et al., 2019), by providing facilities throughout Qatar's infrastructure, public transportation, and services to accommodate persons with disabilities (PWDs) and those with limited mobility (Schaffner et al., 2021). Visually impaired and partially sighted fans can access descriptive commentary with special audio in Arabic for the first time. Moreover, sensory rooms for neuro-divergent fans are available in three stadiums and different fan zones – the finest facilities offered at the world's biggest sporting event (Milloy et al., 2022).

According to Brannagan et al.,(2023), it is now recognized that everyone needs and deserves a means of engaging in sports, and people with disabilities have the right to access sports and be treated fairly. Ms. Mariam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad, Minister of Social Development and Family, also stated that Qatar provides all the necessary means to accommodate fans with disabilities during the 2022 World Cup (Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2020). To promote and introduce the vision of an inclusive and PWD-friendly FIFA World Cup 2022, Ghanim Al Muftah was invited to become a brand ambassador for the world's largest football event (Schaffner et al., 2021). The presence of a brand ambassador plays a vital role in facilitating marketing activities both locally and globally (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015).

The selection of Al Muftah as a brand ambassador was undoubtedly based on several considerations, especially because Al Muftah is an inspirational figure from Qatar, a person with disabilities who has Caudal Regression Syndrome (CRD) but has managed to inspire many people with his achievements and activities despite his limitations (Al-Thani et al., 2022). During the opening ceremony of the FIFA World Cup, Al Muftah recited Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, which touches upon unity, diversity, and dialogue (Silva, 2022). His interaction with Morgan Freeman also captivated the audience, symbolizing global unity and peace (Ali, 2023).

The figure of Ghanim Al Muftah attracted public attention during the FIFA World Cup 2022, especially when he became an icon at the opening ceremony. Although FIFA is already well-known

globally, conveying the message of inclusivity and promoting various facilities for people with disabilities must be communicated to the general public. Based on the above presentation, the research problem is formulated as follows, what is the role of Ghanim Al Muftah as a brand ambassador in introducing the inclusive FIFA World Cup 2022.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate and gain insights into the phenomena presented by the research subjects. Specifically, it utilizes a qualitative-descriptive method to collect detailed data regarding the role of the brand ambassador. The aim is to present and summarize the conditions prevailing in society as the subject of investigation (Bungin Burhan, 2019).

The research methodology consists of two main components: the case study method and a literature review. The case study method, as elucidated by Maxfield (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021), focuses on the detailed phases or characteristics of various personalities. Meanwhile, the literature review is a systematic, explicit, and reproducible method used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research findings from previous studies conducted by researchers. Data collection is carried out to obtain the necessary information through observations and online data retrieval (Sari et al., 2022).

3. Theoretical Framework

Brand Image

Brand image is a component of brand equity as it conveys the brand's value to consumers. Kotler et al., (2021) defines image as a collection of ideas, beliefs, or perceptions and impressions that consumers form about an object. This perception varies from one consumer to another, as consumers interpret the brand based on their personal experiences (Helmold, 2022). Companies also aim to position their brand in line with how consumers perceive it. According to Dobni and Zinkhan in Wardhana (2022) brand image is largely a subjective and perceptual phenomenon shaped through consumer interpretation, thus it can vary greatly depending on each consumer's mental representation of the brand. Brand image is a strong perception in consumers' minds that is formed from their memory of the brand (Faircloth et al., 2001). To build consumer memory of a brand image and highlight the brand's positive image, various methods are used, often seen in the digital era with the endorsement of well-known personalities who align with the brand's values (Baños-González et al., 2021).

Brand Ambassador

The A brand ambassador is a public figure who supports the use of a particular brand with the aim of influencing consumers (Herawati & Putra, 2023). This is done to capture consumers' attention, as the use of a brand ambassador is usually based on the public's perception of the famous

figure. Although public figures are often seen in the media, it is essential to distinguish between brand ambassadors who genuinely support the brand and those who have been trained by the company (Suleman et al., 2023). According to Belch and Belch in Panjaitan & Harahap (2021), brand ambassadors typically collaborate with the company or brand to provide information about products, services, or offerings to others, creating word-of-mouth marketing that can spread widely.

Every company desires a positive impact from using a brand ambassador; therefore, it is crucial to select the right individual who aligns with the brand image or the campaign's objectives. The ideal brand ambassador is a celebrity or a well-known figure (Nasrin, 2020). According to Rossiter in Wardhana (2022), there are several indicators for evaluating potential brand ambassadors using the VisCap model (Visibility, Credibility, Attraction, and Power):

- a. **Visibility:** The popularity and visibility of the public figure among the public.
- b. **Credibility:** The public figure's expertise in product knowledge and their ability to influence consumers to get to know and purchase the product.
- c. **Attraction:** How much the public figure is liked by the audience and how closely they align with the criteria or personality expected by consumers.
- d. **Power:** The ability of the figure to influence, persuade, and engage consumers in learning about and buying the product.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the consumer's desire to recognize and remember a specific brand as one of the products (Soedarsono et al., 2020). Brand identification involves the consumer's ability to remember the identity of a particular brand and serves as a guide (Nasri, 2020). According to Peter and Olson in Iacobucci & De Cicco, (2020) brand awareness is the goal of communication for promotional strategies. With brand awareness, brands or companies expect that when consumers need something, they can remember the brand, making it a consideration as an alternative when making decisions. Usually, brand awareness is formed through the proximity of the brand to consumers, through direct and repeated communication. Strengthening brand awareness increases consumer awareness of the brand and influences strong brand equity (Febriyantoro, 2020). Aaker Faircloth et al., (2001) reveals that there are four levels of brand awareness: (a) Unaware of brand: Consumers have no awareness of the brand; they are unaware of its existence; (b) Brand recognition: This is the first stage of brand awareness, achieved through repeated exposure or aided recall to make consumers remember information about the brand.; (c) Brand recall: Consumer's ability to remember the brand based on demand to recall the brand in a specific product category

or class; (d) Top of mind: When a specific brand becomes the primary brand in consumers' minds among various brands.

4. Result and Discussion

The selection of Ghanim Al Muftah as the brand ambassador for FIFA World Cup 2022 can be considered appropriate and fitting. Based on the analysis and research conducted through online news sources, there is no doubt about the suitability of Al Muftah for this role. Ghanim Al Muftah is a prominent motivator who actively spreads motivational content through YouTube and his social media accounts.

Al Muftah was born on May 5, 2002, with a rare condition known as Caudal Regression Syndrome (CDS), a condition that results in the lower part of the body being absent, requiring him to use a wheelchair for mobility. However, his condition has not hindered his daily life. Al Muftah has achieved remarkable success and has inspired many people. He is the youngest entrepreneur in Qatar, having founded Gharissa Ice Cream with six branches and 60 employees. On his social media accounts, he enjoys various sports activities such as swimming, diving, soccer, hiking, and skateboarding. He also has a strong commitment to education and is known as a Hafidz Al-Qur'an (someone who has memorized the Quran). Here is a list of achievements attained by Ghanim Al Muftah:

- a. Award of Unsung Heroes from 21st Century Leaders Foundation.
- b. Ambassador of Peace, H.H the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in 2014.
- c. Goodwill Ambassador of Reach Out To Asia, ROTA Foundation.
- d. Youth Ambassador, The Paralympics Athletics World Champions Doha.
- e. Brand Ambassador, Qatar Financial Centre Authority.
- f. Arab Social Networking Pioneers for Youth 2015, Award of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.
- g. Ambassador of Goodness and Humanity, Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA) Qatar.
- h. Speaker at TEDxQatarUniversity.
- i. Brand Ambassador for FIFA World Cup 2022 Qatar.

The achievements and image of Ghanim Al Muftah, a person with disabilities who motivates many people, were key factors for FIFA in choosing him as a brand ambassador to promote an inclusive sporting event. Additionally, there are several other indicators according to the VisCap model (Visibility, Credibility, Attraction, and Power) developed by Rossiter. Below is an explanation

of these indicators in relation to Ghanim Al Muftah as the brand ambassador for FIFA World Cup 2022:

Visibility: A brand ambassador is highly recommended to have high popularity and be well-known to the public. Popularity is crucial as it influences the brand's recognition among the public. Ghanim Al Muftah's popularity has spread worldwide due to his inspirational story and motivational content. He has 1.16 million subscribers on his YouTube channel and 4.5 million followers on Instagram. With his popularity, FIFA's message of inclusivity can be effectively conveyed to the public.

Credibility: The skills, abilities, and experience of a brand ambassador are essential to ensure that the information and points being conveyed are trustworthy to the audience. Therefore, a brand ambassador should be someone with a clean record and without negative stigmas. Al Muftah's impeccable credibility makes him a suitable choice for FIFA World Cup 2022. This can be seen through his positive image in the public eye and his alignment with promoting inclusivity in the event. His credibility is further evident from the numerous awards he has received and his successful collaborations with other activities and brands.

Attraction: A brand ambassador must possess an attraction factor, which can be related to intelligence, behavior, activities, appearance, or skills that support the product's message and draw greater public attention. Ghanim Al Muftah's attractiveness lies in his perseverance to achieve ongoing success, engage in meaningful activities, and share his experiences with the public through his real-life and social media presence. He clearly demonstrates that individuals with disabilities can be equal to or even excel beyond typically abled individuals.

Power: The ability of a brand ambassador to influence, persuade, and capture the interest of the audience is crucial, as it is related to the ambassador's impact on the audience's curiosity about the event. Ghanim Al Muftah possesses significant influential power. This can be observed in the tremendous viewership of one of his Instagram videos during the opening ceremony of FIFA World Cup 2022, where he engaged in a conversation with Morgan Freeman. In this video, he recited a verse from the Quran, Al-Hujurat, verse 13, which garnered 11.6 million views within 26 days, starting from November 24, 2022. From the above discussion, it is evident that Ghanim Al Muftah meets all four indicators of a well-chosen brand ambassador: visibility, credibility, attraction, and power.

After conducting research on online media, it is clear that the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, as mentioned on Qatar2022.qa, has actively involved individuals with disabilities from the outset in the planning process. They ensure that these individuals have a voice in identifying

what is essential to them. Through this inclusive community approach, FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar provides a truly accessible fan experience and will leave a strong legacy for the future.

"We have involved individuals with disabilities from the very beginning of the planning process and ensured that they have a voice in identifying what is important to them. As a result of this inclusive community approach, Qatar 2022 is delivering a truly accessible fan experience and will leave a strong legacy for the future." (Committee for Delivery & Legacy on Qatar2022.qa)"

From the FIFA team itself, it is acknowledged that the collaboration with Al Muftah was aimed at involving individuals with disabilities as an approach to emphasize the inclusive aspects of this event. Since April 2022, Ghanim Al Muftah has uploaded videos stating that he became the brand ambassador for the FIFA World Cup 2022, and this was greeted with considerable enthusiasm from the audience, reaching 183,000 viewers on YouTube.

Not only on YouTube, but also on Instagram, since April, Al Muftah has announced to the public that he officially became a brand ambassador through Instagram Reels, reaching 426,000 viewers. Subsequently, there was a video with FIFA President Gianni Infantino, which garnered 747,000 viewers, and a video of the signing ceremony as brand ambassadors, reaching 597,000 viewers.

During the opening ceremony of the FIFA World Cup 2022 on November 20, 2022, Ghanim Al Muftah opened the World Cup festivities by engaging in a conversation with Morgan Freeman about uniting the world through the beautiful game of football, which is the most valuable tournament. When Morgan Freeman asked, "How can so many countries, languages, and cultures come together if only one way is accepted?" Ghanim Al Muftah responded in a spectacular manner. He recited a sacred verse from the Quran, Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, which means:

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted."

The response provided by Al Muftah with Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 left many people amazed, leading to various media reports that put Ghanim in the spotlight for conveying a message through this verse. On this occasion, Morgan Freeman conveyed a message of optimism, harmony, and tolerance, while Al Muftah, through Surah Al-Hujurat, conveyed the message of equality and diversity. He also made the following statement: *"Within my capacities as a FIFA World Cup ambassador, I want to send a message of hope, inclusivity, peace, and unity for humanity."*

The theme of inclusivity is consistently conveyed by Al Muftah, both directly and indirectly. On November 24, Al Muftah uploaded a video of his conversation with Morgan Freeman during the opening ceremony, which was viewed 11.7 million times and received 4,420 comments on Instagram. Throughout the FIFA World Cup, Al Muftah has uploaded several videos related to the event, and it is evident that he has been actively watching the matches while using his wheelchair.

This implicitly showcases the facilities provided and makes it easier for individuals with disabilities to enjoy the matches alongside other spectators.

As a brand ambassador tasked with advocating for inclusivity, particularly among individuals with disabilities, Ghanim Al Muftah has played an outstanding role and received a positive response from the audience. Consequently, FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar has effectively conveyed its leading strategy of inclusivity.

5. Conclusion

Ghanim Al Muftah's role as a brand ambassador to promote inclusivity at the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar is a highly appropriate step. The criteria for selecting a good brand ambassador, based on the Vicsap model (visibility, credibility, attraction, and power) possessed by Ghanim Al Muftah, are exceptionally strong, and his image aligns well with his involvement in the FIFA World Cup, particularly in highlighting inclusivity for individuals with disabilities. This is evident from the audience's response and enthusiasm for Al Muftah, especially during the opening ceremony, including the substantial number of viewers and media coverage of his recitation of Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13. Overall, Al Muftah's role as a brand ambassador is deemed highly effective for the FIFA World Cup 2022 event.

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